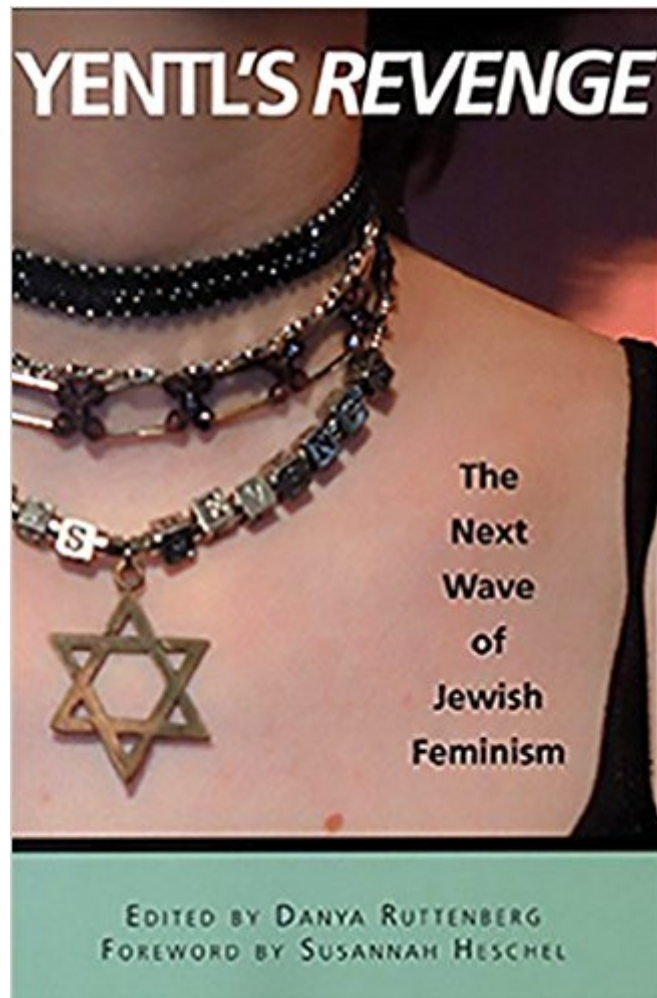




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# Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave Of Jewish Feminism



## Synopsis

Thanks in large part to the struggles of their activist foremothers, today's young Jewish women have a dizzying array of spiritual options. *Yentl's Revenge* chronicles a range of experiences lived by an entire generation of women, from Judeo-pagan witches to young Orthodox mothers, from rabbis to sex educators. Contributors ponder Jewish transgenderdom, Jewish body image, Jewish punk, the stereotype of the Jewish American Princess, intermarriage, circumcision, faith, and intolerance. Essays include "Bubbe Got Back: Tales of a Jewish Caboose" by Ophira Edut, and "On Being a Jewish Feminist Valley Girl" by Tobin Belzer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ruttenberg, a San Francisco-based writer and contributing editor to the Jewish feminist journal *Lilith*, has assembled a provocative collection of impassioned essays by an unorthodox group of young Jewish feminists. The 20 writers wrestle with a wide range of issues from mainstream concerns like identity and Zionism, to edgier ones such as witchcraft and transgender theory. Particularly challenging is Haviva Ner-David's "Parenting as a Religious Jewish Feminist." Having grown up feeling "marginalized and irrelevant," Ner-David is now studying with an Orthodox rabbi in Jerusalem for rabbinic ordination. She prays with the male accouterments of phylacteries and prayer shawl, and has taken part in other traditionally male rituals. Attuned to the discomfort she produces in other observant Jews, she expresses ambivalence about imposing her customs on her

daughters. Loolwa Khazzoom, a Jew of Iraqi descent, describes the alienation she felt sitting behind the women's prayer partition and in the face of condescension from Jews of European descent. Like the other writers here, instead of simply rejecting Judaism, Khazzoom is actively involved in redefining her Jewishness, currently working as program coordinator of the Jewish Multicultural Education Project when she is not singing and playing bass for her all-girls band. A left-wing religious Jew, Emily Wages takes on those progressive Jews who identify Judaism with oppression, patriarchy and xenophobia, while they honor other religions and cultures. With an upbeat foreword by noted Jewish scholar and feminist Susannah Heschel, this cutting-edge anthology is a welcome testament to how Jewish Gen-X women are finding their own distinctive voices. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

I was deeply moved by this provocative and absolutely necessary book. Ruttenberg has done a great job in selecting these essays. However, I was able to identify strongly with one specific essay. The one by Loolwa Khazoom, a Jewish woman of Iraqi descent. Being a Jew from Yemeni origin, I have found myself constantly struggling to preserve my Yemenite Jewish upbringing and redefining Jewishness for myself. Living in North America makes it even more difficult to communicate that we are Jews and yet entitled to our Middle Eastern difference. And that we are Arabs and yet entitled to our religious difference, like Arab Christians and Arab Muslims. For me, Jewishness wasn't always Ashkenazi. I never heard of a dreidel, even though I love bagels I don't understand a word of Yiddish. To me, Jewishness was almost always inextricably linked to Middle Easternness. For those of us who don't hide our Middle Easternness under one Jewish "we," it becomes tougher and tougher to exist in an American context hostile to the very notion of Easternness. As an Arab Jew, I am often obliged to explain the "mysteries" of this oxymoronic entity. That we have spoken Arabic, not Yiddish; that for millennia our cultural creativity, secular and religious, had been largely articulated in Arabic (as well as Judeo-Arabic and Aramaic. Maimonides being one of the few Middle Eastern Jewish intellectuals to "make it" into the consciousness of the West. His famous "Guide to the Perplexed" was written in Arabic under the title "Dalalat Al-Hai'reen"); and that even the most religious of our communities in the Middle East and North Africa never expressed themselves in Yiddish-accented Hebrew prayers, nor did they practice liturgical-gestural norms and sartorial codes favouring the dark colours of centuries-ago Poland. Middle Eastern women similarly never wore wigs; their hair covers, if worn, consisted of different variations on regional clothing (and in the wake of British and French imperialism, many wore Western-style clothes). If you go to our synagogues, even in New York, Montreal, Paris or London, you'll be amazed to hear the winding quarter tones of

our music which the uninitiated might imagine to be coming from a mosque. I strongly recommend this book!

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Deftly compiled and edited by Danya Ruttenberg, *Yentle's Revenge: The Next Wave Of Jewish Feminism* is an impressive collection of essays by women in their 20s and 30s who are changing the very meaning of what it is to be Jewish. The range of thoughtful, informative, and challenging contributions offer a range of perspectives from former riot grrls to Judeo-pagan witches to young Orthodox mothers. The wide ranging and diverse issues covered include circumcision, intermarriage, and the stereotype of the Jewish American Princess. Also chronicled are searches for

faith, detailed intolerance, and defying expectations. Enhanced with a preface by Susannah Heschel (editor of "On Being A Jewish Feminist) and a glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terminology, Yentl's Revenge is a welcome and seminal contribution to feminist studies in general, and the changing roles and perceptions of Jewish women entering the 21st Century in particular.

This anthology offers a startling, fresh set of essays on the issues faced by 20- and 30-something women who wish to embrace Judaism in positive, feminist ways. The good news is that the book avoids becoming a gripe session about the sexism or other shortcomings in some Jewish practices. Instead most of the authors offer intriguing and often entertaining glimpses of how they have dealt with or are dealing with those issues (which are certainly diverse, ranging from involvement with Paganism, to being a "sexy" Rabbi, to -- horror of horrors -- marrying a nice Jewish boy).I found the book very accessible, and I'm betting it'll prompt interesting debates at coffee klatsches as well as in the classroom. Thus the rating: 5 stars (of David)!!

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