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# Jewish Intellectual History: 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Course Guidebook

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Professor Ruderman is the author of *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham B. Mordecai Farissol* (Hebrew Union College Press), for which he received the JWB National Book Award in Jewish History in 1982; *Kabbalah, Magic, and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Harvard University Press); and *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham Ben Hananiah Yagel* (University of Pennsylvania Press; Shazar Institute, Jerusalem). He is co-author, with William W. Hallo and Michael Stanislawski, of the two-volume *Heritage: Civilization and the Jews Study Guide and Source Reader* (Praeger), prepared in conjunction with the showing of the public television series of the same name. Professor Ruderman has edited *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York University Press), *Preachers of the Italian Ghetto* (University of California Press), and *The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians* (with David Myers; Yale University Press). His most recent works are *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (Yale University Press; Wayne State University Press) and *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press). He received the Koret Book Award in Jewish History in 2001 for the latter book.

Professor Ruderman is also the author of numerous articles and reviews. He has served on the board and as vice-president of the Association of Jewish

Studies and on the boards of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, the Renaissance Society of America, and the World Union of Jewish Studies. He also chaired the task force on continuing rabbinic education for the Central Conference of American Rabbis and HUC-JIR (1989–1992) and the Publications Committee of the Yale Judaic Series, published by Yale University Press (1984–1994). He is the current president of the American Academy for Jewish Research, the senior honor society of American professors of Judaic studies. He also has taught in the graduate school of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at the Hebrew University. Professor Ruderman currently serves as director of the Victor Rothschild Memorial Symposium in Jewish studies, a seminar for doctoral and post-doctoral students held each summer at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University, in Jerusalem. The National Foundation for Jewish Culture recently awarded him a lifetime achievement award for his work in Jewish history. He has lectured widely to university audiences, as well as clergy, community, synagogue, and church groups. He was born in New York in 1944 and is married with two grown children.

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# Jewish Intellectual History: 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

## Scope:

This course explores the problem of Jewish identity in the modern era, roughly in the last three centuries. Like other religious and national groups, Jews confronted manifold challenges in defining the meaning their religious and cultural affiliation could hold in a social and intellectual world radically different from that of the pre-modern age. Secularist and universalistic ideologies threatened to undermine the specific faith and practice that had bound Jews together for centuries. Were the propositions that an all-powerful God existed, that he demanded of his adherents a sanctified body of religious duties, and that he still provided comfort in a world plagued with untold suffering, especially for Jews, still tenable to the majority of Jews? Could Jews still justify the notion of a chosen people, living apart from the rest of humanity, marrying within its own faith community, and even living within the borders of its ancestral homeland in a social climate where Jewish integration and full participation with the rest of humanity had become the norm? And what were Jews expected to do as Jews to express this group loyalty if the traditional notions of divine service had become increasingly tenuous to many who valued more their own human autonomy and “doing their own thing”? Could the dictates of a communal legal code and an insistence on group loyalty and group cohesiveness still command their continued allegiance?

This is a course about Jewish identity but hardly one for Jews alone. Although it looks specifically at the social and cultural world of Jews and their intellectual responses to modernity, it addresses more broadly the challenge of any particular group, grounded in a tradition of religious thought and practice, attempting to make sense of the overwhelming and radical changes in its social, political, economic, and intellectual status in the modern world. Could any traditional ideology survive the onslaught of these new social pressures and intellectual challenges without discarding, modifying, or redefining its very notions of self in relation to “others” and its self-imposed norms of group behavior that had retained their legitimacy for centuries?

This course deals with the Jewish encounter with modernity, but it is not meant to be a survey of modern Jewish history or sociology that focuses primarily on the political, social, or economic contexts of the modern

Jewish experience. Although it refers to these specific contexts, the continuities and discontinuities of Jewish life in Europe, North America, and the Middle East in the last three centuries, it is primarily concerned with a small group of thinkers living in the modern era, who responded to the changes of their lifetimes by reflecting deeply on the texts and traditions of Judaism and their continuing relevance for modern Jews. In other words, the course deals with the formation of a modern Jewish consciousness on the part of an elite group of intellectuals and, in some cases, communal leaders, who addressed in their writing the challenge of being Jewish in the modern world. As Jewish thinkers had done in previous ages, they grappled with the meaning of God, Torah, and Israel, that is, with personal belief, with the meaning of Jewish ritual acts, and with the purpose of continued Jewish existence. They began from a position of faith and attempted to articulate a sense of the meaning of that faith to other Jews with attenuated loyalty to Jewish tradition. In this manner, the writings of these thinkers are linked directly to the long exegetical traditions of Jewish writers in earlier ages, who had previously attempted to breathe new life and meaning into the sacred texts and utterances of classical Judaism.

After carefully describing the broad setting of modern Jewish life, the course initially looks backward at several radical changes that affected Jewish life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, establishing the context for Benedict Spinoza and his devastating assault on the foundations of both Judaism and Christianity. In some sense, the lectures that follow offer a series of responses to Spinoza's challenge regarding the viability of Judaism in the modern era. Beginning with the German Jewish thinker Moses Mendelssohn, the course then offers a series of case studies of Jewish thinkers who strove to understand the meaning of Judaism for their era. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Enlightenment ideas, political emancipation, nationalism, and socialism, along with new and virulent forms of anti-Semitism, stimulated the construction of new religious and secular ideologies (Reform, Conservatism, Neo-Orthodoxy, Zionism, and Jewish socialism). In the twentieth century, Jewish thinkers again rethought their identities in post-modern categories, which for many, meant a painful engagement with the implications of the Holocaust for the future of human existence and Jewish faith.



No doubt the selection of thinkers and subjects I have chosen to treat is subjective, based on my own personal interests and expertise. But I do contend that the panoramic view of Jewish intellectual history in modern times offered by these lectures will provide a useful and fairly comprehensive introduction to a subject of great import to those attempting to understand the condition of Jewish belief, as well as the place of religion and ethnic identity in our contemporary world.

# Lecture One

## On Studying Jewish History

**Scope:** This first lecture offers some preliminary observations about studying Jewish history, in any period, in an academic setting. It focuses first on the most interesting and unique aspect of the Jewish historical experience—the landlessness of the Jewish community during most of its existence. The concepts of *homeland* and *diaspora* become, accordingly, central to understanding the particular evolution of Jewish political, religious, and intellectual life. Thus, the problem of defining “Jewishness” is not merely a problem of the modern era but of centuries of Jewish existence. In understanding themselves, Jews have had to constantly ponder the problem of spatial and temporal discontinuities. Without a common government, language, and land, in what way do Jews share a common history?

The academic study of Jewish history also requires us to spell out clearly and honestly our own approach to material that has often been treated with certainly ideological presuppositions. In defining my own approach to studying Jewish history, I identify three previous approaches laden with ideological baggage that have left their impact on the study of the Jewish past: the traditional Jewish approach, the traditional Christian approach, and the approach of the nineteenth-century founders of the academic study of Judaism. In exploring the biases and limitations of each approach, I seek a more neutral and critical stance toward my subject.

The lecture ends with a preliminary look at the three themes that will link the disparate case studies of modern Jewish thinkers the course treats. The themes of *God*, *Torah*, and *Israel* represent a succinct formulation of the overriding system of belief and praxis constructed by rabbinic Judaism. These same themes have a particular resonance in the modern era and will be used as markers of analysis in tracing the evolution of modern Jewish thought.

### Outline

- I. To begin our course, we should consider some general remarks on the study of Jewish history.

- A. Jewish history, although interwoven with the history of world civilization, is unique in one respect: its landlessness.
    - 1. This uncommon aspect begins in 586 B.C.E. with the Babylonian exile. In 70 C.E., it becomes more uncommon with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome and, by 136 C.E., it becomes even more uncommon and fascinating after the final defeat by Rome.
    - 2. Without a common government, language, or land, how do Jews have a history? Is there really a commonality between the United Monarchy of Israel in its biblical setting and the contemporary United Jewish Communities of the United States of America?
  - B. Although the problem of spatial and temporal discontinuity is real, Jews generally acted as a self-conscious and definable group. They acted corporately and were acted upon corporately.
    - 1. In the Middle Ages, Jews were more or less a legal corporate group, governing themselves by their own divine laws and through governmental consent.
    - 2. Only in the modern period, Jews began to acquire regular citizenship with no special corporate rights and disabilities.
    - 3. Especially in the pre-modern world, the nature of Jewish religious affiliation was all-embracing. As Jews moved from culture to culture, they took their religion with them.
    - 4. In more recent times, both the sense of group consciousness and religious affiliation have significantly diminished for many Jews.
  - C. Jewish history is one of adaptation and synthesis with the larger cultures in which Jews lived.
    - 1. Jewish history cannot be studied in isolation from general currents.
    - 2. The Bible needs to be studied in relation to the ancient Near East, medieval Jewish thought as part of Islamic and Christian thought, and Zionism as part of the history of modern nationalism.
- II. Three previous approaches have prevailed in the study of Jewish history. Each of these approaches has its limitations.
- A. The Jewish traditional approach incorporates some basic assumptions inherent in the Jewish tradition itself.

1. This approach assumes the linear development of history, a divine drama unfolding, culminating in the messianic era.
  2. Events occur because of the will of God.
  3. The Bible is of divine authorship.
  4. The exile is a condition caused by the Jewish people's breaking of the covenant, which will not be overcome until God sends the messiah.
  5. The notion of exile implies both a physical and a theological "casting out."
  6. This view dominated Jewish writing before the modern era, providing a theological explanation of Jewish fate and suffering.
- B.** The Christian traditional approach sees Jewish history as significant only as a pre-history of Christianity.
1. Only until 136 C.E. did Jews have a political cultural history. Jewish history ends with the rise of the Catholic Church, engendered by the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees and the later rabbis.
  2. Because the Church is the true Israel, what happens to Jews after the rise of Christianity is insignificant and not worthy of study.
  3. As the historian Gavin Langmuir has argued, this view of Jewish history had great impact on secular historical writing at least until the 1960s.
- C.** Nineteenth-century Jewish scholars, especially Heinrich Graetz (the subject of a later lecture), were methodologically limited, as well.
1. Graetz saw Jewish history primarily as a history of Jewish intellectual elites and the record of Jewish suffering immorally carried out by non-Jews.
  2. This history was clearly apologetic, attempting to show how Jews were entitled to full citizenship rights, that their culture was up-to-date and rational. What appeared out-of-date and embarrassing was often understated or distorted, such as the history of Jewish mysticism.
- D.** A meaningful approach to Jewish history must try to overcome the biases of these previous approaches.
1. Divine causality does not offer the key to understanding how individuals, peoples, and institutions behave.

2. Jewish history shares a common methodology with other histories.
3. I certainly bring my own prejudices to the subject because there is no such thing as an objective historian. But at least I attempt to be self-conscious about my own prejudices and to strive for objectivity and honesty in viewing the past.

**III.** Our study of Jewish history focuses on the history of modern Jewish thought through the use of three traditional categories of Jewish faith: *God*, *Torah*, and *Israel*. The questions these categories raise shall be used to analyze and to link the thinkers in this course together.

- A.** *God* is a central concern of modern Jewish intellectual history.
  1. The primary questions are: Is there a God and how do we know it?
  2. A third question emerges, especially from Jewish experience: How can God exist in the background of so much human suffering?
- B.** *Torah* literally means the five books of Moses, but for our purposes, it denotes the question of the validity of Jewish practice.
  1. Are Jews still required to accept traditional revelation and the dictates of rabbinic law?
  2. In place of Jewish law, what do Jews do to express their identity: speak Hebrew, eat Jewish food, socialize with Jews, live in Israel—what else?
- C.** *Israel* addresses the question of a rationale for Jewish particularity.
  1. In a universal culture, why should Jews remain distinct and apart from others?
  2. Why can't individual Jews intermarry with non-Jews?
  3. What is the rationale of a distinct Jewish state of Israel?

### **Essential Reading:**

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Michael Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 1–42.

Review of Meyer by Jacob Neusner in *History and Theory* 14 (1975), pp. 212–226 (reprinted in Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Essays in Jewish Historiography*, pp. 176–190).

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Is there such a field as Jewish history, given the temporal and spatial discontinuities of Jewish existence? Can it be studied in the same manner as any national history?
2. Given the ideological baggage that students of Jewish history have brought to their subjects, can the academic historian really address this human experience objectively and dispassionately? Does one have to be Jewish to fully understand Jewish history?

## Lecture Two

### Defining Modern Jewish History and Thought

**Scope:** The modern period represents a time of tremendous upheaval and change in the political, economic, and social status of Jews. It also marks a radical shift in Jews' own understanding of their identity and heritage. Modern Jewish history can be characterized by six major developments: a change in the political structure of Jewish communal life; major demographic changes, including major population shifts, dramatic growth spirals, and the migration of Jews to urban centers; changes in the economic status of Jews, especially associated with the rise of modern capitalism; the rise of modern anti-Semitism and the Holocaust of European Jewry; the rise of Jewish nationalism and the rebirth of a Jewish state; and the emergence of a uniquely untraditional Jewish community in North America.

Historians have long contested the precise criteria for distinguishing the modern era. When does modern Jewish history actually begin? The views of some major historians are considered, including those of Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891) (the subject of a later lecture), Simon Dubnov (1860–1941), Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1972), and Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), along with the ideological presuppositions that influenced their views. No precise date for the beginning of the modern period is offered, but rather, a process of “modernization” gradually unfolds over centuries, varying among differing localities and sub-communities.

Modernity can also be traced to the Jews' evaluation of themselves in light of the radical changes affecting their status. In relative terms, one might note a shift of Jewish self-definition from a focus on divine demands and expectations, more characteristic of the pre-modern Jew, to a greater concern for those of non-Jewish society. In the modern era, the problem of providing a rationale for Jewish particularism in an increasingly universal age, at least in theory if not in practice, obliges Jewish thinkers to discard Jewish identity in the name of a more universal culture (I call this the outsider approach); or to retain Jewish identity but to reform its anachronistic aspects (I call this the insider approach); or to reject

any encroachment of Western culture altogether by defiantly reasserting the desirability of a distinct Jewish identity. We shall refer to these three approaches taken by Jewish thinkers throughout the course.

## Outline

- I. Six major developments radically altered the character of Jewish experience in the modern era.
  - A. First, and perhaps most important, was a change in the structure of Jewish communal life.
    1. In the modern period, the corporate structure of Jewish life disintegrates. With the centralization of the absolute state, all groups that potentially threaten the authority of the ruler are dissolved.
    2. With the lack of official recognition of the Jewish community, the problem of Jewish self-definition arises: Were the Jews to be considered a community or a church, or perhaps, was there no longer any rationale for group cohesiveness?
    3. The breakdown of the community was not a monolithic process; it varied among different regions and sub-communities.
  - B. Major demographic changes affected the modern Jewish community.
    1. Major population shifts affected Jewish life in the sixteenth, seventeenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, including migrations emerging from expulsions, poverty, persecution, and even the threat of mass killing.
    2. The Jewish community experienced natural growth rates, especially in the nineteenth century up until 1939, that far outstripped the general population.
    3. Jews increasingly settled in urban centers in modern Europe, accelerating their interaction with the non-Jewish population.
  - C. Changing economic opportunities emerged for Jews, especially associated with the rise of capitalism.
    1. The historian Werner Sombart (1863–1941) initiated a discussion about the role of Jews and the rise of capitalism by claiming that Jews brought capitalism to Europe.
    2. Sombart's points are clearly exaggerated, but no doubt, Jews were deeply involved in some aspects of the new economic



order. Moreover, capitalism allowed them greater economic opportunities than ever before.

- D.** Modern anti-Semitism arose in Europe.
  - 1. Associated with new nationalist and racist ideologies, a new anti-Semitism emerged in Western and Eastern Europe that was radically different than its pre-modern forms.
  - 2. Jews were now hated even when they chose to convert to Christianity.
  - 3. The culmination of these new trends was the extermination of European Jewry in the twentieth century.
- E.** The fifth development was the rise of Jewish nationalism and the rebirth of the state of Israel.
  - 1. Jews had lived from 136 outside the land of Israel.
  - 2. Drawing from traditional messianism and modern nationalist ideologies, Zionist ideologues attempted to solve the Jewish problem by creating a Jewish national homeland.
  - 3. Their efforts were accelerated by a growing despair among Jews over the new anti-Semitism and the bleak prospects of coexistence with their non-Jewish neighbors.
- F.** An American Jewish community emerged.
  - 1. North America offered new promise for Jewish immigrants where a long tradition of anti-Semitism was absent and repudiated.
  - 2. American Jewish life, with its open and volunteeristic character, also lacked a tradition of Jewish group cohesiveness, leading to easy assimilation and loss of Jewish identity.

**II.** Jewish historians have dated the modern Jewish experience in differing ways.

- A.** Heinrich Graetz dated modernity from the end of the eighteenth century. For him, the crucial factor was the beginning of the Enlightenment. Thus, Moses Mendelssohn was the first modern Jew.
- B.** Simon Dubnov saw the French Revolution and political emancipation as the beginning of modernity. Given his interest in political and communal history, the social and political factors were critical to him.

- C. Ben-Zion Dinur, the Zionist historian, saw the beginning of a mass Jewish return to the land of Israel in the early eighteenth century as the critical factor. He located this beginning in the immigration of Rabbi Judah Hasid and his followers in 1700.
  - D. Gershom Scholem located the beginning of modernity in the Sabbatean movement surrounding the alleged messiahship of Shabbetai Zevi in the late seventeenth century. For Scholem, an internal revolt against the norms of Judaism, based on mystical ideologies, preceded any external changes.
  - E. It is impossible to date modern Jewish history precisely; modernization is more a process than a singular event. One must also bear in mind the differing ways in which sub-Jewish communities based on region, cultural background, and gender responded to the changes of the modern world.
- III.** Modern Jewish thought can be traced to the Jews' evaluations of their own identity and faith in light of the aforementioned changes in their social and political status.
- A. In the pre-modern world, the Jew defined his faith primarily in relationship to God. In relative terms, medieval Jews were primarily concerned with living a divine life as revealed by God and rabbinic tradition.
  - B. In the modern world, the judge and jury of the Jews' actions became more the non-Jewish world.
    - 1. This does not mean that modern Jews did not continue to believe in God and his demands or that they were previously unconcerned with the non-Jewish world.
    - 2. In the modern world, however, with the weakening of the Jewish community, the problem of providing a rationale for being Jewish before a non-Jewish world became more enhanced.
- IV.** There were three possible ways to respond to the new challenge of being a modern Jew.
- A. The "insider" approach: to retain one's Jewishness but to alter it from its present anachronistic form by tailoring it to fit in with Western civilization.
    - 1. Most of this course deals with "insiders."

2. The classic problem of the “insider” is not only to show that Judaism is consistent with modern values but that, in some way, it adds something unique to the general culture and, thus, justifies its existence.
- B.** The “outsider” approach: to be liberated entirely from Judaism by creating a new culture altogether.
1. The Jewish problem in this case is solved by eliminating all particularities in the name of a new post-Jewish and Christian culture.
  2. In this category, the philosophies of Spinoza, Marx, and even Freud might be included.
- C.** The “rejectionist” approach: to defiantly refuse any encroachment by Western culture in general.
1. This primarily twentieth-century response reasserts Jewishness by rejecting any union or dialogue with Western culture at all.
  2. It is especially apparent in the wake of the Nazi extermination.

### **Essential Reading:**

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, especially chapters 3–7.

Michael Meyer, “Where Does Modern Jewish History Begin?” *Judaism* 24 (Summer 1975), pp. 329–338.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community*, pp. 1–20.

Raymond Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*, pp. 149–263.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. If the beginning of modern Jewish history cannot be precisely dated, what are the most important criteria in locating its approximate beginning?
2. How does modernity affect distinct regional communities (e.g., Eastern Europe, Western Europe, North Africa) and distinct sub-communities (e.g., men, women, urban, rural, intellectuals, and non-intellectuals) differently and in different times?

## Lecture Three

### Cultural Transformation in the Italian Ghetto

**Scope:** The setting of Jewish life in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century appears as unlikely a place as any to begin a survey of modern Jewish thought. I would argue, however, that the erection of the ghetto system throughout the Italian peninsula in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries ushers in a new era of Jewish-Christian relations and a new restructuring of Jewish cultural life. Although the term *ghetto* is usually laden with negative emotion when referring to the Jewish experience, its origin in Venice in the early sixteenth century suggests a more complicated reality. The ghettoization of the Jews theoretically obliged Jews to live in a compulsory segregated quarter, but it also created the conditions for their first urban experience, living in quarters contiguous with their Christian neighbors and appreciating, for the first time, a sense of entitlement and belonging in the cities they now inhabited. Paradoxically, the ghetto experience intensified the interaction between Jews and Christians, both elites and non-elites, by creating dramatic changes in the communal structure and internal life of Italian Jews; serving as a catalyst of cultural efflorescence in literature and the arts; and clearly adumbrating, in many respects, the challenges and opportunities of urban life for modern Jews in subsequent centuries.

Our examination of the cultural impact of the ghetto will be restricted to several case studies, especially in Venice, where among other features, the intense printing of Jewish books and the conspicuous presence of Jewish students at Italian universities are especially noteworthy.

### Outline

- I. *Ghetto* is a word laden with negative emotion in Jewish experience, but it is often loosely and inaccurately used and misunderstood.
  - A. The first ghetto was erected in Venice in 1516 as a compulsory segregated quarter in which all Jews were required to live and in which no Christian was allowed to live.

1. The term probably derives from the word for “foundry,” the site of the first ghetto.
  2. The ghetto was later instituted throughout Italy by the second half of the sixteenth century and the early seventeenth.
  3. Through enclosure and segregation, the Catholic community was to be shielded from Jewish contamination. One historian calls it “an urban condom.”
- B.** The period of the ghetto has usually been seen as a period of growing distancing and alienation of the Jewish minority from its Christian neighbors, where Jewish culture becomes more insulated and cut off, culturally and socially.
1. The ghetto period is usually contrasted with the Renaissance. In the eyes of earlier historians, the latter was more open and encouraged Jewish-Christian dialogue.
  2. The ghetto cut off this dialogue, forcing the Jew to retreat into a parochial and stifling existence.
- II.** The cultural significance of the ghetto period needs to be looked at in a different way. I propose to offer four scenes of ghetto life to make my point.
- A.** Scene 1: In 1638, Simone Luzzatto, a rabbi of Venice, wrote in Italian his *Discourse on the Condition of the Jews in the Fair City of Venice* for Venetian leaders and the public, arguing against a proposed expulsion of the Jewish population.
1. Luzzatto offered cogent economic and political arguments addressing why Jews should remain in the city and how they had contributed culturally, as well.
  2. He succeeded in protecting the Jewish community by composing his anti-defamatory work and standing up for the rights to which he believed Jews were entitled.
- B.** Scene 2: In 1624, Joseph Hamitz graduated from the medical school of Padua and his teacher, the renowned Venetian rabbi Leon Modena, made him a party.
1. Modena published a pamphlet of Hebrew poems written by many Jewish cultural leaders and Paduan graduates.
  2. The event symbolized the new reality of talented Jewish students attending a Catholic university and entering the medical field in relatively large numbers.

3. Hamitz, who eventually disappointed his teacher by becoming a follower of Shabbetai Zevi, the false messiah, nevertheless exemplified the new intellectual and professional life of Jewish elites in the ghetto.

C. Scene 3: At the end of the sixteenth century, the same Leon Modena recruited his talented friend Salomone de Rossi to compose music for the synagogue in Venice, using Hebrew texts and introducing, for the first time, polyphonic music.

1. Modena wrote an accompanying rabbinic *responsum* justifying the novelty according to Jewish law.
2. By introducing choral music into the synagogue, Modena fused Jewish cultural habits with those of the larger Catholic society. The synagogue was remade into the image of a Baroque church.

D. Scene 4: At the end of the sixteenth century, the kabbalist and rabbi Aaron Berachiah of Modena curbed a good time by not allowing the festivities associated with the evening before a ritual circumcision to continue as they had previously been done.

1. Before his enactment, men and women had celebrated all night with good food and wine until the circumcisor arrived in the morning to perform the ritual.
2. Modena separated the sexes and called on members of the religious confraternity to study the mystical works and to pray throughout the night.
3. Modena's toning down the popular celebration and sacralizing it clearly conformed to a larger pattern of Catholic counter-reform society.

III. What these four scenes all have in common is another way of looking at the cultural experience of the ghetto and its significance.

A. The notion of paradox might explain the nature of the ghetto experience.

1. No doubt, the congested ghetto was humiliating and miserable, but it also provided Jews a clearly defined space in Christian society.
2. Their proximity to Christians ironically created a new intimacy, a sense of belonging and identifying with the outside culture, given that the walls of the ghetto hardly inhibited Jewish-Christian interaction.

- B.** The ghetto enhanced Jewish cultural interaction with the outside world, rather than retarded it.
1. The active Jewish printing industry and the Jewish participation in the university were two signs of cultural efflorescence.
  2. Well-to-do Jews created not only Jewish music, but also conspicuous works of synagogue art and architecture and sumptuous wedding feasts and marriage certificates, even composing baroque poetry for their joyous occasions.
  3. The *kabbalah*, the traditions of Jewish mystical study and practice, became especially popular in the ghetto. The *kabbalah* was introduced into public sermons and into the life of religious confraternities and even became an element of fascination to Christian intellectuals.
- C.** The ghetto thus helped to restructure a new urban experience for Jews, stimulated by a new cultural energy among elites and a new closeness with the Catholic world.
- D.** The ghetto experience needs to be rethought regarding its impact on Jewish culture and as an interesting adumbration of the close cultural interactions the modern urban experience would hold for Jews in the centuries that followed.

### **Essential Reading:**

Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*.

Cecil Roth, *A History of the Jews of Italy*, pp. 329–420.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Robert Bonfil, “Changes in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century,” *Jewish History* 3 (1988), pp. 11–30.

David Ruderman, “The Cultural Significance of the Ghetto in Jewish History,” in *From Ghetto to Emancipation*, pp. 1–16.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What did the architects of the ghetto expect to achieve by their creation and what were, ultimately, the results?

2. In light of the historical experience in Italy, are ghettos good or bad for contemporary Jews? Can Jewish culture survive without the enclosure of the ghetto?



## Lecture Four

# Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Messianism

**Scope:** Two primary features of the Jewish experience in the seventeenth century were the reintegration and return to Jewish life of large numbers of Iberian Christians whose ancestors had originally been baptized and left the Jewish community (*conversos* or *marranos*). These Iberian exiles left Portugal and Spain to reassert their Jewish identity in Italy, the Ottoman Empire, the Netherlands, and Germany. They brought with them an intimate knowledge of Christianity, an entrepreneurial spirit, and an appreciation of European culture in general. Their re-education and return to Jewish life represented both a challenge and a unique opportunity in the restructuring of traditional Jewish-Christian relationships.

These conversos were especially aware of, and attracted to, the bizarre and repercussive messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676) who announced his messiahship to the world in 1665–1666 but eventually converted to Islam. The Sabbatean movement consisted of followers who continued to believe that Shabbetai Zevi was still the Jewish messiah and that the end of the world was at hand. Some of the more radical fringes of this movement repudiated Jewish norms and practices altogether in either converting to Islam or Christianity. The clear nexus between Sabbateanism and Marranism is underscored by the conspicuous numbers of conversos who even joined the leadership ranks of the movement. In blurring the boundaries between Jewish messianism and Christian millenarianism, between Jewish and Christian beliefs; in simultaneously adopting more secular lifestyles; and in repudiating traditional norms and practices, both the Sabbateans and conversos have been considered as contributing to a new modern Jewish consciousness. Their experience sets the stage for understanding the life and thought of Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza.

### Outline

- I. As a result of the mass emigration of conversos (previously baptized Jews) from the Iberian peninsula to Amsterdam, Hamburg, and other

places of refuge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Jewish community faced a new challenge and opportunity.

- A.** The converso phenomenon had emerged two centuries earlier in Spain.
1. Beginning in 1391, large numbers of Jews were baptized either under physical or psychological pressure, for economic, social, and even religious reasons.
  2. These conversos, derogatorily called *marranos* (“swine,” in Spanish), were harassed and subjected to the inquisition established in 1481.
  3. When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, the converso problem abated in Spain with the removal of a living Jewish community. In Portugal, however, the recent Jewish refugees from Spain were soon forcefully converted, creating a new converso problem and eventually a new inquisition.
  4. In 1580, when Portugal annexed Spain, conversos emigrated back to Spain, but a negative reaction again ensued, fed by deep racial bigotry toward the conversos, who were still considered racially Jewish.
  5. The new wave of hostility towards the conversos obligated them to flee to Italy (especially Livorno and Pisa), Amsterdam, Hamburg, the Ottoman Empire, and even central and eastern Europe.
- B.** The cultural implications of the new converso influx were manifold.
1. Those who returned to the Jewish community returned to Judaism as adults, having to master the rudiments of the Jewish religion and Hebrew and to accustom themselves to a post-biblical Judaism they had never known.
  2. Some conversos became zealots of their newfound faith, composing works in Spanish and Portuguese to “rehabilitate” other conversos.
  3. Some remained either convinced Catholics, opportunists open to any religious experience, or indifferent to any faith whatsoever.
  4. Some, such as Juan de Prado (c.1615–c.1670), Uriel da Costa (1585–1640), and Spinoza, viewed the dichotomy between what they imagined Judaism to be and what it actually was in

negative terms, denied rabbinic law and authority, and became heretics.

5. Others found refuge in messianic utopianism, especially the messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676).

**II.** In the seventeenth century, the messiahship of Shabbetai Zevi (see Biographical Notes) injected a new instability into Jewish life, creating a crisis of Jewish rabbinic authority.

**A.** Historians have differed about the causes of the Sabbatean movement.

1. Gershom Scholem has emphasized the ideological link with sixteenth-century kabbalistic ideas of Isaac Luria (1534–1572), particularly the implied messianic mission of his notion of repairing the world.
2. What is now clear is the conspicuous numbers of conversos who joined the Sabbatean ranks, seeing Shabbetai as a kind of Jesus-like messianic figure soon to bring about their own redemption.

**B.** After Shabbetai’s incarceration by the Ottoman authorities, his conversion to Islam, and his death, the movement continued to exist into the eighteenth century in both moderate and radical wings.

1. Already in his lifetime, Abraham Cardozo (1626–1706), the converso theoretician, adapted Sabbateanism to appeal to a converso mentality.
2. The Doenmeh, a group of Sabbateans who converted to Islam, and the Frankists, followers of Jacob Frank (see Biographical Notes) who converted to Christianity, elicited intense fears in the Jewish community regarding the nihilistic, antinomian tendencies of Sabbatean extremists.
3. In the eighteenth century, public recriminations continued against Sabbateans, who were generally considered to be enthusiasts, radicals who accepted no authority other than their own and threatened the viability of the Jewish community and its authority.

**III.** The implications of Marranism and Sabbateanism were significant in transforming traditional Jewish norms and challenging Jewish authority.

- A. Spinoza and Shabbetai Zevi are two connected phenomena because both involved the converso community, both were enthusiasts, and both were revolts against Jewish normative authority.
- B. Historians have argued that both the conversos and the Sabbateans were the first modern Jews in challenging the rabbis and the authority of the Jewish law and trying to create a new version of Jewish identity and practice.
- C. The dual interlocking phenomenon of Marranism and Sabbateanism is significant in blurring the boundaries between Judaism and other faiths, creating new syncretistic religious beliefs, and facilitating the merger of Jewish ideas with radical religious and political movements in Islam and Christianity, well into the nineteenth century.

### **Essential Reading:**

Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardic Diaspora in Western Europe*.

Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Jacob Barnai, "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna," *Jewish History* 7 (1993), pp. 119–126.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. In what way can the conversos (marranos) be considered the first modern Jews? How were their traditional communities in Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, and elsewhere remarkably untraditional?
2. What is ultimately the common link between Shabbetai Zevi and Benedict Spinoza? What do they together teach us about the Jewish experience in the seventeenth century?

## Lecture Five

# The Challenge of Baruch Spinoza

**Scope:** Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), born to a converso family living in Amsterdam, represents not only a seminal figure in European civilization but one crucial in shaping the evolution of modern Jewish thought. His *Theological-Political Treatise* first appeared in 1670 and marked his clear estrangement from his ancestral heritage. Spinoza, although indebted to medieval Jewish philosophy, especially Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), ultimately repudiated the assumptions on which Maimonides built his rational edifice of Judaism. Spinoza offered a radically new understanding of the separation of church and state; argued that the Bible should be understood for precisely what it says, not allegorically; rejected the Maimonidean equation of biblical prophecy and philosophy; denied the chosen status of the Jewish people; and questioned the rationale for the continued observance of ceremonial law as determined by rabbinic authority.

For Spinoza, reason had now come to judge the Bible and Jewish religious tradition on the basis of its own assumptions, and the shattering results sent shock waves through the intellectual world of Europe. True faith meant for Spinoza the unhampered activity of the human mind; reason and faith had to be disentangled to preserve the integrity of each. Spinoza, thus, became the first post-Jewish-Christian thinker to subject the two religions of the West to a devastating rational critique. Every Jewish (and Christian) thinker after him had to address and respond to his arguments, which placed the intellectual tradition of the West in direct opposition to Jewish religious authority. Spinoza had underscored the tension between personal autonomy and reason and Jewish communal demands, a tension to be felt acutely by all subsequent Jewish thinkers.

## Outline

- I. Spinoza's philosophy represents a critical turning point in the history of Jewish thought.
  - A. Spinoza came out of a converso milieu in Amsterdam.

1. He received a traditional rabbinic education, plus a knowledge of classical sources.
  2. When his father died, he stopped observing a traditional Jewish life, left the community for Rensberg, and broke fully from Judaism, though he did not convert.
  3. He composed his *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670, careful not to offend Christianity but openly hostile to Judaism.
- B.** His significance to Jewish thought is his total break from the tradition of medieval philosophy, especially the twelfth-century Spanish philosopher Moses Maimonides (see Biographical Notes).
1. His newness is, first of all, in his political beliefs. For him, the ideal state was the Protestant state—not the Mosaic theocracy—where church and state were separate.
  2. His target was the medieval philosopher Maimonides. Spinoza rejected Maimonides’s ideal of a theocracy, his equation of philosophy with prophecy, and his allegorical manner of reading the Bible.
  3. Spinoza’s reading of the Bible was radically new, reading it “naturally” for what it says exactly, in contrast to the way Maimonides had read it, arbitrarily and artificially.
  4. Spinoza laid the foundation of modern textual criticism of the Bible, arguing that the Bible was not written by God but by human beings.
  5. He saw the prophets speaking in fantasies to those unable to know God rationally, relying on fallacious miracles to convince their illiterate following.
- C.** His critique of Judaism is devastating and leaves the defense of Jewish particularity in question.
1. Having undermined the divinity of the Bible, there is no longer any justification for the chosenness of the Jewish people.
  2. There is also no rationale for observing the ceremonial laws nor for accepting the authority of the rabbis.
  3. The biblical stories of Moses and the prophets are fables meant to appeal to an uneducated slave population.
- II.** The impact of Spinoza’s critique is enormous; every subsequent thinker must deal with the implications of his position.

- A. Reason had now come to judge the Bible on its own assumptions and, thus, had negated the possibility of reconciling reason and faith, the primary objective of medieval religious philosophy.
- B. Spinoza had argued persuasively against the perpetuation of Judaism as a particular faith and community. Religion was meaningful only when universal, shared by all human beings, without particular barriers between Christians and Jews.
- C. Spinoza's critique was equally applicable to Christianity, but he nevertheless went out of his way to present Christianity more favorably than Judaism.
  - 1. For Spinoza, Jesus had begun the process of universalizing the religious experience, which reached a culmination in Paul.
  - 2. In some respects, Spinoza saw himself as a new Paul, further universalizing religion by underscoring its pure rational foundations.
- D. Spinoza's critique laid bare the contradiction between Jewish communal values and secular liberal ones.
  - 1. In many respects, Spinoza already offered the classical liberal argument about the incompatibility of being liberal and being Jewish in a traditional sense.
  - 2. The ideal of complete freedom to follow one's own path baldly contradicted the demands of a Jewish communal tradition and its commandments and requirements.
- E. Modern Jewish thought represents, to a great extent, a series of responses, repudiations, revisions, and acknowledgements of Spinoza's understanding.
  - 1. Beginning with Moses Mendelssohn and throughout the twentieth century, Jewish thinkers who advocate Jewish continuity must find a way of reconciling personal autonomy with communal authority.
  - 2. In some respects, Marx and Freud use a Spinoza-like argument in repudiating Judaism in the name of a higher human ideal. They were universalizers, as well.
  - 3. Some Jewish thinkers had to address the more favorable treatment Spinoza gave to Christianity over Judaism.

**Essential Reading:**

Steven Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*.

Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. by R. H. M. Elwes.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*.

Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How was Spinoza's experience as a Jew relevant in shaping his thinking about religion and state?
2. How is modern Jewish thought, in many respects, a direct response to the *Theological-Political Treatise*? For Spinoza, are Judaism and liberalism compatible?



## Lecture Six

### Moses Mendelssohn and His Generation

**Scope:** Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) was partially responding to Spinoza’s conclusions when he penned *Jerusalem* almost a hundred years later. He was also responding to the external pressure of his intellectual circle in Berlin, which had accepted him into its ranks despite his Jewish ancestry. Mendelssohn had significantly absorbed the values of the German religious Enlightenment. He had made his reputation in general philosophy, affirmed the value of intellectual freedom and the separation of church and state, and attempted to explain Judaism in rationalist and universalistic terms. For Mendelssohn, Judaism consisted of three elements: eternal truths based on reason, historical truths, and ceremonial laws. In formulating Judaism in this way, he had significantly reduced Jewish revelation to historical narratives and ceremonial laws. In so doing, he had tried to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism over Christianity because Judaism possessed revealed law, not revealed doctrines. In Mendelssohn’s new formulation, Jewish law became an individual obligation, detached from its communal or national setting. Judaism’s enduring significance now rested on its stress on intellectual freedom, along with the proper observance of law.

Mendelssohn’s strategy in rescuing Judaism from the assault of Spinoza and the Enlightenment ultimately failed, even among his own children, who converted to Christianity. In a changing intellectual context where Enlightenment presuppositions were giving way to the new intellectual styles of historicism and romanticism, Mendelssohn’s intellectual construction soon had little appeal. His rational arguments for maintaining Jewish practice were intellectually and emotionally unconvincing. In the end, the image of Mendelssohn as an exceptional Jew accepted as an intellectual equal among his contemporaries proved more compelling than his arguments in favor of Jewish continuity.

## Outline

- I. In the hundred years separating Spinoza and Mendelssohn, some shifts in social attitudes and the economic position of Jews are noticeable in Western Europe.
  - A. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a class of court Jews with extensive business connections and political power enjoyed special status in European society.
  - B. Spinoza's ideas about religious tolerance and the moral self-sufficiency of the state were articulated by such thinkers as John Locke and John Toland. In the Enlightenment period, these ideas became fashionable, particularly ideas of separation of church and state and the individual's right to do his or her own thing.
  - C. Not all Enlightenment thinkers tolerated Jews and sought their civic emancipation; especially notable was Voltaire.
  - D. An interesting venue for social contact and relatively equal treatment for Jews and Christians were the freemason associations in England and throughout the Continent.
- II. Moses Mendelssohn and his intellectual circle were active in Berlin.
  - A. Mendelssohn's development as a philosopher emerged in the 1760s and 1770s.
    1. Born in Dessau in 1729, he came to Berlin in 1743, where he had already studied philosophy and the sciences.
    2. He established social contact with people who did not normally associate with Jews, for example, the dramatist and philosopher Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the political theorist Christian Wilhelm von Dohm (1751–1820), and other leading intellectuals.
    3. He gained acclaim for his philosophic work on the immortality of the soul, called the *Phaedon*, expressing his intellectual journey from an exclusively Jewish environment to European society.
    4. Mendelssohn wrote other works in Hebrew but also translated the Torah into German and wrote a commentary on it.
  - B. Despite his social acceptance, Mendelssohn's Jewish identity seemed contradictory to Enlightenment values in the eyes of some of his circle.

1. He believed that the traditions of Judaism were binding on every Jew.
2. Publicly challenged to explain how he could remain traditionally Jewish while espousing the universal values of the Enlightenment, Mendelssohn was forced to compose *Jerusalem*.

### III. Mendelssohn argues that Jewish particularity is justified.

- A. Mendelssohn, in the first part of *Jerusalem*, argues for the separation of church and state and for the political rights of Jews. Following Locke, this part of his argument was critical in arguing that Jews had the right to practice their religion freely as full citizens of the state.
- B. In the second half of *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn offers his definition of Judaism and how it can be consistent with the philosophies of the Enlightenment. For Mendelssohn, there are three entities that constitute the Jewish faith. They are:
  1. Eternal truths based on reason, not on revelation, and synonymous with the eternal verities articulated as the basis of the universal religion by Spinoza and later by the deists.
  2. Historical truths essentially found in the Bible describing Israel's ancient history and its reception of the divine law.
  3. Ceremonial law revealed by God and incumbent upon every Jew to follow.

### IV. Mendelssohn's Jewish theology was a careful construction designed to show not only Judaism's correlation with Enlightenment values (and, in return, a response to Spinoza) but its superiority to Christianity.

- A. The explicitly revealed part of Judaism was now reduced to historical narratives and ceremonial law.
  1. This demonstrated the superiority of Judaism over Christianity because the former allowed for full intellectual freedom while the latter still relied on religious dogma imposed on its believers.
  2. By constructing Judaism in this way, Mendelssohn restricted the particular core of Judaism—the thing that was revealed by God—to ceremonial law.
- B. Mendelssohn had retained traditional laws but had cast them in a way that transformed their meaning.

1. The purpose of the ceremonies for Mendelssohn was to establish a unique way of life so that the Jewish people could exemplify a purer form of religion.
  2. He argued that by following certain ceremonial laws (keeping kosher, for instance), Jews were made more morally and ethically sensitive.
  3. His abstract argument on behalf of the law was hard to understand and remained unconvincing.
  4. He unconsciously designated the Jews with a spiritual mission to disseminate the natural religion, an idea Abraham Geiger would later more fully develop.
- V. Mendelssohn had constructed a bold new definition of Judaism, but it failed to persuade many, including his own family.
- A. Mendelssohn constructed new principles of Judaism for the modern world: an intellectual freedom combined with the individual observance of the law. This was the first clear articulation of a response to Spinoza and the Enlightenment.
  - B. With an intellectual climate moving away from Enlightenment categories to historicism and romanticism, Mendelssohn's construction was soon becoming obsolete.
  - C. Lacking emotionalism and offering a feeble defense of Jewish law, it failed to capture the loyalty of his own children and grandchildren, all but one of whom converted to Christianity.
  - D. Despite the limited impact of his defense of Jewish particularity, the image of Mendelssohn as Jew and universal man left an enduring impression on generations to come. Here was the example of a proud Jew who could fully function in a non-Jewish world.

### **Essential Reading:**

Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*.

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, trans. by Allan Arkush.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Alan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*.

David Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did Mendelssohn reconcile his rationale for Jewish continuity and practice with the principle of separation of church and state he so strongly espoused?
2. Is it true that Judaism has no dogma or was this simply a polemical tactic for Mendelssohn to make this claim?

## Lecture Seven

### The Science of Judaism

**Scope:** By the nineteenth century, intellectuals focused their attention less on the eternal verities of metaphysics and more on the individual and empirical facts of history. The cosmopolitan ideal was also replaced by the romantic ideal of the nation. In this new intellectual climate, a small group of German Jewish intellectuals banded together in 1819 to found the Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews. Through this organization, they proposed that a critical and objective scholarly view of the Jewish past might yield a fair estimate of the nature of contemporary Jews and Judaism. By studying Judaism “scientifically,” they hoped to discover the essence of Judaism and, eventually, to reveal the greater significance of Jewish civilization within the general intellectual and spiritual context of humanity. They genuinely believed that scholarship could be made to serve the political and cultural interests of contemporary Jewry. Their intellectual leader was Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) whose 1818 essay “On Rabbinic Literature” had already set the agenda of modern academic scholarship of Judaism. Immanuel Wolf (1799–1829), a student of Hegel, introduced the society’s journal in 1822 with his own programmatic essay on the science of Judaism.

Wolf naively believed that when Judaism became the object of “science,” its bad press would go away, and it would raise itself to the level of the rest of European civilization. He and his colleagues clearly overestimated the power of their scholarship. All of the founding members of the society, except Zunz, converted to Christianity. They had laid the foundations of modern Jewish scholarship but they had failed to provide a contemporary rationale for Jewish survival.

### Outline

- I. By the early nineteenth century, the ideal of philosophy that had informed Mendelssohn’s thought gave way to another, the ideal of *Wissenschaft*, “scientific” historical detachment and objectivity. The

ideal of a universal humanity eventually was superseded by the particular ideal of nation.

- A.** The new critical historical consciousness provided the stimulus for the birth of modern Jewish historical scholarship.
  - 1. In 1819, the Verein fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden was founded in Berlin.
  - 2. This new organization founded to promote historical scholarship on Judaism was to serve the dual purpose of overcoming the misconceptions of Judaism spawned by anti-Semites, on the one hand, and on the other, by Jews themselves who lacked self-respect for their own religion and culture.
  - 3. Among the original seven founding members of the organization was Edward Gans (1798–1839), the legal historian; Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), the renowned writer; and Leopold Zunz (1794–1886), literary historian and bibliographer.
- B.** Zunz, a philologist trained at the University of Berlin, had already launched the program of Wissenschaft des Judentums (“The Science of Judaism”) a year earlier in his pioneering essay, “On Rabbinic Literature.”
  - 1. In this essay, Zunz offered the first secular definition of Jewish studies in the context of contemporary scholarship.
  - 2. He was especially concerned with rehabilitating post-biblical literature as a broad field of endeavor totally neglected by modern scholarship and revealing in its entirety the broad range of Jewish creativity.
  - 3. Zunz also wrote a history of the homiletical literature of the Jews to demonstrate that the rabbis had always tried to make their teaching relevant to their communities.
- C.** In the first issue of the society’s new journal, appearing in 1822, Immanuel Wolf offered his own programmatic essay about the purpose of this organization and its cultural aspirations.
  - 1. Wolf called for a view of Judaism that was greater than merely religion, including literature, history, liturgy, philosophy, and the material culture of the Jews.
  - 2. He claimed that a program of historical research would determine the essence of Judaism and discover its significance

in the general intellectual and spiritual context of humanity as a whole.

3. The organization's activity, he believed, would serve the practical goal of reintegrating Jews into the course of history, thus reintegrating them into contemporary society.
4. Scholarship was to reveal the essential Judaism. Ultimately, intellectual integration would lead to social and political integration.

**D.** Wolf also inserted in this essay his own philosophy of history and his peculiar view of Judaism, highly influenced by Hegelian categories (for example, the notion of Judaism evolving over time, rather than developing).

1. The essence of Judaism was the single idea of the unconditional unity of all being, the idea of one God.
2. This idea unfolded over time to higher and higher spiritual levels, overcoming its limitations during the period of national statehood and those of the medieval scholastic rabbis.
3. It reached its full disclosure in the glorious philosophy of Benedict Spinoza, according to Wolf, who could hardly see any problem for Jewish continuity in such a formulation.
4. Wolf ended his essay with a call for the study of texts and history, finally leading to abstracting the essential philosophy of Judaism.
5. His call for the reintegration of Jews in the common task of mankind underscored his greatest concern: "They must raise themselves and their principle to the level of a science" to overcome the sense of strangeness that had characterized the relationship between Jews and the rest of the world.

**II.** The outcome and legacy of the Verein were mixed.

**A.** The Verein had focused all its energies on reintegrating Judaism in European civilization, but nowhere was there an ideology for Jewish survival.

1. All the original members of the organization, with the exception of Zunz, eventually converted to Christianity with little hope in achieving their goals.
2. With little support from the Jewish community, who had little appreciation of elitist scholarship, the idealistic dreams of these scholars were never realized.



- B.** The larger legacy of the Verein was the foundation of modern secular Jewish studies in the university and beyond.
1. Jewish historians continued to imbibe the “scientific” ideals of the original organization.
  2. Others used the tools of scholarship for blatantly apologetic and ideological purposes: to support the cause of reform or orthodoxy or to criticize the role of Christianity in suppressing its Jewish minority. We shall consider such uses of history in the thinking of Heinrich Graetz and Abraham Geiger, two important heirs of the Wissenschaft ideal, in forthcoming lectures.

**Essential Reading:**

Michael Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*.

Immanuel Wolfe, “On the Concept of a Science for Judaism,” *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 2 (1957), pp. 194–204 (republished in Michael Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 141–155).

**Supplementary Reading:**

Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, pp. 77–103.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. In light of the hindsight of the development of Jewish studies in our own day, does historical scholarship undermine or fortify collective memory and Jewish identity?
2. How did Wolf reconcile his desire to defend Jewish integrity with his conclusion that Spinoza’s philosophy was the ultimate culmination of the Jewish idea of monotheism?

## Lecture Eight

### Heinrich Graetz—Jewish Historian

**Scope:** Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), the most important German Jewish historian of the nineteenth century, authored the monumental *History of the Jews* in eleven volumes. A scholar trained in the methods of the “science of Judaism,” Graetz used history as a battleground to defend the integrity of Judaism against its Christian detractors, especially against the renowned German historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) who had justified hostility toward German Jews in a series of highly publicized academic articles. Himself an Orthodox Jew, Graetz still considered revelation as a crucial factor in history, although he used some of the critical tools of his contemporaries. He considered Judaism a moral and intellectual force that was critical to the spiritual health of humanity in general and Germany in particular. His history was a history of individual Jewish savants and the intellectual legacy they left. For him, the moral rationalism of Maimonides, in contrast to kabbalistic superstition, was at the heart of Judaism and was what it had to offer the world.

Graetz’s lachrymose view of history underscored the atrocities and pogroms to which Jews had been subjected throughout the ages. It was Graetz’s way of assigning blame to the non-Jewish tyrannical governments who had poorly treated their Jewish minority and were, thus, directly responsible for the inferior cultural and moral state in which Jews often found themselves. It was Graetz’s perceived moral arrogance that von Treitschke found so objectionable: his public scorn of German national heroes, such as Luther and Kant, and his assumption that Christian ethics were insufficient to save German society. In his writing, Graetz became a powerful advocate for Jewish interests and for the integrity of rabbinic Judaism against its perceived enemies both within the Jewish world and beyond it.

### Outline

- I. Heinrich Graetz was clearly the most important Jewish historian of his time.

- A. His monumental history of the Jews in eleven volumes became the standard work for Jews and Christians alike.
  - 1. It was written in German and translated into many other languages.
  - 2. In his introduction, Graetz professed to write an objective history, but his critical sense is limited.
  - 3. As an Orthodox Jew, he was unable to relinquish his belief in divine revelation and eschewed biblical criticism.
  - 4. He saw history as a means of setting the record straight by judging the non-Jewish leaders on how they had conducted themselves toward their Jewish minorities. Treatment of a Jewish minority becomes a barometer of the moral health of a given society.
  - 5. For Graetz, Jewish history was primarily a history of atrocities, persecutions, and pogroms.
  - 6. Graetz's notion of history was limited to a history of ideas with little consideration of social and economic history.
- B. His critique of Christianity and its illegitimate moral claims evoked a powerful response from a leading German historian of Christianity, Heinrich von Treitschke.
  - 1. von Treitschke charged Graetz with moral arrogance in accusing Christianity of groundless charges. Their polemics clearly reveal how history had become a battlefield for playing out the Jewish-Christian debate.
  - 2. By shifting the blame to the Christian governments who had held down their Jewish minorities, Graetz countered the notion of an innate inferiority on the part of the Jews that made them undeserving of civic emancipation.
- C. Graetz also revealed a bias for intellectual history and for rationalist thinkers who defended the Jewish tradition.
  - 1. His was a history of Jewish intellectuals and their literary writings.
  - 2. Like Zunz, he hoped to reveal the moral and literary worth of the Jewish intellectual tradition to an illiterate and indifferent Jewish and Christian readership. Writing in German was a way of educating humanity.
  - 3. His hero was Maimonides, the embodiment of the Jewish rationalist tradition and the author of a famous legal code.

4. He had little use for the kabbalah, the mystical traditions of the Jewish past, or the Polish Hasidim, the fantasies of which embarrassed him and his project of providing a positive and progressive image of Jewish intellectual and spiritual life.
- D. Graetz clearly used his history to fight his battles not only with Christians but also with other Jews.
1. Graetz was part of the conservative bloc of scholars who claimed that reformers had misused history in their quest to justify the sweeping changes they prescribed to save Judaism from a rigid orthodoxy.
  2. Graetz challenged Abraham Geiger's understanding of history as a means of legitimating reform. His history was a response to strengthen the bonds of Orthodox Jewish faith.

## II. Graetz left a legacy for modern Jewish culture.

- A. In an important exchange between two contemporary historians, Yosef Yerushalmi and Ismar Schorsch, the issue of interpreting the legacy of Jewish historical scholarship as exemplified by Graetz is raised.
1. Yerushalmi sees modern Jewish historiography as a rupture with the past and its form of collective memory. Jews look at the past selectively, emotionally, and subjectively, while historians purport to look at the past objectively.
  2. Schorsch sees Graetz and his colleagues as primarily defenders of the faith, great preachers, using history not to aggravate the break but to fortify the bonds with the past.
- B. Whether history supports or damages faith remains a question for our time.

### Essential Reading:

Michael Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History*, pp. 217–244.

Ismar Schorsch, "Ideology and History in the Age of Emancipation," in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*, pp. 1–62.

### Supplementary Reading:

Salo W. Baron, *History and Jewish Historians*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What upset von Treitschke so much about Graetz's academic history?
2. In the light of Schorsch's and Yerushalmi's differing understandings of the project of writing history in the modern period, who would Graetz have agreed with? Who was Graetz's primary audience, and how did his history ultimately affect this readership? Does Jewish historical scholarship today have the same impact?

## Lecture Nine

### Abraham Geiger—The Shaping of Reform Judaism

**Scope:** Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) was also a product of the scientific school of Judaism, who used his vast knowledge of Jewish sources in the service of his own ideology of Reform Judaism. At the same time, he challenged the Christian scholarly world, as Graetz was also doing, to recognize the significance of rabbinic Judaism in understanding its own religious origins. As a prolific author, editor, and chief rabbi of Breslau, Geiger soon became the leading theoretician of Reform Judaism in Germany. Geiger and his like-minded colleagues argued for sweeping changes in the ritual life of the Jew, making its internal spirit more in consonance with the external dictates of its legal system. While preserving the inner core of rational moral truths as eternal and immutable, the external ritual law, the product of human construction, the reformers argued, could be discarded or re-formed to fit the needs of the present generation. In reforming Judaism, Geiger urgently sensed that he was saving Judaism from oblivion and massive defection.

Geiger's scholarship on the Pharisees, and on the origins of classical rabbinic Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam, laid the foundations for his claims that reform was the most authentic version of Judaism. Reform Jews, in his estimation, were the Pharisees of his day and the legitimate heirs of the rabbinic tradition. In rejecting the alleged outmoded notions of a personal messiah and national redemption, Reform saw the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Diaspora as an opportunity to bring its pristine moral teachings to the world at large. Reform's notion of "the mission of Israel" had been anticipated by both Mendelssohn and Wolf and was shared in part by Geiger's Orthodox contemporaries, but it especially became a central tenet of German Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century.

### Outline

- I. Abraham Geiger's ideology of Reform Judaism grew out of his own involvement in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

- A.** Geiger emerged among a second generation of Reform rabbis committed to fusing intellectual inquiry with practical reform. Building on earlier external reforms in education and the aesthetics of the worship service (introducing the organ, for example), they tried to ground these changes in a theory of modern Judaism. These changes had little to do with ideology.
1. Geiger wrote his doctoral dissertation on the Jewish foundations for the Koran. He was one of the first to argue that out of Judaism came many of Muhammad's original thoughts. His later scholarly work dealt especially with the Pharisees and the Jewish origins of Christianity.
  2. For Geiger, his understanding of the Pharisees as revolutionaries attuned to the spirit of their times and the spiritual needs of their community was clearly related to the present. Just as the Pharisees had responded at the critical moment to save Judaism, Reform Judaism was continuing in their path and in their spirit in his own day.
  3. If the reformers were the present-day Pharisees, the Orthodox of Geiger's day were the Saducees, whose ideological leadership of an outdated understanding of Judaism was becoming hopelessly irrelevant in failing to change with the times.
- B.** Geiger was one of the first Jewish scholars to study the New Testament in depth.
1. His profound scholarship about Jesus and the Pharisaic tradition underscored Christianity's indebtedness to Judaism. Only a rabbi, Geiger proclaimed unabashedly, was in a position to fully understand Christian origins.
  2. What Geiger further implied was that Jesus was a good Pharisee and a liberal one, as well. Reform Judaism not only offered the purest form of Judaism for Jews but also for Christians.
  3. Geiger uses his knowledge of the past to promote the present.
- II.** Geiger's formulation of Judaism rested on a unique view of revelation, clearly built on Spinoza's and Mendelssohn's formulations.
- A.** Geiger began with the assumption that the traditional understanding of revelation and Jewish law held little meaning for most contemporary Jews.

1. Because of the impotency of traditional Judaism to command the average Jewish mind and heart, there was a need to articulate a religious ideology to address the individual and his or her spiritual needs.
  2. Judaism, then, had to value intellectual freedom and human autonomy and could not impose its will on each individual Jew. The criteria for changes come from the individual will of every member of the Jewish community.
  3. The divine law was humanly created though divinely inspired. Its inner core of ethical truths (e.g., the Ten Commandments) was eternal and consonant with reason, but its outer core of particular customs was not.
  4. The Reform distinction between an inner and outer core bore a clear resemblance to Mendelssohn's eternal truths and ceremonial law. For Mendelssohn, both categories were binding; for Geiger and his colleagues, only the first was.
  5. Given that the ceremonies and laws were created by human beings, they could also be discarded, revised, or altered by them, as well, reinterpreted by the spirit of the age and the sentiments of each individual heart. In the end, changes in Jewish law rested on the will of each individual.
- B.** With Geiger, we now have a criterion by which to define what is changeable and what is not changeable. The ultimate arbiter is the human conscience.

**III.** Geiger and his colleagues believed that the rationale of Jewish existence in the present and future was encapsulated in the idea of the "mission of Israel."

- A.** A Judaism consonant with reason could no longer accept the idea of a personal messiah and the return of the Jews to their ancestral homeland.
1. By assuming the separation of powers between church and state, the reformers believed, like Mendelssohn, that Jews would always be faithful and productive citizens of the states they inhabited.
  2. As especially expressed in their new prayer books, Judaism was exclusively a religious faith divested of its national elements.



- B. In place of national redemption and a personal messiah, they insisted on a messianic age of universal peace.
  - 1. In the pre-messianic age, it was the mission of the Jews to disseminate the moral teachings of Judaism to the rest of the world, not by actually converting them, but by sharing their pristine moral doctrines with them.
  - 2. If ceremonial law were to be given up, a strong commitment to social action would take its place.
  - 3. Such a notion made the dispersion of the Jews around the world an opportunity rather than a negative condition. Through dispersion, their role of disseminating morality was ensured.

#### IV. What is the legacy of German Reform?

- A. Geiger's scholarship notwithstanding, his views about the historical justification of reform were highly challenged by both Orthodox Jewish scholars and Christians. He had used his scholarship as an ideological weapon that elicited sharp rebuttals from his opponents.
- B. Many of the radical positions of Geiger and his colleagues were modified considerably by later reformers, especially when adapted to an American context.

#### Essential Reading:

Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*.

Michael Meyer, "Abraham Geiger's Historical Judaism," in *New Perspectives on Abraham Geiger*, pp. 3–16.

#### Supplementary Reading:

Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*.

#### Questions to Consider:

- 1. To what extent did Geiger's historical justification of Reform make sense; to what extent was it simply a polemical tactic?
- 2. Why do you think Geiger was so obsessed with demonstrating the Jewishness of Jesus? Has the effort he partially initiated of Jews studying Christian origins been recognized by later scholarship?

## Lecture Ten

### The Neo-Orthodoxy of Samson Raphael Hirsch

**Scope:** Samson Raphael Hirsch (1810–1888), Geiger’s and Graetz’s contemporary, became the leading proponent of Neo-Orthodox Judaism, or modern Orthodoxy, and a prominent critic of the Reform movement. For Hirsch, Germany Jewry in the nineteenth century faced two separate questions: the cultural question—was Judaism to be preserved in its pre-emancipatory form—and the religious question—was it to be considered an immutable divine revelation or a manmade construction subject to change? On the cultural question, Hirsch was in favor of emancipation and the diffusion of secular culture among his co-religionists. On the religious question, he affirmed the divine origin of rabbinic law and upheld its continued validity in the contemporary world. For Hirsch, Judaism was to be comprehended intrinsically from within by embracing the totality of its precepts and commandments and, thus, preserving its inner coherence and inner spirit. In attacking the Enlightenment’s individualist subjectivism, Hirsch argued that human beings needed a higher objective standard by which to live and to be elevated to the highest moral path. This was the way of Torah, which every modern Jew could embrace.

Writing in German, addressing an audience of Jews who remained uncertain about their Jewish commitments, Hirsch represented a different kind of Orthodox rabbi from his colleague Hatam Sofer, or Moses Sofer of Pressberg, Hungary (1762–1839). Sofer, in contrast, opposed modernism in any form and was unyielding in his opposition to university education, linguistic assimilation, or any concession to change whatsoever. Along with other rabbis, Sofer composed a series of rabbinic *responsa* against reform, published in 1819, in which he strenuously objected to the smallest deviation from traditional practice. If Hirsch moved to the center in addressing those who were leaving the Orthodox fold, Sofer moved to the other extreme in attempting to erect a wall around a lifestyle and an authoritative system that was being challenged from all sides.

## Outline

- I. Reform Judaism continued to adapt and adjust even after it traveled to the United States.
  - A. American Reform Judaism retained the same commitment to the notion of an inner and outer core, to social action, and to gender equality.
  - B. Reform Judaism, as it continued to develop, also incorporated distinct changes.
    1. Reform Judaism in the twentieth century gradually adopted a more positive approach to ritual, Hebrew prayers, and enhanced ceremonial life.
    2. It eventually accepted Zionism and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life.
    3. The “mission of Israel” idea was eventually discarded altogether.
- II. Samson Raphael Hirsch, like Geiger, his contemporary, saw the limits of the academic study of Judaism without a focus on the faith of living Jews.
  - A. Hirsch’s “Neo-Orthodoxy” was based on separating the cultural from the religious question facing German Jewry.
    1. On the cultural question, whether Judaism was to be preserved in its pre-emancipatory state, Hirsch responded negatively. Jews needed to attain secular knowledge and participate in the larger social and cultural world, learning German and looking, acting, and dressing like their Christian contemporaries.
    2. On the religious question, Judaism was not to change. Hirsch affirmed the divine origin of Jewish law and its obligatory nature.
  - B. Hirsch’s position was, then, middle of the road: against the crippling human atmosphere of the ghetto Jew and against the radical claims of the reformers. He affirmed the possibility of being a faithful Torah Jew and a good European.
- III. Hirsch’s initial formulation of his position is presented in his *Nineteen Letters of Ben Uziel*.
  - A. Judaism needs to be discovered intrinsically, from within, organically comprehended.

1. Hirsch took issue with Maimonides, who sought “to reconcile Judaism...from without instead of developing it creatively from within.”
2. One needs to see each particular law in the light of the totality of Torah, to see an inner coherence, and to find “the indwelling spirit” (the *geist*) in the various laws.
3. Whether conscious or not of his language, Hirsch’s articulation was closely reminiscent of that of Hegel, particularly the language of “indwelling spirit.”

**B.** Hirsch’s theology was also an attack on the individual subjectivism of the Enlightenment.

1. For Hirsch, man’s consciousness must be elevated from its subjective state and subordinated to the objective mind of the Torah.
2. True freedom is not “doing one’s own thing” but identifying one’s own individual will with a higher one in a state of full obedience.
3. This formulation, too, recalls Hegel’s call to subordinate individual subjective feelings to the absolute mind, associated with the German state and the German society.

**C.** Hirsch, like Geiger, emphasized the spiritual, not the historical character, of the Jewish people.

1. He de-emphasized the idea of a Jewish national restoration. The Jewish people need no state other than the objectification of the law.
2. He, too, spoke in the language of a mission of Israel in exile, to reveal God’s existence to the world at large.

**IV.** Comparing Hirsch’s position with Geiger’s reveals interesting similarities and differences.

**A.** Both thinkers share the need to harmonize Jewish identity with the social and cultural demands of the European world. They are alike in their religious definition of Judaism, devoid of nationalism with similar articulations of the mission ideal.

**B.** There are two profound differences between them.

1. Geiger identifies with Western culture while Hirsch only tolerates it as a concession to the new social and political reality in which Jews must now live.

2. Because Geiger's struggle is not with Western culture per se, he needs to show Judaism's religious differences from Christianity. He is preoccupied with the Jewish-Christian dialogue and issues of separation of church and state, concerns less critical to Hirsch.
3. Borrowing the terminology from Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Freedom*, it would be fair to say that Geiger subscribes to the notion of negative freedom, freedom from restraint, while Hirsch subscribes to the notion of positive freedom, freedom in surrendering one's own subjective will to an objective higher authority.

### **Essential Reading:**

Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism*.

Michael Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, pp. 23–84.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Did Hirsch actually describe Judaism "from within" as he claimed to do, or was his formulation the direct result of his encounter with the intellectual world around him?
2. What is the legacy of Hirsch and Sofer in our own times? What orthodoxy now commands the hearts and minds of this sub-community of Jews in Israel and the Diaspora?

## Lecture Eleven

### Zecharias Frankel and Conservative Judaism

**Scope:** Zecharias Frankel (1801–1875) initially participated in the deliberations of Reform Jewish leaders but decided to walk out, out of the fear that the reformers had instituted too radical changes in Judaism all in the name of “the spirit of the times.” His own middle-of-the-road position attempted to maintain “the integrity of Judaism simultaneously with progress,” as he put it. His “positive-historical Judaism,” which eventually became known as “Conservative Judaism,” affirmed both the divine nature and historical basis of Judaism. Attempting to find a path between Geiger’s and Hirsch’s formulations, Frankel located in the will of the people, the community of Israel who takes Jewish law and practice seriously, the mechanism for continuity and change in Judaism. Neither the individual will nor that of the divine were sufficient in charting Judaism’s normative course. Frankel’s notion of the will of the entire community was later called “catholic Israel,” and became the central tenet of Conservative Judaism.

Frankel was eventually named the head of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, which became the prototype of the modern rabbinical seminary in Europe and North America. Combining historical scholarship with a positive attitude toward Jewish law, it institutionalized the guiding principles of Frankel’s theological position.

### Outline

- I. Comparing Hirsch’s position to the Orthodoxy of Moses Sofer clarifies Hirsch’s middle-of-the-road stance.
  - A. Moses Sofer, known as Hatam Sofer, a rabbi of Pressberg, Hungary, was an acknowledged leader of the most traditionalist wing of Orthodoxy.
    1. In 1819, in publishing with other rabbis a series of legal responsa condemning changes in the synagogue service initiated by the reformers, he was uncompromising. It is significant that he wrote in the traditional style of a rabbinic responsum.

2. Both in substance and style, his arguments were rigid in rejecting any innovation in Judaism, either small or great. Sofer said that anything that was new was forbidden by the Torah.
  3. Sofer's staunch defensive posture became itself a new element in defining Judaism in modern times. The new rigidity, fed by an anxiety about any changes, was itself a unique response to the changing conditions of the nineteenth century.
  4. Orthodoxy itself, then, becomes a modern construction.
- B.** Sofer's position clearly places Hirsch squarely between his two opponents, the position of modern Orthodoxy until this day.
- II.** Zecharias Frankel's "positive-historical Judaism" (later to be called Conservative Judaism) emerged from his break with radical reform.
- A.** Frankel initially participated in the Reform rabbinical synod in Frankfurt and held grave doubts about the reformer's commitment to the use of Hebrew in public worship.
1. Frankel's despair led him to seek a more general position, somewhere between those of Geiger and Hirsch.
  2. He initially framed his position as maintaining the integrity of Judaism together with progress. He meant by *integrity*, a commitment to the practice, not only to the lofty ideals, of Judaism.
- B.** Frankel sought a path of affirming both the divine value of Jewish revelation and the changing historical basis of Judaism.
1. Like Geiger, Frankel took seriously the historical study of Jewish culture and its implications in seeing Judaism as evolving over time.
  2. The issue for Frankel was to identify the mechanism of change in Judaism, a mechanism not solely divine nor resting solely on the subjective will of each individual Jew.
  3. His guiding principle for change he defined as "that which was adopted by the entire community of Israel and was accepted by the people and became a part of its life." In other words, the community, not the individual nor the rabbis, would become the final authority in determining Jewish practice.
  4. Solomon Schechter (1847–1915), second president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in America, developed

Frankel's notion, which he called "catholic Israel," that is, the universally acknowledged practices of committed Jews. That community would be the final arbiter of Jewish legal practice.

- III. Frankel gained institutional legitimacy when he became director of the Juedisch-Theologisches Seminary at Breslau.
  - A. In his new role, he created the first prototype of the modern rabbinical seminary.
  - B. In shaping a curriculum positively committed to the practical laws of Judaism but engaged simultaneously in the critical historical study of Jewish sources, Frankel institutionalized the guiding principles of what was later known as Conservative Judaism.
  - C. The Breslau seminary also became the model for the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the central hub of Conservative Judaism in America.
- IV. What is the legacy of Zecharias Frankel?
  - A. Frankel offered an intermediate position between uncompromising divine revelation and total individual subjectivism in determining Jewish practice.
    - 1. By appealing to the middle, American Conservative Judaism ultimately attracted large numbers of followers, particularly among Eastern European Jewish immigrants.
    - 2. They found the traditional but critical-historical orientation appealing.
  - B. Like any intermediate position, however, the notion of catholic Israel was conceptually ambiguous and was interpreted broadly among rabbis and laypersons. Defining how the Torah is both divine and subject to human interpretation, and defining who is precisely catholic Israel, have remained intellectual challenges to Conservative Judaism from its inception.
  - C. The Jewish Theological Seminary of America has emerged as a more traditionally observant institution than some of its constituent congregations.

**Essential Reading:**

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 178–180, 194–197.



Ismar Schorsch, "Zecharias Frankiel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism," *Judaism* 30 (1981), pp. 343–354.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is the meaning of *catholic Israel* in an American context where the overwhelming number of Jews are non-observant? How has Frankel's notion of divine revelation and historical change offered a clear direction to Conservative Jews?
2. What was Frankel's importance in creating a new style of religious leader for the modern Jewish community?

## Lecture Twelve

### Samuel David Luzzatto—Judaism and Atticism

**Scope:** Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), the renowned Italian Jewish scholar who taught at the traditional rabbinical seminary of Padua, brought his own individual perspective to the nineteenth century debates about the future of Jewish belief and practice. Raised in the relatively open surroundings of Italian Jewish society, where the social and intellectual integration of Jews with their surrounding culture had been the norm since the Renaissance, Luzzatto had no inhibition about using the critical methods of secular scholarship in studying Judaism. But his theological position emerged from a rejection of the Enlightenment’s optimistic assessment of human nature. In fact, he viewed the history of Western civilization from the perspective of an opposition between Judaism and what he called Atticism. By the latter, he meant the Greek love of philosophy, arts, and sciences; the development of the intellect; and the love of beauty. Judaism, in contrast, imparted to the world religion and morality that springs from the heart, not the mind.

Accordingly, Judaism was, for Luzzatto, the ethical enthusiasm that sprang from the heart, free of cognitive elements and requiring no methodological justification. Rationalism imperils Israel, endangering its existence by denying the historical character of the Jewish people, which is based on supernaturalism and religion, not philosophy. In underscoring the oppositional nature of Judaism’s relationship to Western culture, Luzzatto articulated a unique vision of Judaism based on both traditional and contemporary insights.

### Outline

- I. Samuel David Luzzatto offers a unique perspective among nineteenth-century Jewish thinkers.
  - A. Luzzatto used critical scholarship to define the special role of the Jewish people.

1. As professor at the new rabbinical college in Padua, Luzzatto's education was typically Italian: reared in Jewish sources but fully comfortable with secular studies.
  2. For Luzzatto, the wisdom of Israel, without a grounding in its divinity, had no meaning or purpose.
  3. As a student of Western culture and rabbinics, Luzzatto concluded that Judaism was essentially non-philosophical and was primarily preoccupied with imparting moral sentiment.
- B.** For Luzzatto, Western culture consists of two oppositional forces: Atticism and Judaism.
1. Athens bequeathed to Western culture philosophy, the arts, the sciences, the development of the intellect, order, love of beauty and grandeur, and intellectual and studied morality (a morality calculated through philosophical thinking).
  2. Jerusalem, on the other hand, bequeathed religion, "the morality which springs from the heart and from selflessness and love of good."
  3. Reminiscent of the formulations of Mathew Arnold and others, Luzzatto's antithetical system places in tension the values of beauty, rationalism, and the search for truth (Atticism) with those of supernaturalism, sanctified ethics, and emotion (Judaism). To be a Jew is to acknowledge the opposition, not to seek a reconciliation.

**II.** For Luzzatto, Judaism is a system of imparting morality.

- A.** In opposition to Western culture and all the Jewish thinkers we have encountered up to now, the purpose of Torah is not to impart wisdom and knowledge but to lead human beings to the paths of righteousness. A Jew is not judged on what dogmas he accepts or rejects but how he acts morally.
- B.** Religion is supernatural in character and is fundamentally irrational.
1. Belief cannot be commanded because metaphysics is beyond human comprehension (note, perhaps, the influence of Kant).
  2. Mendelssohn had emphasized the pragmatic ethical purpose of the commandments, but Luzzatto goes farther in eliminating entirely the speculative part.

- C. The essence of Judaism is ethical enthusiasm that springs from the heart, free of cognitive elements and requiring no methodological justification.
1. True morality is not based on any utilitarian abstract intellectualism or impersonal sense of duty (contrary to either John Stuart Mill or Immanuel Kant).
  2. Man is inherently evil; this reflects the chaos following the French Revolution and the Christian view of man's original sin. Judaism needs to offer a system that conditions the total human personality to do good.
  3. This process begins with the human emotion of pity at the root of good human impulses to subdue the raw appetites.
  4. The Torah, then, provides a system of rewards and punishments to motivate the believer to do good.
  5. It adds, finally, the notion of election (being the chosen people), a sense of *noblesse oblige* to strengthen Israel's ethical sense.

### III. Judaism is imperiled by universal rationalism.

- A. For Luzzatto, rationalism is the lurking danger that puts Jewish survival in jeopardy.
1. Rationalism denies the historical character of the Jewish people, which is based on supernatural and religious foundations.
  2. Rationalism, by its very nature, opposes particularity. Only a non-rational and supernatural ideology can provide a rationale for Jewish continuity.
- B. Luzzatto's position is shaped by his repudiation of nineteenth-century political and cultural developments.
1. In the wake of the French Revolution, Luzzatto was appalled by the war and destruction, which he believed was the legacy of the philosophers.
  2. He also reacted negatively to the nineteenth-century cult of the Greeks that transcended the bounds of art and literature into a kind of neo-heathenism.
  3. In Atticism, Luzzatto saw anti-Judaic forces operating among Jews engendering widespread defection and indifference.
  4. His strongest criticism was leveled at Maimonides and Spinoza, who had overemphasized the intellectual perfection

of human beings over their moral perfection. He also objected to their studied morality based on rational calculation.

5. For Luzzatto, only compassion, love, and altruism could save Judaism and Western culture as a whole.

**Essential Reading:**

Noah Rosenbloom, *Luzzatto's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism*.

Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times*, pp. 30–42.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Morris Margolies, *Samuel David Luzzatto: Traditionalist Scholar*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Is Luzzatto right in ruling out the Bible as a source of knowledge and philosophy? What were the roots and legacy of his strong position?
2. For Luzzatto, why is the Jewish notion of morality different and superior to that of Christianity? Is his position sustainable?

## Lecture Thirteen

### Zionism's Answer to the Jewish Problem

**Scope:** By the second half of the nineteenth century, much of the optimism regarding Jewish political and social emancipation had diminished as the political climate both in Western and Eastern Europe seemed less conducive to a full integration of the Jews into their host societies. In Eastern Europe, massive numbers of Jews lived in restricted areas known as the “Pale of Settlement.” Living in a fully unemancipated state, they retained a more traditional lifestyle while preserving a literary culture in Hebrew and Yiddish, in sharp contrast to their co-religionists in the West. Their encounter with Western ideas manifested itself in an intellectual and literary movement called the Haskalah, made up of writers who wrote in Hebrew or Yiddish or both. With the rise of more virulent forms of anti-Semitism throughout Europe, the hopes of proponents of Jewish enlightenment in both the West and the East were dashed.

Drawing both from the Haskalah, with its strong critique of traditional Jewish society, and from an acute awareness of the lurking dangers of the anti-Semites, Zionism, the political movement calling for the creation of a Jewish state in Israel, emerged as a novel response to the condition the Jewish community now faced. From its inception, Zionism was both traditional and radically new, drawing from the wellsprings of traditional Jewish messianism, on the one hand, but also constructing a new political definition of Judaism based on the new nationalist ideologies of its time. Zionism was also simultaneously an assertion of normalcy, to create the conditions of statehood associated with every normal nation state, and at the same time, an assertion of chosen-ness, difference, and alienation from the European world from which it emerged. These conflicting visions of what a Jewish state was to become, articulated in the Zionist ideologies of such early thinkers as Moses Hess (1812–1875), Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), and Leo Pinsker (1821–1891), would remain a source of conflict and tension through the long history of Zionism and the state of Israel.

## Outline

- I. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews and Christians alike believed the dream of emancipation, of integration, was realizable.
  - A. By the middle of the nineteenth century, many of these hopes had been dashed.
  - B. With the rise of modern anti-Semitism, Jewish thinkers had to deal with an increasingly hostile climate.
  - C. Jewish thinkers responded in three ways, with new solutions of how Jews fit in the culture of European civilization in the second half of the nineteenth century.
    1. The concept of Zionism suggested that Jews should create their own separate society.
    2. Society needed to be radically transformed, through creation of the proletariat and class warfare, through Marxism and socialism.
    3. The least ideological solution was emigration. Almost three million Jews moved from Eastern Europe to Western Europe and North America.
- II. Given the lack of political and social emancipation of Eastern European Jews, their cultural development was markedly different from that of their counterparts in the West.
  - A. In Eastern Europe, the Jewish population was immense and highly concentrated.
    1. Jews lived among multiple ethnic groups and had little motivation to integrate with them.
    2. Jews lived in the “Pale of Settlement,” under conditions of economic hardship and impoverishment and without the rights and privileges granted to Jews in the West.
  - B. The Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, emerged in Germany but was transformed in the East as a literary movement, offering a critique of traditional Jewish society and calling for educational and cultural changes.
    1. The Haskalah emerged first in Hebrew and later in Yiddish, creating a literary revival of the first magnitude and offering the first secular ideology of Jewish survival.
    2. The proponents of this movement criticized the leadership of the rabbis and called for a more productive Jewish society, the

infusion of science and rationalism, education reform, and the liberation of women.

**III.** Zionism was a natural outgrowth of both the Haskalah and modern anti-Semitism.

- A.** Zionism emerged during a period of rising anti-Semitism, the erosion of Jewish political rights, and the rise of powerful nationalist and racist ideologies of exclusion.
    - 1.** By the second half of the nineteenth century, the naive expectations of both the advocates and recipients of Jewish social emancipation in the West were increasingly narrowed.
    - 2.** A new political reality emanating from powerful romantic and nationalistic tendencies made the hopes of Jewish citizenship less realistic than ever.
    - 3.** In this new climate, radical solutions were called for. Zionism was clearly an acknowledgement that emancipation and integration were not working and that a new solution to the Jewish problem was in order.
  - B.** Zionists were indebted to the Haskalah in offering them a ready-made critique of traditional society and a secular ideology of Judaism (the possibility of defining one's Jewish identity without God). The literary revolution the Haskalah had stimulated was continued in the writing of the Zionists.
  - C.** Zionists broke with the Haskalah in its assumption that education and integration into European society were tenable and desirable.
    - 1.** A turning point in the Zionists' prognosis of the Jewish problem emerged during the pogroms of 1881–1882 in Russia, when they realized that the problem of anti-Semitism could never be eliminated and that Jews had to consider the radical solution of leaving Europe to create their own political state.
    - 2.** Early Zionist thinkers, such as Moses Hess, Theodor Herzl, and Leo Pinsker, were deeply affected by the anti-Semitism they personally experienced either in Western or Eastern Europe. As assimilated intellectuals, they came to Zionism as a means of overcoming the problem of anti-Semitism.
- IV.** From its inception, Zionism was built on certain paradoxes that were never fully resolved. Zionism was the product of both the traditional



messianic yearning of Jews to return to the land of Israel and of modern nationalism.

- A. It drew simultaneously from traditional notions of chosen-ness and uniqueness and from a desire to be normal and like other nations with their own lands and states.
- B. It was both traditional and modern, an expression of identification with European society and alienation from it, both assimilatory and anti-assimilatory at the same time.

**Essential Reading:**

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 15–100, 103–139.

David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Was Zionism primarily an outgrowth of the Jewish tradition itself or, rather, a modern version of Jewish nationalism?
2. What do the initial tensions in defining the Zionist idea teach us about the current struggles and divisions in Israeli society and politics? In what ways are these initial struggles still relevant today?

## Lecture Fourteen

### Three Zionist Visions

**Scope:** Our reading of Zionist thinkers is restricted to several prominent models who contribute meaningfully to the larger questions of Jewish identity examined in the course. Ahad Ha-Am (1856–1927), like Samuel David Luzzatto, reacted negatively to the new nineteenth-century nationalism rooted in power. For him, the unique genius of the Jewish people lay in its power of the spirit. Unable to speak in religious language, Ahad Ha-Am instead spoke not about God but about the special moral power of Judaism. He saw Israel as a spiritual center attracting an elite leadership who would shape a new secular culture for Israel and the Diaspora. The language of spiritual uniqueness and moral mission were particularly objectionable to his ideological rival Jacob Klatzkin (1882–1948). For Klatzkin, the only meaningful goal of Zionism was to regain the land of Israel and to normalize the conditions of Jewish existence. Klatzkin rejected any notion of chosen-ness, either religious or secular. The spiritual definition of Judaism denied the full freedom in which Jews could express themselves and, ultimately, led to an ugly form of national chauvinism.

Louis Brandeis (1856–1941), the renowned American Supreme Court justice, approached Zionism from a totally different perspective, from an American one. Zionism did not create, so he argued, a problem of dual loyalty for American Jews because it never demanded their actual immigration to Palestine. Instead, it was consonant with the best traditions of American philanthropy. American Jews were asked to support other needy Jews financially in engendering their return to their ancient homeland, in the same way other ethnic Americans supported their special charities and causes. By this definition, Zionism exemplified the highest ideals of American culture.

### Outline

- I. As stated in the last lecture, Zionism was built on certain paradoxes, the simultaneous traditional messianic yearning of Jews to return to the

land of Israel and the desire of Jews to be like other nations, with their own land and state.

- A. Normalcy, for some, became the ideal of the Zionist dream; yet, for others, Zionism was to create a new, rejuvenated culture contributing, through the agency of statehood, to humanity.
- B. Among the visions of Zionism were those of building the great society and defending Jewish rights and interests. The Jew as builder and fighter, of creating a utopian society while defending the homeland with guns and tanks, were values that might sometimes complement each other but could also be in tension.
- C. These paradoxes of early Zionist ideologies, between asserting uniqueness and being like everyone else, and between creating a perfect society and defending it against its enemies, are reflected in the long history of Zionism and the rise of the state of Israel.

**II.** Ahad Ha-Am, pen name of Asher Hirsch Ginsberg, was born in Russia and was the leading proponent of cultural Zionism, as opposed to the political Zionism of Theodor Herzl and his followers.

- A. Ahad Ha-Am criticized other Zionist leaders who emphasized the political and practical problems of Jewish statehood and Jewish settlement and ignored the cultural and spiritual.
  - 1. He did not believe in the mass immigration of Jews to Israel.
  - 2. He hoped, instead, for the immigration of an elite group of intellectual leaders who would leave their mark on shaping an autonomous Jewish culture in Israel, a model society and culture. They would, through their writings, radiate an influence on Jews in the Diaspora.
  - 3. Zionism needed to solve, ultimately, the problem of Judaism, not merely that of the Jews. Judaism in its traditional form, Jewish culture in the Diaspora, was for him, a lifeless entity.
  - 4. The spiritual center of Israel would then nourish the Jews of the Diaspora by providing a direction and inspiration to their Jewish strivings.
- B. Ahad Ha-Am, reminiscent of Luzzatto, attempted to provide a spiritual albeit secular definition of Judaism.
  - 1. He reacted negatively to the nineteenth-century nationalisms rooted in power.

2. He believed the unique genius of the Jewish people was its hatred of the sword for the book, its alienation from power politics.
3. At the same time, he was an agnostic who could not evoke the name of God. He spoke about moral and spiritual power instead of using religious language.
4. He struggled with the problem of denying God yet affirmed chosen-ness: The Jewish people are singled out to be the moral leaders of the world. Because this did not come from God, however, it called for loyalty to a spirit he could not precisely define.
5. Although what is unique about Judaism is its morality, Ahad Ha-Am postponed the task of defining the Jewish ethic until a spiritual center was in place. But one might ask what was the need for a spiritual center if it remains unclear what spirit needs to be preserved?

### III. Jacob Klatzkin was Ahad Ha-Am's chief critic.

- A. For Klatzkin, the only goal of Zionism was to regain the land of Israel and to normalize the people living there.
  1. As historian Arthur Hertzberg put it, Klatzkin was the first important Zionist thinker to affirm that a third-rate, normal national state and culture are enough.
  2. Klatzkin believed in the notion of the negation of the Diaspora.
  3. Klatzkin objected to the need to be spiritually unique (to have a moral heritage to present to the world), of possessing a divine or secular destiny or mission. All of this, he claimed, was the mark of a diseased mentality of abnormal nations.
  4. Judaism depended on form, not content. A spiritual center was not the goal but only a free national life.
  5. Klatzkin excoriated Ahad Ha-Am for the notion that morality was the key to Israel's uniqueness. The power of an ethic is to transcend national boundaries; an ethic is universal, not the possession of one particular people.
  6. The spiritual definition of Judaism, so he maintained, also denied freedom of thought and led to national chauvinism.
- B. Klatzkin, the true liberal, had pointed out the contradictions in Ahad Ha-Am's position, but had he made a compelling argument

for Jewish continuity if the only goal for his envisioned Jewish society was normalcy and being like everyone else?

- IV. Louis Brandeis, the Supreme Court justice, offered an entirely different definition of Zionism, an American one, and was a leader of Zionism on the American continent.
- A. Brandeis was a political Zionist in the tradition of Theodor Herzl.
1. Zionism was, for him, about saving disadvantaged Jews from oppression by providing them their own homeland, a haven from persecution.
  2. Zionism never meant the liquidation of the Diaspora. On the contrary, a strong Jewish presence in the Diaspora could always support the Jewish state, politically and financially.
- B. Brandeis's greatest contribution to Zionist thought was his analysis of the problem of "dual loyalty."
1. For Brandeis, Zionism never required American Jews to immigrate to Israel because America provided them a haven from persecution.
  2. American Jews were not unloyal to America by supporting Israel. By supporting their underprivileged co-religionists, they were doing the "American" thing—supporting the needy.
  3. American Jews were not only better Jews but better Americans in their support for a Jewish state in Palestine.
  4. Brandeis's understanding of Zionism became emblematic for many American Jews, who supported Israel primarily through financial contributions, helping their brethren as other ethnic Americans supported other needy communities abroad.

### **Essential Reading:**

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 247–277, 314–327, 514–523.

Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha-Am and the Origins of Zionism*.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Ben Halpern, *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann and American Zionism*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. In the light of Ahad Ha-Am's position, how can one justify Jewish particularity in a purely secular manner?
2. What was the legacy of American Zionism as articulated by Brandeis? Does the history of the relationship between Israeli and American Jews confirm his posture toward Zionism?

## Lecture Fifteen

### The Jewish Adventure with Socialism

**Scope:** Karl Marx's attitude toward Judaism and Jews was merely a minor reflection of the wider aspects of his politics and personality. Born into a family of converted Jews, he had little use for the Judeo-Christian tradition, seeing it as a negative byproduct of the capitalist system to be discarded. Focusing on the economic aspects of the Jew as a capitalist exploiter, Marx saw the solution to the Jewish problem as part of the larger problem of transforming society as a whole through class struggle.

Despite Marx's rejection of Jewish particularity, socialism and Marxism had an enormous appeal to many Jews living both in Western and Eastern Europe. Secular Jews attracted to socialist ranks were surely captivated by the moral sense of justice that the movement espoused. But beyond this factor, many Jews victimized by the rising tide of anti-Semitism staked their own personal hope on the socialist ideal. The utopian ideas of socialism resonated for them as a radical means of alleviating their wretched status in European society. Unfortunately for them, when the socialist revolution lost its initial élan, Jews were left more frustrated than ever. Socialism hardly eradicated the Jewish problem but, in many ways, exacerbated it. The Jew could be hated simultaneously as an ugly capitalist and a feared political radical.

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were active in Western socialist parties, in the creation of a distinct Jewish labor party called the Bund in Russia, and in the creation of labor unionism in Israel and the United States. Among the Zionists, several theoreticians conceived of a return to the national homeland based on socialist principles. Jewish socialism played an important role in the dissemination of popular Yiddish culture, the legacy of the Jewish masses.

### Outline

- I. Karl Marx's thinking about Jews was only a minor reflection of his broader analysis of capitalism and Western culture.

- A. He emphatically rejected the entire Judeo-Christian tradition and saw religion as a negative result of the capitalist system.
    - 1. His primary analysis of the Jewish condition was an economic one. The problem of anti-Semitism emerged because of the inequities engendered by capitalism.
    - 2. The Jewish problem would be solved when the larger problem of society was solved through class struggle.
  - B. Marxism and socialism indirectly contributed to anti-Semitic discourse by fostering two new stereotypes, the dual image of Jewish capitalists and Jewish communists.
    - 1. The image of the Jew as economic exploiter goes back to the Middle Ages. Jews were now seen as the most conspicuous abusers of the capitalist system.
    - 2. Ironically, as many Jews joined socialist ranks, they were also hated as communist radicals who would bring about the utter destruction of society.
- II.** Given Marx's attitude toward Jews and Judaism, it is ironic that so many Jews were attracted to his ideology and played a major role as leaders and intellectuals in socialist ranks.
- A. The power of Marx's utopian vision was felt by many Jews.
    - 1. It reminded them of their own moral utopian thought, as articulated by the prophets.
    - 2. Socialism also represented a real solution to the pressing problem of anti-Semitism for them. By radicalizing society, they believed that an egalitarian culture would ultimately emerge in which prejudice and intolerance would disappear.
  - B. Other than getting out or founding their own state elsewhere, socialism left them the only hope to remain in their countries of domicile in a society free of anti-Semitism.
- III.** The emergence of Jewish socialism is an important dimension of the modern Jewish experience.
- A. The history of Jewish socialism can be divided into several stages:
    - 1. The beginnings of Jewish involvement in Western socialist parties and the attraction of populist socialism in Russia to some Russian-Jewish intellectuals.
    - 2. The creation of the Hebrew socialist union in Germany and the Vilna circle in the 1870s.



3. The rise of Marxism in the 1890s, the anti-Semitism of the 1880s, and the creation of the Bund in 1897, that latter the most prominent Jewish socialist organization.
  4. The eventual demise of the Bund in Russia and the history of Jewish labor in Israel and North America.
- B.** The growth of a Jewish labor movement in Russia, distinct from the international community party, grew out of the need for self-defense to fight anti-Semitism.
1. With the growing isolation of the Bund from the rest of the socialist movement, the goals of the organization slowly changed.
  2. The Bund fostered, primarily, the goals of a Jewish labor force within the Pale of Settlement.
  3. It became preoccupied with traditional cultural concerns, especially the promotion of the Yiddish language. Yiddish, a hybridization originally of German and Hebrew and adapted into an Eastern European context, was the language of commoners, especially women.
  4. It rejected the revolutionary proletarian dictatorship of Lenin in favor of a gradualist approach to public ownership of the means of production.
- C.** What is the legacy of Jewish socialism?
1. It left its mark on the history of trade unionism in America and in Israel.
  2. Several Zionist thinkers, such as A. D. Gordon (1856–1922) and Ber Borochov (1881–1917), espoused socialist ideals, especially as manifest in the *kibbutz* movement, and attempted to fuse Zionism with socialism.
  3. For many Jews, Jewish socialism offered a surrogate religion based on a socialist gospel of the dignity of the worker and a secular culture grounded in Yiddish. Much of this legacy evaporated with the passing of the first generation of Jewish immigrants to American shores.

### **Essential Reading:**

Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*.

Moses Mishinsky, “The Jewish Labor Movement and European Socialism,” in *Jewish Society Throughout the Ages*, pp. 284–296.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Henry Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why were so many Jews attracted to socialism despite the anti-Semitic attitudes it fostered? What has happened to the Jewish socialist legacy in more recent times?
2. What was the contribution of Jewish socialism to the development of a secular Jewish culture in America and Israel?

## Lecture Sixteen

### Hermann Cohen's Religion of Reason

**Scope:** Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) represents both a final stage of nineteenth-century Jewish thought in Germany and the beginning of a new era with a set of new responses to the challenges of Jewish identity in the twentieth century. Professor of philosophy at the University of Marburg, one of the chief interpreters of Neo-Kantian thought in Germany, Cohen approached Judaism initially as an outsider with limited knowledge of Jewish sources and Jewish life. Philosophy for Cohen began with the given facts of reality as established by science, then brought to a kind of self-consciousness by attempting to reveal the common principles at work in them. For Cohen, the idealist philosopher, reason was the ultimate source of truth, ideas were the very substance of reality, and God was simply a grand idea in his system of thought. God, in the terms of his Neo-Kantian discourse, was that bridging transcendent idea that united the natural and ethical world to ensure that the ethical task, the center of human existence, could be eternal in the real world. By God's guaranteeing the eternity of the world, a covenant was enacted, enabling human beings to fulfill their moral purpose.

In his later years, Cohen retired from Marburg and immersed himself in a more Jewish environment in Berlin. In this period, he composed his *Religion of Reason*, giving religion a more distinctive place in his system and demonstrating that Judaism in particular was the classic model of a rational religion. For Cohen, the essence of Judaism was ethical monotheism grounded in a prophetic universalism stressing moral commitments to humanity as a whole and emphasizing a mission to bring about a utopian future. Cohen's Jewish theology meshed organically with his optimistic assessment of Jewish integration in Germany and the role Jews were destined to play in the development of German culture. In many respects, Cohen's moral idealism represented the springboard for later Jewish thinkers in reformulating Jewish thought in radically different ways.

## Outline

- I. Hermann Cohen's fame rested on his reconstruction of Neo-Kantianism, an interpretation of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Cohen is the first of a new generation and a new way of speaking about Judaism.
  - A. At the University of Marburg, he achieved fame as a secular philosopher.
    1. For Cohen, as an idealist philosopher, anything is important if it becomes a construction of thought. The task of philosophy was to discover the logical conditions underlying scientific knowledge.
    2. Philosophy begins with the given facts of reality and brings them to a kind of self-consciousness by revealing the common principles at work in them.
    3. For Cohen, culture was the product of the human mind, and the latter was the sole guarantor of reality. God, religion, and Judaism are all based on the notion that the highest reality is the mind.
  - B. In Cohen's original system, religion was only a phase of philosophy.
    1. Religion has meaning only in the construction of mind, of ideas. Because ideas are the very substance of reality, God is simply an idea, a problem of knowledge.
    2. Cohen reached the idea of God by focusing primarily on ethics. Ethics provides humankind with an eternal idea, but natural science indicates that the world is coming to an end.
    3. The system requires an idea on the transcendent level to unify both realms, to ensure that the ethical task is eternal in the real world.
    4. The supreme idea of God links the natural world and the ethical world by guaranteeing the eternity of the world and the eternity of ethical ideals.
- II. When Cohen left Marburg at the age of seventy for Berlin, he started teaching in a Jewish school and became more attuned to Judaism.
  - A. Teaching Jewish students in Berlin, he composed his *Religion of Reason, Out of the Sources of Judaism*.

1. Religion now was to give a more distinctive place as a supplement to ethics.
  2. The religious value of Judaism lies in the domain of ethical behavior and its striving for social justice.
  3. Judaism exemplifies most dramatically a religion of reason, cultivating ethical sensitivity and emphasizing prophetic universality and the notion of a messianic age.
- B.** For Cohen, the essence of Judaism was ethical monotheism and ethical socialism.
1. In his public debate with Martin Buber, Cohen objected to Zionism and saw the role of the Jew in inculcating ethical ideals by living in the Diaspora.
  2. He saw Judaism as exclusively a religious faith, not a nationality. Jews had a moral obligation to support the states they live in and to work for their messianic vision of universal peace among them.
  3. Cohen was the last of the philosophers from Mendelssohn on to define Judaism as exclusively a rational religion, based on a system of philosophy (Neo-Kantianism) into which Judaism was reformulated to fit.
  4. His position regarding the confluence of Judaism and Germanism also represented one of the most forceful articulations of the Jewish-German symbiosis.
  5. His emphasis on ethics generally ignored the place of ceremonies and ritual in Judaism.
- C.** His writing on Judaism left an enormous impression on later Jewish thinkers.
1. His importance as a philosopher made prominent his ideas about Judaism.
  2. As a liberal Jew, his philosophy brought to a close the development of German Jewish reform thought in the nineteenth century.
  3. His ideas became a springboard for later German Jewish thinkers, particularly Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig, to conceive of Judaism as something more than merely a religion of reason.

**Essential Reading:**

Jehuda Melber, *Hermann Cohen's Philosophy of Judaism*.

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinartz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 571–577.

Steven Schwarzschild, “The Democratic Socialism of Hermann Cohen,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 27 (1956), pp. 417–438.

**Supplementary Reading:**

William Kluback, *The Legacy of Hermann Cohen*.

Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. by John Denton.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How did Cohen exemplify both the promise and the tragedy of the German-Jewish symbiosis?
2. What was the significance of Cohen's work for the subsequent development of twentieth-century Jewish thought? How did his positions stimulate others?

## Lecture Seventeen

### Leo Baeck's Mystery and Commandment

**Scope:** Leo Baeck (1873–1956) was a disciple of Cohen, but unlike him, pursued a highly prominent career as a rabbi in Berlin. In his first major work, *The Essence of Judaism*, written in response to an earlier work on Christianity by Adolf von Harnack, Baeck underscored, like Cohen, the central role of ethical monotheism in the Jewish religion but departed from him in stressing the role of religious consciousness, as well. Baeck understood Jewish faith as dialectical, created by the two poles of divine commandment and religious consciousness, or mystery, as he called it. God makes ethical demands of the believer, but he is also experienced personally; he is transcendent but also personal. Baeck continued to stress the universal message of Judaism in Cohenian fashion, although in his later work, he also focused on the notion of the Jewish people.

Much of Baeck's thinking is typological and polemical. He is always comparing Judaism with Christianity in his writing. Even his most original formulation of mystery and commandment is constructed in reaction to his perception that Christianity had stressed too much the former at the expense of the latter. Baeck was deported to Theresienstadt in 1943, survived the Nazi Holocaust, and eventually settled in the United States, remaining essentially a non-Zionist. Despite his trying personal experiences, his understanding of Jewish faith remained virtually the same as in his earlier formulations.

### Outline

- I. Leo Baeck was a disciple of Hermann Cohen but not a professional philosopher.
  - A. Baeck's early writings betray his indebtedness to German idealist philosophy but also his break from it.
  - B. In his first major work, *The Essence of Judaism*, his position parallels that of Cohen in defining Judaism as essentially ethical monotheism.

- C. Yet he departs from Cohen in his acknowledgment that the experience of being a Jew involves both ethical monotheism and religious consciousness.
- II.** The new element in Baeck's thinking was the importance he assigned to "religious consciousness."
- A. The intellectual influence for this idea was his study of German Christian thought, especially *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) by Rudolf Otto.
1. For Otto, religion arises out of a sense of the holy, out of fascination and fear. This inner experience complements the ethical.
  2. This new element shattered the philosophical integrity of the Neo-Kantian system of pure reason. Cohen would never have acknowledged so directly the emotional experience Baeck had underscored.
- B. Baeck, unlike Cohen, was also a rabbi with a primary interest in the quality of the religious life.
1. Baeck realized the difference between philosophical reality, which defined ideas as most real, from the religious reality of the common believer.
  2. Throughout his life, he served as the liberal rabbi of Berlin and, when captured by the Nazis, served as the rabbi of Theresienstadt, a camp outside Prague, until he was released and made his way to America after the war.
- III.** Baeck's thinking is dialectical.
- A. He creates two poles of religious experience, in tension with each other.
1. God demands the infinite moral task, but beyond the ethical is a realm of experiencing God's presence. God is both transcendent and personal.
  2. The ethical task alone is not sufficient because it leaves the believer cold, failing to capture the depth of his religious belief.
  3. Religious consciousness is also insufficient because religious feeling needs to be checked by ethics so that it does not degenerate into sheer romanticism.



4. Baeck was aware of the excesses of German romanticism, of a troubling sense of religious dependence that could potentially make the believer ethically inert.
- B. The metaphor of Baeck's dialectic was the biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham listened to God's call, but in the end, God's commanding voice would not or could not violate the ethical.
  - C. Baeck's "Jewish" reading of the biblical story clearly opposed that of the Christian theologian Soren Kierkegaard, who had emphasized what he called Abraham's "teleological suspension of the ethical" as the primary model of Christian faith.
- IV. For Baeck, to be a Jew means both, to believe in the commandment, as well as the mystery. At the same time, Baeck's thinking is highly polemical.
- A. From his earliest writing, Baeck presented Judaism in contrast with Christianity.
    1. His *Essence of Judaism* was written as a response to the *Essence of Christianity* of Adolph von Harnack.
    2. Baeck's typological method contrasted a romantic Christianity to a classical Judaism.
    3. Judaism for Baeck was positive, activist, masculine, and ethical. Christianity, in contrast, was passive, inward, faith and grace oriented, and feminine.
  - B. Baeck's dialectical Judaism was clearly a polemical response to Christianity, which he believed lacked the dialectic between ethics and religious consciousness and was, thus, inferior.
  - C. Like any polemic, Baeck's comparisons were often unfair and one-sided. In the long tradition of liberal religious thought that began with Geiger, Baeck continued to try to demonstrate the superiority of Judaism's construction over that of Christianity.
- V. It is also important to examine Baeck's attitude toward peoplehood and ceremonial law.
- A. After the war, Baeck became more cognizant of Jewish peoplehood than before.
    1. He composed *This People Israel*, which emphasized the role of the Jewish community in promoting the commandment and mystery of Judaism.

2. Offering a version of the idea of the mission of Israel, Baeck stressed the importance of the Jewish people retaining their special character as a mission to the world.
  3. Baeck was not an anti-Zionist, but Zionism did not play a major role in his thinking.
- B.** For Baeck, in the tradition of liberal Jewish thought, commandment meant, essentially, the moral commandment.
1. Baeck marginally addressed the place of ritual in the religious life of Jews.
  2. He saw ceremonial law as a means of fostering communal consciousness and the spiritual function of the Jewish people.
  3. Baeck's emphasis, however, was still in the Cohenian mold of ethical monotheism, the universal message of Judaism rather than the particular ritual acts that create a specific Jewish way of life.

**Essential Reading:**

Leo Baeck, *Judaism and Christianity*.

Albert Friedlander, *Leo Baeck: Teacher of Theresienstadt*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why was Baeck so concerned with demonstrating Judaism's superiority over Christianity? Are his typologies of the two religions fairly drawn?
2. Is Judaism indeed a dialectical faith? Are the two poles of commandment and mystery pulling at each other reconcilable? Can a faith based on tension be a stable, certain faith?

## Lecture Eighteen

### Martin Buber's Religious Existentialism

**Scope:** Martin Buber (1878–1965) is probably the most well known Jewish social and religious philosopher of the twentieth century, acknowledged especially for his book *I and Thou*, written in 1923. To appreciate Buber as a Jewish thinker, one needs to understand the universal condition he was addressing, which he once called “the eclipse of Heaven, the eclipse of God.” By this he meant the inability of human beings to address God as a person but, rather, to speak of him as an idea. Buber’s preoccupation was to relocate the absolute as a living subject rather than an object. The eclipse of God also accompanies the eclipse of man. Before one can recover God, one requires a revival of spontaneity, self-awareness, and openness on the part of human beings before the world. The essential condition of our time is alienation and divestment, the absence of God and the incompleteness of man. Buber accordingly defines a twofold relation of human beings before the world: The I-It relation, a relation to objects of experiencing and using, and the I-Thou relation, the ultimate reception of the other on the basis of his uniqueness. For Buber, when one is fully able to know other human beings through both relations, one is capable of knowing God. God is present in every I-Thou relation but can also be encountered directly as a person.

Buber’s universal concerns lead him, ultimately, to his Jewish ones. The essence of Judaism, for him, is the Jewish people’s dialogical relation with God, known as the covenant. Buber’s translation of the Bible with Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), his biblical commentaries, his infatuation with the mystical community of Hasidism, and his notion of Zionism as “Hebrew humanism,” all embody his guiding principles of dialogue, meaningful human encounter with the other and with the divine.

### Outline

- I. Martin’s Buber essay on Hermann Cohen is a good point of departure in understanding the newness of his position.

- A. In it, he records the lines of the French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and scholars.”
  - B. Buber used this phrase to explain the historical moment through which the world was passing, which he called, “the eclipse of Heaven, the eclipse of God.”
  - C. He argued that the absolute was dead in his century because philosophers and their devices of the intellect had divested God of his mystery.
  - D. God was no longer a personality to speak to but an idea. Thus, the immediate God of the patriarchs had vanished.
- II.** A second point of departure is Buber’s famous exchange with a worker listening to one of his lectures.
- A. Buber was challenged by the worker, who claimed he had no need for God in his life.
  - B. Buber initially responded by trying to shatter the worker’s argument intellectually.
  - C. He convinced the worker but rebuked himself for having proven the merit of the “God of the philosophers” but not what Pascal had called “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, him to who one calls ‘Thou.’”
  - D. He had won the argument but not the conversion, proving an idea, not evoking a real presence.
- III.** Buber’s preoccupation was to relocate the absolute as a living subject rather than an object.
- A. The eclipse of God (the loss of the absolute) is accompanied by the eclipse of man.
    - 1. Before one can recover God, one must overcome the alienation and lack of openness and spontaneity that characterize human relationships.
    - 2. Human beings know the world insufficiently by knowing it only one dimensionally.
    - 3. Human beings most often relate to others through an “I-It relationship,” a relation to objects—experiencing, analyzing, and using them.

4. The other relationship is called “I-Thou,” a means of approach that surpasses handling and manipulation. It is defined as that state of between-ness that is most completely human.
- B.** When one learns how to relate to human beings in a twofold way (I-It and I-Thou), one is ready to know God.
1. Each thou is a glimpse through to the eternal Thou.
  2. The eternal Thou is present in every particular thou but only incompletely.
  3. God, too, can be encountered directly as a person. One learns to talk to God rather than about him.
  4. By loving, one learns how to believe.
  5. God is not an idea; God is a presence.
- IV.** Buber’s preoccupation with the universal human condition should not obscure his deep commitments to Judaism and to the Jewish people.
- A.** The essence for Judaism is the Jewish people’s dialogical relation with God.
1. The covenantal relation is the quintessential dialogical relationship between an entire community and the eternal Thou.
  2. The Bible represents the testimony of this unique relationship. Meeting God through a state of openness and readiness to hear his voice is the central leitmotif of the biblical narrative.
- B.** The eighteenth-century movement of Hasidism exemplifies powerfully the dialogical relationship.
1. Buber invests Hasidic thought with this theological concern.
  2. He finds the relationship among the Hasid, his God, and his world and the relation of the Zadik (the rabbi) with his flock as emblematic of the relationship.
  3. Buber adopted the language and concepts of the Hasidic masters in his return to an authentically rich and meaningful Judaism.
- C.** Buber’s particular understanding of Zionism also exemplifies the dialogical relation of the Jewish people.
1. Zionism, for Buber, is Hebrew humanism, reviving the covenantal, dialogical relationship between God and the nation.

2. Buber was against the narrow egotistical nationalism espoused by some. He took on David Ben-Gurion and other Zionist political thinkers.
3. He saw Israel as a laboratory of dialogical relations between Jews and Jews and between Jews and Arabs.
4. For him, the *kibbutz* was a model of the kind of relationships that could emerge.
5. Accordingly, he favored a bi-national state in Palestine, which made him most unpopular politically.

### **Essential Reading:**

Martin Buber, *The Eclipse of God*, pp. 3–9, 49–62.

Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea*, pp. 451–463.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann.

Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. If Buber's I-Thou relationship is the essential feature of his faith, what makes his faith specifically a Jewish one? Does the individual I-Thou relationship always coincide with the communal covenantal one?
2. Why was Buber as a religious existentialist philosopher more popular and influential among non-Jews than Jews?

## Lecture Nineteen

### Jewish Law—Martin Buber versus Franz Rosenzweig

**Scope:** Buber's closest collaborator was the German Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), with whom he shared a similar notion of religious existentialism, as well as an openness to the spiritual and literary sources of Judaism from the Bible through Hasidism. They disagreed intensely, however, on the matter of Jewish ritual observance. In a work addressed to Buber entitled *The Builders*, Rosenzweig challenged his dear friend to adopt the same openness toward Jewish observance that he had demonstrated toward the study of Jewish texts. Rosenzweig clearly understood the difference Buber had explained between the authentic personal commandment that comes out of the I-Thou relation with God and the cold, impersonal duties traditionally required of every Jew by the rabbis. He, too, could not accept a legal ruling until it could be elevated to the level of a personal commandment. But Rosenzweig objected to Buber's hasty dismissal of these religious laws. Instead, he claimed that "one hears differently when one hears in the doing," that is, the actual performance of Jewish ritual can reveal to the doer a personal meaning and authenticity that is unappreciated beforehand. In actually performing the commandments, one embraces a Jewish experience other Jews have personally encountered and makes it one's own.

Ultimately, Buber could not accept his friend's differing posture toward Jewish law. He remained essentially a Jewish thinker with minimal engagement in ritual life. Unlike Rosenzweig, however, he strongly believed in a Jewish spiritual revival in the land of Israel and eventually left Germany for Palestine. Their famous disagreement over the place of Jewish ritual and practice in Jewish life left its mark on many of their disciples in Europe and America.

### Outline

- I. Franz Rosenzweig's debate with Martin Buber over Jewish law (ritual practice or ceremonial law) is a dramatic example of the centrality of the issue in modern Jewish thought.

- A. Although they disagreed on this topic, they collaborated on a translation of the Bible.
  - B. A brief review of the positions of earlier Jewish thinkers is necessary. We have asked the question “Why is there a need for ceremonial law?”
    - 1. Mendelssohn had made the distinction between moral (eternal truths based on reason) and ritual (ceremonial) commandments, although insisting both were obligatory.
    - 2. Liberal Jewish thought from Geiger to Baeck had made a similar distinction but clearly elevated the moral over the ritual, claiming the former was eternal, but the latter could change.
    - 3. As we shall soon see, Mordecai Kaplan rejected the notion that rituals had legal status. Rather, they were folkways that fostered group consciousness and individual spiritual growth.
    - 4. Orthodox thinkers from Hirsch to Abraham Heschel insisted on the divine nature of both the moral and ritual law, which were equally binding.
  - C. For secularized Jews in the twenty-first century, the problem of the law is paramount.
- II.** Buber’s position on Jewish law naturally followed from his general presuppositions.
- A. Buber distinguished between God-given commandments and law.
    - 1. The former emerges authentically out of the I-Thou relationship between human beings and God.
    - 2. The latter is inauthentic because it was artificially imposed by the rabbis and the Jewish community.
  - B. In revelation, God reveals not a specific content but a presence. What emerges out of the relationship is different for each individual.
  - C. A commandment is meaningful and authentic only when it comes out of a real I-Thou encounter. When accepted by imposed authority, it is inauthentic and does not enhance spirituality or religiosity.
  - D. It is possible that one’s personal commandment might coincide with the imposed laws of the community, but this often does not



happen, and one should follow only the real commandment emerging from the I-Thou encounter, not a false one.

E. Ultimately, for Buber, commandment could not be reduced to law.

**III.** Franz Rosenzweig, Buber's dear friend and colleague, understood Buber's position but, nevertheless, dissented from it.

A. For Rosenzweig, Jewish law was essential to understanding Jewish consciousness.

B. Rosenzweig, whose notions of God and revelation were close to those of Buber, criticized Buber's view of Jewish law in *The Builders*.

1. Rosenzweig initially praised Buber for a series of lectures he had given on the subject of Jewish learning.
2. Buber had insisted on not prejudging the materials of Jewish learning beforehand. By actual study, one reveals their inner power and the innate spiritual message of any Jewish text.
3. Buber was reacting to the presuppositions of the scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, whose preconceptions would often not allow them to appreciate certain Jewish texts, especially kabbalistic and Hasidic ones.
4. Rosenzweig asked Buber to consider a similar position with respect to Jewish law. One should not prejudge specific laws until one does them repeatedly.
5. Rosenzweig acknowledged Buber's distinction between personal commandment and communal law. But he claimed one should not discard the laws before doing them because one hears differently when one hears in doing.
6. It is possible to elevate a law to a personal commandment. Moreover, there is a limit to one's subjectivity in being part of the Jewish community.

**IV.** Their exchange continued in a series of letters in which they restated their views.

A. Rosenzweig continued to claim that the performance of laws communicates a message of its own and that openness before God as a Jew means, especially, openness to his laws/commandments.

B. Buber continued to insist that all laws cannot become commandments and remained, essentially, a non-observant Jew.

- C. Conservative rabbis found a greater kinship with Rosenzweig’s position than Buber’s.
- D. Perhaps the difference between their orientations on Zionism—Buber moved to Israel; Rosenzweig remained a non-Zionist—is relevant in understanding each thinker’s stance toward Jewish law.
  - 1. Buber’s living in a Jewish state perhaps made Jewish practice for him less compelling.
  - 2. The place of ritual and practice in Judaism was essential to Rosenzweig’s notion of a metaphysical nation living in time, not in a particular space.
- E. Buber and Rosenzweig capture the essential debate over the place of Jewish law in Jewish life in modern times.

### **Essential Reading:**

Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 188–215.

Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning*.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Leora Batnitsky, *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered*.

Nahum N. Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. To your mind, which arguments in favor of Jewish ritual are most compelling to contemporary Jews, or as Arnold Eisen ultimately suggests, are none of them?
2. Rosenzweig’s argument is that doing a ritual elevates it to the level of a personal commandment. But can the reverse also happen? By performing a ritual repeatedly, personal conviction and motivation diminish or disappear.

## Lecture Twenty

### Mordecai Kaplan and American Judaism

**Scope:** Mordecai Kaplan (1881–1983) was, perhaps, the most original of American Jewish thinkers, “reconstructing” Judaism to meet the needs of second-generation, native-born American Jews. Strongly influenced by the American philosophic tradition of pragmatism and by the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha-Am, Kaplan offered a rationale for Judaism to Jews questioning the relevance of their faith in a seemingly universalist and scientific world. Kaplan began with the premise that Judaism is essentially a group affair and that, based on a study of the civilizations of primitive peoples, the essence of religion is group emotion. Thus, anthropology offered Kaplan a rationale for Jewish group cohesiveness in place of the traditional doctrine of chosen-ness, which he emphatically rejected.

Kaplan similarly explained God in rational empirical terms as a process in the universe that works for good—neither the mere strivings of human beings nor a transcendent force but a kind of cosmic urge. Because this God is not personal, God cannot respond to prayer. Yet prayer is efficacious because the impulse to pray is human and prayer reinforces the sense of group cohesiveness. Similarly, Jewish ritual acts are meaningful when not viewed as divine dictates but as folkways enhancing the life of the individual and the group.

Kaplan’s Reconstructionist movement failed to capture the hearts and minds of most American Jews. But its impact on other movements and religious leaders was not insignificant in offering a fresh rethinking of Jewish theology and a creative approach to liturgy and ritual practice.

### Outline

- I. Mordecai Kaplan was clearly the most important thinker to create a uniquely American Jewish theology.
  - A. His Reconstructionist Judaism was an attempt to respond to the questions and doubts of second-generation American Jews growing up in the 1930s and beyond.

- B. He tried to offer a rationale for Judaism in the seemingly universal and scientific world of the twentieth century.
  - C. In a world where biblical supernaturalism clearly had been challenged by modern sensibilities, Kaplan tried to provide a new formulation of Judaism in consonance with the basic assumptions of his secular, modern age.
- II.** Kaplan begins with the most difficult challenge for Jews: the need to justify Jewish particularity.
- A. Based on the anthropological assumptions he had studied at Columbia University—the theories of Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Emile Durkheim—Kaplan found a “scientific basis” for describing the Jewish community.
    1. One learns from anthropology, Kaplan contended, that the religion of the savage is nothing more than the sublimation or projection of the wants of his tribe. The essence of religion is group emotion; you can’t have religion without collective.
    2. Kaplan concluded that it is only as a member of society that one comes to know God. The function of God is to hallow the national will.
  - B. To reach his conclusion, Kaplan assumed that primitive religion was typical religion and can serve to measure our own societies.
    1. He assumed that descriptive anthropology can be used to construct a science of human behavior.
    2. Based on this assumption, it was natural and, thus, desirable for religions to constitute themselves as folk religions. Each nation in the present should develop its religion as each tribe did in ancient times.
    3. What easily followed was a justification of Judaism as a civilization, the fusion of nation and religion, which science—that is, social science—had proclaimed as both natural and normal.
    4. As a naturalist, Kaplan had rejected the supernatural election of the Jewish people as an outdated and morally obnoxious concept; he required, therefore, a natural justification of Jewish religious peoplehood. This he found in the anthropological theories he espoused.
    5. Influenced by Ahad Ha-Am and cultural Zionism, Judaism as a civilization, with a spiritual center in Israel linked

symbiotically to Jewish communities in the Diaspora, was also affirmed by Kaplan as a means of reinvigorating contemporary Jewish life.

### III. Kaplan's idea of God could also not be supernatural.

- A. Kaplan sought a scientific basis for belief in God that would not offend modern sensibilities.
  - 1. "God is the sum of all those factors and relationships in the universe that make for unity, creativity, and worthwhileness in human life."
  - 2. Kaplan's God was neither a supernatural God outside nature nor identifiable with the mere strivings of human beings. God is not to be identified with the human conscience alone.
  - 3. His notion of God was clearly ambiguous; Kaplan was writing both as a theist and humanist.
  - 4. The living God of Israel was now reduced to a name given to the sum total of processes that make for human welfare.
- B. Can people pray to Kaplan's God?
  - 1. If God is no longer personal, are prayers still necessary?
  - 2. Kaplan's answer is that prayer is necessary because people have the need to ascribe personality to that which is abstract and impersonal (the process of reification). Prayer is not objectively efficacious but subjectively so, and in prayer, the group enhances its collective consciousness.

### IV. Kaplan reinterpreted the Jewish tradition of 613 commandments.

- A. In rejecting a supernatural Judaism, Kaplan rejected the legally binding basis of Jewish practice.
  - 1. Jewish law can no longer function as a legal system with rewards and punishments for the believer.
  - 2. Jewish rituals and practices are folkways that need to be constantly reinterpreted.
  - 3. By identifying their functional value, old practices can still be relevant to the group and individual, and new ones can be constantly invented.
- B. To observe ritual meant a twofold function: to see how it psychologically meets the needs of the individual and how it sociologically meets the needs of the group.

### V. What is Mordecai Kaplan's legacy?

- A. Institutionally, the Reconstructionist movement has attracted the smallest numbers of Jews to its ranks.
1. Kaplan's influence was still far-reaching among Reform and Conservative American Jews.
  2. To a great extent, his appeal diminished in subsequent years as the need to reconcile religion and science, as he had done, became less pressing.
  3. Kaplan's theories ultimately proved wanting to both the scientist and religionist. Kaplan's God, for example, was highly questionable scientifically and problematic to one seeking a personal deity.
- B. The Reconstructionist movement has proved viable after Kaplan by adopting positions unanticipated by its founder but, perhaps, in the spirit of his evolving Judaism, such as embracing spirituality and mysticism, as well as advocating strong feminist attitudes.

### **Essential Reading:**

Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 218–228.

Mordecai Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask*, pp. 263–276.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Arnold Eisen, *The Chosen People in America: A Study in Jewish Religious Ideology*, pp. 73–98.

Mordecai Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization: Towards a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*.

Mel Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan*.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Did Kaplan succeed in constructing a rational religion? Is his notion of God and peoplehood rationally compelling?
2. How has Reconstructionist Judaism dealt with Kaplan's ideas? How has the movement become more "spiritual" and more open to mysticism since his death? Is this a violation of his principles or a confirmation of them?

## **Lecture Twenty-One**

### **Abraham Heschel—Mystic and Social Activist**

**Scope:** Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), although the product of the Hasidic world of Eastern Europe, as well as that of German philosophy, also wrote, like Kaplan, for American Jews. Both Kaplan and Heschel taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, but besides their parallel careers, they were significantly different in their theological orientations. Heschel saw God as ineffable, that is, indescribable in words and beyond the scope of the mind. What he attempted to describe was the concept of divine revelation, the very process by which God reaches out to human beings. In this process, Heschel argued, God is intimately affected and involved in the conduct and fate of men. Drawing heavily on the literature of Jewish mystics and Hasidic sages, Heschel argued that God’s search for man could be rewarded by man’s openness to God through the performance of the divine commandments.

Heschel’s effectiveness as a writer was ultimately more significant than the clarity of his theological affirmations. He wrote to convince the non-believing Jew of the power of Judaism and the power of the divine presence. He evoked brilliantly the mood of the Sabbath day or the ambiance of Eastern European Jewry before the Holocaust. He also combined his mystical passion with a deep commitment to social action, personally involving himself in the struggle for civil rights in America, as well as the fate of Russian Jewry. This remarkable fusion of mystic, social activist, and popular religious writer deeply affected the sensibilities of several generations of American Jews. In fact, Heschel’s version of Judaism has continued to hold its appeal, particularly because of its post-modern resonances, to a greater extent than that of Mordecai Kaplan.

### **Outline**

- I. Abraham Joshua Heschel was a product of Eastern European and German Jewish culture who exerted a profound influence on American Jewish culture.

- A. Heschel was educated in the world of Hasidism and German philosophy.
  - 1. He was deeply saturated from birth in the writings of kabbalists and Hasidic masters, from whom he drew considerably in his writing.
  - 2. He was identified with the lost pre-Holocaust world of Eastern European Jewry, which he evocatively presented to the American reader in *The Earth Is the Lord's*.
  - 3. He was also educated in the world of Buber and Rosenzweig and, in many ways, adopted parallel positions to both.
- B. His coming to America and his professorship at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York left a lasting impression on non-Orthodox Jews.
  - 1. His traditionalist position on Jewish observance clearly left its mark among the faculty and students he encountered.
  - 2. His mystical rhetoric was attractive to many and gained even more acceptance with the waning of the rationalism on which Kaplan had built his theories.
  - 3. Heschel's remarkable social activism, especially his embrace of the civil rights movement, as well as the cause of Russian Jewry, defied all simple attempts to categorize him as a mystic or activist. Indeed, he was both.

## II. Heschel's theology of Judaism focused primarily on the notion of revelation.

- A. Upholding a traditional view of revelation, he provided it with a phenomenological explanation.
  - 1. Heschel, in *The Prophets*, tried to describe what happens when the prophets are addressed by God and how they respond to him.
  - 2. He discovered that the essential notion of divine revelation is the divine pathos, that God is intimately affected, involved, and stirred by the conduct and fate of human beings.
  - 3. The divine pathos gives God a crucial stake in the human situation because whatever human beings do not only affects their own lives but also directly the life of God.
  - 4. Heschel's notion of "God in search of man" was inspired not only by the biblical narratives but by kabbalistic and Hasidic



- sources, where the notion of Jews performing the commandments in order to affect the Godhead is central.
5. By describing divine revelation in this way, Heschel hoped to revitalize the traditional idea and to capture the hearts of contemporary Jews.
- B.** Heschel's impressive evocation of the prophetic experience attempted to show to non-religious Jews the very aliveness of the traditional understanding.
1. Heschel's powerful rhetoric, meant to inspire and transform his readers through stories, meaningful citations from the sources, and lofty sermons about the human condition, was clearly his strong point to those readers who enthusiastically devoured his many works.
  2. Despite his wide-ranging erudition, Heschel was hardly a systematic philosopher. He evoked a mood more than a coherent message.
  3. He was effective because he lived what he preached. He became the embodiment of the mystic who is comfortable with social action and the particularist who is comfortable with universal causes.
- C.** Like Rosenzweig, Judaism for Heschel was primarily a religion of time rather than place.
1. In one of his last works, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, written in 1967, he displayed his passion for the land of Israel.
  2. Yet the land of Israel has little place in his larger theological thinking. How the modern Jew can understand and accept God's revealed law, making it the center of his activity as a Jew and human being, remained Heschel's major preoccupation.

### **Essential Reading:**

Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, pp. 167–184.

Abraham Heschel, *God in Search of Man*.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Samuel Dresner and Edward Kaplan, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*.

Fritz Rothschild, ed., *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism from the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the similarities in the thought of Buber, Rosenzweig, and Heschel? What are the differences?
2. Why was Heschel, an essentially Orthodox thinker, so popular among Conservative Jewry? Are his powerful evocations of Jewish life and observance still accessible to contemporary non-observant Jews?

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### Theological Responses to the Nazi Holocaust

**Scope:** Richard Rubenstein (1924– ) was the first American Jewish thinker to identify the Holocaust as the central issue of Jewish theology in the twentieth century. In the first edition of *After Auschwitz*, published in 1961, he emphatically claimed that after the destruction of European Jewry, a Jew could no longer affirm the myth of an omnipotent God, nor its corollary, the election of Israel. After the Holocaust, Jews now lived in a time of the death of God, “in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources.” Given this condition of helplessness, Jews could take comfort in belonging to a religious community where “that condition could be shared in depth.” In subsequent books and revisions, Rubenstein has sought to refine and rethink this initial position, but he has never retreated from it altogether.

Emil Fackenheim (1916– ), a significant scholar of modern philosophy, as well as Jewish thought, ultimately provided a meaningful response to Rubenstein in his 1970 work *God's Presence in History*. Although unable to offer a satisfying explanation to the tragedy of Hitler, Fackenheim was certain of one fact: “We, as Jews, are not permitted to hand Hitler any posthumous victories.” From the Holocaust must emerge a reaffirmation of Jewish existence from those fortunate to survive. The commanding voice of Auschwitz orders the Jew to remember, to tell the tale to succeeding generations, to survive, and never to despair. In establishing their oppositional positions, Fackenheim and Rubenstein opened a larger discourse among contemporary Jewish thinkers about the meaning of the Nazi genocide for Jewish faith.

### Outline

- I. The Nazi Holocaust has raised new and painful questions about Jewish belief.

- A. Although Jewish responses to theodicy have a long history, many have seen the Holocaust, in its sheer intensity and magnitude, as requiring a new response.
  - 1. The Holocaust raises questions about God's presence (or absence) in a time of mass Jewish slaughter. Can one still believe in an omnipotent and beneficent God after Auschwitz?
  - 2. The Holocaust raises questions about the future of human interaction and dialogue. Can humanity be trusted after the Holocaust?
  - 3. What are the implications of the Holocaust for the state of Israel and its security? What are the implications for Jewish-Christian coexistence after the tragedy?

- B. Previous theological responses to the Holocaust before Richard Rubenstein were partial and indirect.
  - 1. Leo Baeck, despite his personal experiences, hardly addressed the issue head-on, remaining throughout, an ethical optimist.
  - 2. Mordecai Kaplan, by defining God as a process for good, does not hold God responsible for evil, which exists but cannot always be explained. Certainly for Kaplan, human evil is the responsibility of human beings, not God.
  - 3. Abraham Heschel holds to a more traditional view of evil in seeing the horrors of our day as a result of an excessive faith in men over God. Observance of God's commandments is the only response a Jew can offer to the presence of evil.
  - 4. Martin Buber initially describes evil as the lack of I-Thou relationships, emphasizing human inadequacy. Later, he seems to acknowledge God's lack of response and calls for an openness to God, who will eventually renew the relationship with humanity.

**II.** Richard Rubenstein was the first theologian to make the Holocaust the central challenge of modern Jewish theology.

- A. Rubenstein wrote his *After Auschwitz* at the same time that a group of Christian theologians were writing about "the death of God" and was immediately linked to them.
  - 1. Rubenstein's boldest claims were that a Jew can affirm neither the myth of the omnipotent God nor its corollary, the election of Israel, in the wake of the Holocaust.

2. Since the Holocaust, he claimed, Jews live in a time of the death of God, in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources.
3. In the end, all things crumble into nothingness, which is the beginning and end of all creation.
4. Given this condition of human hopelessness, Jews need to embrace a sense of religious community “as an institution in which that condition can be shared in depth.”

**B.** Rubenstein continued to write on the Holocaust and revised *After Auschwitz* as recently as 1992. His thinking was informed by history, sociology, psychoanalysis, and even the study of Eastern religions, and his more radical stance has been considerably toned down, if not modified.

**III.** Responses to Rubenstein’s challenge came from various sources, particularly from those who felt the need to preserve some form of traditional Jewish faith after Auschwitz.

**A.** The most famous respondent to Rubenstein was the philosopher Emil Fackenheim.

1. His 1970 work, *God’s Presence in History*, did not offer an explanation of God’s absence, which Fackenheim could not explain. Rather, it offered a way of responding to the challenge of the Holocaust.
2. For Fackenheim, response can emerge only in an absolute fashion as imposed commandment, a way God has commanded us to act.
3. Jews are commanded never to hand to Hitler any posthumous victories. They must survive; they must remember; they must never despair; and they must not go mad.
4. Jews must accept their singled-out condition, face up to its contradictions, and endure them.

**B.** Others have followed Fackenheim in offering a sense of Jewish hope and faith in a post-Nazi era.

1. Elie Wiesel was one of the first of many novelists to struggle with the dilemmas raised in essay form by Rubenstein.
2. Irving Greenberg and Eugene Borowitz have offered important variations on Fackenheim’s unambiguous response.
3. In more recent years, books, museums, films, and video testimonies have made the issue of the Holocaust central to

Western culture. For Jewish theology, however, the responses of Rubenstein and Fackenheim still frame the discourse some sixty years after the event.

**Essential Reading:**

Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, pp. 67–104.

Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, pp. 209–225.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, pp. 187–220.

Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,” in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, pp. 7–55.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What intermediate positions might exist between the “death of God” theology of Rubenstein and the “commanding voice of Auschwitz” of Fackenheim?
2. Besides theological writing, what is the impact of the Holocaust on post-Holocaust Jewish culture, both in Israel and the Diaspora?

## Lecture Twenty-Three

### Feminist Jewish Theology

**Scope:** The emergence of feminist theology in the Jewish community is a relatively recent phenomenon of the 1960s and 1970s and a development primarily emanating from American Jewish circles. One of the key manifestos of Jewish feminist theology was the essay of Judith Plaskow of 1971, later expanded into her book *Standing Again at Sinai*. In both writings, she boldly proclaimed that rabbinic tradition had classified women as marginal Jews, possessing a spirituality based on not doing and not being, while relegating to men to perform and to be. Plaskow's words revolutionized the debate about whether Judaism in its classical forms—its notion of God, its hierarchical structures, its forms of participation in community and divine service, its decision-making process—could ever allow women to be full and equal participants in Jewish life. Plaskow's subversive critique even raised a more provocative question: Could Judaism and feminism find a way of coexisting, or was it necessary to chose one over the other?

More recently, Rachel Adler's *Engendering Judaism* has gone beyond the stage of critique and moral outrage, working with the assumption that despite its limitations from a feminist perspective, the *halakha*—the rabbinic structure of laws and observances—cannot be discarded. Instead, there is a need to engage its texts and utterances with new scholarly tools of legal and narrative theory, with new ways of reading, and with an open heart sensitive to the multiple meanings that it might contain. If feminists simply reject the categories and content of the tradition, how can they claim that what they create in its place is authentically Jewish?

Jewish feminism has contributed to a new understanding of Judaism through the emergence of new readings of classical texts and liturgy, new scholarship in Jewish history, and new theological perspectives that take into account the perspective of gender when examining the values and priorities enunciated in the Jewish tradition.

## Outline

- I. The impact of Jewish feminism on modern Jewish thought is a relatively recent phenomenon.
  - A. Jewish feminists began to make their voices heard in American Jewish life from at least the early 1960s, arguing that they had been left out and needed more power and authority in the Jewish community.
    1. Their successes were initially limited to liberal and conservative sectors of the American Jewish community.
    2. Initially, they criticized gender inequities in communal leadership roles, synagogue worship, and rabbinic ordination and demanded a greater voice for women in Jewish life.
    3. They specifically challenged discrimination stemming from Jewish law: the inability of women to be counted in a *minyan* (a quorum of ten that makes up the traditional Jewish service) or to be called to the Torah, their credibility as witnesses or their power to change their own marital status, and especially, their inability to interpret the law as rabbinic experts.
  - B. Feminism greatly affected the study of Jewish history and culture. Gender offered a new and meaningful way of rethinking the past by taking cognizance of the difference between male and female Jews.
  - C. Feminists contributed greatly to the creation of new liturgical and literary writing that is more welcoming and inviting to women.
- II. Judith Plaskow significantly opened the question for Jewish thought in her 1971 article, followed by her book *Standing Again at Sinai*.
  - A. Plaskow raised dramatically the question about women's role during the foundational experience of the Jewish people at Sinai.
    1. She pointed out that, at the critical moment of receiving the commandments, Moses addresses men only and women are invisible.
    2. Jewish law has classified women as peripheral Jews whose spirituality is based on not performing all the commandments assigned to men and who are relatively absent, not only at Sinai, but from the central activities that define Jewish life.
  - B. Women's roles in Jewish life are those of enablers, enabling males to do and to be counted.



1. The problem of the otherness of women extended beyond Jewish law for Plaskow. It was directly linked to theological conceptions of God as male and to an exclusively male authorship of the canonical Jewish tradition.
  2. Plaskow underscored the hierarchical structure of power that dominated the very structure of classical Judaism.
- C. Her powerful critique raised the question of how to modify Judaism from a feminist perspective without undermining its very foundations. Can a feminist also be a good Jew?

**III.** More recently, Rachel Adler, in her *Engendering Judaism*, has continued to refine Plaskow's position and to respond to her challenge to create an authentic Jewish theology that is ethically sensitive to both men and women.

- A. For Adler, like Plaskow, Judaism's commitment to justice obligates it to understand and redress gender inequality.
1. Adler addresses the most critical problem of a feminist Jewish theology: If feminists reject the categories and content of the tradition, how can they claim that what they create in its place is authentically Jewish?
  2. Adler's effort is to interpret classical Jewish texts "without rejecting them, apologizing for them, or merging with them." In this sense, she makes a more serious effort than Plaskow in engaging the Jewish tradition.
  3. Her focus has been on the hermeneutics of the classical texts—to encounter, renew, and reclaim the holiness of these texts for women and men. She uses new tools of legal and narrative theory to discover new ways of reading, new ways of understanding the tradition.
- B. Adler proposes an ethic of intersubjectivity between self and other, rather than an ethic that regulates the relations of domination and subordination. She offers a new model of the marriage contract as partnership.

### **Essential Reading:**

Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*.

Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, pp. 313–340 (essay by Ellen Umansky).

Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Is it possible to fully reconcile feminism and traditional rabbinic Judaism? What does it mean to be an Orthodox Jewish feminist?
2. What new insights about Judaism and its history have emerged from the new feminist scholarship?

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### Current Trends in Jewish Thought

**Scope:** Beyond the impact of feminism on Jewish thought, it is difficult to summarize and even more difficult to appraise the significance of the most recent theological thinking in the Jewish community. Some, both with the Reform and modern Orthodox camps, have attempted to refine the notion of *covenant* for contemporary Jews. Others, beyond Rubenstein and Fackenheim, have continued to grapple with the singular impact of the Holocaust on Jewish faith. Perhaps symptomatic of the post-modern mentality, some thinkers have reconnected with the body of mystical teachings in Judaism in an attempt to revitalize Jewish life and spirituality. In Israel, other thinkers have struggled with the meaning of a Jewish state still in conflict with its Arab neighbors.

Arnold Eisen has recently argued that we know very little about contemporary Jewish belief, and what we do know suggests that much observance does not derive from, or depend on, the belief that God commanded it. Ultimate truths mean little to most Jews performing the ritual of the Passover Seder, nostalgically evoking the memory of their ancestors. Thus, the ruminations of Jewish thinkers are irrelevant to most Jews and hardly address the reasons why they continue to act Jewishly at all. Can nostalgia alone sustain an enduring faith and an enduring community? Ultimately, are the questions of God, Torah, and Israel of interest only to intellectuals? Are the latter the only people who give some thought to the meaning of their lives? This is a question worthy to ponder at the end of this course. Contrary to Eisen, it is my contention that thinking does matter and not only for intellectuals. If nothing else, this course might demonstrate the very seriousness of the project of modern Jewish thought—its richness, its profundity, no doubt its inadequacies as well, but also its sheer honesty and courage in attempting to make sense of itself and its strongest convictions in a vastly complex and often confusing world.

## Outline

- I. Our lectures have attempted to trace the evolution of Jewish thought in the modern era from a hawk's eye view.
  - A. Through a broad survey of Jewish thinking over some five centuries, we have been able to identify long-term trends and developments.
  - B. Modern Jewish thought is a mere mirror and reflection of the historical experience of Jews in modern times.
  - C. It is a record of Jewish reflections on enlightenment and emancipation, secularism, nationalism and socialism, anti-Semitism, radical upheaval, dislocation, and disaster.
  - D. It is an attempt to extract meaning from the Jewish tradition against the backdrop of the radical transformations and upheavals that have marked the history of modern Jewry.
- II. Over the course of these lectures, we have looked at three traditional issues: God (Is there a God? Is there a God in the face of tragedy?); Torah (the nature of Jewish practice; ceremonial law); and Israel (the issue of particularity, of what it means to be a Jew in a universal world).
  - A. Every one of the thinkers we have dealt with has tackled these questions, either singly or in combination.
  - B. We have even seen secularist versions of Jewish thinking, for example, in the context of Zionism and socialism.
  - C. We have spoken of three general responses—insider, outsider, and rejectionist—and we can categorize these thinkers by their responses. Most of the thinkers we have considered were insiders.
- III. Contemporary Jewish thought has not produced the same level of thinking as in Buber, Rosenzweig, and others we have treated. Some recent directions of contemporary reflection, other than feminism, include the following:
  - A. Eugene Borowitz, Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, and others have reflected on the meaning of a covenant theology, both in the liberal and Orthodox Jewish community.
  - B. Others have reflected on the theme of the disunity of Judaism, on the meaning of Jewish spirituality in a so-called post-modernist

age, on the meaning of Zionism and post-Zionism, or on social issues, such as ecology.

**IV.** Historian Arnold Eisen has also reflected on the project of modern Jewish thought.

- A.** Eisen has recently raised doubts about his own profession, the study of modern Jewish thought.
1. Eisen has recently suggested that much contemporary Jewish practice does not derive from, or depend on, a belief that God commanded it.
  2. Ultimate truths are a matter of little importance to most Jews, who practice ritual, such as that of Passover, without any clear creedal affirmation regarding what they are doing.
  3. Eisen further argues that although beliefs matter little for most Jews, what matters is nostalgia, a general sense that what one is doing is honoring parents and grandparents, recalling and hallowing the memory of generations passed.
  4. For Eisen, the experience of the modern era suggests that practice is far more important than the theory of practice. Nostalgia is the most compelling factor for American Jews in preserving the tradition, albeit incompletely, and in passing it down to their children.
- B.** One might argue with Eisen that intellectuals are not the only people who give thought to the meaning of their lives and who have deep-seated beliefs.
1. One might question how nostalgia is anything more than a fleeting sentiment, capable of sustaining the commitment of engaged Jews and capable of being transmitted to the next generation.
  2. Firm commitments are usually based on firm convictions, which in turn, are based on self-knowledge and self-reflection.
- C.** Contrary to Eisen, we might argue in closing that the reflections covered in this course are rich, profound and relevant and speak to the condition of all Jews, indeed all human beings. They reveal the courage and honesty of Jewish intellectuals to confront the past in terms of the present and future, to attempt to offer meaning to a tradition challenged in manifold ways, and to continue a process at the very heart of Jewish creativity.

- D. In the final analysis, modern Jewish thought, with all its flaws and imperfect answers to the dilemmas of Jewish life, is an authentic extension of Jewish exegetical activity, or *midrash*, the attempt to grapple with the meaning of an ancient faith and a tradition of sacred texts in a vastly complex and uncertain time.

**Essential Reading:**

Alan Arkush, “Thinkers and Doers: Eisen’s Rethinking Modern Judaism,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 90 (1999), pp. 127–136.

Arnold Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, pp. 228–263.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Arnold Eisen, “Jewish Theology in North America: Notes on Two Decades,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 91 (1991), pp. 3–33.

Steven T. Katz, ed., *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What do you suppose is the future of modern Jewish thought? Has it become irrelevant to the concerns of most contemporary Jews?
2. In what ways are the concerns of modern Jewish thinkers surveyed in this course similar to, or different from, those of other non-Jewish religious thinkers attempting to make sense of their own faith communities?

## Timeline

1492	Expulsion of the Jews from Spain.
1497	Mass conversion of the Jews of Portugal.
1516	First ghetto established in Venice.
1536	Inquisition introduced to Portugal.
1553	Burning of the Talmud in Italy.
1555	Ghetto established in Rome.
1632–1677	Life of Baruch Spinoza.
1648–1649	Persecution of the Jews in Polish Ukraine by the Cossacks.
1665–1666	Shabbetai Zevi acclaimed as Jewish messiah.
1670	Publication of the <i>Theological-Political Treatise</i> of Spinoza.
1700–1760	Life of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism.
1726–1791	Life of Jacob Frank, most radical Sabbatean.
1727–1786	Life of Moses Mendelssohn.
1782	Joseph II of Austria's edict of toleration to the Jews.
1783	Publication of Mendelssohn's <i>Jerusalem</i> .
1791	Emancipation of the Jews in France.
1804	Regularization of the pale of settlement in Russia by Tsar Alexander I.
1818	Hamburg Reform Temple established.

1819–1822 .....	Rise and fall of the Verein fuer Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums.
1836 .....	Publication of Hirsch’s <i>Nineteen Letters on Judaism</i> .
1840 .....	Damascas blood libel.
1844–1846 .....	Reform Jewish synods in Germany.
1853–1878 .....	Publication of Graetz’s <i>History of the Jews</i> .
1854 .....	Breslau rabbinical seminary opened.
1872 .....	Reform rabbinical seminary founded in Berlin.
1881–1882 .....	Wave of pogroms in Russia.
1889 .....	First essays of Ahad Ha-Am published.
1894–1899 .....	The Dreyfus affair in France.
1896 .....	Herzl publishes <i>The Jewish State</i> .
1897 .....	The Jewish Bund established in Vilna and the first Zionist Congress in Basle.
1903 .....	The Kishinev pogrom.
1905 .....	Publication of Leo Baeck’s <i>The Essence of Judaism</i> .
1915 .....	Louis Brandeis publishes his manifesto of American Zionism.
1917 .....	Balfour declaration in England recognizing a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
1919 .....	Publication of Hermann Cohen’s <i>Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism</i> .
1921 .....	Publication of Franz Rosenzweig’s <i>Star of Redemption</i> .



1923 .....	Publication of Martin Buber's <i>I and Thou</i> .
1925 .....	Hebrew University opened in Jerusalem.
1934 .....	Publication of Mordecai Kaplan's <i>Judaism as a Civilization</i> .
1941–1944 .....	Nazi Holocaust.
1948 .....	Establishment of the state of Israel.
1966 .....	Publication of Richard Rubenstein's <i>After Auschwitz</i> .
1967 .....	Six Day War in Israel.
1990 .....	Publication of Judith Plaskow's <i>Standing Again at Sinai</i> .

## Glossary

***aliyah***: The Hebrew word for ascent, meaning pilgrimage to the land of Israel, or generally, the Jewish act of immigrating to Israel.

**Atticism**: As used by nineteenth-century thinkers, the cultural legacy of Western civilization bequeathed from the ancient Greeks.

**Brit Milah**: Literally, the covenant of circumcision, referring to the Jewish commandment of ritual circumcision prescribed for every Jewish male on the eighth day after his birth.

**Bund**: An abbreviation for the ALEGEMEYNER YIDISHER ARBETER BUND IN LITE, POYLN UN RUSLAND (General Jewish Workers' Union in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), the Jewish socialist party founded in Russia in 1897.

**burning of the Talmud**: A reference to the decree of Pope Paul IV in 1553 to burn all copies of the Talmud throughout Italy, launching a major offensive against the Jewish community.

**catholic Israel**: Term first introduced by Solomon Schechter, meaning that collective body of the Jewish community who take seriously Jewish practice and whose observance should become the source of authority in determining Jewish law.

**ceremonial laws**: The ritual commandments under which the Jew is obligated that constitute, for Mendelssohn, that part of the divine revelation extended exclusively to Jews.

**Conservative Judaism or positive-historical Judaism**: Generally associated with the theology of Zecharias Frankel, an attempt to find a path between Reform and Orthodoxy, insisting that the actually practicing Jewish community, as opposed to either the individual or the rabbis, is the ultimate source of authority in Judaism.

***conversos*, referred to negatively as *marranos***: Jews who were baptized, either forcefully or voluntarily, in Spain and Portugal from the fifteenth century on, many of whom returned to Judaism by the seventeenth century.

**Counter-Reformation**: The Catholic reformation initiated by the pope and clergy to counter the threat of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

**covenant:** The legal contract between God and the Israelite community articulated in the Hebrew Bible.

**cultural Zionism:** The stream of Zionism emphasizing the goal of reviving the spirit and culture of the Jewish people over the political, associated with the views of Ahad Ha-Am.

**Damascus blood libel:** In February 1840, a Catholic priest in Damascus disappeared. His fellow priests accused the Jews of killing him for Passover ritual purposes and even gained the support of the French government in backing these malicious charges. This reemergence of the medieval blood libel stimulated the political consciousness of the international Jewish community to refute these accusations and to secure the release of Jews held as prisoners in Damascus.

**death of God theology:** A trend of Christian radical theology of the 1960s made famous especially by Thomas Altizer of Emory University, with which Richard Rubenstein has often been associated.

**deism:** A belief in God based solely on rational criteria rather than revelation and supernaturalism, emerging, first, in England, then the rest of Europe, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**dialectical faith:** A faith characterized by a tension or opposition between two interacting forces or elements; in the case of Leo Baeck, between mystery and commandment.

**Diaspora:** The area outside the land of Israel settled by Jews.

**Doenmeh:** Sect of adherents of Shabbetai Zevi who converted to Islam in imitation of the messiah's personal apostasy.

**Dreyfus affair:** The court-martial, conviction, and final acquittal of Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), a Jewish army officer in France falsely accused in 1894 of treason primarily because of his Jewish origins. The affair was a watershed in the history of anti-Semitism, eliciting a powerful reaction from the eminent French novelist Emile Zola, among many others, and shaking the confidence of Jews in the liberal order and modern democracy.

**eclipse of God:** Expression used by Buber to describe the death of the absolute, the enclosure of God by rational systems of religion, divesting him of his mystery and power.

**Enlightenment:** Generally refers to the philosophical, political, and pedagogic movement of the eighteenth century characterized by a reliance on reason and a critique of established religious dogma.

**eternal truths:** As understood by Spinoza and Mendelssohn, those moral principles that are eternally binding and based on reason.

**feminism:** The political, social, and cultural movement that promotes sexual equality between men and women.

**Frankists:** Followers of Jacob Frank, the radical follower of Shabbetai Zevi, who eventually converted to Christianity and advocated a radical nihilistic stance toward traditional Judaism.

**galut:** The term denoting exile from the land of Israel, interpreted in the Bible and rabbinic literature as the divine punishment of the Jewish people for breaking God's covenant. In the messianic era, according to this view, Jews will be redeemed from exile and restored to their land.

**ghetto:** The enclosed urban quarters restricted for Jewish residents, first appearing in Venice in 1516 and spreading throughout Italy in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

**Halakha:** Rabbinic law; those commandments that Jews are obligated to observe according to the interpretation of the rabbinic tradition.

**Hasidism:** The Jewish mystical, spiritual movement originating in eastern Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century, founded by the Baal Shem Tov.

**Haskalah:** The secular Jewish enlightenment that emerged both in western and eastern Europe at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

**Hegelianism:** The philosophical system of George Wilhelm Hegel, resting on the notion of the dialectical principle, where reflective thinking establishes an order of development that corresponds to the order of the real world.

**hermeneutics:** The art or science of interpretation, usually of the Bible.

**historical truths:** As understood by Mendelssohn, those self-evident historical facts based on the reliable testimony of the biblical narrative.

**historicism:** The nineteenth-century intellectual movement that sees history as the ultimate standard of value or truth.

**homiletics:** The branch of rhetoric concerned with the writing and delivery of sermons.

**idealism:** A predominant philosophical school of thought in nineteenth-century Germany that saw the rational mind as the only guarantor of reality.

**ineffable:** The notion that the reality of God cannot be described in words, associated with the theology of Abraham Heschel.

**inquisition:** A general reference to the Catholic Church tribunal erected to examine and try heretics. Also refers specifically to the Spanish Inquisition active in the fifteenth century, examining especially the alleged heresy of converts from Christianity to Judaism.

**I-Thou, I-It relations:** The two fundamental relationships through which human beings confront the world, especially other human beings and even God, described by Martin Buber in his philosophy.

**Jewish particularity:** A specific Jewish identity, something demarcating Jews from non-Jews.

**kabbalah:** The mystical and esoteric traditions of Judaism that first appear publicly in the thirteenth century in Spain and Provence and continue to flourish into the modern period.

**kosher:** Permitted by Jewish ritual law.

**lachrymose:** Tearful, gloomy, a term used by the historian Salo W. Baron to refer to the type of history written by Heinrich Graetz that emphasized the long history of atrocities and pogroms perpetrated against the Jews.

**law and commandment:** Buber's distinction between legislation formally mandated by the rabbis and personalized obligation, which organically comes out of the I-Thou relationship, the latter meaningful and authentic and the former, not.

**Marranism:** The phenomenon of the *marranos* or *conversos*. See *conversos*.

**marranos:** Literally in Spanish, "swine," a derogatory reference to converts from Judaism to Christianity, especially in the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries in Spain and Portugal, who were accused by the Inquisition of heresy and practicing Judaism despite their conversions.

**Marxism:** The political and economic principles of socialism advocated by Karl Marx, including a belief in economic determinism, the eventual dictatorship of the proletariat, and the erection of a classless society.

**Maskilim:** The proponents of the Haskalah. See Haskalah.

**messianism:** A powerful stream of classical Judaism, calling for the redemption of humankind by a personal savior and the return of the Jews to the land of Israel.

**midrash:** Generally denoting rabbinic biblical commentary and homiletics; also refers to a particular genre of rabbinic literature that includes both.

**minyan:** The minimum number of ten male Jews above the age of thirteen required for congregational worship and the public reading of the Torah in traditional Judaism.

**mission of Israel:** The doctrine of nineteenth-century Reform Judaism justifying the existence of the Jewish people as the moral catalyst of humanity as a whole.

**Mitsvot:** The general term for the divine commandments said to be given by God at Mount Sinai to the Jewish people and computed by the rabbis as numbering 613.

**Moriscos:** Moors or Moslems who remained in Spain after the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492, forced to convert or to practice their former faith in secret.

**mystery and commandment:** Leo Baeck's two poles of religious experience—a God demanding moral responsibility and one to be experienced in worship and in life—in creative tension with each other, which is the essence of Judaism.

**mysticism:** As used in the Jewish tradition, the doctrines and activities of those seeking a direct and unmediated connection or union with the divine source of reality.

**naturalism:** An attempt to explain reality without recourse to supernatural causes or forces, based instead on scientific and empirical verification.

**Neo-Kantianism:** The various schools of thought interpreting the philosophy of Immanuel Kant at the end of the nineteenth century, one of which was the Marburg school of Hermann Cohen.

**Neo-Orthodox Judaism:** The theology of Judaism associated with Samson Raphael Hirsch, who argued for a modern version of Orthodoxy encouraging secular education with a firm commitment to traditional practice.

**Orthodox Judaism:** A construction of Jewish theology emerging in the nineteenth-century traditionalist camp, defining itself in opposition to Reform and Conservative Jews who had allegedly deviated or undermined traditional Jewish beliefs and praxis.

**pale of settlement:** Territory within the borders of czarist Russia wherein the residence of Jews was legally authorized.

**Pharisees:** A sectarian Jewish group emerging in Palestine in the first centuries before the Common Era, arguing for the sanctity of a twofold law, one written in the Bible and one oral, based on the interpretations of the rabbis.

**pogrom:** A massacre, riot, or other disturbance, officially instigated, referring especially to one directed against Jews.

**post-modernism:** Several broad trends in literature, philosophy, and art that constitute reactions against modernist philosophy and practice, sometimes accompanied by a revival of traditional forms and elements.

**post-Zionism:** A recent movement of Israeli intellectuals challenging the moral legitimacy, standard history, and relevance of Zionist ideology in our day.

**purity of blood:** A reference to a doctrine of racial purity emerging in Spain as early as the fifteenth century, justifying discriminating treatment of recent converts from Judaism or Islam who were not deemed legitimately Christian.

**rabbinic Judaism or rabbinic tradition:** A reference to the beliefs and practices of traditional or classical Judaism constructed by the rabbis in the early centuries of the Common Era and accepted universally by Jews until the modern era.

**Reconstructionism:** The movement to reconstruct Judaism as a civilization defined in anthropological and naturalistic terms; inspired by the writing of Mordecai Kaplan.

**Reform Judaism:** The movement of Judaism emerging in nineteenth-century Germany arguing that Judaism was constantly evolving and that individuals have the right to modify religious practice to suit the needs of their age.

**responsum, responsa:** A reference to the rabbinic rulings composed by rabbis from the early Middle Ages to the present on specific cases of Jewish law requiring their immediate attention. This literature, also found in other faith communities, especially Islam, was an important supplement and elucidation of the legal tradition of Judaism as embodied in the Talmud and the medieval codes.

**revelation:** The act of revealing or communicating divine truth, especially that of the Bible. In Judaism, this occurred traditionally at Mount Sinai through the agency of Moses.

**romanticism:** The literary, artistic, and intellectual movement, originating in the eighteenth century, emphasizing the imagination and the emotions and an exaltation of the primitive and the common man.

**Sabbateanism:** The movement of the followers of Shabbetai Zevi, who declared himself the Jewish messiah in 1665 but eventually converted to Islam, leading his followers to either despair in him or to interpret his bizarre behavior in mystical and nihilistic terms.

**Sadducees:** An ancient Jewish sect that challenged the views of the Pharisees, upholding only the written law of Judaism and accepting the exclusive authority of the priesthood over the rabbis.

**sephardic Jews:** In the Middle Ages, generally refers to Jews living in Islamic lands while *ashkenazic Jews* refers to those who lived in Christian northern Europe. These categories become more blurred after the Christian conquest of Moslem Spain and after the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century.

**Socialism:** Any of a range of economic and political theories advocating the creation of a classless society and government ownership of goods and the means of production.



**Socialist Zionism:** An ideology of Zionism based on the fusion of socialist and nationalist theories and leading to the creation of a classless national Jewish homeland.

**Talmud:** The body of rabbinic literature, appearing in both a Palestinian and Babylonian recension, composed roughly between the second and sixth centuries of the Common Era. The Talmud consists of the Mishnah, a simple exposition of Jewish law completed in Palestine in the second century, and the Gemarah, elaborations, discussions, and legal refinements of the Mishnah completed in subsequent centuries. The Talmud became the primary text of traditional study for Jews throughout the ages and was accompanied by many medieval commentaries.

**teleological suspension of the ethical:** A concept associated with the Danish Christian thinker Soren Kierkegaard and exemplified by the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, whereby Abraham listens to the voice of God rather than his own moral conscience.

**theodicy:** The attempt of reconciling the existence of evil in the world with the goodness and sovereignty of God.

**theurgy:** As understood in kabbalistic tradition, the ritual and spiritual activity of human beings affecting the divine world.

**Torah:** Specifically, the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, but generally, Jewish sacred literature.

**transubstantiation:** The conversion of the bread and wine of the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ, according to the doctrine of the Catholic and Eastern Churches.

**Wissenschaft des Judentums:** Literally, "the science of Judaism," the academic and critical study of Jewish culture launched by a group of German Jewish intellectuals in the nineteenth century.

**Zionism:** The Jewish nationalist movement originating in the nineteenth century and leading to the creation of the state of Israel.

## Biographical Notes

**Uriel da Costa** (1585–1640). *Marrano* philosopher and free thinker who fled to Amsterdam from Portugal and attempted to return to Judaism. He discovered the Jewish beliefs and observances the community practiced to be at variance with what he considered Judaism to be. He wrote several works against rabbinic law, was excommunicated, and eventually, took his own life. His troubled relationship with Catholicism and Judaism was recorded in an autobiography published some years after his death.

**Ben-Zion Dinur** (1884–1972). As historian and educator, Dinur was one of the chief founders of the “Jerusalem” school of Jewish historiography. For Dinur, the determining factor shaping the history of the Jewish people, both in the land of Israel and in the Diaspora, was its conscious link with its land. This all-pervading connection to the land of Israel determined the divisions and periodization of his multivolume history of the Jews, appropriately titled *Israel in its Land* and *Israel in Exile*. Allowing the sources “to speak for themselves,” Dinur carefully guided his readers to grasp the essential unity of the Jewish experience from its earliest beginnings until the culminating return to its own homeland in modern times. As a prominent educator in Israeli public schools, his vision of Jewish history had a significant impact on educating generations of Israeli children.

**Simon Dubnov** (1860–1941). Russian Jewish historian and political ideologue, Dubnov believed that a deep understanding of the forces of the Jewish historical past allowed him to improve the present lot of his community and prepare for its future. In his world history of the Jewish people, Dubnov tried to demonstrate that in every period of its existence, regional centers of Jewish communal autonomy provided Jews with self-rule and national creativity, from Babylonia to Spain to the lands of Poland-Lithuania. On the basis of this glorious history of autonomous centers, it was possible to establish, in modern times, a similar structure of self-rule among the nationalities of Eastern Europe and Russia. Opposed both to Zionism and radical assimilation, his unique ideological position, informed by his prodigious historical research, left a significant mark on modern Jewish culture.

**Jacob Frank** (1726–1791), founder of a sect called the Frankists, representing the last and most radical stage of the Sabbatean movement, originating from the messiahship and eventual conversion of Shabbetai

Zevi to Islam in the previous century. Frank had personal contact with extremists of this movement in the Ottoman Empire. On his return to Poland, he preached a nihilist ideology of overturning the norms and practices of traditional Judaism. He considered himself as the messiah, empowered to destroy rabbinic Judaism in the name of his own revelatory teaching. He and a group of his followers eventually converted to Christianity, although he was soon arrested by the Inquisition for his heretical tendencies. His followers engendered a crisis and fear among the organized Jewish community, and some continued to follow revolutionary religious and political paths well into the next century.

**Theodor Herzl** (1860–1904). Known as the father of political Zionism and the founder of the World Zionist Organization, he was drawn to the idea of a Jewish state as the solution to the problem of anti-Semitism. As a correspondent for a Vienna newspaper covering the Dreyfus affair in Paris, he watched in horror as a young Jewish officer was humiliated because of his Jewish ancestry. In his *The Jewish State*, written in 1895, he sketched out a plan for securing politically a Jewish state in Palestine and putting in place the economic infrastructure of this political entity, arguing eloquently why this project would enhance the Jews and Western society alike. His political activities until his death paved the way for the beginning of political recognition of his plan by European states and the construction of an organization to promote Jewish aspirations for statehood.

**Moses Hess** (1812–1875). An important German socialist thinker, Hess underwent a transformation in his attitude toward the suffering of Jews in his later years. In 1862, he published *Rome and Jerusalem*, one of the earliest Zionist manifestos calling for the preservation of Jewish national consciousness in the Diaspora and the restoration of a Jewish state in Palestine. Hess integrated his socialist principles into this national project with his call for a Jewish society and economy founded on socialist principles, which he identified as Mosaic ones.

**Isaac Luria** (1534–1572). Safed kabbalist, Luria taught orally a comprehensive system of esoteric speculation offering a mystical account of creation, the origin of cosmic evil, and the ultimate restitution of the world and the spiritual state of the Jewish people. For Gershon Scholem, Luria's speculation was a response to the existential crisis of the Jewish people engendered by their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and directly influenced the messianic movement of Shabbetai Zevi and, later Polish, Hasidism. Other historians have challenged Scholem's linkage of Lurian

kabbalah to 1492 and its alleged influence on the messianic movements of subsequent centuries.

**Simone Luzzatto** (1583–1663). Rabbi in Venice for fifty-seven years, Luzzatto composed a discourse on the state of the Jews in Venice, written in Italian and directed to the political authorities of the city. In this work, he attempted to argue on political and economic grounds for the utility of the Jews, their loyalty to the political state, and their economic significance in strengthening Venice's commercial interests. This was one of the first apologetic works written on purely secular grounds intended to influence public opinion in favor of the Jews. Luzzatto also composed another Italian work on the trial of Socrates on the relation of human reason and divine revelation.

**Moses Maimonides** (1143–1204; known as the Rambam). Maimonides was the most significant Jewish intellectual of the Middle Ages, author of the code of Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*, as well as the philosophical classic *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Born in Cordoba, he eventually settled in Fostat, in the old city of Cairo, where he functioned as an illustrious physician. His other works are numerous, including many letters, shorter treatises, and rabbinic rulings. His impact on subsequent Jewish thought is enormous. He is especially significant in the thought of Spinoza, Hirsch, and several other thinkers of the modern era, either as a model of emulation or as a source of criticism for his attempt to reconcile rationality and faith.

**Leon Modena** (1571–1648). Rabbi, preacher, and prolific writer in Venice, Modena reveals the multifaceted and colorful side of Italian Jewish life. He is most well known for his revealing autobiography suggesting a troubled inner self in contrast to the public figure he embodied. His Italian sermons, heard by Jews and Christians alike, made him a celebrated personality in Venice though he constantly suffered personal and economic loss. He composed a polemic against Christianity and against the kabbalah among his many works. Although poised as a defender of Judaism in his popular Italian apologia on Judaism, he may have also composed a critique of rabbinic law revealing an intimate familiarity with rabbinic jurisprudence while undermining it.

**Rudolf Otto** (1869–1937). German Protestant theologian and historian of religion. His most famous work was *The Idea of the Holy*, published in 1923, which underscored the notion of the holy as the characteristic feature of all religious experience. This notion, experienced in the religious

consciousness of the believer, had a major impact on several twentieth-century Jewish thinkers, especially Leo Baeck.

**Leo Pinsker** (1821–1891). A university-trained physician in Odessa, Pinsker was profoundly affected by the Russian pogroms of 1881. He reached the conclusion that Jewish enlightenment and emancipation were impossible in the West because anti-Semitism, the deep-rooted psychological fear of Jewish ghosts, could never be removed from its culture and society. In his *Auto-Emancipation*, written in 1882, he argued that the Jewish problem would never go away given the degree of alienation Jews will always face. Their only solution is to take their fate in their own hands by creating a Jewish homeland of their own. He never stipulated that the homeland was to be in Palestine but eventually was won over to the idea and became a leading member of the Hibbat Zion movement in Russia, which supported Jewish settlement in the Holy Land.

**Solomon Schechter** (1847–1915). Judaic scholar and one of the first presidents of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the rabbinical school of Conservative Judaism. As the head of this seminary from 1902 until his death, Schechter became the chief architect of American Conservative Judaism. His most important theological elaboration of Conservative ideology was to explain how tradition and change could coexist. Change for him was based on the actual practice of the living community, a community he called “catholic Israel.” Schechter’s position was related directly to the positive-historical Judaism of Zecharias Frankel.

**Gershom Scholem** (1897–1982). One of the most important scholars of Judaic studies in the twentieth century and pioneer in the academic study of the Jewish esoteric and mystical traditions at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Scholem was clearly the most influential scholar to establish the philological and historical foundations of the field, exploring the beginnings of the kabbalah in antiquity until the emergence of Polish Hasidism in the eighteenth century. His many books, especially his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and his grand biography of the mystical messianic figure Shabbetai Zevi, were highly influential. Before settling in Israel, Scholem was a prominent intellectual figure in Germany, maintaining a close relationship with other thinkers, such as Walter Benjamin and Martin Buber.

**Shabbetai Zevi** (1626–1676). Emerging in 1665 from obscure Ottoman origins, Shabbetai Zevi was perceived by his followers as the messiah who

had come to redeem the Jewish people. He was eventually caught by governmental officials, imprisoned, and persuaded to convert to the Islamic faith. For his most ardent of followers, the messiah's apostasy represented a crisis of faith that required explanation and interpretation. In the "holiness of his sin," they claimed, he was still the messiah, who had entered the realm of evil to wrestle with it, overcome it, and ultimately, to redeem the world. His followers, especially the most radical of them, preached an anti-nomian and nihilistic ideology that threatened the very foundations of normative Judaism. The Sabbatean threat lasted for well over 150 years after his death.

**Leopold Zunz** (1794–1886). Zunz was a philologist and historian and one of the chief architects of the "science of Judaism" in nineteenth-century Germany. His influential essay of 1818, *Etwas ueber der rabbinische Literature*, was one of the first statements calling for an academic and historical approach to the study of rabbinic literature. Jewish literature, Zunz argued, could not be any longer enclosed in the narrow confines of the religious tradition but needed to be studied comparatively in the broader fields of the humanities. In his major book on the homiletic literature of the Jews, Zunz constructed for the first time the historical evolution of *midrashic* literature, and in his study of synagogue poetry, he presented the artistic and aesthetic qualities of the Jewish worship service.

## Bibliography

### Essential Reading:

Adler, Rachel. *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998. A long-awaited feminist theology of Judaism that takes seriously rabbinic sources.

Altmann, Alexander. *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*. University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1973. The classic exhaustive study of his thought and intellectual world.

Baeck, Leo. *Judaism and Christianity*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1958. Several important essays of the thinker, including his classic “Mystery and Commandment.” Judaism is defined in contrast to Christianity.

Batnitsky, Leora. *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. A recent and insightful study of the philosopher.

Bonfil, Robert. *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. A masterful overview written from the perspective of an Israeli historian with a strong nationalist consciousness.

Borowitz, Eugene. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*. New York: Behrman House, 1983. A clear and accessible introduction to modern Jewish thought written from the perspective of a Reform Jewish theologian.

Buber, Martin. *The Eclipse of God*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957. A wonderful collection of Buber’s essays, including several short pieces that illuminate Buber’s view of God against the setting of his cultural world.

Cohen, Arthur, and Paul Mendes-Flohr. *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987. A massive encyclopedia of concepts of Jewish belief written by a wide array of authorities; includes useful bibliographies.

Fackenheim, Emil. *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*. New York: New York University Press, 1970. Volume includes some of his most important reflections on faith after the Holocaust and the rise of the state of Israel.

Frankel, Jonathan. *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862–1917*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press,

1981. A brilliant synthesis of this key period in Jewish history, integrating the socialist and nationalistic strains of Eastern European Jewish culture.

Glatzer, Nahum N. *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*. New York: Schocken, 1961. A critical collection of documents on Rosenzweig with a classic introduction to his life and thought.

Hertzberg, Arthur. *The Zionist Idea*. New York: Doubleday and Co., 1959. Still the best anthology of its kind, with a brilliant introductory essay.

Heschel, Susannah. *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Heschel studies Geiger from the perspective of his historical critique of Christianity, opening up a deeper understanding of Jewish-Christian polemics in the nineteenth century.

Hirsch, Samson Raphael. *The Nineteen Letters on Judaism*. Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1969. The young Hirsch takes on the most serious challenges to traditional Jewish faith in a series of letters to an imagined doubting student.

Kaplan, Mordecai. *Questions Jews Ask*. New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1956. The “user-friendly” Kaplan, answering theological questions in an accessible and simple manner.

Kaplan, Yosef. *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardic Diaspora in Western Europe*. Leiden: Brill, 2000. A recently translated collection of some of the most important essays by the leading historian of the *converso* Diaspora in Western Europe.

Katz, Jacob. *Out of the Ghetto*. New York: Schocken Books, 1978. The classic account of the enlightenment and emancipation of Western European Jewry. In recent years, Katz’s exclusive focus on Germany has been challenged by several historians.

Katz, Steven T., ed. *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Bnai Brith Books, 1993. Brief essays with bibliographies on a collection of recent Jewish thinkers, some more significant than others.

Mendelssohn, Moses. *Jerusalem*. Trans. by Allan Arkush. Hanover, N.H., and London: University Press of New England, 1983. The best translation in English of this important statement of modern Judaism.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul, and Jehuda Reinharz. *The Jew in the Modern World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. A remarkable introduction to modern Jewish history through wonderfully annotated and



translated source material. Worth its weight in gold, it is important for both intellectual and social history.

Novack, Simon, ed. *Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader*. Washington, D.C.: Bnai Brith, 1974. A companion volume of selections from the thinkers to be read with the next work.

———, ed. *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*. Washington, D.C.: Bnai Brith, 1974. A simple and accessible introduction to some important Jewish thinkers.

Plaskow, Judith. *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990. The manifesto of Jewish feminist theology, already a classic.

Rosenbloom, Noah. *Luzzatto's Ethico-Psychological Interpretation of Judaism*. New York: Yeshivah University, 1965. A useful introduction to a thinker often ignored in English-language accounts of modern Jewish thought.

Rosenzweig, Franz. *On Jewish Learning*. New York: Schocken, 1965. Contains the famous exchange between Buber and Rosenzweig on Jewish observance.

Rotenstreich, Nathan. *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. A highly philosophical treatment of major thinkers and themes in modern Jewish thought.

Roth, Cecil. *A History of the Jews of Italy*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946. Outdated but still a classic, well-written account of a fascinating history.

Rubenstein, Richard. *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966. Rubenstein's famous challenge to traditional Jewish faith. The argument is scattered throughout the book, which need not be read in full.

Scholem, Gershom. *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973. The classic biography of this complex historical figure and the early years of the movement surrounding his messiahship. Masterful and exhaustive.

Schorsch, Ismar. "Ideology and History in the Age of Emancipation," in Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and Other Essays*. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1975, pp. 1–62. A thoughtful essay on Heinrich Graetz, situating him carefully among the cultural figures and ideological debates of his time.

Seltzer, Robert. *Jewish People, Jewish Thought: The Jewish Experience in History*. New York: Macmillan, 1980. One of the most useful textbooks of Jewish history in all periods, with an important emphasis on the history of Jewish thought. It contains good summaries of the thinkers treated in this course.

Silber, Michael. "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition." In *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, edited by Jack Wertheimer. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992, pp. 23–84. The best essay on the subject of Ultra-Orthodoxy as a response to the modern Jewish experience.

Smith, Steven. *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. A recent, insightful account of the philosopher, with an emphasis on the tension between Jewish and liberal commitments.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Theological-Political Treatise*. Trans. by R. H. M. Elwes. New York: Dover Publications, 1951. Spinoza's important statement on the relation of religion and politics, biblical criticism, and the irreconcilable nature of reason and traditional Jewish practice.

Vital, David. *The Origins of Zionism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. The first of a series of exhaustive histories of Zionism written by a major historian in the field.

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982. A much-discussed book on the tension between collective memory and academic history in the Jewish experience. Eloquent and provocative.

### **Supplementary Reading:**

Arkush, Alan. *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994. Arkush presents Mendelssohn as a radical philosopher challenging the basic premises of traditional faith.

Baeck, Leo. *The Essence of Judaism*. New York: Schocken, 1971. His classic formulation of Judaism, written in response to the work of the Christian theologian Adolf von Harnack.

Barnai, Jacob. "Christian Messianism and the Portuguese Marranos: The Emergence of Sabbateanism in Smyrna." *Jewish History* 7 (1993): 119–126. An important statement linking the history of Sabbateanism with that of Marranism.

Baron, Salo W. *History and Jewish Historians*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964. A classic collection by the great historian of reflections on the writers and writing of Jewish history.

Bonfil, Robert. "Changes in the Cultural Patterns of a Jewish Society in Crisis: Italian Jewry at the Close of the Sixteenth Century." *Jewish History* 3 (1988): 11–30. A complex and profound essay on the cultural significance of the ghetto period in Jewish history.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Trans. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970. His most important book on the discovery of the Absolute and human relations.

Dresner, Samuel, and Edward Kaplan. *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness*. New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1998. A recent and important biography of the thinker.

Eisen, Arnold. *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. A fresh rethinking of the meaning of American Jewish religion, with thoughtful readings of several of the modern thinkers discussed in this course.

Falk, Marcia. *Book of Blessings*. San Francisco: Harper, 1996. A creative and poetic rendering of traditional Jewish liturgy in gender-free language; a remarkable product of the Jewish feminist movement.

Greenberg, Irving. "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire." In *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* edited by Eva Fleischner, pp. 7–55. New York: Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, 1977. An important statement on Jewish faith after the Holocaust.

Halpern, Ben. *A Clash of Heroes: Brandeis, Weizmann and American Zionism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. An important treatment of Brandeis in the context of the history of Zionism.

Heschel, Susannah, ed. *On Being a Jewish Feminist*. New York: Schocken, 1983. An essential collection of early statements on Jewish feminism.

Hyman, Paula. *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995. A critical and pioneering attempt to view the process of modernization in Jewish history from the differing perspectives and situations of men and women.

Kaplan, Mordecai. *Judaism as a Civilization: Towards a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. New York: Macmillan, 1934. His classic critique of American Jewish life and his manifesto of Reconstructionist Judaism.

Meyer, Michael. *Ideas of Jewish History*. New York: Behrman House, 1974. (Review of Meyer by Jacob Neusner in *History and Theory* 14 [1975]: 212–226 [reprinted in Ada Rapaport-Albert, *Essays in Jewish Historiography (History and Theory)*, Beiheft 27, 1988, 176–190]). A useful anthology of Jewish historiographical writing from the Bible to the twentieth century. Neusner's review raises some fascinating questions about the alleged unity of the Jewish historical experience.

———. *The Origins of the Modern Jew*. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1967. An important introduction to Jewish thought in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

———. *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. The most significant history of Reform Judaism.

Rosenbloom, Noah. *Tradition in an Age of Reform*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976. A comprehensive intellectual biography of Samson R. Hirsch.

Rothschild, Fritz, ed. *Between God and Man: An Interpretation of Judaism from the Writings of Abraham J. Heschel*. New York: Free Press, 1965. A useful anthology of Heschel's writings, with a good introduction.

Scheindlin, Raymond. *A Short History of the Jewish People*. New York: Macmillan, 1998. A quick but accurate introduction to Jewish history.

Schorsch, Ismar. *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism*. Hanover, N.H., and London: University Press of New England, 1994. A collection of insightful essays on Jewish thought in the nineteenth century, particularly on the emergence of the "science of Judaism."

Scult, Mel. *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan*. Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1993. The standard biography of this American Jewish thinker.

Sklare, Marshall. *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972. The classic history, written from a sociological perspective.

Sorkin, David. *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment*. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996. Sorkin sees

Mendelssohn as part of the “religious enlightenment” rather than a radical philosopher. He concentrates on his Hebraic writings.

Stanislawski, Michael. *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. An important biography of a major figure of the Eastern European Haskalah.

Strauss, Leo. *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*. New York: Schocken Books, 1965. Still an important interpretation of Spinoza's view of Judaism and Christianity.

Tobias, Henry. *The Jewish Bund in Russia*. Stanford, Calif.: University of Stanford Press, 1972. An important study of the Jewish socialist movement.

Weissler, Chava. *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1998. A groundbreaking study of prayers written for, and in some cases by, women, revealing a relatively hidden dimension of women's spirituality in early modern traditional Jewish culture.

Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1971. An elegant and rich intellectual biography of a seventeenth-century converso physician and apologist for Judaism.

Yovel, Yirmiyahu. *Spinoza and Other Heretics*. 2 volumes. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989. Yirmiyahu situates Spinoza in the context of the converso experience, then traces the reverberations of his thought among modern thinkers.