

הקשר היהודי שלך

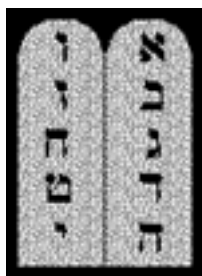
Your Jewish Connection

Brought to you by the Lifelong Learning Committee

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What Is This Thing Called Jewish Law?

In October, Professor Noah Feldman of Harvard Law School visited TBA. He and the rabbi discussed several US Supreme Court decisions that touched on religion and gay marriage. I found this discussion fascinating and thought I'd look at Jewish law.

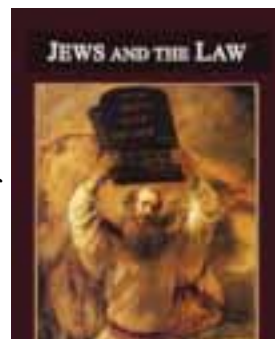


So, do Jews have a body of law, or do they live with a mindset and way of life? The latter is how Aish.com frames their series of articles on [Practical Jewish Law](#). At [MyJewishLearning.com](#), there are articles on the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform approaches to *halakhah*.

In December 2013, [Mosaic magazine published an article](#) by Joshua Berman, and the responses to it, about Jewish law or *halakhah*. Though two years old, the issues and concerns are still relevant today. What constitutes religious law? How do we interpret it? Where and when did it start? It seems to have started as common law, using various systems of interpretation (such as *midrash*) that allowed the law to develop over time, responding to the needs of the day. As Berman states, "How then did Judaism come to embrace the legal codes of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) and Joseph Karo (1488-1575)? When and why did Jewish jurisprudence turn toward statutory law?"

For a complete history, go to Oxford Scholarship Online and review [An Introduction to History and Sources of Jewish Law](#). The table of contents is a timeline of the development of Jewish law. You can view an abstract of the chapters, each written by a specialist.

In contrast, consider [Jewish Law by Prof. Lawrence H. Schiffman](#). He delves into the different sects of Judaism and how they looked at the law. He states that there is a rabbinic concept of a dual Torah, including a written law and an oral law. He concludes: "...what becomes clear here is that rabbinic literature and second Temple texts may often represent opposite sides of the same coin, that is, two separate approaches to the same set of problems. Without the use of second Temple materials we would never have known this."



Machon Mamre has a page titled [Halakhah: Jewish Law](#). It provides a definition and describes the different components. To see a list of the 613 commandments, go to [Chabad.org](#). For something more concise and stated in modern language, check out the Constitutional Rights Foundation and [The Hebrews and the Foundation of Western Law](#). To get a perspective on how Jewish law is developing today, visit [The Rabbinical Assembly's Jewish Law page](#).



Interested in learning more about Jewish law? [Torah.org](#) offers classes via email for beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. If you prefer video presentations, [Berkeley Law has a series of videos](#) on YouTube covering Jewish law and other Jewish topics. If you want to research Jewish law, and the laws of other religions, the [Hauser Global Law School Program](#), part of NYU Law, has an extensive article, written by a law librarian, on researching these topics.

There are so many parts to the puzzle of Jewish law. The question is, where does one start? With one thing at a time.

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