

# Section 9 – Patriarchal Monotheism

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## Winners and Losers

In the long struggle between priests and priestesses there were temporal winners and losers. Men gained everything: religious and political power, wealth and control, and the subservience of women. The Judahites were not at all unique in their misogyny, but there was a significant difference between them and others, such as the Athenians or the Assyrians. These latter, though they too reduced their women to the status of chattels, never took away their access to the Goddess, their light in the darkness of male oppression. In Judah, the monotheist priests of El effaced his consort and did everything they could to eradicate the Goddess and destroy her power. It needs little imagination to see how this, by extension, was also perpetrated on women, who had every vestige of equality stripped from them, always in the name of greater devotion to Jahweh.

The cumulative effect of this was shocking. Women were literal possessions of men, for all of their lives. They were not even counted as people in the official censuses, a system of enumeration that began in Greece, continued throughout the Middle East and spread across the Roman Empire. No census ever counted a woman – since she was merely the property of a man. In Judah, especially after the return of the Babylonian Exiles, the oppression of women was suffocating. Men could beat or even kill the women they possessed and, in some cultures, they could have many wives. Of course, women were forbidden to have sex with any but their husbands, on pain of horrific death, and had to obey their commands. A woman had to be a virgin when she married. She could not speak to a man who was not her husband, brother, father or son. A woman could not speak to any man, no matter his relation to her, during her monthly flow, and then she had to hide away from society and neither cook food nor otherwise attend to her family. Women could not eat at the same table as men. They could not inhabit the same space as men and instead lived in a closed compartment of their husband's tent, or in a separate room in his house. They could not walk beside their husbands, but had to remain several paces behind. They could not show themselves in public, nor hold political office or property in their own names. Even citizenship was denied them.<sup>1</sup>

‘They had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above

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<sup>1</sup> The imposition of the veil upon women was not originated by Muslims, it is just continuing as part of Islam. ‘If the wives of a man, or the daughters of a man go out into the street, their heads are to be veiled.’ *The Code of Assura*. c. 1075 BCE, Assyria. ([http://www.world-mysteries.com/awr\\_laws3.htm](http://www.world-mysteries.com/awr_laws3.htm) Retrieved 01/09/2014.)

that of slaves.<sup>2</sup>

This was an oppressed and oppressive culture, and ripe for new ideas.

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<sup>2</sup> Metzger B.M. & Coogan M.D., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, Oxford University Press. 1993. Cited at [http://www.religioustolerance.org/ofe\\_bibl.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/ofe_bibl.htm) Retrieved 14/10/2014.