



# The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition

*Michael Kaufman*

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Are abortion and birth control permitted in Jewish law? Does Judaism require women to marry? May women be called to the Torah? Why are women excused from certain commandments in the Torah, and are they permitted to fulfill those from which they are exempt? How does Judaism view Torah study for girls? What is the status of women in Jewish religious, civil, and criminal law? In *The Woman in Jewish Law and Tradition*, Michael Kaufman explores these and other issues in order to dispel the myths and misunderstandings that have distorted the popular conception of women in Judaism and been propagated for generations. 'Much of the misunderstanding concerning the status of women in Judaism,' says Kaufman, 'is undoubtedly rooted in popular misconceptions regarding the gender spheres in Judaism.' Jewish gender spheres refer to the complementary positions men and women are assigned in both the public and private areas of life. Kaufman explains that Judaism has long recognized that the two sexes are fundamentally different in many ways. 'Judaism teaches that the inherent disparities between the dominant inclinations of men and women are part of the grand design of the Creator that people fulfill the task set out for them in the world. Each finds satisfaction in his or her complementary role. This contributes to the harmony of the family unit.' The Torah provides a set of laws and rules governing the relationship of men and women to God and to each other for the proper functioning of the world. In addition to defining the roles of women in marriage and family life, ritual observances, prayer, Torah study, and systems of law, Kaufman provides a look at the extensive impact of women in Jewish history.

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