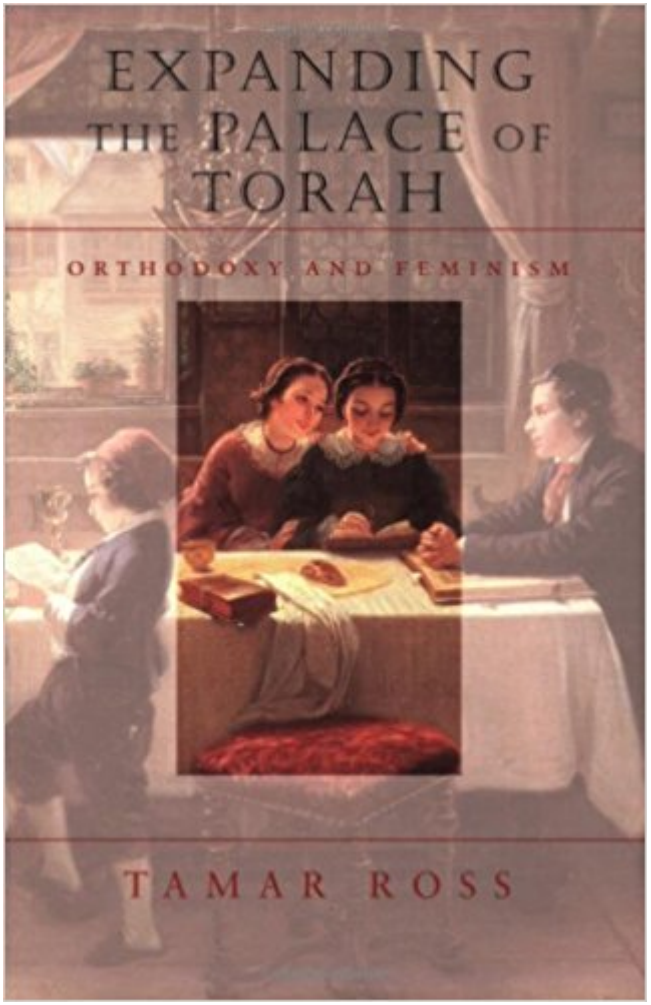
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Expanding The Palace Of Torah: Orthodoxy And Feminism (HBI Series On Jewish Women)



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Synopsis

Expanding the Palace of Torah offers a broad philosophical overview of the challenges the women's revolution poses to Orthodox Judaism, and Orthodox Judaism's response to those challenges. Surprisingly, very little work has been done in this area, beyond exploring the leeway for ad hoc solutions to practical problems as they arise on the halakhic plane. Most Jewish feminist critiques addressing broader theological concerns are conducted by non-Orthodox, Anglo-educated women. Their works attempt to locate in Judaism the root causes for what is allegedly wrong with the past and current state of women and offer suggestions for more fundamental reform. In relying on an avowedly selective range of sources and ignoring the full stock of Judaism's rich interpretive tradition, such studies bypass internal tools and concepts of the existing halakhic establishment and fail to engage the unique religious assumptions of the living community most totally committed to its tenets. Ross believes that this approachÃ¢â ¬â •in many ways extrinsic to the reality it purports to affectÃ¢â ¬â •has little chance of gaining the type of halakhic or theological credibility crucial for wholehearted acceptance by the Orthodox mainstream.Writing as an insider (herself an Orthodox Jew), Ross confronts the radical feminist critique of Judaism as a religion deeply entrenched in patriarchy. In exposing the largely androcentric thrust of the rabbinic tradition and its biblical grounding, she sees this critique as posing a potential threat to the theological heart of traditional JudaismÃ¢â ¬â •the belief in divine revelation. Ross seeks to develop a theological response that fully acknowledges the male bias of Judaism's sanctified texts, yet nevertheless provides a rationale for transforming the relative import and significance of that bias in today's world without undermining their authority. Uncovering aspects of Jewish tradition that support this response, Ross proposes an approach to divine revelation which she calls "cumulativism." Building upon some interesting points of contact between postmodernist thinking and traditional Jewish ideas with regard to the meaning and function of religious language and the significance of context, this approach is based on a conflating of strict boundaries between text and its interpretation, or divine intent and the evolution of human understanding. Ross believes that the greater fluidity afforded by cumulativism in understanding the mechanics of revelation and halakhic deliberation is necessary for legitimizing the insights of feminism and fully absorbing women's changed status within the religious rubric of Jewish tradition. Emphasizing that continuity with tradition can be maintained only when the halakhic system is understood as a living and dynamic organism that grows via affirmation of its historical legacy and respect for its constraints, her book shows that the feminist revolution in Orthodox Judaism reaches beyond its practical effect upon individual lives to teach us something more profound about the nature of religious practice in general.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This may be one of the most important works to date in tracking the changes in Judaism over the past 2000 years." Ã¢â ¬â •Jewish Book WorldÃ¢â ¬Å“Addressing the practical and the theological challenges that feminism poses to halakah, Ross offers a brilliant study, informed not only by ancient, medieval, and modern Jewish sources, but also by postmodernism, the history of feminism, process theology, mysticism, and legal theory . . . She finds the key to change in women's increasing knowledge of halakah, whose meaning women can transform by weaving a different narrative . . . Highly recommended.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •CHOICEÃ¢â ¬Å“[Expanding the Palace of Torah is] a brave, in many ways radical and essential, attempt to deal with the problem seriously, and is a model of erudition and scholarshipÃ¢â ¬Â¦ Her book offers a powerful alternate theological vision that challenges some of the basic assumptions of the Orthodox Jewish world, and gives a glimpse of just how revolutionary feminism could be to Orthodoxy.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •ForwardÃ¢â ¬Å“Ross' conjoining of the patriarchal past with a feminist future in the single unfolding process of divine revelation is an unprecedented, and I would suggest brilliant, move in the world of Jewish feminism... this book is ground-breaking in the field of theology (Jewish, feminist and otherwise). It is beautifully written, masterfully insightful in its analysis of earlier feminist attempts to resolve a similar set of challenges and subtly brilliant in the presentation of its own solutions. I simply cannot say enough positive things about it. It is thought-provoking and

sophisticated. I have no doubt that this book will become a standard textbook for courses on Jewish feminism.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues

Ã¢â ¬Å“In this exceptional book, Ross brings together philosophical, theological, legal, and feminist writings, presenting a many faceted critique of Jewish legal developments and an account of the latest thinking on problematic issues. Writing as a passionately engaged Orthodox Jew, her approach is a refreshing combination of the critical and the respectful, and her solutions to the problems she raises are both provocative and eloquent. Writing in a postmodernist vein, she offers a quantum leap in her complex yet trenchant perspective on the challenge posed by feminism to the concept of Revelation.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg, author of Genesis: the Beginning of Desire, winner of the National Jewish Book Award for nonfiction)

In this brilliant book, Tamar Ross explores theological questions essential to Orthodox Judaism with honesty and a deep commitment to the Orthodox tradition. She does a remarkable job of exploring the Feminist critique of Orthodox Judaism while maintaining that the tradition and its loyalty to halacha -- Jewish law -- are essential for the long-term survival of the Jewish people. Rejecting apologist rationalizations of a woman's sometimes difficult position in the tradition, she instead offers a powerful and satisfying alternative explanation of how to view women's issues within the tradition, a view based on respected and even revered sources in Orthodoxy itself. This book should be required reading for all thinking, searching and questioning Jewish women.

Excellent. Highly recommended.

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