

THE JEWISH
RECONSTRUCTIONIST
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THE STATUS OF THE JEWISH WOMAN

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I

Few aspects of Jewish thought and life illustrate so strikingly the need of transforming and reconstructing what has come down to us from the past as the traditional status of the Jewish woman. In Jewish tradition, her status is unquestionably that of inferiority to the man. If the Jewish woman is to contribute her share to the regeneration of Jewish life, and if in turn Jewish life is to bring out the powers for good that are in her, this status must be changed. She must attain in Jewish law and practice a position of religious, civic and juridical equality with the man, and this attainment must come about through her own efforts and initiative. Whatever liberal minded men may do in her behalf is bound to remain but a futile and meaningless gesture. The Jewish woman must demand the equality due her as a right to which she is fully entitled. That right is conceded to her in other civilizations where she is treated as a full-fledged person. There is no reason why the Jewish civilization should persist in treating her in this day and age as though she were a minor, a half-wit, or a slave.

As a prerequisite to her self-emancipation, the Jewish woman must be on her guard against being misled into believing that all she needs to do to improve her position is to carry out the spirit of Jewish traditional teaching. The first step in her struggle for equality is to have her eyes opened to the truth concerning her position in Jewish life and teaching of the past. She must be made aware that her status, as defined in Jewish tradition, is not only incompatible with enlightened opinion, but also prejudicial to her material and spiritual interests. Too much of what has been said and written about the Jewish woman is of a kind that is likely to act as an opiate, and to set her mind at rest instead of arousing her to an awareness of the disabilities which are imposed upon her by traditional law. Numerous discourses have been delivered and essays