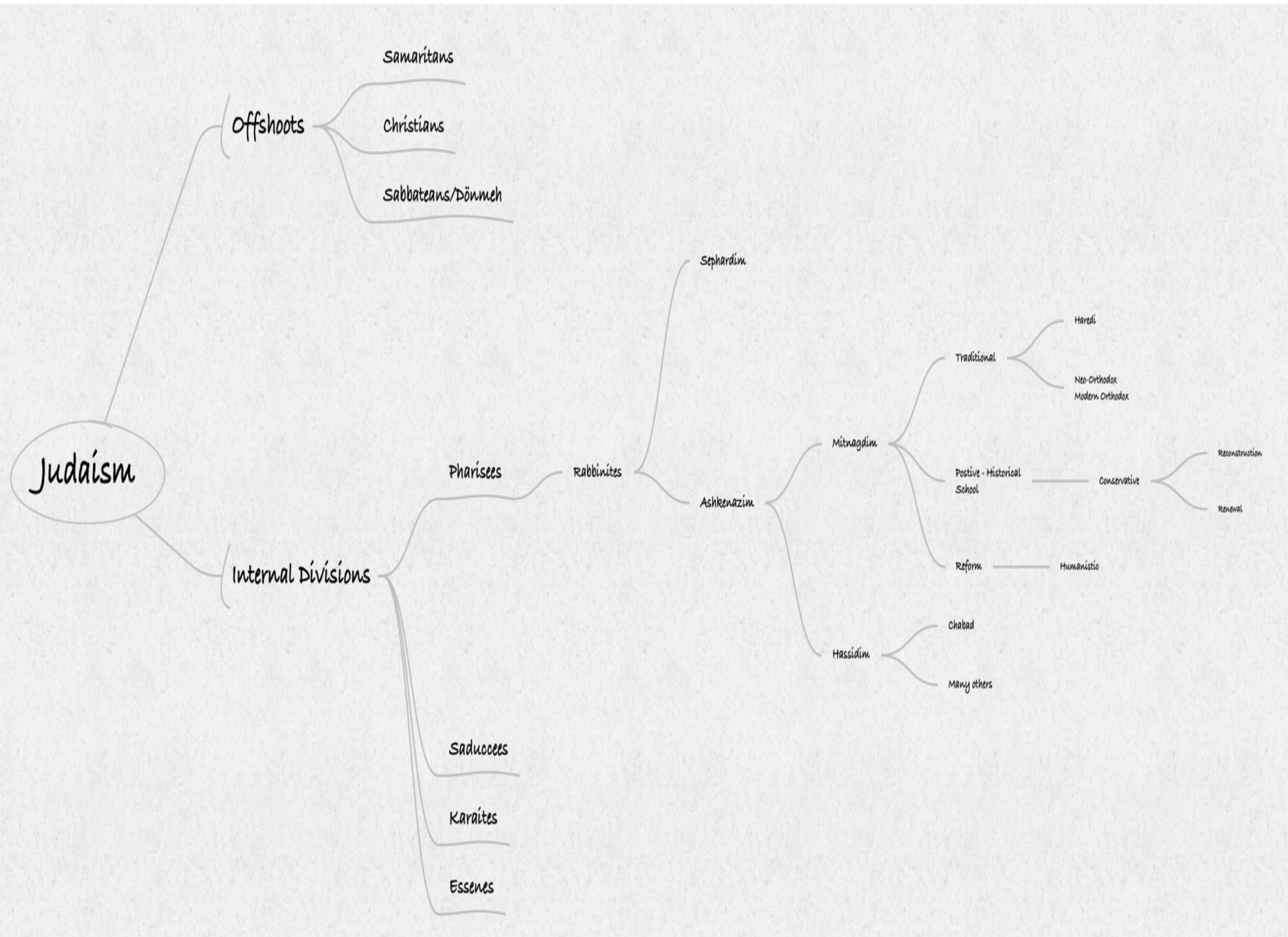


# Exploring Judaism's Denominational Divide

## Historical Background

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# Jewish Texts

- Hebrew Bible
  - Torah
  - Nevi'im (The Prophets)
  - Ketuvim (The Writings)
  - Tanach (T,N,K)

- **Midrash (Exegesis and Eisegesis)**
  - Halachic (Legal)
  - Aggadic (Homelitical)
- **Halachic Works**
  - Mishna
  - Talmud
  - Codes (Compendiums)
  - Mishnah Torah (Maimonides)
  - Questions and Answers

# Things to bear in mind!

- Historical picture is extremely well portrayed in “Response to Modernity” by Michael Meyer.
- Early reformers did not see themselves as separating from the community or forming a new denomination. They meant their changes to be for all Jews, not just a few.
- Strong interplay between ideas, social situations, and societies in which the communities lived. More integration, more absorption of ideas.
- Fluidity in regard to doctrines, beliefs, teachings, attitudes and practices (e.g. national identity within Judaism)

# Polarities

- Continuity with Jewish tradition vs sharp break with the past
- Authority - revelation (Written and Oral) and institutional (Rabbinic and Communal) vs personal autonomy and freedom of conscience
- Universalism vs Particularism
- Chronological time (continual change as a result of internal and external circumstances and pressures) vs Generational time (each generation rediscovers issues encountered and dealt with before)

- We tend to focus on issues of controversy or specific occurrences like conferences while in fact there is a prior history of ongoing evolution and change which is largely ignored.
- Jewish Secularism, Modern Orthodox, Conservative and Reform are all responses to a common set of historical challenges.



- “The origins of the movement are as difficult to determine as its essence. There is no decisive event or individual by which one can mark its onset no sharp break with the past that leads forward to all that follows... *(Response to Modernity, Michael Meyer, Preface, Pg x)*

# What was...

- European Jewry prior to 18<sup>th</sup> Century
- Persecution and expulsion (Spain 1492)
- Ghettoization
- Intellectual, economic and social isolation
- Communal autonomy
- Traditional education
- Shabbetai Zevi (1626-1676) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)









- Beggars and Court Jews
  - Increased contact with non-Jewish world
  - Living in incompatible worlds - societal norms vs Jewish observance and practice
- Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)
  - Language
  - Natural religion
  - Revelation makes Judaism unique
- Enlightenment and Haskalah



