



SHANBERG EAT AND EDUCATE

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Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom

This Year's Topic:

People Who Have Influenced Judaism

Who are the people who made Judaism what it is today? In some cases, they are the patriarchs and prophets of the religion. However, the people who have tried to destroy and change Judaism have had a profound influence on the religion as well. This year, we will look at both the positive and negative influences on Judaism in an attempt to piece together the mosaic of practices and beliefs of Judaism today.

A partial list of the people we will look at follows. We will not deal with them in chronologic order. The first question to address is, with what criteria do we assess the influence of any one person on Judaism? Are these the most influential people?

Abraham	<i>Patriarch</i>	Isaac	<i>Patriarch</i>
Jacob	<i>Patriarch</i>	Joseph	<i>Sustained Israel</i>
Sarah	<i>matriarch</i>	Moses	<i>Lawgiver</i>
David	<i>King, unifier</i>	Solomon	<i>Temple, king</i>
Isaiah	<i>prophet</i>	Ezra	<i>Prophet, Torah</i>
The Masoretes	<i>Torah</i>	Nebuchadnezzar	<i>Destroyed temple</i>
Vespasian/Titus	<i>Destroyed temple</i>	Jesus	<i>Alternate belief</i>
Muhammed	<i>Islam</i>	Pope Gregory	<i>Anti-semitism</i>
Constantine	<i>Christianity</i>	Rav Amram/Saadia Gaon	<i>Siddurim</i>
R. Yochanan ben Zackai	<i>Midrash</i>	Judah haNasi	<i>Mishnah</i>
Joseph Karo	<i>Shulchan Arukh</i>	Baal Shem Tov	<i>Hasidism</i>
Hitler	<i>Anti-semitism</i>	Carlebach	<i>20th cent music</i>
Yossele Rosenblatt	<i>Music</i>	Israel Goldfarb	<i>20th cent music</i>
Herzl	<i>Israel</i>	Napoleon	<i>Emancipation</i>
ben Yehuda	<i>Hebrew</i>	Isaac Luria	<i>Zohar</i>
Mordechai Kaplan	<i>Reconstruction</i>	Maimonides	<i>Mishneh torah</i>
Moses Mendelson	<i>emancipation</i>	Samson R. Hirsch	<i>Modern orthodoxy</i>
Abraham Geiger	<i>Reform</i>	R. Wise	<i>Modern reform</i>
Birnbaum/Silverman/Harlow	<i>Machzorim</i>	Hillel	<i>Post-temple teaching</i>
Akiva	<i>Post-temple teaching</i>	Solomon Schechter	<i>Academic, geniza</i>
Henrietta Szold	<i>Hadassah</i>	Arthur Green	<i>Renewal</i>
Rav Kook	<i>Chief Rabbi</i>	Johannes Gutenberg	<i>Movable type</i>

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Abraham



What is the meta-story of Abraham? We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who created and changed Judaism?

When did they become 'enlightened'?

What does their very existence say about Judaism?

What was the alternative?

Abraham - implies patriarchy, male oriented.

Separate from family. Throughout life, parallel struggles with family as well as tribe

Ethics sometimes

shocking

Names mean something

Impacted by nature as well as man

Food: famine

Geography, land, food

How does one communicate with God?

Succession is important-determining who comes next

Who gets remembered?

Physical changes - marking

Rembrandt, Sacrifice of Isaac, 1635

Born [Mesopotamia](#)

Died [Canaan](#)

Honored in [Judaism](#)

[Christianity](#)

[Islam](#)

[Mandaeism](#)

[Baha'i Faith](#)

Impact on Judaism

Monotheism, Covenant, (no) Human Sacrifice,
Ethics

Abraham ([Hebrew](#): אַבְרָהָם (help·info), [Modern](#): Avraham, [Tiberian](#): אַבְרָהָם, [Ashkenazi](#) Avrohom or Avruhom, [Arabic](#): إِبْرَاهِيم *Ibrāhīm*, [Ge'ez](#): ለአብራሃም ለአብራሃም *Abṛāham*, [Greek](#): Ἀβραάμ), whose birth name was **Abram**, is the [eponym](#) of the [Abrahamic religions](#), among which are [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#), and [Islam](#). According to both the [Hebrew Bible](#)^[1] and the [Qur'an](#), through his sons [Ishmael](#) and [Isaac](#), Abraham is the forefather of many tribes, including the [Ishmaelites](#), [Israelites](#), [Midianites](#) and [Edomites](#).^[1] Abraham was a descendant of [Noah](#)'s son, [Shem](#).^{[2][3]} Christians believe that [Jesus](#) was a descendant of Abraham, while Muslims believe that [Muhammad](#) was a descendant, through [Ishmael](#).^[4]

The [Book of Genesis](#) narrative that records the life of Abraham presents his role as one that could only be fulfilled through a monotheistic [covenant](#) established between him and [God](#).^[5] The [Qur'an](#) has stories about Abraham and his offspring that are similar to the Bible's.^[6] In [Islam](#), Abraham is recognized as a [prophet](#), [patriarch](#), and [messenger](#), archetype of the perfect [Muslim](#), and reformer^{[7][8]} of the [Kaaba](#).^[9]

Joseph Blenkinsopp said that the Genesis story of Abraham has not been transmitted by [oral traditions](#), but from literary circles of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE.^[10] He said that it served to assure the Israelites in exile that despite the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Davidic kingship, [Yahweh](#)'s dealings with their ancestors provided a historical foundation on which hope for the future could be built.^[11] Abraham's association with Mamre and Hebron, in the south, in the territory of Jerusalem and Judah, suggests that this region was the original home of his cult.^[12] Some oral traditions, however, may still hold an earlier history.^[10]

About Abraham

Etymology

Abraham first appears in the book of Genesis as *Abram*, until he is renamed by [God](#) in [Genesis 17:5](#). The narrative indicates that *abraham* means "the father of a multitude" ([Hebrew](#): אֲבִי הַרְבֵּה - *hāmôn goyim*),^[13] but although "ab-" means "father", "-hamon" is not the second element, and "-Raham" is not a word in Hebrew. [Johann Friedrich Karl Keil](#) suggested that there was once a word *raham* (רָחַם) in Hebrew that meant "multitude", on analogy with the Arabic *ruhām* which does have this meaning, but no trace of "raham" has been found;^[14] another possibility is that the first element should be *abr-*, which means "chief", but this yields a meaningless second element, "-aham". [David Rohl](#) suggests the name comes from the [Akkadian](#) "the father loves",^[15] but scholars would prefer an origin based on Hebrew.

Chronology

The standard [Masoretic](#) text of the Hebrew Bible places Abraham's birth 1,948 years after the Creation, or 1948 AM ([Anno Mundi](#), "Year of the World"). The two other major textual traditions have different dates, the translated Greek [Septuagint](#) putting it at 3312 AM and the [Samaritan version of the Torah](#) at 2247 AM. All three agree that he died at the age of 175.^[16] There have been over two hundred attempts to match the biblical chronology to dates in history, two of the more influential being the traditional Jewish dates (Abraham lived 1812 BCE to 1637 BCE), and those of the 17th century Archbishop [James Ussher](#) (1976 BCE to 1801 BCE); but the

most that can be said with some degree of certainty is that the standard Hebrew text of Genesis places Abraham in the earlier part of the second millennium BCE.^[17]

Historicity and origins

It is generally recognised by scholars that there is nothing in the Genesis stories that can be related to the history of Canaan of the early 2nd millennium: none of the kings mentioned is known, Abimelech could not be a Philistine (they did not arrive till centuries later), Ur could not become known as "Ur of the Chaldeans" until the early 1st millennium, and Laban could not have been an Aramean, as the Arameans did not become an identifiable political entity until the 12th century.^[18] Joseph Blenkinsopp, Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at the [University of Notre Dame](#), notes that the past four or five decades have seen a growing consensus that the Genesis narrative of Abraham originated from literary circles of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE as a mirror of the situation facing the Jewish community under the Babylonian and early [Persian empires](#).^[10] Blenkinsopp describes two conclusions about Abraham that are widely held in biblical scholarship: the first is that, except in the triad "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," he is not clearly and unambiguously attested in the Bible earlier than the [Babylonian exile](#); the second is that he became, in the Persian period, a model for those who would return from Babylon to Judah.^[19] Beyond this the Abraham story (and those of [Isaac](#) and [Jacob/Israel](#)) served a theological purpose following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Davidic kingship: despite the loss of these things, Yahweh's dealings with the ancestors provided a historical foundation on which hope for the future could be built.^[11] There is basic agreement that his connection with Haran, Shechem and Bethel is secondary and originated when he became identified as the father of Jacob and ancestor of the northern tribes; his association with Mamre and Hebron, on the other hand (in the south, in the territory of Jerusalem and Judah), suggest that this region was the original home of his cult.^[12]

Narrative in Genesis

The life of Abraham is recorded in [Genesis 11:26-25:10](#) of the [Hebrew Bible](#).



 Abraham's Departure, by [József Molnár](#) / Abram Journeying into the Land of Canaan (engraving by [Gustave Doré](#) from the 1865 *La Sainte*

Birth of Abram



Bible)

Terah, the tenth in descent from [Noah](#), fathered Abram, [Nahor](#) and [Haran](#), and Haran fathered [Lot](#). Haran died in his native [Ur of the Chaldees](#), and Abram married [Sarai](#), who was barren. Terah, with Abram, Sarai and Lot, then departed for Canaan, but settled in a place named [Haran](#), where Terah died at the age of 205. ([Genesis 11:27-11:32](#))

Abram's calling



Abram's Counsel to Sarai (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](#))

[God](#) "appeared" to Abram and told him to "depart". After settling in Haran, where his father Terah died, God then told Abram to "go" from his country and his father's house for a land that He would show him, promising to make of him "a great nation", [bless](#) him, make his name great, bless those who blessed him, and curse those who cursed him. ([Genesis 12:1–3](#)) Following God's command, at age 75, Abram took his wife [Sarai](#), his nephew Lot, and the wealth and persons that they had acquired, and traveled to [Shechem](#) in [Canaan](#).

The Covenant between Abraham and God

There God appeared to Abram to tell him that he would give [the land](#) to his heirs, and Abram built an [altar](#) to God. Abram then moved to the hill country east of [Bethel](#) and built an altar to God there and invoked God by name, and journeyed toward the [Negeb](#) (the south).

Abram and Sarai

There was a severe famine in the land of Canaan, so that Abram and Lot and their households, travelled south to [Egypt](#). En route, Abram told his wife Sarai, to say that she was his sister, so that the Egyptians would not kill him. ([Genesis 12:10–13](#)) When they entered Egypt, the princes of Pharaoh praised Sarai's beauty to the [Pharaoh](#), and she was taken into his palace, and Abram was given provisions: "oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels." However, God afflicted the Pharaoh and his household with great plagues, ([Genesis 12:14–17](#)) and after discovering that Sarai was really Abram's wife, the Pharaoh wanted nothing

to do with them. He demanded that he and his household leave immediately, along with all their goods. ([Genesis 12:18–20](#))

Abram and Lot separate

Main article: [Abraham and Lot's conflict](#)

When they came back to the Bethel and Hai area, Abram's and Lot's sizeable numbers of livestock occupied the same pastures ("and the [Canaanite](#) and the [Perizzite](#) dwelled then in the land.") This became a problem for the herdsmen who were assigned to each family's cattle. The conflicts between herdsmen had become so troublesome that Abram graciously suggested that Lot choose a separate area, either on the left hand or on the right hand, that there be no conflict amongst "brethren". But Lot chose to go east to the plain of [Jordan](#) where the land was well watered everywhere as far as Zoar, and he dwelled in the cities of the plain toward Sodom. Abram went south to [Hebron](#) and settled in the plain of [Mamre](#), where he built another altar to worship [God](#). ([Genesis 13:1-18](#))

Abram and Chedorlaomer

Main article: [Battle of the Vale of Siddim](#)



Meeting of Abram and Melchizedek (painting circa 1464–1467 by [Dieric Bouts the Elder](#))

During the rebellion of the [Jordan River cities](#) against [Elam](#), ([Genesis 14:1–9](#)) Abram's nephew, Lot, was taken prisoner along with his entire household by the invading [Elamite](#) forces. The Elamite army came to collect booty from the spoils of war, after having just defeated the King of Sodom's armies. ([Genesis 14:8–12](#)) Lot and his family, at the time, were settled on the outskirts of the [Kingdom of Sodom](#) which made them a visible target. ([Genesis 13:12](#))

One person that escaped capture came and told Abram what happened. Once Abram received this news, he immediately assembled 318 trained servants. Abram's elite force headed north in pursuit of the Elamite army, who were already worn down from the [Battle of Siddim](#). When they caught up with them at [Dan](#), Abram devised a battle strategy plan by splitting his group into more than one unit, and launched a night raid. Not only were they able to free the captives, Abram's unit chased and slaughtered the Elamite King [Chedorlaomer](#) at Hobah, just north of

[Damascus](#). They freed Lot, his household, possessions, and recovered all of the goods from Sodom that were taken. ([Genesis 14:13–16](#))

Upon Abram's return, Sodom's King (whom we do not know since the previous king [Bera](#) of Sodom perished in Gen14:10) came out to meet with him in the [Valley of Shaveh](#), the "king's dale". Also, [Melchizedek](#) king of Salem ([Jerusalem](#)), a priest of [God Most High](#), brought out bread and wine and blessed Abram and God. Abram then gave Melchizedek a [tenth](#) of everything. The king of Sodom then offered to let Abram keep all the possessions if he would merely return his people. Though he released the captives, Abram refused any reward from the King of Sodom, other than the share his allies were entitled to. ([Genesis 14:17–24](#))

Abrahamic covenant



 The Vision of the Lord Directing Abram to Count the Stars (woodcut by [Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld](#) from the 1860 *Bible in Pictures*)

The word of God came to Abram in a vision and repeated the promise of the land and descendants as numerous as the stars. Abram and God made a covenant ceremony, and God told of the future bondage of Israel in Egypt. God described to Abram the land that his offspring would claim: "the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites." ([Genesis 15](#))

Abram and Hagar

See also: [Hagar](#)



Abraham, [Sarah](#) and [Hagar](#), imagined here in a [Bible illustration](#) from 1897.

Abram and Sarai were trying to make sense of how he would become a progenitor of nations since it had already been 10 years of living in Canaan, and still no child had been born from Abram's seed. Sarai then offered her Egyptian handmaid, [Hagar](#), for Abram to consort with so that she may have a child by her, as a wife. Abram consented and had sexual intercourse with Hagar. The result of these actions created a fiery relationship between Hagar and Sarai. ([Genesis 16:1-6](#))

After a harsh encounter with Sarai, Hagar fled toward [Shur](#). En route, an angel of the [LORD](#) appeared to Hagar at the well of a spring. He instructed her to return to Sarai for she will bear a son who “shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.” She was told to call her son: [Ishmael](#). Hagar then referred to God as “[El-roi](#)”, meaning that she had gone on seeing after God saw her. From that day, the well was called Beer-lahai-roi. She then did as she was instructed by returning to Abram in order to have her child. Abram was eighty-six years of age when Ishmael was born. ([Genesis 16:7-16](#))

Abraham and Sarah

[Genesis 17](#) records the inauguration of Abram into God's covenant that was initiated thirteen years ago, as was stated in Genesis 15. Abram is now ninety-nine when God declares Abram's new name: “Abraham, a father of many nations.” Abram then received the instructions for the inauguration rite into God's covenant because the time was approaching for him to have a son by his wife, Sarai. The initiation rite was that in order to be part of this “great nation”, whether by bloodline or inducted, every male must be [circumcised](#) otherwise it was a breach of contract. Then God declared Sarai's new name: “[Sarah](#)” and blessed her. Immediately after Abram's encounter with his God, he had his entire household of men, including himself and Ishmael, circumcised. ([Genesis 17:1-27](#))

[\[edit\]](#) Abraham's three visitors



Abraham and the Three Angels (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by [James Tissot](#))

Not long afterward, during the heat of the day, Abraham had been sitting at the entrance of his tent by the [terebinths](#) of [Mamre](#). He looked up and saw three men in the presence of God. Then he ran and [bowed](#) to the ground to welcome them. Abraham then offered to wash their feet and fetch them a morsel of bread of which they assented. Abraham rushed to [Sarah](#)'s tent to order cakes made from choice flour, then he ordered a servant-boy to prepare a choice calf. When all was prepared, he set curds, milk and the calf before them waiting on them, under a tree, as they ate. ([Genesis 18:1–8](#))

One of the visitors told Abraham that upon his return next year, Sarah would have a son. While at the tent entrance, Sarah overheard what was said and she laughed to herself about the prospect of having child at their ages. The visitor inquired to Abraham why Sarah laughed at bearing a child for her age as nothing is too hard for God. Frightened, Sarah denied laughing.

Abraham's plea

Main articles: [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) and [Lot \(Biblical\)](#)



Abraham Sees Sodom in Flames (watercolor circa 1896–1902 by James Tissot)

After eating, Abraham and the three visitors got up. They walked over to the peak that overlooked the *Cities of the Plain* to discuss the fate of [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) for their detestable sins that were so great, it moved God to action. Because Abraham's nephew was living in

Sodom, God revealed plans to confirm and judge these cities. At this point, the two other visitors leave for Sodom. Then Abraham turned to the Lord and pleaded with him that 'if there were at least ten righteous men found in the city, would not God spare the city?' For the sake of ten righteous people, God declared that he would not destroy the city. ([Genesis 18:17-33](#))

When the two visitors got to Sodom to conduct their report, they planned on staying in the city square. However, Abraham's nephew, Lot, met with them and strongly insisted that these two "men" stay at his house for the night. A rally of men stood outside of Lot's home and demanded that they bring out his guests so that they may "know" them. However, Lot objected and offered his virgin daughters to the rally of men instead. They rejected that notion and sought to break Lot's doors down to get to his male guests,^[20] thus confirming the "outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah" and sealing their doom. ([Genesis 19:12-13](#))

Early the next morning, Abraham awoke and went to the elevation that looked over the River Jordan plain, at the very spot where he stood before God, the day prior. From his vantage point, he saw what became of the cities of the plain as "dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace." ([Genesis 19:27-29](#)) This meant that there was not even ten righteous people in any of those cities. ([Genesis 18:32](#))

Abraham and Abimelech

Abraham settled between [Kadesh](#) and [Shur](#) in the land of the [Philistines](#). While he was living in [Gerar](#), Abraham openly claimed that Sarah was his sister. Upon discovering this news, King [Abimelech](#) had her brought to him. Later, God came to Abimelech in a dream and declared that taking her would result in death because she was a married woman to a prophet of God. Abimelech had not laid hands on her, so he inquired if he this God would slay an innocent man, especially since Abraham had claimed that he and Sarah were siblings. In response, God told Abimelech that he did indeed have a blameless heart and that is why he continues to exist. However, should he not return the wife of Abraham back to him, God would surely destroy Abimelech and his entire household. ([Genesis 20:1-7](#))

Early next morning, Abimelech informed his servants of his dream and approached Abraham inquiring as to why he had brought such great guilt upon his kingdom. Abraham stated that Gerar of Philistia had no fear of God in them and the only way for this kingdom to recognize the fear of God was to do what he had done. Then Abraham justified what he had said as not being a lie at all: "And moreover she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and so she became my wife." ([Genesis 20:12](#)) Abimelech returned Sarah to Abraham, then gave him sheep, oxen, and slaves, and invited him to settle wherever he pleased in Abimelech's lands. Further, Abimelech gave Abraham a thousand pieces of silver to serve as Sarah's vindication before all. Abraham then prayed in behalf of Abimelech and the women in his household, so that they bore children, since God had stricken the women with infertility because of the taking of Sarah. ([Genesis 20:8-18](#))

After living for some time in the land of the Philistines, [Abimelech](#) and [Phicol](#), the chief of his troops, approached Abraham because of a dispute that resulted in a violent confrontation at a well. Abraham then reproached Abimelech due to his Philistine servant's aggressive attacks and

the seizing of Abraham's well. Abimelech, however, acted in ignorance. Then Abraham offered a pact by providing sheep and oxen to Abimelech. Further, to attest that Abraham was the one who dug the well, he also gave Abimelech seven ewes for proof. Because of this sworn oath, they called the place of this well: [Beersheba](#). After Abimelech and Phicol headed back to [Philistia](#), Abraham planted a [tamarisk](#) tree to invoke God's name. ([Genesis 21:22-34](#))

Abraham and Ishmael

Abraham was fond of his son [Ishmael](#) who had grown up to be fourteen years old when his son [Isaac](#) was born. However, with Sarah, things were never the same with Ishmael's mother [Hagar](#), back in her life. Now that Sarah had finally borne her own child, she could no longer stand the sight of either [Hagar](#) or [Ishmael](#). When the teenager was jesting around, Sarah told Abraham to send the two of them away. She declared that Ishmael would not share in Isaac's inheritance. Abraham was greatly distressed by his wife's words and sought the advice of his God. The Lord told Abraham not to be distressed but to do as his wife commanded. God reassured Abraham that "in Isaac shall seed be called to thee." ([Genesis 21:12](#)) He also said that Ishmael would make a nation, "because he is thy seed", too. ([Genesis 21:9-13](#))

Early the next morning, Abraham brought Hagar and Ishmael out together. He gave her bread and water and sent them away. The two wandered the wilderness of [Beersheba](#) until her bottle of water was completely consumed. In a moment of despair, she burst in tears. The boy then called to God and upon hearing him, an [angel](#) of God confirmed to Hagar that he would become a great nation. A well of water then appeared so that it saved their lives. As the boy grew, he became a skilled [archer](#) living in the wilderness of [Paran](#). Eventually his mother found a wife for Ishmael from her native country, the land of Egypt. ([Genesis 21:14-21](#))



Abraham Sacrificing Isaac, by [Laurent de La Hire](#), 1650 ([Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans](#))

Abraham and Isaac

Main article: [Binding of Isaac](#)

See also: [Isaac#Binding of Isaac](#)

At some point in [Isaac](#)'s youth, Abraham was commanded by God to offer his son up as a sacrifice in the land of [Moriah](#). The patriarch traveled three days until he came to the mount that God taught him. He commanded the servant to remain while he and Isaac proceeded alone to the mountain, Isaac carrying the wood upon which he would be sacrificed. Along the way, Isaac

repeatedly asked Abraham where the animal for the burnt offering was. Abraham then replied that God would provide one. Just as Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, he was prevented by an [angel](#), and given on that spot a [ram](#) which he sacrificed in place of his son. As a reward for his obedience he received another promise of numerous descendants and abundant prosperity. After this event, Abraham did not return to Hebron, Sarah's encampment, but instead went to [Beersheba](#), Keturah's encampment, and it is to Beersheba that Abraham's servant brought [Rebecca](#), Isaac's patrilineal parallel cousin who became his wife.^[21]

Later years

Sarah is said to have died at the age of 127, and Abraham buried her in the [Cave of the Patriarchs](#) (also called the Cave of Machpelah), near [Hebron](#) which he had purchased, along with the adjoining field, from Ephron the [Hittite](#).

After the death of Sarah, he took another wife, or [concubine](#), named [Keturah](#), who bore Abraham six sons: [Zimran](#), [Jokshan](#), [Medan](#), [Midian](#), [Ishbak](#), and [Shuah](#).^[22]

Abraham is said to have died at the age of 175 years. Jewish legend says that he was meant to live to 180 years, but God purposely took his life because he felt that Abraham did not need to go through the pain of seeing [Esau](#)'s wicked deeds.^[23] The Bible says he was buried by his sons Isaac and Ishmael in the [Cave of the Patriarchs](#).^[24]

Narrative in the Qur'an

This is a summary of all the references to Abraham in the Qur'an

There are numerous references to Abraham in the [Qur'an](#), including, twice, to the [Scrolls of Abraham](#) (87: 18-19; 53: 36-37); in the latter passage, it is mentioned that Abraham "fulfilled his commandments" (53: 37), a reference to all the trials that Abraham had succeeded in. In a whole series of chapters, the Qur'an relates how Abraham preached to his community as a youth and how he specifically told his father, named [Azar](#) in 6:74, to leave idol-worship and come to the worship of [God](#) (37: 83-98; 26: 69-89).^[25] Some passages of the Qur'an, meanwhile, deal with the story of how God sent angels to Abraham with the announcement of the punishment to be imposed upon [Lot](#)'s people in [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) (51: 24-34; 25: 51-60).^[26] Other verses mention the near-sacrifice of Abraham's son (37: 100-111), whose name is not given but is presumed to be [Ishmael](#) as the following verses mention the birth of [Isaac](#).^[27] The Qur'an also repeatedly establishes Abraham's role as [patriarch](#) and mentions numerous important descendants who came through his lineage, including Isaac (25: 53), [Jacob](#) (29: 49)^[28] and Ishmael (2: 132-133). In the later chapters of the Qur'an, Abraham's role becomes yet more prominent. The Qur'an mentions that Abraham and Ishmael were the reformers who set up the [Kaaba](#) in [Mecca](#) as a center of pilgrimage for [monotheism](#) (2: 124-141; 3: 65-68, 95-97).^[29] The Qur'an consistently refers to [Islam](#) as the "religion of Abraham" (*millat Ibrahim*) (2: 135) and Abraham is given a title as *Hanif* (*The Pure*; 3: 67). The Qur'an also mentions Abraham as one whom God took as a friend (*Khalil*; 4: 125), hence Abraham's title in Islam, *Khalil-Allah* (*Friend of God*) (The term, however, is but a derivation of the Patriarch's [Hebrew](#) title, [Kal El](#) (אֵל-לֵק, which means "voice of God").^{[30][31]} Other instances in the Qur'an which are described in a

concise manner are the rescue of Abraham from the fire into which he was thrown by his people (37: 97; 21: 68-70); his pleading for his father (28: 47); his quarrel with an unrighteous and powerful king (2: 58) and the miracle of the dead birds (2: 260).

All these events and more have been discussed with more details in [Muslim tradition](#), and especially in the [Stories of the Prophets](#) and works of universal Islamic theology.^[32] Certain episodes from the life of Abraham have been more heavily detailed in Islamic text, such as the arguments between Abraham and the evil king [Nimrod](#), the near-sacrifice of his son, and the story of [Hagar](#) and Ishmael, which [Muslims](#) commemorate when performing [pilgrimage](#) in Mecca. Some believe in some cases, these legends in Islamic text may have influenced later [Jewish tradition](#).^[33]

Abraham in religious traditions

In Islamic and Jewish traditions, Abraham is referred to as "our Father" (Hebrew: *Avraham Avinu*, Arabic: *abeena Ibraheem*^[34]).

In Islamic tradition, Abraham is considered a [prophet of Islam](#), the ancestor of [Muhammad](#), through his firstborn son, [Ishmael](#) whose mother's name is nowhere mentioned in the [Qu'ran](#).

In Jewish tradition, Abraham is also the father of the Israelites through his second born child, [Isaac](#) whose mother was [Sarah](#). Accordingly, the mother of his firstborn son, Ishmael is identified as [Hagar](#), Sarah's Egyptian handmaiden.

In Christian tradition, God's promise to Abraham would be fulfilled, in its entirety, through [Jesus Christ](#) who provides the opportunity for all mankind to be under the same covenant that was offered to Abraham and all of his people.

Judaism

Abraham's life can be read in the weekly [Torah](#) reading portions, predominantly in the [Parashot: Lech-Lecha](#) (לֶךְ-לְךָ), [Vayeira](#) (וַיֵּרָא), [Chayei Sarah](#) (חַיֵּי שָׂרָה), and [Toledot](#) (תּוֹלְדוֹת)

Rabbinic Judaism (i.e., Judaism in its modern form, as it developed after the 1st century CE) faced a problem with Abraham, in that he lived before the [Torah](#) had been revealed to [Moses](#); in the light of this fact, could he be counted as a true follower of the Law? He had, of course, the instruction to practice circumcision, but of the rest of the law he knew nothing. The rabbis (traditional teachers and interpreters of the Torah) solved this by declaring that Abraham had in fact known and practiced the Law in its entirety, despite the lack of evidence in Genesis or elsewhere.

Abram's birthplace disputed

See also: [Noach \(parsha\)](#)

11th and 12th century Rabbis [Rashi](#) and [Abraham ibn Ezra](#) agree that Abram's native homeland was [Ur Kašdim](#), better known as *Ur of the Chaldees*, a [Mesopotamian](#) location settled by the descendants of [Ham](#).^[35] Some modern Jewish studies identify this location to be the same as the [Sumerian](#) city-state of [Ur](#).^{[36][37]} However, this [Persian Gulf](#) city in [Iraq](#) is only a candidate among others to be the actual Ur Kašdim, as well as the most popularly debated one since 1927.^[38] The city of [Urfa](#) (classical Urha <Ur of Haran) in [Turkey](#), not too far from [Haran](#) also claims to the birthplace of the Patriarch. [Urfa](#) is famous for its monuments, pools and shrines associated with Patriarch Abraham.

Rabbi [Nahmanides](#), known as *the Ramban*, was a medieval Jewish scholar of the 13th century who disagreed with Rashi and Ibn Ezra concerning Abram's birthplace. The Ramban states that because Ur Kašdim was settled by Ham's descendants, this could not be Abram's birthplace as he was a descendant of [Shem](#). However, everyone does agree that Abram's family under the headship of his father, [Terach](#), had all lived in Ur Kašdim before being called to move to [Canaan](#).^[35]

The three Rabbis also agree that Terach's native homeland was Charan, the biblical place known as [Haran](#) in [Genesis 11:31,32](#), where the *House of Terach* was located.^{[Gen.12:1][35]} Since this settlement was established by Shem's descendants, only Ramban assumed that Charan had to be Abram's birthplace. He further concluded that Terach and his three sons eventually moved from Charan to Ur Kašdim, then later by God's command, they headed to Canaan. Of course, they stopped back at Terach's hometown of Charan, where the father stayed there rather than going to Canaan after all.^[35]

Christianity



This section **does not** [cite any references or sources](#). Please help improve this section by adding citations to [reliable sources](#). Unsourced material may be [challenged](#) and [removed](#). (June 2011)

In the [New Testament](#) Abraham is mentioned prominently as a man of faith (see e.g. [Hebrews 11](#)), and the apostle [Paul](#) uses him as an example of [salvation](#) by faith, as the progenitor of the [Christ](#) (or [Messiah](#)) (see [Galatians 3:16](#)).

The New Testament also sees Abraham as an obedient man of God, and Abraham's interrupted attempt to offer up Isaac is seen as the supreme act of perfect faith in God. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called', concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." ([Hebrews 11:17-19](#)) The imagery of a father sacrificing his son is seen as a [type](#) of [God the Father](#) offering [his Son](#) on [Golgotha](#).

The traditional view in [Christianity](#) is that the chief promise made to Abraham in *Genesis 12* is that through Abraham's seed all the people of earth would be blessed. Notwithstanding this, [John the Baptist](#) specifically taught that merely being of Abraham's seed was no guarantee of salvation.^[39] The promise in Genesis is considered to have been fulfilled through Abraham's

seed, Jesus. It is also a consequence of this promise that Christianity is open to people of all races and not limited to Jews.^[citation needed]

The [Roman Catholic Church](#) calls Abraham "our father in Faith", in the [Eucharistic prayer](#) of the [Roman Canon](#), recited during the [Mass](#) (see [Abraham in the Catholic liturgy](#)). He is also commemorated in the [calendars of saints](#) of several denominations: on August 20 by the [Maronite Church](#), August 28 in the [Coptic Church](#) and the [Assyrian Church of the East](#) (with the full [office](#) for the latter), and on October 9 by the Roman Catholic Church and the [Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod](#). He is also regarded as the [patron saint](#) of those in the hospitality industry.^[40]

The [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) commemorates him as the "Righteous Forefather Abraham", with two [feast days](#) in its [liturgical calendar](#). The first time is on October 9 (for those churches which follow the traditional [Julian Calendar](#), October 9 falls on October 22 of the modern [Gregorian Calendar](#)), where he is commemorated together with his nephew "Righteous Lot". The other is on the "Sunday of the Forefathers" (two Sundays before [Christmas](#)), when he is commemorated together with other [ancestors of Jesus](#). Abraham is also mentioned in the [Divine Liturgy](#) of [Saint Basil the Great](#), just before the Anaphora. Abraham and Sarah are invoked in the prayers said by the [priest](#) over a newly married couple at the [Sacred Mystery](#) of [Crowning](#) (i.e., the Sacrament of Marriage).

Islam

Main article: [Islamic views on Abraham](#)

Abraham ("Ibrahim") is an important figure in the [Quran](#), mentioned in 25 chapters, briefly or in detail.^[41] Muslims regard him as a [prophet](#) and [patriarch](#), the archetype of the perfect [Muslim](#), and the revered reformer of the [Kaaba](#) in [Mecca](#).^[9]

Islamic traditions consider Abraham the father of Islam (which is also called *millat Ibrahim*, the "religion of Abraham"), and that his purpose and mission throughout his life was to proclaim the Oneness of God.

Baha'i

[Bahá'u'lláh](#), the prophet of the Baha'i Faith, affirms the highest religious station for Abraham and generally for prophets mentioned among the other Abrahamic religions,^[42] and has claimed a lineage of descent from Abraham through [Keturah](#) and [Sarah](#).^{[43][44][45]} Additionally Bahá'u'lláh actually did lose a son, [Mírzá Mihdí](#).^[46] Bahá'u'lláh, then in prison, eulogized his son and connected the subsequent easing of restrictions to his dying prayer and also compared it to the intended sacrifice of Abraham's son.^[47]

Abraham in the Arts

Paintings

Paintings on the life of Abraham tend to focus on only a few incidents: The sacrifice of Isaac; Meeting Melchizedek; Entertaining the three angels; Hagar in the desert; and a few others.^[48]

Many artists have been inspired by the life of Abraham: [Albrecht Dürer](#) (1471–1528), [Caravaggio](#) (1573–1610), [Rembrandt van Rijn](#) (Dutch, 1606–1669) created at least seven works on Abraham, [Petrus-Paulus Rubens](#) (1577–1640) did several, [Donatello](#), [Raphael](#), [Philip van Dyck](#) (Dutch painter, 1680–1753), [Marc Chagall](#) did at least five on Abraham, Gustave Doré (French illustrator, 1832–1883) did six, [Claude Lorrain](#) (French painter, 1600–1682), [James Jacques Joseph Tissot](#) (French painter and illustrator, 1836–1902) did over twenty works on the subject.^[48]

Sculpture



Cast of the [Sacrifice of Isaac](#). The hand of God originally came down to hold Abraham's knife (both are now missing).

Plaster cast of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus

The [Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus](#) depicts a set of biblical stories, including Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac. These sculpted scenes are on the outside of a marble [Early Christian sarcophagus](#) used for the burial of [Junius Bassus](#). He died in [359](#). This sarcophagus has been described as "probably the single most famous piece of early Christian relief sculpture."^[49] The sarcophagus was originally placed in or under [Old St. Peter's Basilica](#), was rediscovered in 1597,^[50] and is now below the modern basilica in the Museo Storico del Tesoro della Basilica di San Pietro (Museum of [Saint Peter's Basilica](#)) in the [Vatican](#). The base is approximately 4 × 8 × 4 feet. The Old Testament scenes depicted were chosen as precursors of Christ's sacrifice in the [New Testament](#), in an early form of [typology](#). Just to the right of the middle is Daniel in the lion's den and on the left is Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael by [George Segal](#). The artist created figural sculptures by molding plastered gauze strips over live models. The human condition was central to his concerns. On several occasions, Segal turned to the Old Testament as a source for his imagery. This sculpture depicts the dilemma faced by Abraham when Sarah demanded that he expel Hagar and Ishmael. In the sculpture, the father's tenderness, Sarah's rage, and Hagar's resigned acceptance portray a range of human emotions. The sculpture was donated to the Miami Art Museum after the artist's death in 2000. This footnote provides a link to a picture of the sculpture.^[51]

Literature

Fear and Trembling (original [Danish](#) title: *Frygt og Bæven*) is an influential philosophical work by [Søren Kierkegaard](#), published in [1843](#) under the pseudonym *Johannes de silentio* (*John the Silent*). Kierkegaard wanted to understand the anxiety^[52] that must have been present in Abraham when God asked him to sacrifice his son.^[53]

Music

Bob Dylan's "[Highway 61 Revisited](#)"^[54] is the title track for his 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited*. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked the song as number 364 in their [500 Greatest Songs of All Time](#).^[55] The song has five stanzas. In each stanza, someone describes an unusual problem that is ultimately resolved on Highway 61. In Stanza 1, [GOD](#) tells Abraham to "[kill me a son](#)". God wants the killing done on Highway 61. Abram, the original name of the biblical Abraham, is also the name of Dylan's own father.

Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

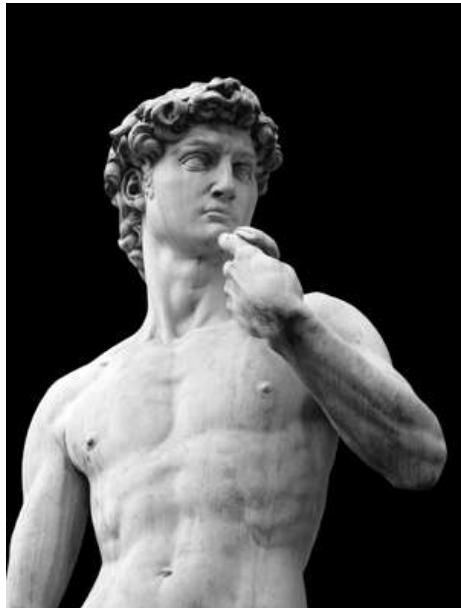
Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



David



What is the meta-story of David? We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who created and changed Judaism?

When did they become 'enlightened'?

What does their very existence say about Judaism?

What was the alternative?

David: warrior, musician, poet

Never lost a war; horrible family man

Unethical behavior

Unified Israel

Consults prophets

Parallels with patriarchs

Food: famine

Succession is important-determining who comes next

Who gets remembered?

Linked to the Messiah!

David ([Hebrew](#): דָּוִד, דָּוִדָּה, [Modern](#) *David* [Tiberian](#) *Dāwīd*, [ISO 259-3](#) *Dawid*; [Strong's](#) *Daveed*;

beloved; [Arabic](#): داود or داوود^[note A] *Dāwūd*) was the second king of the united [Kingdom of Israel](#) according to the [Hebrew Bible](#) and, according to the [Gospels](#) of [Matthew](#) and [Luke](#), an ancestor of [Jesus Christ](#) through both [Saint Joseph](#) and [Mary](#). He is depicted as a righteous king, although not without fault, as well as an acclaimed warrior, musician and poet, traditionally credited for composing many of the psalms contained in the Book of [Psalms](#).

[Edwin Thiele](#) dates his life to c. 1040–970 BC, his reign over [Judah](#) c. 1010–1003 BC, and his reign over the united Kingdom of Israel c. 1003–970 BC.^[1] The [Books of Samuel](#), 1 Kings, and 1 Chronicles are the only source of information on his life and reign; the [Tel Dan stele](#) may record

the existence in the mid-9th century of a Judean royal dynasty called the "House of David", although this is disputed. David's life is very important to [Jewish](#), [Christian](#) and [Islamic](#) culture. In Judaism, David, or David HaMelekh, is the [King of Israel](#), and the Jewish people. A direct descendant of David will be the [Messiah](#). In Islam, he is known as *Dawud*, considered to be a prophet and the king of a nation.

Biblical narrative

David, chosen by God

God withdraws his favour from [Saul](#), king of Israel: *It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he is turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments.* The prophet [Samuel](#) seeks a new king from the sons of [Jesse](#) of [Bethlehem](#). Seven of Jesse's sons are led before Samuel, but Samuel says, "Yahweh has not chosen these." He then asks, "Are these all the sons you have?" and Jesse answers, "There is still the youngest but he is tending the sheep." So David is brought to Samuel, and "Yahweh said (to Samuel), 'Rise and anoint him; he is the one.'"^[2]

David at the court of Saul

God sends an evil spirit to torment [Saul](#), *1 Samuel 16:14*, and his attendants suggest he send for David, a young warrior famed for his bravery and for his skill with the harp. Saul does so and makes David one of his armor-bearers and "whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him."



David and Goliath



David hoists the severed head of [Goliath](#) by [Gustave Doré](#)

The [Israelites](#), under King [Saul](#), face the [Philistines](#) in the [Valley of Elah](#). The boy David is bringing food to his older brothers who are with Saul. He hears the Philistine giant [Goliath](#) challenging the Israelites to send their own champion to decide the outcome in single combat. David tells Saul he is prepared to face Goliath and Saul allows him to make the attempt. He is victorious, striking Goliath in the forehead with a stone from his [sling](#). Goliath falls, and David kills him with his own sword and beheads him; the Philistines

flee in terror. Saul sends to know the name of the young champion, and David tells him that he is the son of Jesse.^[3]

David and Jonathan

Saul makes David a commander over his armies and offers him his daughter [Michal](#) in marriage for bringing more than 200 foreskins of the Philistines to him. David is successful in many battles, and his popularity awakes Saul's fears — "What more can he have but the kingdom?" By

various stratagems the jealous king seeks his death, but the plots only endear David the more to the people, and especially to Saul's son [Jonathan](#), who [loves David](#) (1 Samuel 18:1, 2 Samuel 1:25-26).^{[4][5]} Warned by Jonathan, David flees into the wilderness, where he gathers a band of followers and becomes the champion of the oppressed while evading the pursuit of Saul. He accepts the town of [Ziklag](#) as a chief from the Philistine king [Achish](#) of [Gath](#), but continues secretly to champion the Israelites. Achish marches against Saul, but David is excused from the war on the accusation of the Philistine nobles that his loyalty to their cause cannot be trusted.

David becomes king

Jonathan and Saul are killed in battle with the Philistines at [Mount Gilboa](#). David mourns their deaths, especially that of Jonathan, his friend. He goes up to [Hebron](#), where he is [anointed](#) king over [Judah](#). In the north, Saul's son [Ish-Bosheth](#) becomes king of the tribes of Israel. War ensues between Ish-Bosheth and David, until Ish-Bosheth is murdered. The assassins bring the head of Ish-Bosheth to David hoping for reward, but David executes them for their crime against the Lord's anointed. Yet with the death of the son of Saul, the elders of Israel come to Hebron and David, who is 30 years old, is anointed King over Israel and Judah.^[6]

Jerusalem and the Davidic Covenant

David conquers the [Jebusite](#) fortress of [Jerusalem](#), and makes it his capital, and "[Hiram](#) king of [Tyre](#) sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house." David brings the [Ark of the Covenant](#) to Jerusalem, intending to build a temple, but God, speaking to the prophet [Nathan](#), forbids it, saying the temple must wait for a future generation. **God makes a covenant with David, promising that he will establish the house of David eternally: "Your throne shall be established forever."**

With God's help, David is victorious over his people's enemies. The Philistines are subdued, the [Moabites](#) to the east pay tribute, along with [Hadadezer](#) of [Zobah](#), from whom David takes gold shields and bronze vessels.^[7]

Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite

David commits adultery with [Bathsheba](#), the wife of [Uriah the Hittite](#).^[8] Bathsheba becomes pregnant. David sends for Uriah, who is with the Israelite army at the siege of [Rabbah](#), so that he may lie with his wife and conceal the identity of the child's father. Uriah refuses to do so while his companions are in the field of battle and David sends him back to [Joab](#), the commander, with a message instructing him to abandon Uriah on the battlefield, "that he may be struck down, and die." David marries Bathsheba and she bears his child, "but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."^[9] The prophet [Nathan](#) confronts David, saying: "Why have you despised the word of God, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife." Nathan presents three punishments from God for this sin. First, that the "sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10) second, that "Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel., (2 Samuel 12:12) and finally, that "the son born to you will

die." [2 Samuel 12:14](#) David [repents](#), yet God "struck the [David's] child ... and it became sick ... [And] on the seventh day the child died." David leaves his lamentations, dresses himself, goes to the House of the Lord and worships, and then returns home to eat. His servants ask why he wept when the baby was alive, but ends his mourning when the child dies. David replies: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me." [2 Samuel 12:22-23](#)

David's son Absalom rebels

David's son [Absalom](#) rebels against his father, and they come to battle in the [Wood of Ephraim](#). Absalom is caught by his hair in the branches of an oak and David's general Joab kills him as he hangs there.^[10] When the news of the victory is brought to David, he does not rejoice, but is instead shaken with grief: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"^[11]

The old age of David

When David has become old and bedridden, [Adonijah](#), his eldest surviving son and natural heir, declares himself king. Bathsheba, David's favorite wife, and [Nathan the prophet](#), fearing that they will be killed by Adonijah, go to David and procure his agreement that [Solomon](#), Bathsheba's son, should sit on the throne. And so the plans of Adonijah collapse, and Solomon becomes king.^[12] It is to Solomon that David gives his final instructions, including his promise that the line of Solomon and David will inherit the throne of Judah forever, and his request that Solomon kill his oldest enemies on his behalf.^[13] David dies and is buried in the [City of David](#), having ruled forty years over Israel, seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem.

David the Musician



"David Playing the Harp" by [Jan de Bray](#), 1670

In various biblical passages, David is referred to as "the favorite of the songs of Israel,"^[14] the one who soothed Saul with music,^[15] and the founder of Temple singing.^{[16][17]} A Psalms scroll from the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) (11QPs^a) attributes 3600 [tehilim](#) (songs of praise) plus other compositions to David.^[18] Seventy-three of the 150 Psalms in the Bible are attributed to David.^[19] The supreme kingship of [Yahweh](#) is the most pervasive theological concept in the book of Psalms,^{[20][21]} and many psalms attributed to David are directed to Yahweh by name,^[22] whether in praise or petition, suggesting a relationship.^[23] According to the [Midrash Tehillim](#), King David was prompted to the Psalms by the [Holy Spirit](#) that rested upon him.^[24]

In addition to ascribing authorship to David, several Psalms are identified with specific events in David's life.^[25] [Psalm 34](#) is attributed to David on the occasion of his escape from the Abimelech (king) Achish by pretending to be insane.^[26] According to the narrative in 1 Samuel 21, instead

of killing the man who had exacted so many casualties from him, Abimelech allows David to depart, exclaiming, “Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?”^[27] Psalm 34 is one of seven [acrostic](#) Psalms in the original Hebrew; most English translations do not retain the acrostic form.^[28] The first part of Psalm 34 is directed toward Yahweh in complete and humble gratitude (David does not even mention his own royal status); the second part confidently directs others to Yahweh.^[29]

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them ... Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

— *Psalm 34:6-7,11 (ESV)*

In contrast, Psalm 18 is not related to a specific incident but rather to God’s faithful deliverance from “all of his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”^{[30][31]} The text of this Psalm was thought to date to the 10th century BC even before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls^[32] and is very similar to that of 2 Samuel 22.^[33] In this Psalm, David recalls being in deadly situations: “The cords of death entangled me, the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.”^[34] He cries out to God for help, and God rescues David.

I love you, O [LORD](#), my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

— *Psalm 18:1-3 (NIV)*

The Scottish theologian [Samuel Rutherford](#) (1600–1661) notes that crying out to God is mentioned in many Psalms attributed to David.^[35] He comments, “Fervour is a heavenly ingredient in prayer. An arrow drawn with full strength hath a speedier issue.”^[36] The Midrash Tehillim teaches from Psalm 4 “that the mere mechanical application to the Throne of Mercy is not efficacious is plainly seen from the words of King David, who says God is nigh to all that call upon Him, and ... he adds the important words, ‘to those who call upon Him *in truth*.’”^[37]

According to Psalm 40, David’s cries to God were heartfelt though not necessarily impatient; the poignant combination of a cry for help with a confident expression of faith echo today in the song “[40](#)” by the rock group [U2](#) and that encapsulates David’s experience with his God:

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

— *Psalm 40:1-3 (NIV)*

David is an important figure in Judaism. Historically, David's reign represented the formation of a coherent [Jewish kingdom](#) centered in [Jerusalem](#). David is an important figure within the context of [Jewish messianism](#). In the [Hebrew Bible](#), it is written that a human descendant of David will occupy the throne of a restored kingdom and usher in a [messianic age](#).

David is also viewed as a tragic figure; his acquisition of Bathsheba, and the loss of his son are viewed as his central tragedies.

Many legends have grown around the figure of David. According to one Rabbinic tradition, David was raised as the son of his father Jesse and spent his early years herding his father's sheep in the wilderness while his brothers were in school. Only at his anointing by Samuel - when the oil from Samuel's flask turned to diamonds and pearls - was his true identity as Jesse's son revealed. David's adultery with Bathsheba was only an opportunity to demonstrate the power of repentance, and some [Talmudic authors](#) stated that it was not adultery at all, quoting a Jewish practice of divorce on the eve of battle. Furthermore, according to David's apologists, the death of Uriah was not to be considered murder, on the basis that Uriah had committed a capital offence by refusing to obey a direct command from the King.^[39]

According to [midrashim](#), [Adam](#) gave up 70 years of his life for the life of David.^[40] Also, according to the [Talmud Yerushalmi](#), David was born and died on the Jewish holiday of [Shavuot](#) (Feast of Weeks). His piety was said to be so great that his prayers could bring down things from Heaven.



David and [King Saul](#), by [Rembrandt](#). David plays the lyre (depicted here as a [harp](#)) to the king "tormented by an evil spirit"

David's succession

Genealogy

According to [Genesis 46:12](#) and [Ruth 4:18-22](#), David is the eleventh^[67] generation from [Judah](#), the fourth son of the patriarch [Jacob](#) (Israel). The genealogical line runs as follows: (1) [Judah](#) → (2) [Pharez](#) → (3) [Hezron](#) → (4) [Ram](#) → (5) [Amminadab](#) → (6) [Nahshon](#) → (7) [Salmon](#) → (8) [Boaz](#) (the husband of [Ruth](#)) → (9) [Obed](#) → (10) [Jesse](#) → (11) David.^[67]

David's family

David was born in [Bethlehem](#), in the territory of the [Tribe of Judah](#). His father was named [Jesse](#). His mother is not named in the Bible, but the [Talmud](#) identifies her as [Nitzevet](#) daughter of Adael.^[68] David had seven brothers and was the youngest of them all. He had eight wives: [Michal](#), the second daughter of [King Saul](#); [Ahinoam](#) the Jezreelite; [Abigail](#) the Carmelite, previously wife of [Nabal](#);^[69] [Maachah](#), daughter of [Talmi](#), king of [Geshur](#); [Haggith](#); [Abitai](#); [Eglah](#); and [Bathsheba](#), previously the wife of [Uriah the Hittite](#).

The [Book of Chronicles](#) lists David's sons by various wives and [concubines](#). In Hebron he had six sons [1 Chronicles 3:1-3](#): [Amnon](#), by Ahinoam; [Daniel](#), by Abigail; [Absalom](#), by Maachah; [Adonijah](#), by Haggith; [Shephatiah](#), by Abital; and [Ithream](#), by Eglah. By Bathsheba, his sons were: Shammua; [Shobab](#); [Nathan](#); and [Solomon](#). His sons born in Jerusalem by other wives included: [Ibhar](#); Elishua; [Eliphelet](#); Nogah; Nepheg; [Japhia](#); [Elishama](#); and [Eliada](#). [2 Samuel 5:14-16](#) According to [2 Chronicles 11:18](#), [Jerimoth](#), who is not mentioned in any of the genealogies, is mentioned as another of David's sons. According to [2 Samuel 9:11](#), David adopted Jonathan's son [Mephibosheth](#) as his own.

David also had at least one daughter, [Tamar](#) by Maachah, who was raped by Amnon, her half-brother. Her rape leads to Amnon's death. [2 Samuel 13:1-29](#) Absalom, Amnon's half-brother and Tamar's full-brother, waits two years, then avenges his sister by sending his servants to kill Amnon at a feast to which he had invited all the king's sons. [2 Samuel 13](#)

Descendants of David

The following are some of the more notable persons who have claimed descent from the Biblical David, or had it claimed on their behalf:

- [Jesus](#) of Nazareth (Jesus Christ)
- [Maimonides](#) (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon of Spain/haRaMbaM apx. 1135-1204)
- [Judah Loew](#), Yehuda Loew ben Bezalel (c. 1525, Prague; 22 August 1609 Prague), also known as "The Maharal of Prague".
- The [Abravanel](#) family
- The [Baal Shem Tov](#), and through him every Hassidic Rebbe descended from him
- [Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson](#), whose family is descended from Judah Loew.

Impact of David on Judaism

- **First MAJOR king of Israel (Saul only reigned for 2 years)**
- **United Northern and Southern tribes (political unification which defined tribal composition of Judaism): Creation of the Political Entity**
- **Identified Israel as a force in the ancient middle east**
- **Defined the sense of struggle and emotion in Judaism through the psalms**
- **Continued the definition of a patriarch: external strength, requirement for family unification, emotional struggle**
- **Link to the Messiah (The Anointed One)**



Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and the Revival of Hebrew

(1858-1922)

by Jack Fellman*

In his pioneering work on language revivals and language revivers published in 1966, the American linguist Einar Haugen wrote: “It appears to be almost the rule that such movements can be traced back to a single devoted person, who gave focus to the prevailing dissatisfactions of his people. Having issued from the group whose language was neglected, such reformers often had more than a purely intellectual motivation for establishing the existence of their language. Theirs became one contribution to the general liberation of the group, a medium of revolt and a symbol of unity.” For the Hebrew language revival, one of the truly outstanding socio-linguistic events of modern times, this characterization is eminently true of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, was born Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman, in the Lithuanian village of Luzhky on January 7, 1858. Like virtually all Jewish children of that time and place he began learning Hebrew from a very tender age as part of a thoroughly religious upbringing. He excelled in his studies and ultimately was sent to a talmudic academy (*yeshiva*) in the hope that he would become a rabbi. However, like many promising young Jews of the time in eastern Europe, he became interested in the secular world and ultimately exchanged the yeshiva for a Russian gymnasium, completing his studies as an external student in 1877. In the same year Russia proclaimed war on the Ottoman Empire to aid their fellow Slavs, the Bulgarians, to regain their independence from the Turks. Ben-Yehuda was captivated by the idea of restoring to the Bulgarians their rights and reviving the Bulgarian nation on its national soil. In the 19th century, several European nations had been so revived, perhaps the most celebrated being the Greeks, the heirs of Classical Athens, in 1829, and the Italians, the heirs of Classical Rome, in 1849. Ben-Yehuda was deeply influenced by such revivals and came to the conclusion that the

European concept of national fulfilment should also be applied to his people, the Jews. He felt deeply that if the Bulgarians, who were not an ancient, classical people, could demand and obtain a state of their own, then the Jews, the People of the Book and the heirs of historic Jerusalem, deserved the same. True, Eretz-Israel, the land of the Jews, contained few Jews in the 19th century, and the language of the Jews, Hebrew, was virtually only a written language and not a spoken tongue, but he felt these obstacles were not insurmountable. The Jews must return to their land and begin anew to speak their own language.

Acting on these ideas, Ben-Yehuda determined that he himself should go to Palestine. He left Russia in 1878, first going to Paris to study medicine, so as to be of future help to the Jewish community in Palestine. However, due to his own health problems (tuberculosis), Ben-Yehuda was unable to continue his studies, yet, to his eternal credit, he did not waver in his convictions, and in 1881 he arrived in Palestine with his revival plans for the Hebrew language intact. Indeed, while still abroad, he had pondered upon the revival question deeply, and had published several articles in various Hebrew periodicals on the triple question of the renaissance of the Jewish people, their land, and their language. Indeed, these early articles can be considered forerunners of modern political Zionism, for in them are included the basic elements pertinent to Jewish nationalism: settlement policy, the revival of the Hebrew language, literature, and culture in the national homeland. Ben-Yehuda settled in Jerusalem, where most Jews of Palestine lived in their various communities, planning to use the town as the base for spreading his revivalist ideas throughout Palestine and the Diaspora.

Ben-Yehuda adopted several plans of action. The main ones were three-fold, and they can be summarized as “Hebrew in the Home,” “Hebrew in the School,” and “Words, Words, Words.”

As far as “Hebrew in the Home” was concerned, even before coming to Palestine, as a result of his first successful prolonged Hebrew conversation, Ben-Yehuda had decided to speak only Hebrew with every Jew he met. From what is known, this first conversation took place either with Getzel Zelikovitz or Mordechai Adelman, in a café on the Boulevard Montmartre in Paris. Since Ben-Yehuda had proved to himself that he could speak Hebrew successfully with friends and acquaintances, he wanted Hebrew to be his only language when he arrived in Palestine. It should be noted that this was not too difficult for him, except perhaps for a shortage of Hebrew words on certain topics. Indeed, Ben-Yehuda relates with great enthusiasm his first conversations in Hebrew when he and his wife disembarked from the boat in Jaffa, and he talked with a Jewish money-changer, a Jewish innkeeper, and a Jewish wagoneer, all in Hebrew. For here he had encountered simple people who could speak Hebrew, perhaps with mistakes, but still more or less naturally and freely. But Ben-Yehuda wanted the Jews in Palestine to speak Hebrew exclusively. Therefore, when his first son, Ben-Zion Ben-Yehuda (or, as he is more commonly known, Ittamar Ben-Avi), was born in 1882, Ben-Yehuda made his first wife Deborah promise to raise the boy as the first all-Hebrew speaking child in modern history.

According to Ben-Yehuda, this was a very important symbolic event for the future of the revival, because, with a child in the house, parents and visitors would have to speak naturally to him, and to converse on the most everyday topics, all in Hebrew. And when the child would finally begin to speak on his own, Ben-Yehuda would have living proof that a complete revival

of the language was, indeed, possible.

As Ben-Yehuda wrote in the introduction to his dictionary, “If a language which has stopped being spoken, with nothing remaining of it save what remains of our language – (if there is such a language) can return and be the spoken tongue of an individual for all necessities of his life, there is no room for doubt that it can become the spoken language of a community.”

And this is indeed what happened. Ittamar Ben-Avi, in his autobiography, describes (albeit somewhat over-romanticized), some of the drastic precautions taken by Ben-Yehuda to ensure his son would hear—and thus ultimately speak—only Hebrew. Thus, for example, when visitors came to the house who did not know Hebrew, Ben-Yehuda would send him to bed so that he would not hear their foreign languages. Similarly, he would not let the child listen to “the chirping of the birds and the neighing of horses, the braying of donkeys and the fluttering of butterflies, because even they are, after all, foreign languages, at any rate not Hebrew.” Indeed, the child only began to speak at the relatively late age of four. His mother could not keep to Ben-Yehuda's demand, and speak to the child only in Hebrew. One day, when Ben-Yehuda was out of the house, she began absent-mindedly singing lullabies to the child in her native Russian. Ben-Yehuda had returned early and when he heard Russian being used inside his house, he rushed in and began shouting. Ittamar wrote about the bitter scene that followed: “It caused a great shock to pass over me when I saw my father in his anger and my mother in her grief and tears, and the muteness was removed from my lips, and speech came to my mouth.”

The fact that there was a child in the house accentuated the need to find appropriate Hebrew words for the mundane things of everyday life. Thus, new Hebrew words were coined by Ben-Yehuda for objects such as doll, ice-cream, jelly, omelette, handkerchief, towel, bicycle, and hundreds more. As the child grew, so did Hebrew, both in vocabulary and in naturalness of expression. Indeed, Ben-Yehuda and his Hebrew-speaking family became a living legend, an embodiment of the revival for others to emulate.

Of all the steps Ben-Yehuda took to revive Hebrew, the use of “Hebrew in the School” was clearly the most important, and Ben-Yehuda realized this. In his first articles, written while abroad, he had dwelt on the way the Russian language had become rooted among the youth in Russia, even among those for whom it was not their mother tongue, through being introduced as the language of instruction in schools. On the same principle, Ben-Yehuda preached that rabbis and teachers should use Hebrew as the language of instruction in the Jewish schools in Palestine, and for all subjects, both religious and secular. Ben-Yehuda understood that the revival could succeed especially, and perhaps only, if the younger generation would begin to speak Hebrew freely. Therefore, when Nissim Bechar, the principal of the Torah and Avodah School of the Alliance Israélite Universelle School in Jerusalem proposed to Ben-Yehuda in 1882 that he teach in his school, Ben-Yehuda seized the chance. Bechar understood the necessity of using Hebrew in the school, because, for the first time, children from several different Jewish communities would be studying in the same classroom, and they had no other common language which could be used. Bechar explained to Ben-Yehuda his method of teaching Hebrew through Hebrew, a direct system, with no translation into other tongues—a system which had already been used in teaching French and other languages. Bechar had

already tried the system in Hebrew in the Alliance School in Istanbul, which he had headed before coming to Jerusalem. Ben-Yehuda was able to teach for only a brief period, due to health reasons, but his Hebrew teaching was successful. After just a few months, the children were able to chatter fluently in Hebrew on daily topics connected with eating and drinking, clothing, daily life and events inside and outside the home.

It was clear to Ben-Yehuda that herein lay the very future of the revival. If children could learn Hebrew from a young enough age in school, they would become virtually unilingual in Hebrew when they grew up. In his words: "The Hebrew language will go from the synagogue to the house of study, and from the house of study to the school, and from the school it will come into the home and... become a living language" (*Hatzvi*, 1886).

And thus it came to pass. Ben-Yehuda's personal example and his teaching success made a great impression on other teachers. True, teaching in Hebrew involved many problems: lack of trained teachers, lack of textbooks, lack of materials such as games or songs, lack of terminologies and so on. David Yudeleviz, an early teacher, wrote in 1928: "In a heavy atmosphere, without books, expressions, words, verbs and hundreds of nouns, we had to begin... teaching. It is impossible to describe or imagine under what pressure the first seeds were planted... Hebrew teaching materials for elementary education were limited... We were half-mute, stuttering, we spoke with our hands and eyes." Another prominent teacher, David Yellin, wrote in the same vein: "Every teacher had a French or Russian teaching book of his own, and he organized his Hebrew work according to it... Terms for teaching did not exist. Every village teacher was an Academy (of the Hebrew Language) member with respect to creating words according to his taste, and everyone, of course, used his own creations." However, as time went on, all these linguistic problems were ultimately solved, and a young all-Hebrew speaking generation did emerge and develop, thus ensuring beyond anything else that the revival would be a success.

Besides teaching the youth, Ben-Yehuda also wanted to attract adults to his ideas. After writing for a few years in the local paper, *Hahavatzelet*, he began to publish his own newspaper *Hatzvi*, in 1884, to serve as an instrument for teaching adults, both via its content and its language. Newspapers in Hebrew were at that time still somewhat of a novelty, the first one having appeared in the mid-1850s (especially as the model Ben-Yehuda wanted to emulate was no less than *Le Figaro* of Paris). He foresaw a Hebrew paper that would treat all topics of interest to a people living on its own land, including international and local topics, weather bulletins, fashion, etc. And indeed virtually every (male) Jew in Palestine at the end of the 19th century could read and understand a Hebrew newspaper without too much difficulty. Ben-Yehuda believed that if he published a newspaper at a low price, people would become convinced of their ability to express everything they would want to in Hebrew, and that there would then be more readiness to use the language to convey their ideas. Ben-Yehuda also used his paper as a means to introduce new words which hitherto were missing, such as: newspaper, editor, telegramme, subscriber, soldier, fashion and many others. Jews being avid readers, Ben-Yehuda's paper did much to spread his ideas and his linguistic coinages, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora.

To help would-be speakers and readers of Hebrew, Ben-Yehuda began to compile a dictionary.

Actually, he started the dictionary as an aid for himself when he was still in Paris, and at first it contained simply a short bilingual list in Hebrew and French written in the back of the notebook he used to write down his grocery lists. But, as Ben-Yehuda himself explains in the introduction to his dictionary, when he began speaking Hebrew daily, he became more aware of the lack of words in Hebrew, and his list grew longer, and he began publishing word lists in his newspaper, as aids for other would-be speakers with similar problems. But there were difficulties. As long as Ben-Yehuda spoke Hebrew at home or with his friends, he was able to use the language more or less as he wished. But if he wanted the entire society to use Hebrew, then the words would have to be precise and accurate, according to strict philological rules. Therefore, Ben-Yehuda became a scientific lexicographer. The results of his arduous labours, working sometimes 18 hours a day, are astounding, culminating in his 17-volume “A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew.” It was completed by his second wife, Hemda, and his son after his death, and to this day is still unique in the annals of Hebrew lexicography.

To help him with his dictionary, and to solve various problems connected with the form and type of Hebrew – problems of terminology, pronunciation, spelling and punctuation, – in December, 1890, Ben-Yehuda founded the Hebrew Language Council. The Council was the forerunner of today's Hebrew Language Academy, the supreme arbiter and authority on all matters pertaining to the Hebrew language.

These were the main steps Ben-Yehuda took to implement his dream of the revival of Hebrew. Of course, he did not revive the language entirely on his own, as is often rather simplistically stated. Rather, he needed and relied on the support of the society around him. Besides the help of the local population (which was limited and at times even outright hostile), what helped Ben-Yehuda most of all in his linguistic crusade was that the year 1881, the same year he came to Palestine, also signalled the beginning of the early immigration waves of Jewish settlers to Palestine. The critical mass of these settlers were like Ben-Yehuda himself – young, educated, and idealistic. They came from similar east European Jewish socio-economic backgrounds, who, like him, had decided to begin their lives anew in the promised land of their forefathers. They were of great help to Ben-Yehuda because they were receptive to his novel ideas and were ready to speak Hebrew, as he insisted. Indeed, many could already speak Hebrew upon arrival in the country, while others were willing to improve their knowledge or begin learning the language. They passed on Hebrew to their children in the home, and in the kindergartens and schools they set up throughout the country. Thus, within a biblical generation, in the forty years between 1881-1921, a core of young, fervent Hebrew-language speakers was formed, with Hebrew as the unique symbol of their linguistic nationalism. This fact was acknowledged by the British mandate authorities, who on November 29, 1922, recognized Hebrew as the official language of the Jews in Palestine. The Hebrew revival was now complete, and Ben-Yehuda's lifelong dream had been fulfilled. Sadly, and perhaps significantly, only one month later, he succumbed to the tuberculosis which had stalked him ever since his Paris days.

As we have pointed out, one should not say (as is often done) that before Ben-Yehuda, Hebrew was a “dead” language and that he single-handedly and miraculously revived it. Indeed, the term “dead” as applied to Hebrew is actually a much abused term. As the philologist Chaim Rabin noted in 1958, “...it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that at the time of Ben-Yehuda's first article in 1879, over 50 percent of all male Jews were able to understand the

pentateuch, the daily prayers, etc. and some 20 percent could read a Hebrew book of average difficulty, allowing for a much higher proportion in eastern Europe, north Africa and Yemen, and a very much lower one in western countries.” This being the case, we note Cecil Roth's penetrating axiom on Ben-Yehuda's role in the revival: “Before Ben-Yehuda... Jews could speak Hebrew; after him they did.”

Ben-Yehuda, then, was the prophet and propagandist, the theoretician and tactician, the sign and symbol of the revival. He himself wrote in 1908 in his newspaper, Hatzvi, “For everything there is needed only one wise, clever and active man, with the initiative to devote all his energies to it, and the matter will progress, all obstacles in the way notwithstanding... In every new event, every step, even the smallest in the path of progress, it is necessary that there be one pioneer who will lead the way without leaving any possibility of turning back.”

For the revival of the Hebrew language, that pioneer was Eliezer Ben-Yehuda himself.

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Source: [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)

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Village Shalom

Judah Maccabee



What is the meta-story of
 Judah Maccabee?
 We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who
 created and changed Judaism?
 When did they become 'enlightened'?
 What does
 their very existence say about Judaism?
 What was the alternative?

Born [Modiin](#), [Judea](#)

Died Elasa, near modern day [Ramallah](#)

Allegiance [Hasmonean](#)

Service/branch [Maccabees](#)

Years of service 167–160 BCE

Battles/wars [Maccabean revolt](#)

Relations Father – [Mattathias](#)

Brothers – [Jonathan](#), [John](#), [Simon](#), [Eleazar](#)



Judah Maccabee (or **Judas Maccabeus**, also spelled Machabeus, or Maccabaeus, [Hebrew](#): יהודה המכבי, *Y'hudhah HamMakabi*, Judah the Hammer) was a [Kohen](#) and a son of the [Jewish](#) priest [Mattathias](#). He led the [Maccabean revolt](#) against the [Seleucid Empire](#) (167–160 [BCE](#)) and is acclaimed as one of the greatest warriors in [Jewish history](#) alongside [Joshua](#), [Gideon](#) and [David](#).

The Jewish feast of [Hanukkah](#) ("Dedication") commemorates the restoration of Jewish worship at the temple in Jerusalem in 165 BCE, after Judah Maccabee removed the pagan statuary.

Judah was a son ([Josephus](#)) of [Mattathias](#) the [Hasmonean](#), a [Jewish priest](#) from the village of [Modiin](#). In 167 BCE Mattathias, together with his sons Judah, [Eleazar](#), [Simon](#), [John](#), and [Jonathan](#), started a revolt against the [Seleucid](#) ruler [Antiochus IV Epiphanes](#), who since 175 BCE had issued decrees that forbade [Jewish](#) religious practices. After Mattathias's death in 166 BCE, Judah assumed leadership of the revolt in accordance with the deathbed disposition of his father. The [First Book of Maccabees](#)^[1] praises Judah's valor and military talent, suggesting that those qualities made Judah a natural choice for the new commander.

In the early days of the rebellion, Judah received a surname Maccabee. Several explanations have been put forward for this surname. One suggestion is that the name derives from the [Aramaic](#) *maqabā* ("makebet" in modern [Hebrew](#)), "hammer" or "sledgehammer" (cf. the cognomen of [Charles Martel](#), the 8th century Frankish leader), in recognition of his ferocity in battle. It is also possible that the name Maccabee is an [acronym](#) for the [Torah](#) verse *Mi kamokha ba'elim YHWH*, "Who among the gods is like you, O Jehovah?", his battle-cry to motivate troops. ([Exodus](#) 15:11). Rabbi Moshe Schreiber writes that it is an acronym for his father's name Mattityahu Kohen Ben Yochanan. Some scholars maintain that the name is a shortened form of the Hebrew *maqab-ya ḥû* (from *na ḥab*, "to mark, to designate"), meaning "the one designated by Yahweh."^[2]

Mindful of the superiority of Seleucid forces during the first two years of the revolt, Judah's strategy was to avoid any engagement with their regular army, and to resort to [guerrilla warfare](#), in order to give them a feeling of insecurity. The strategy enabled Judah to win a string of victories. At the [battle of Nahal el-Haramiah](#) (wadi haramia), he defeated a small Assyrian force under the command of Apollonius, governor of [Samaria](#), who was killed. Judah took possession of Apollonius's sword and used it until his death as a symbol of vengeance. After Nahal el-Haramiah, recruits flocked to the Jewish cause.

Early victories

Judah from [Die Bibel in Bildern](#)

Shortly thereafter, Judah [routed a bigger Seleucid army](#) under the command of Seron near [Beth-Horon](#), largely thanks to a good choice of battlefield. Then in the [Battle of Emmaus](#), Judah proceeded to defeat the Seleucid forces led by generals [Nicanor](#) and



[Gorgias](#). This force was dispatched by [Lysias](#), whom Antiochus left as [viceroy](#) after departing on a campaign against the [Parthians](#). By a forced night march, Judah succeeded in eluding Gorgias, who had intended to attack and destroy the Jewish forces in their camp with his cavalry. While Gorgias was searching for him in the mountains, Judah made a surprise attack upon the Seleucid camp and defeated the Seleucid at the [Battle of Emmaus](#). The Seleucid commander had no alternative but to withdraw to the coast.

The defeat at [Emmaus](#) convinced Lysias that he must prepare for a serious and prolonged war. He accordingly assembled a new and larger army and marched with it on [Judea](#) from the south via [Idumea](#). After several years of conflict Judah drove out his foes from Jerusalem, except for the garrison in the citadel of [Acra](#). He purified the defiled [Temple of Jerusalem](#) and on the 25th of [Kislev](#) (December 14, 164 BCE) restored the service in the Temple. The reconsecration of the Temple is a permanent Jewish holiday, [Hanukkah](#). The liberation of Jerusalem was the first step on the road to ultimate independence.

After Jerusalem

Upon hearing the news that the Jewish communities in [Gilead](#), [Transjordan](#), and [Galilee](#) were under attack by neighboring [Greek](#) cities, Judah immediately went to their aid. Judah sent his brother, Simeon, to Galilee at the head of 3,000 men; Simeon proceeded to successfully fulfill his task, achieving numerous victories and transplanted a substantial portion of the Jewish settlements, including women and children, to Judea. He personally led the campaign in Transjordan, taking with him his brother Jonathan. After fierce fighting, he defeated the Transjordanian tribes and rescued the Jews concentrated in fortified towns in Gilead. The Jewish population of the areas taken by the Maccabees was evacuated to Judea.^[3] At the conclusion of the fighting in Transjordan, Judah turned against the [Edomites](#) in the south, captured and destroyed [Hebron](#) and [Maresha](#).^[4] He then marched on the coast of the Mediterranean, destroyed the altars and statues of the pagan gods in [Ashdod](#), and returned to Judea with much spoils.

Judah then laid siege to the Assyrian garrison at the [Acra](#), the Seleucid citadel of Jerusalem. The besieged, who included not only Assyrians but also [Hellenistic](#) Jews, appealed for help to Lysias, who effectively became the regent of the young king [Antiochus V Eupator](#) after the death of Antiochus Epiphanes at the end of 164 BCE during the [Parthian](#) campaign. Lysias together with Eupator set out for a new campaign in Judea. Lysias skirted Judea as he had done in his first campaign, entering it from the south, and besieged [Beth-Zur](#). Judah raised the siege of the Acra and went to meet Lysias. In the [Battle of Beth-zachariah](#), south of [Bethlehem](#), the Seleucids achieved their first major victory over the Maccabees, and Judah was forced to withdraw to Jerusalem. Beth-Zur was compelled to surrender and Lysias reached Jerusalem, laying siege to the city. The defenders found themselves in a precarious situation because their provisions were exhausted, it being a [sabbatical year](#) during which the fields were left uncultivated. However, just as capitulation seemed imminent, Lysias and Eupator had to withdraw when Antiochus Epiphanes's commander-in-chief Philip, whom the late ruler appointed regent before his death, rebelled against Lysias and was about to enter [Antioch](#) and seize power. Lysias decided to propose a peaceful settlement, which was concluded at the end of 163 BCE. The terms of peace were based on the restoration of religious freedom, the permission for the Jews to live in accordance with their own laws, and the official return of the Temple to the Jews. Lysias

defeated Philip, only to be overthrown by Demetrius, the true heir to the Assyrian throne. Demetrius appointed Alcimus (Jakim), a Hellenist Jew, as high priest, a choice the Hasidim (Pietists) might have accepted since he was of priestly descent.

Internal conflict

When war against the external enemy came to an end, an internal struggle broke out between the party led by Judah and the Hellenist party. The influence of the Hellenizers all but collapsed in the wake of the Seleucid defeat. The Hellenizing [High Priest Menelaus](#) was removed from office and executed. His successor was another Hellenizer [Alcimus](#). When Alcimus executed sixty priests who were opposed to him, he found himself in open conflict with the Maccabees. Alcimus fled from Jerusalem and went to the Seleucid king, asking for help.

Meanwhile, [Demetrius I Soter](#), son of [Seleucus IV Philopator](#) and nephew of the late Antiochus IV Epiphanes, fled from Rome in defiance of the [Roman Senate](#), arrived in Assyria, captured and killed Lysias and Antiochus Eupator, and usurped the throne. It was thus Demetrius to whom the delegation led by Alcimus, complained of the persecution of the Hellenist party in Judea. Demetrius granted Alcimus's request to be appointed High Priest under the protection of the king's army and sent to Judea an army led by [Bacchides](#). The weaker Jewish army couldn't oppose the enemy and withdrew from Jerusalem, so Judah returned to wage Guerrilla warfare. Soon after, it was necessary for the Seleucid Army to return to [Antioch](#) because of the turbulent political situation. Judah's forces returned to Jerusalem and the Seleucids dispatched another army, again led by Nicanor. In a [battle near Adasa](#), on the 13th [Adar](#) 161 BCE, the Assyrian army was destroyed and Nicanor was killed. The annual "Day of Nicanor" was instituted to commemorate this victory.

Agreement with Rome

The [Roman-Jewish Treaty](#) was an agreement made between Judah Maccabee and the [Roman Republic](#) in 161 BCE according to [1 Maccabees](#) and [Josephus](#). It was the first recorded contact between the [Jewish](#) people and the [Romans](#).

Renewed fighting

The agreement with Rome failed to have any effect on Demetrius' policy. On receipt of the news of Nicanor's defeat, he dispatched a new army, again commanded by Bacchides. This time the Assyrian forces of 20,000 men were numerically so superior that most of Judah's men left the field of battle and advised their leader to do likewise and to await a more favorable opportunity. However, Judah decided to stand his ground. In the [Battle of Elasa](#), Judah and those who remained faithful to him were killed. His body was taken by his brothers from the battlefield and buried in the family sepulchre at [Modiin](#).

The death of Judah Maccabee (d. 160 BCE) stirred the Jews to renewed resistance. After several additional years of war under the leadership of two of Mattathias' other sons (Jonathan and Simon), the Jews finally achieved independence and the liberty to worship freely.

Sports

Judah Maccabee strongly disapproved of athletic games and competitions, which were a clear influence of Greek culture, were introduced into Jerusalem by his staunch enemies the Hellenising Jews and were abolished upon his getting control of the city.

Nevertheless, by the irony of history, one of the main sports federations of contemporary [Israel](#) is named for him [Maccabi](#), and most Israeli cities have athletics, football and basketball clubs of that name (some of them internationally famous). Also named for him are the [Maccabiah Games](#), an international [Jewish](#) athletic event similar to the modern [Olympics](#) – in turn modeled on the Classical Greek ones, of which Maccabeus also evidently disapproved as part of a foreign and hostile culture.

G. CONCLUSIONS

▶ With the death of Judah Maccabee the revolt seemed to have ended in utter failure; Seleucid governors were in control in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, while only a handful of rebels stood fast in the Judean Desert. But, as is usually the case with national movements rooted in the vital needs of a people, the factors which were in the end to lead to the Hasmonean's victory were still operating. And less than ten years after the death of Judah, his brother Jonathan ruled as High Priest and governor of Judea.

Despite a natural esteem for the heroism and sagacity of the early Hasmoneans, the historian cannot ignore the objective historical factors which were likely to cause the collapse of the forces arrayed against the Jews. One of these factors was the political weakness of the Seleucid government — a weakness which sprang from two causes: one external, the other internal. The external cause was a consequence of the efforts made by the Romans to undermine the Hellenistic kingdoms. At the end of the third century B.C.E., after their victory over Carthage, the Romans had emerged as the strongest military power in the entire Mediterranean basin. Their defeat of Antiochus III in the battle of Magnesia in Asia Minor (190 B.C.E.) had severely shaken the structure of the Seleucid kingdom. It was precisely the desperate efforts of Antiochus IV to strengthen his kingdom from within which — owing to the juxtaposition of internal and external strains customary in the history of declining kingdoms — led to the revolt of the Hasmoneans and hastened the decline. The second weakness derived from the internal structure of the kingdom. Like all absolute kingdoms lacking a written constitution, the Seleucid monarchy was entirely in the hands of

an autocratic ruler. Since the occupant of the throne was — in theory and to some extent also in practice — omnipotent in the state, various members of the dynasty were constantly striving to seize power. The fact that Antiochus IV was crowned as the heir of his brother Seleucus IV while the latter's son, Demetrius I, was being held captive in Rome, provoked a serious split within the royal family itself. Two factions arose in the dynasty, and their struggle for the crown lasted right up to the actual dissolution of the kingdom and its conversion by Pompey into the province of Syria, in 64 B.C.E. The presence of an external enemy seeking to exploit the weakness of the Seleucid dynasty, combined with civil war within the country, were of great help to the Jews. For one thing, they could obtain assistance from the Romans. Moreover, on at least two occasions, the Greek commanders were compelled for reasons of internal policy to discontinue their campaign in Judea and sign an armistice of sorts, or even a real agreement. To these two factors a third should be added: an erroneous appraisal of the true feelings of the Jewish people. Here, the culprits were to be found not among the king's officials, but among the Jewish Hellenizers themselves. Of course, these were the circles which were close to the government and spoke its language. The officials had contact mainly with such people and tended to accept their views. But, in fact, their opinions were those of a minority far removed from reality. In this sense, the Hellenizers, who misled "the king's men," cut off the branch on which they were sitting. It was their mistaken assumption that the majority of the people would be prepared to accept the fusion of religions as proposed by Antiochus, and that only a minority of benighted fanatics would oppose it, which doomed all the political and military activity of the Seleucids and their officials in Judea to failure. Even before the death of Antiochus IV, the king's commanders had realized their error and made haste to initiate negotiations with the rebels through the High Priest Menelaus, the main spokesman of the Hellenizers. Although this was a defective instrument, they did achieve their object, at least in part.

At this stage, the possibility of achieving some reconciliation between the rival sides still existed, and this brings us to one of the factors which worked to the detriment of Judah and his men. It must be admitted that, in a certain sense, the supporters of the Maccabees were also divided, except that this division stemmed not from personal reasons, but from dissimilar aims and differing evaluations of the situation. Alongside Judah Maccabee and his brothers there stood the *Hasidim*, who had been fighting the battle of the Lord; but — in contrast with the open or hidden ambition of the Hasmoneans to achieve political liberation — the *Hasidim* aimed only at

the purification of the Temple and the restoration of worship there. This difference in aims was unimportant so long as the oppressive government opposed both the political and religious objectives equally. But the moment the royal advisers took the revolutionary step of agreeing to the purification and rededication of the Temple, even appointing a ritually acceptable High Priest for the Jews, Eliakim-Alcimus, they succeeded in splitting the Hasmonean camp and won an advantage in the struggle, the influence of which was felt for a long time. If they, nevertheless, failed to liquidate the separatist tendencies among the Jews and permanently turn Judea into an obedient province of their kingdom, this failure was a result of the logic of historical development, which they could not control. Our sources, in the manner of ancient historiography in general, attribute the event to conflicts between personalities, but in point of fact the clash of interests between the Seleucid command (represented by Nicanor) on the one hand, and the priesthood and the nation, on the other, was unavoidable. Moreover, the memory of common victories in the past could heal the breach between the Hasmonians and the *Hasidim* at any moment, in the event of some new affront on the part of the Seleucid governor — a situation which could easily be inferred from many of the actions of the king's officials at a time when the kingdom was struggling for survival. Under the circumstances, political opposition was likely to revive with all its military consequences.

Proclamation of Independence:

Tryphon. And the official historian of the Hasmonean dynasty proclaims with a flourish: "In the one hundred and seventieth year [of the Seleucid era] was the yoke of the heathen taken away from Israel. And the people of Israel began to write in their instruments and contracts: 'In the first year of Simeon the great High Priest and captain and leader of the Jews'" (I Macc. 13: 41-42). And to mark the discontinuance of the payment of tribute to Syria, the 27th of Iyyar was declared a holiday: "On the 27th of that month [Iyyar] the crown tax was remitted from Judea and Jerusalem."³⁰ In other words they eliminated the payment of the gold wreaths, the form in which subject peoples used to pay tribute to the Syrian king, which Simeon had also sent to Demetrius.

Once free of Tryphon and assured of Demetrius' willingness to recognize Judea's complete independence (end of 143 or beginning of 142 B.C.E.), Simeon made haste to induce the Jews of Alexandria to recognize the significance of Judea's liberation from foreign dominion by celebrating the *Hanukkah* festival, proclaimed by Judah Maccabee after his decisive victory.³¹ For Simeon realized even then that the Hasmonians had achieved a tremendous feat which ought to be perpetuated as a holiday for generations to come. On that holiday all the Jews in all the lands of their dispersion should rejoice at the restoration of the second free Kingdom of Israel, following the Kingdoms of Judea and Israel in the days of the First Temple. This was the first holiday universally observed by Jews which is not prescribed by the Torah; accordingly, work is permitted, but there are special readings from the Pentateuch, a special prayer (*al-ha-nissim*) is recited, and the *Hallel* liturgy praising God is chanted.

Hanukkah and the Redemption of the Land JOSEPH G. KLAUSNER

professor of modern Hebrew literature and of Second Temple history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; prolific author of scholarly books and articles; editor in chief of the Encyclopedia Hebraica (1874-1958)

The great victory of Judah Maccabeus, whose memory is honored in every Jewish house and every Jewish heart during the eight days of Hanukkah, was the triumph of the Jewish tiller of the soil. It was not the city of Jerusalem, nor the ranks of the wealthy and large landowners, but the obscure village of Modin in Judah, with its peasants whose plot of land was their all, that produced Mattathias the Hasmonean and his sons, who saved Jewish culture and perhaps the whole Jewish race from destruction. We have here a historic fact which speaks more than all the theoretical arguments in the world for the importance of national land and agricultural workers who literally draw their bread from their soil by the labor of their hands, for the sake of the culture, the freedom, the life of the nation.

Zionism knew how to raise the Feast of Hanukkah, that feast of small candles which shed their eternal light from the past into the

future, to the height of a new national symbol. Can one ever forget that fine sketch by the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, "The Menorah"? The picture of Herzl standing wrapped in troubled thought, in front of a menorah, is one of the most beautifully symbolic in the life of the leader. But it seems to me that this festival has come to tell the people, through its two-thousand-year-old symbol, of the principle of land redemption, and the creation of a class of workers on the soil that shall serve as a basis for the future existence of the race.¹¹

Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Jesus



What is the meta-story of Jesus? We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who created and changed Judaism?

When did they become 'enlightened'?

What does their very existence say about Judaism?

What was the alternative?

Jesus: carpenter

Teacher, Jewish, rebels against traditional Judaism

Causes trouble

Gets crucified by Romans

Gets presents on birthday

Jesus of Nazareth (♂ / ˈdʒiːzəs/; 7–2 BC/BCE to 30–36 AD/CE), commonly referred to as **Jesus Christ** or simply as **Jesus** or **Christ**, is the central figure of [Christianity](#). Most [Christian denominations](#) venerate him as [God the Son incarnated](#) and believe that he [rose from the dead](#) after being [crucified](#).^{[10][11]} The principal sources of information regarding Jesus are the four [canonical gospels](#),^[12] which most [biblical scholars](#) find useful for reconstructing Jesus' life and teachings.^{[13][14][15][16]} Scholars have correlated the [New Testament](#) accounts with non-Christian historical records to arrive at an [estimated chronology](#) for the major episodes in the life of Jesus.^{[17][6][4][18]}

Most critical historians agree that Jesus was a [Galilean Jewish Rabbi](#) who was regarded as a teacher and [healer](#) in [Judea](#),^[19] that he [was baptized](#) by [John the Baptist](#), and that he was crucified in [Jerusalem](#) on the orders of the [Roman Prefect, Pontius Pilate](#), on the charge of [sedition](#) against the [Roman Empire](#).^[20] Critical [Biblical](#) scholars and historians have offered competing descriptions of Jesus as a self-described [Messiah](#), as the leader of an [apocalyptic](#) movement, as an itinerant sage, as a charismatic healer, and as the founder of an independent religious movement. Most contemporary scholars of the [historical Jesus](#) consider him to have been an independent, charismatic founder

of a Jewish restoration movement, anticipating a future apocalypse.^[21] Other prominent scholars, however, contend that Jesus' "[Kingdom of God](#)" meant radical personal and social transformation instead of a future apocalypse.^[21]

Christians traditionally believe that Jesus was [born of a virgin](#), performed [miracles](#), founded [the Church](#), died sacrificially to achieve [atonement](#), [rose from the dead](#), and [ascended](#) into [heaven](#), from which he [will return](#).^[11] The majority of Christians worship Jesus as the incarnation of God the Son, and "the Second Person of the [Blessed Trinity](#)".^[22] A few Christian groups, however, [reject Trinitarianism](#), wholly or partly, believing it to be non-scriptural.^{[22][23]} Most Christian scholars today present Jesus as the awaited Messiah promised in the [Old Testament](#) and as [God](#),^[24] arguing that he fulfilled many Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.^[25]

Judaism [rejects](#) assertions that Jesus was the awaited Messiah, arguing that he did not fulfill the [Messianic prophecies](#) in the [Tanakh](#).^[26] In [Islam](#), Jesus (in [Arabic](#): عيسى in Islamic usage, commonly transliterated as [Isa](#)) is considered one of [God's](#) important [prophets](#),^{[27][28]} a bringer of [scripture](#), and the product of a virgin birth, but not the victim of crucifixion.^[29] Islam and the [Bahá'í Faith](#) use the title "Messiah" for Jesus,^{[30][31]} but do not teach that he was God incarnate.

Chronology

Although a few scholars have questioned the existence of Jesus as an actual historical figure,^[50] most scholars involved with historical Jesus research believe his existence, but not the supernatural claims associated with him, can be established using documentary and other evidence.^{[51][52][53][54][55][56]} As discussed in the sections immediately below, the estimation of the year of death of Jesus places his lifespan around the beginning of the 1st century AD/CE, in the geographic region of [Roman Judaea](#).^{[57][58][59][60][61]} The New Testament also refers to the [Sea of Galilee](#) which is about 75 miles north of [Jerusalem](#).^[62]

Roman involvement in Judaea began around 63 BC/BCE and by 6 AD/CE Judaea had become a Roman province.^[63] From 26-37 AD/CE [Pontius Pilate](#) was the governor of Roman Judaea.^[64] In this time period, although Roman Judaea was strategically positioned between Asia and Africa, it was not viewed as a critically important province by the Romans.^{[65][66]} At the time the Romans were highly tolerant of other religions and allowed the local populations such as the Jews to practice their own faiths.^[63]

Year of birth

Two independent approaches have been used to estimate the year of the birth of Jesus, one by analyzing the [Nativity](#) accounts in the Gospels of [Luke](#) and [Matthew](#) along with other historical data, the other by working backwards from the estimation of the start of the [ministry of Jesus](#), as also discussed in the next section.^{[6][19]}

In its Nativity account, the Gospel of Matthew associates the birth of Jesus with the reign of [Herod the Great](#), who is generally believed to have died around 4 BC/BCE.^{[19][67]} [Matthew 2:1](#) states that: "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king" and [Luke 1:5](#) mentions the reign of Herod shortly before the birth of Jesus.^[19] Matthew also suggests that Jesus may have been as much as two years old at the time of the visit of the [Magi](#) and hence even older at the time of Herod's death.^[68] But the author of Luke also describes the birth as taking place during the [first census](#) of the Roman provinces of [Syria](#) and [Judaea](#), which is generally believed to have occurred in 6 AD/CE.^[69] Most scholars generally assume a date of birth between 6 and 4 BC/BCE.^[70] Other scholars assume that Jesus was born sometime between 7–2 BC/BCE.^[71]

The year of birth of Jesus has also been estimated in a manner that is independent of the Nativity accounts, by using information in the [Gospel of John](#) to work backwards from the statement in [Luke 3:23](#) that Jesus was "about 30 years of age" at the start of his ministry.^{[4][6]} As discussed in the section below, by combining information from [John 2:13](#) and [John 2:20](#) with the writings of [Flavius Josephus](#), it has been estimated that around 27-29 AD/CE, Jesus was "about thirty years of age".^{[72][73]} Some scholars thus estimate the year 28 AD/CE to be roughly the 32nd birthday of Jesus and the birth year of Jesus to be around 6-4 BC/BCE.^{[4][6][74]}

However, the common [Gregorian calendar](#) method for numbering years, in which the current year is 2011, is based on the decision of a monk [Dionysius](#) in the sixth century, to [count the years](#) from a point of reference (namely, Jesus' birth) which he placed sometime between 2 [BC](#) and 1 [AD](#).^[75] Although Christian feasts related to the Nativity have had specific dates (e.g. December 25 for [Christmas](#)) there is no historical evidence for the exact day or month of the birth of Jesus.^{[76][77][78]}

Analysis of the gospels

The historical-critical method (or higher criticism) is used to examine the Bible for clues about the historical Jesus, whereby sayings and events that are more likely to be genuine in the opinion of scholars are used to construct their portraits of Jesus. Standard historical methods are used to discern the authorship of each book, and its likely date of composition.^[411]

The earliest [extant texts](#) which refer to Jesus are [Paul's](#) letters (mid-1st century), which affirm Jesus' crucifixion. Keulman and Gregory hold that the [Gospel of Thomas](#), a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus, predates the four orthodox gospels, and believe it may have been composed around mid-1st century.^{[412][413]}

Biblical scholars hold that the works describing Jesus were initially communicated by [oral tradition](#), and were not committed to writing until several decades after Jesus' crucifixion. After the original oral stories were written down in Greek, they were transcribed, and later translated into other languages. The books of the New Testament had mostly been written by 100 AD/CE, making them, at least the synoptic gospels, historically relevant.^[414] The Gospel tradition certainly preserves several fragments of Jesus' teaching.^[415] The [Markan priority](#) hypothesis holds that the Gospel of Mark was written first c. 70 AD/CE.^{[416][417][418]} Matthew is placed at being sometime after this date and Luke is thought to have been written between 70 and 100 AD/CE.^{[419][420]} According to the [Q source](#) hypothesis supported by a majority of modern scholars, the gospels were written not by the [four evangelists](#) themselves but derived from other sources.^[411] A minority of prominent scholars, such as J. A. T. Robinson, have maintained that the writers of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John were either apostles and eyewitness to Jesus' ministry and death, or were close to those who had been.^{[421][422][423][423]}

Historical analysis

The impact of Jesus on the course of human history has been significant, affecting Christians, as well as others.^{[426][427]} This impact continues to date on the global culture, and continues to be studied by historians.^[428]

The historical outlook on Jesus relies on [critical analysis of the Bible](#), especially the gospels. Many Biblical scholars have sought to reconstruct Jesus' life in terms of the political, cultural, and religious crises and movements in late 2nd Temple Judaism and in Roman-occupied Palestine, including differences between Galilee and Judaea, and between different sects such as the [Pharisees](#), [Sadducees](#), [Essenes](#) and [Zealots](#),^{[445][446]} and in terms of conflicts among Jews in the context of Roman occupation.

Most scholars hold that the movement Jesus led (and his [eschatology](#)) were apocalyptic, as were the preachings of John the Baptist, but some scholars makes a distinction between John's apocalyptic ministry and Jesus' ethical teachings.^{[447][448]} Some historians argue that Jewish and Roman authorities in Jerusalem were wary of Galilean patriots, many of whom advocated violent resistance to Roman rule.^[15] These arguments contend that as a charismatic leader Jesus was regarded as a potential troublemaker, and was hence executed on political charges.^[15] Jesus' criticism of the Temple, the disturbance he caused there, and his refusal to renounce claims of kingship convinced the Jewish high priest to allow Jesus to be transferred into Roman custody.^{[449][450]}

First century Jewish religious movements

Scholars refer to the religious background of the early 1st century to better reconstruct Jesus' life. Some scholars identify him with one or another group.

[Pharisees](#) were a powerful force in 1st-century Judaea. Early Christians shared several beliefs of the Pharisees, such as resurrection, retribution in the next world, angels, human freedom, and Divine Providence.^[451] After the fall of the Temple, the Pharisee outlook was established in Rabbinic Judaism. Some scholars speculate that Jesus was himself a Pharisee.^[452] In Jesus' day, the two main schools of thought among the Pharisees were the [House of Hillel](#), which had been founded by the eminent [Tanna, Hillel the Elder](#), and the [House of Shammai](#). Jesus' assertion of hypocrisy may have been directed against the stricter members of the House of Shammai, although he also agreed with their teachings on divorce.^{[Mk 10:1–12][453]} Jesus also commented on the House of Hillel's teachings ([Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a](#)) concerning the [greatest commandment](#)^[Mk 12:28–34] and the [Golden Rule](#).^[Mt 7:12] Historians do not know whether there were Pharisees in Galilee during Jesus' life, or what they would have been like.^[454]

[Sadducees](#) were particularly powerful in Jerusalem. They accepted the written Law only, rejecting the traditional interpretations accepted by the Pharisees, such as belief in retribution in an afterlife, resurrection of the body, angels, and spirits. After Jesus caused a disturbance at the Temple, it was to have been the Sadducees who had him arrested and turned over to the Romans for execution. After the fall of Jerusalem, they disappeared from history.^[455]

[Essenes](#) were apocalyptic [ascetics](#), one of the three (or four) major Jewish schools of the time, though they were not mentioned in the New Testament.^[456] Some scholars theorize that Jesus was an Essene, or close to them. Among these scholars is [Pope Benedict XVI](#), who supposes in his book on Jesus that "it appears that not only John the Baptist, but possibly Jesus and his family as well, were close to the Qumran community."^[457]

[Zealots](#) were a revolutionary party opposed to Roman rule, one of those parties that, according to Josephus inspired the fanatical stand in Jerusalem that led to its destruction in the year 70 AD/CE.^[458] Luke identifies Simon, a disciple, as a "zealot", which might mean a member of the Zealot party (which would therefore have been already in existence in the lifetime of Jesus) or a zealous person.^[458] The notion that Jesus himself was a Zealot does not do justice to the earliest Synoptic material describing him.^[459]

A flawed summary from [jesuscentral.com](#):

Jesus (also called Christ which means king or Messiah) was born in Israel 2000 years ago. Modern civilization marks his birth by dividing time B.C. (before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini - or the year of our Lord). For his first thirty years, Jesus lived a traditional Jewish life, working as a carpenter. During this time, all of Israel was under Caesar's Roman dictatorship, including Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, and Nazareth, where he was raised.

In his thirties, Jesus began his public teaching and display of recorded miracles, yet still never travelled more than 200 miles from his birthplace. Over a three year period, despite his efforts to keep a low profile, Jesus' reputation spread nation wide. The Roman governors and rulers of Israel's provinces and the leaders of the Jewish people (the religious counsels) took note of him. Jesus' key messages included:

- [God loves you and is with you](#)
- [Love one another](#)
- [Immense value of each person](#)
- [Good news: kingdom of God has come to earth](#)
- [Reality of judgment to heaven or hell](#)
- [God forgives those who ask](#)

Jewish views

[Judaism](#) rejects the idea of Jesus being God, or a person of a Trinity, or a mediator to God. Judaism also holds that Jesus is not the [Messiah](#), arguing that he had not fulfilled the [Messianic prophecies](#) in the [Tanakh](#) nor embodied the personal qualifications of the Messiah. According to Jewish tradition, there were no prophets after [Malachi](#), who delivered his prophecies about 420 BC/BCE.^[503]

The [Talmud](#) includes stories which some consider accounts of [Jesus in the Talmud](#), although there is a spectrum^[504] from scholars, such as [Maier](#) (1978), who considers that only the accounts with the name [Yeshu](#) יֵשׁוּ refer to the Christian Jesus, and that these are late redactions, to scholars such as [Klausner](#) (1925), who suggested that accounts related to Jesus in the Talmud may contain traces of the [historical Jesus](#). However the majority of contemporary historians disregard this material as providing information on the historical Jesus.^[432] Many contemporary Talmud scholars view these as comments on the relationship between Judaism and Christians or other sectarians, rather than comments on the historical Jesus.^{[505][506]}

The [Mishneh Torah](#), an authoritative work of [Jewish law](#), provides the last established consensus view of the Jewish community, in [Hilkhot Melakhim](#) 11:10–12 that Jesus is a "stumbling block" who makes "the majority of the world err to serve a divinity besides God".

According to Conservative Judaism, Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah have "crossed the line out of the Jewish community".^[508] Reform Judaism, the modern progressive movement, states "For us in the Jewish community anyone who claims that Jesus is their savior is no longer a Jew and is an [apostate](#)".^[509]

Judaism's worldview and Jesus

Indivisibility of God

In Judaism, the idea of God as a [duality](#) or trinity is heretical — it is even considered by some [polytheistic](#).^[8] According to Judaic beliefs, the [Torah](#) rules out a trinitarian God in [Deuteronomy](#) (6:4): "Hear Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

In his book *A History of the Jews*, [Paul Johnson](#) describes the [schism between Jews and Christians](#) caused by a divergence from this principle: To the question, Was Jesus God or man?, the Christians therefore answered: both. After 70 AD, their answer was unanimous and increasingly emphatic. This made a complete breach with Judaism inevitable.^[9]

Fundamentally, Judaism believes that God, as the creator of time, space, energy and matter, is beyond them, and cannot be born or die, or literally have a son. Judaism teaches that it is heretical for any man to claim to be God, part of God, or the literal son of God. The [Jerusalem Talmud](#) ([Ta'anit](#) 2:1) states explicitly: "if a man claims to be God, he is a liar."

In the 12th century, the preeminent Jewish scholar [Maimonides](#) codified core principles of Judaism, writing "[God], the Cause of all, is one. This does not mean one as in one of a pair, nor one like a species (which encompasses many individuals), nor one as in an object that is made up of many elements, nor as a single simple object that is infinitely divisible. Rather, God is a unity unlike any other possible unity."^[10] Some Jewish scholars note that the common poetic Jewish expression, "Our Father in Heaven", was used literally by Jesus to refer to God as "his Father in Heaven" (cf. [Lord's Prayer](#)).^[11]

Judaism's view of the Messiah

Judaism's view of the Messiah differs substantially from the Christian idea of the Messiah. In the Jewish account, the Messiah's task is to bring in the Messianic age, a one-time event, and a presumed messiah who dies before completing the task (i.e., compelling all of Israel to walk in the way of Torah, repairing the breaches in observance, fighting the wars of God, building the Temple in its place, gathering in the dispersed exiles of Israel) is not the Messiah. Maimonides states, "But if he did not succeed in all this or was killed, he is definitely not the Moshiah promised in the Torah... and God only appointed him in order to test the masses."^[12]

Jews believe that the Messiah will fulfill the messianic prophecies of the Prophets [Isaiah](#) and [Ezekiel](#).^{[13][14][15][16]} According to Isaiah, the Messiah will be a paternal descendant of King David^[17] via King Solomon.^[18] He is expected to return the Jews to their homeland and [rebuild the Temple](#), reign as King, and usher in an [era of peace](#).^[5]

and understanding where "the knowledge of God" fills the earth,^[6] leading the nations to "end up recognizing the wrongs they did Israel".^[19] Ezekiel states the Messiah will redeem the Jews.^[20]

Therefore, any Judaic view of Jesus *per se* is influenced by the fact that Jesus lived while the [Second Temple](#) was standing, and not while the Jews were exiled. He never reigned as King, and there was no subsequent era of peace or great knowledge. Jesus died without completing or even accomplishing part of any of the messianic tasks, instead promising a [second coming](#). Rather than being redeemed, the Jews were subsequently exiled from Israel. These discrepancies were noted by Jewish scholars who were contemporaries of Jesus, as later pointed out by [Nahmanides](#), who in 1263 observed that Jesus was rejected as the Messiah by the rabbis of his time.^[21]

Further, Judaism sees Christian claims that Jesus is the textual messiah of the [Hebrew Bible](#) as being based on mistranslations^{[22][23]} and Jesus did not fulfill the [Jewish Messiah qualifications](#).^[24]

However, not all traditional rabbinical authorities viewed Jesus in negative terms. Rabbi [Jacob Emden](#) considered Jesus a righteous man, who brought the light of faith and morality to the world, but not a Messiah. Rabbi [Elijah Benamozegh](#), a prominent Italian Kabbalist, also very positively viewed Jesus and Christianity in general, especially Catholicism.^[citation needed]

Prophecy and Jesus

According to the [Torah](#) ([Deuteronomy 13:1-5](#) and [18:18-22](#)), the criteria for a person to be considered a [prophet](#) or speak for God in Judaism are that he must follow the God of Israel (and no other god); he must not describe God differently than He is known to be from [Scripture](#); he must not advocate change to God's word or state that God has changed His mind and wishes things that contradict His already-stated eternal word; and the things he does speak of must come to pass.^[25]

Additionally, there are two types of "false prophet" recognized in the Hebrew Bible ([Tanakh](#)): the one who claims to be a prophet in the name of [idolatry](#), and the one who claims to be a prophet in the name of the God of Israel, but declares that any word or commandment ([mitzvah](#)) which God has said [no longer applies](#), or makes false statements in the name of God.^[26] As traditional Judaism believes that God's word is true eternally, one who claims to speak in God's name but diverges in any way from what God Himself has said, logically cannot be inspired by Divine authority. Deuteronomy 13:1 states simply, "Be careful to observe only that which I enjoin upon you; neither add to it nor take away from it."^{[27][28][29]}

Even if someone who appears to be a prophet can perform supernatural acts or signs, no prophet or dreamer can contradict the laws already stated in the Bible.^{[30][31]} For two thousand years, Jews rejected the claim that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the dogmatic claims about him made by the church fathers - that he was born of a virgin, was the son of God, was part of a divine Trinity, and was resurrected after his death.

Thus, any divergence from the tenets of Biblical Judaism espoused by Jesus would disqualify him from being considered a prophet in Judaism. This was the view adopted by Jesus' contemporaries, as according to rabbinical tradition as stated in the [Talmud](#) ([Sotah](#) 48b) "when [Malachi](#) died the Prophecy departed from Israel." As Malachi lived centuries before Jesus it is clear that the rabbis of Talmudic times did not view Jesus as a divinely inspired prophet.

Jesus and salvation

Judaism does not share the Christian concept of [salvation](#), as it does not believe people are born in a "state of sin".^[32] Rather, a person who sins can repent of the sin and, in most cases, have it forgiven.^[33]

Authoritative texts of Judaism that mention Jesus

The Talmud

Various works of classical Jewish rabbinic literature are thought to contain references to Jesus, including some uncensored manuscripts of the Babylonian [Talmud](#) (redacted roughly before 600 CE) and the classical [midrash](#) literature written between 250 CE and 700 CE. There is a spectrum of scholarly views on how many of these references are actually to Jesus.^[34]

In the 13th century [Jehiel ben Joseph](#) of Paris wrote that [Yeshu](#) in rabbinic literature was a disciple of Joshua ben Perachiah, and not to be confused with Jesus (*Vikkuah Rabbenu Yehiel mi-Paris*). [Nahmanides](#) too makes this point, and [Rabbis](#) Jacob ben Meir ([Rabbeinu Tam](#)) (12th century), [Jehiel Heilprin](#) (17th century) and [Jacob Emden](#) support this view.^[35] In addition, the information cited from the [Munich](#), [Florence](#) and other manuscripts in support of the identification are late comments written centuries after the original redaction of the Talmud, citing discrepancies between events mentioned in association with *Yeshu* and the time of Jesus' life.^[citation needed] According to some^[who?] the oppression by King Janneus mentioned in the Talmud occurred about 87 BCE, which would put the events of the story about a century before Jesus. The *Yeshu* who taught Jacob of Sechania would have lived a century after Jesus. And differences between accounts of the deaths of *Yeshu* and Jesus. The forty day waiting period before execution is absent from the [Christian](#) tradition and moreover Jesus did not have connections with the government. Jesus was crucified not stoned. Jesus was executed in [Jerusalem](#) not [Lod](#). Jesus did not burn his food in public and moreover the *Yeshu* who did this corresponds to [Manasseh of Judah](#) in the [Shulkhan Arukh](#). Jesus did not make incisions in his flesh, nor was he caught by hidden observers.^[original research?]

In the later [Toledot](#) *Yeshu*, the name of [Yeshu](#) is taken to mean [yimach shemo](#).^[36]

In all cases of its use, the references to *Yeshu* are associated with acts or behaviour that are seen as leading Jews away from Judaism to [minuth](#) (a term usually translated as "heresy" or "apostasy"). Historically the portrayals of Jesus in Jewish literature were used as an excuse for [antisemitism](#) among Christians.^[37]

Modern scholarship on the Talmud has a spectrum^[38] of views from Klausner, Herford and Schäfer^[39] who see traces of a [historical Jesus](#) in the Talmud, to the views of Maier, and Neusner who consider that there are little or no historical traces and texts have been applied to Jesus in later editing, and others such as Boyarin who argue that Jesus in the Talmud is a literary device used by Rabbis to comment on their relationship to and with early Christians.^[40] [Nahmanides](#), in his dispute with [Pablo Christiani](#) in 1263,^[41] and *The Kuzari* by Rabbi [Yehuda Halevi](#) (c.1075-1141),^[42] understood these references in Talmud as referring to Jesus of Nazareth and based on them believed that Jesus of Nazareth lived 130 years prior to the date that [Christians](#) believe he lived, contradicting the [Gospels'](#) account regarding the [chronology of Jesus](#).

Examples

The primary references to [Yeshu](#) are found only in [uncensored](#) texts of the [Babylonian Talmud](#) and the [Tosefta](#). The Vatican's [papal bull](#) issued in 1554 censored the Talmud and other Jewish texts, resulting in the removal of references to *Yeshu*. No known manuscript of the [Jerusalem Talmud](#) makes mention of the name although one translation (Herford) has added it to [Avodah Zarah](#) 2:2 to align it with similar text of *Chullin* 2:22 in the Tosefta. All later usages of the term *Yeshu* are derived from these primary references. In the [Munich](#) (1342 CE), [Paris](#), and [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#) manuscripts of the Talmud, the appellation *Ha-Notzri* is added to the last mention of *Yeshu* in [Sanhedrin](#) 107b and *Sotah* 47a as well as to the occurrences in *Sanhedrin* 43a, *Sanhedrin* 103a, [Berachot](#) 17b and *Avodah Zarah* 16b-17a. [Student](#),^[43] Zindler and McKinsey^[44] *Ha-Notzri* is not found in other early pre-censorship partial manuscripts (the [Florence](#), [Hamburg](#) and [Karlsruhe](#)) where these cover the passages in question.

Although *Notzri* does not appear in the Tosefta, by the time the Babylonian Talmud was produced, *Notzri* had become the standard [Hebrew](#) word for [Christian](#) and *Yeshu Ha-Notzri* had become the conventional rendition of

"Jesus the Nazarene" in Hebrew. For example, by 1180 CE the term *Yeshu Ha-Notzri* can be found in the [Maimonides' Mishneh Torah](#) (*Hilchos Melachim* 11:4, uncensored version).

Maimonides' Mishneh Torah

[Maimonides](#) (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) lamented the pains that Jews felt as a result of new faiths that attempted to supplant Judaism, specifically Christianity and Islam. Referring to Jesus, he wrote:

"Even Jesus the Nazarene who imagined that he would be Messiah and was killed by the court, was already prophesied by Daniel. So that it was said, "And the members of the outlaws of your nation would be carried to make a (prophetic) vision stand. And they stumbled" (Daniel 11.14). Because, is there a greater stumbling-block than this one? So that all of the prophets spoke that the Messiah redeems Israel, and saves them, and gathers their banished ones, and strengthens their commandments. And this one caused (nations) to destroy Israel by sword, and to scatter their remnant, and to humiliate them, and to exchange the Torah, and to make the majority of the world err to serve a divinity besides God."^[45]

Nonetheless, Maimonides continued,

"But the human mind has no power to reach the thoughts of the Creator, for his thoughts and ways are unlike ours. And all these things of Jesus the Nazarene, and of (Muhammad) the Ishmaelite who stood after him – there is no (purpose) but to straighten out the way for the King Messiah, and to restore all the world to serve God together. So that it is said, "Because then I will turn toward the nations (giving them) a clear lip, to call all of them in the name of God and to serve God (shoulder to shoulder as) one shoulder." ([Zephaniah](#) 3:9). How is this? The entire world had become filled with the issues of the anointed one and of the Torah and the Laws, and these issues had spread out unto faraway islands and among many nations uncircumcised in the heart, and they discuss these issues and the Torah's laws. These say: These Laws were true but are already defunct in these days, and do not rule for the following generations; whereas the other ones say: There are secret layers in them and they are not to be treated literally, and the Messiah had come and revealed their secret meanings. But when the anointed king will truly rise and succeed and will be raised and uplifted, they all immediately turn about and know that their fathers inherited falsehood, and their prophets and ancestors led them astray." (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:10–12.)^[45]

Alternative views

Outside of the above-described authoritative texts common to Judaism, a small minority of rabbis hold a more positive view of Jesus, arguing that he himself did not abandon Judaism and/or that he benefited non-Jews. Among these are [Jacob Emden](#),^{[48][49]} [Moses Mendelssohn](#) (as well as some other religious thinkers of the [Haskalah](#) movement), and [Elijah Benamozegh](#).^{[50][51]}

A few Orthodox rabbis today, including [Irving Greenberg](#) hold similar views. While these authors present positions which vary from mainstream views in Judaism, they still do not consider Jesus to be the [Jewish Messiah](#).^[52]

The Impact of Jesus on Religion and Politics

by Abdul H. Manraj

Introduction

Jesus is probably the most misunderstood religious personality in the history of the world. He never claimed divinity and was as human as the prophets who preceded him. From a theological perspective, arguments can be made to support any religious dogma regardless of which denomination one subscribes to, and religious texts can be interpreted in any number of ways, some of them quite nebulous, to bolster a particular argument or belief.

That being the case, this article will approach the above subject from a historical perspective, and provide some substantial evidence that is quite irrefutable, using both historical data as well as sacred texts to defend the

postulation regarding Jesus. The information presented below aims to prove that Jesus was no more than a revered prophet of God, and his “second coming” is a myth. Jesus confirmed his humanity when he reportedly said: “I can of mine own self do nothing...”(John 5:30) Nevertheless, millions (possibly billions) of people in the world today have a vested interest in the “second coming” of Jesus, the very foundation of their belief is riding on this prophecy. As such, his elevation to godly status has some profound implications not only on religion but also on politics, with dire consequences for the future of all humanity.

The Status of Jesus

Jesus was born a Jew, and since he did not preach a new religion or change any laws (Matthew 5:17), he died as a Jew, supposedly betrayed by his own people, who (according to the New Testament) said: “...His blood be on us, and on our children.”(Matthew 27:25) Jesus’ disciples believed that he was the “Messiah” or “Anointed One.” Other titles applied to Jesus were Prophet and Rabbi. According to both the Bible and the Quran (the divine book of Muslims), Jesus came into being through a miraculous virgin birth, i.e., he was born without the intervention of a human father. Both religious texts concur that God has the power to make such miracles happen.

The two texts differ significantly over Jesus’ status. Whereas the New Testament elevated Jesus to divinity, the Quran emphasized his humanity, comparing his creation to that of Adam. Jesus, the son of Mary, delivered the same message as the prophets before him, i.e., “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.”(Deuteronomy 6:4) Neither the word “Trinity” nor this doctrine is explicitly found in the New Testament. In fact, the ideology developed over several centuries after the death of Jesus. There are many factors that led to the outcome of the Trinity concept, some of which will be briefly addressed in this article.

Pauline Christianity

It is believed that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, located in present day Israel. All of the prophets mentioned in the Bible (and Quran) originated from various areas of the Middle East. Paul, not Jesus, is primarily responsible for the current Christian creed based on the doctrine of the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Saul was a Jew who reportedly persecuted the early Christians. His name was later changed to Paul, probably because the name Saul was associated with Judaism. One day on his way to Damascus, Paul had a vision that resulted in his conversion. Following this incident, Paul became the most ardent missionary of Christianity.(Noss 466-467) In his book “The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History,” Michael Hart lists Muhammad first, followed by Paul, and then Jesus. Hart proposes that the honor for the spread of Christianity has to be shared between Paul and Jesus. Apparently Paul won because he wrote more books of the Bible than any other author, whereas Jesus did not write a single word. It should also be noted that Paul never even met Jesus.

Since Jesus did not write any of his teachings, historians are generally in agreement that the writings that have come down to us in the New Testament have been amplified with the predispositions of the early Christians, thus displacing the original teachings of Jesus.(Noss 446) More than three centuries after Jesus was reportedly crucified, there were many controversies and minutiae surrounding his status. Emperor Constantine called the first ecumenical council of the Christian church in ancient Nicaea (now Iznik, Turkey) in 325 CE to resolve the issue. He hoped that a general council would solve the problem created in the Eastern church by Arianism, a “heresy” first proposed by Arius of Alexandria, which affirmed that Jesus was not divine but a created being. The council condemned Arius and incorporated the non-scriptural word *homoousios* (of one substance) into what later became known as the Nicene Creed, signifying the absolute equality of the Son (Jesus) with the Father (God). Emperor Constantine then exiled Arius. To differ from the official and final version of this new theology – which essentially stated that Jesus was God incarnate – was blasphemy.(“Encyclopedia Britannica Online”)

Christianity later became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Theodosius, and there were attempts at formalization and uniformity within the church regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. This did not stop the controversy, and there were more ecumenical council debates between western and eastern Christians for generations. Western Christian theology eventually dominated. The result was that Christians, particularly in the

East, who disagreed with the newly mandated doctrine of the Trinity, were ostracized and persecuted. In some cases, those who rejected the new doctrine were put to death as the concept eventually took hold.

The Europeans were immersed in paganism when Jesus was born, and it took about eight centuries before all of Europe finally accepted Christianity as their creed. During such a lengthy period, it was only natural that some pagan beliefs and practices were incorporated into the new religion. For example, December 25th was a popular Roman holiday that celebrated the winter solstice as a symbol of the resurgence of the sun, which heralded the rebirth of spring and summer. The birth of the sun became synonymous with the birth of the Son of God, which is now commonly accepted as Jesus' birthday. The actual birthday of Jesus cannot be precisely determined, as Christians did not begin to reckon time before and after the birth of Jesus until about six centuries after he was born.(Noss 450) Another example of a pre-Christian ritual is the veneration of the evergreen tree in western and northern Europe, particularly in Germany during pagan times, so the "Christmas tree" was added to the birthday celebration of Jesus.

For thousands of years prior to the birth of Jesus, the Indo-Europeans had developed a tripartite ideology. At the highest level was a "sky god," who sees all human activity from his heavenly abode. The second part of heaven reflected heroic warriors and raiders supported by a war/thunder god. The third part of this Indo-European belief was the pursuit of happiness – a universal human trait.(Winn 4-5) This tripartite scheme was prevalent in many aspects of Indo-European culture, and is evident even today. Examples include many nations' flags that are made up of three colors, and governments that are divided into three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial.

Pre-Christian Europeans ritually sacrificed humans to their pagan gods.(Winn 45-47) As the Europeans gradually started to move away from paganism and adopt their newly discovered Middle Eastern religion – Christianity – the idolatrous tradition of human sacrifice blended harmoniously with the new theology – the sacrifice of God's only begotten son for the sins of all humanity. The tripartite hierarchy that was so embedded in Indo-European culture for thousands of years played an influential role in the development of a doctrine based on a triune God, viz., God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The Second Coming of Jesus and Armageddon

Armageddon is mentioned in the Bible only once: "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."(Revelation 16:16) The Book of Revelation is also known as the Apocalypse of John, and is the last book of the New Testament. It is the only book in the New Testament that is apocalyptic in nature.("Encyclopedia Britannica Online") Armageddon and the second coming of Jesus have been refined into a terminology known as "The Rapture," even though the word "rapture" does not appear anywhere in the Bible. It is difficult to decipher and coherently follow the chronology of events that will lead to the expected Rapture, since the Book of Revelation (although attributed to John) seems to be a collection of units by various unknown authors toward the end of the 1st century CE. The "Rapture theory" was developed using books from both the New Testament as well as the Old Testament, in particular Daniel and Ezekiel. According to the Rapture theory, an anti-Christ (who represents the Devil) will emerge and rule the earth, and there will be much tribulation. Jesus, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, will descend with armies from heaven upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his (Jesus) mouth will be a sharp sword, and with it he will smite the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.(Revelation 19:13-15)

Christians are not the only group expecting the second coming of Jesus; Muslims are also on the lookout for his return. While the Quran states that Jesus survived the crucifixion, it says nothing about his second coming – though Jesus' death is implied at some later stage in his life.(Q5:117) Muslims supposedly derive the "second coming of Jesus" theory from sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad, documented more than 200 years after his death. It is interesting that Muhammad, who claimed to be the last of God's prophets, would have mentioned Jesus' return. As Islam spread in the Middle East, the Arabs generally belonged to two groups: Christians and idolaters. No doubt the stories about the second coming of Jesus were circulating. Some of the early Muslims, no less adept at embellishment than their Christian counterparts, took the same stories and gave them an "Islamic twist." Christians are expecting Jesus to return, destroy an anti-Christ, and save a limited number of Christians who accept him as their savior. The majority of Muslims in the world today believe that Jesus will return and kill an anti-Christ, and save the Muslims who will be going through turbulent times under the yoke of this anti-Christ. At the same time, Jesus will supposedly clear up all of the confusion over his status, i.e., announce to the world that he (Jesus) is only human.

Besides Jesus, Muslims are also expecting another leader known as “the Mahdi,” who will appear just before Jesus. This “Mahdi” is the equivalent of Elijah in the Bible, who is supposed to appear prior to Jesus. There is ongoing speculation regarding the identity of the anti-Christ, and the search for this elusive devil continues.

The concept of Armageddon predates Christianity and Islam. Zarathustra, founder of Zoroastrianism, was a Persian, who it is believed was the first prophet to preach monotheism. Estimates of Zarathustra's birth range from 660 BCE to 6,000 BCE. Zarathustra preached that there was a supreme God (Ahura Mazda), and an evil spirit (Ahriman). There was also a serpent king (Zohak) under the influence of Ahriman. The apocalyptic process is remarkably similar in Zoroastrianism, a battle foreshadows the end of the world, then there is a waiting period followed by a second battle that vanquishes all evil, followed by a peaceful era. Zarathustra's version of Armageddon is derived from an even older version in Indo-European myth. (Winn 209-211)

Current Religious and Political Implications

Many evangelical preachers today allude to our tumultuous times, and advocate that the current global situation is ripe for the second coming of Jesus. TV evangelists reach an estimated 60 million regular viewers (a conservative figure) in the United States, who (according to a Nielsen survey) believe that nuclear war is inevitable because the Bible predicts that planet earth will be destroyed by fire. (Halsell 11) These Christian evangelists are staunch supporters of Israel. They believe that an alliance with Israel is imperative so that they can do God's work, i.e., help to create a chain of events that is necessary in that region (based on their interpretation of the scripture) for the second coming of Jesus. These Jews and Christians are strange bedfellows indeed, given that according to Christian doctrine, Jews (along with every other non-Christian in the world) are doomed to damnation unless they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Fundamentalist Christians constitute a sizeable voting block in the United States, and no sane politician can ignore them. These fundamentalists exercise considerable sway over the U.S Congress and Executive Branch. (Halsell 163-167) They also influence U.S foreign policy in the Middle East, pressuring the U.S government to perform a delicate balancing act. Since evangelists and their followers believe that peace in the Middle East is against God's will and counter productive to the emergence of an anti-Christ and the return of Jesus, politicians have to be careful not to appear too much in favor of peace while at the same time try to prevent a global conflagration from igniting in that volatile region of the world. There was a recent media report that one such evangelist – Jack Van Impe – claimed that the Office of Public Liaison for the White House, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, contacted him for advice regarding the Middle East.

Conclusion

Throughout history, millions of people have been annihilated due to religious polemic. God's prophets all preached a consistent message, essentially for us to do good works given that we will all be held individually accountable on the Day of Judgment, based on the universal adage: “as you sow, so shall you reap.” People continuously engage in rabid arguments and violent conflict over the most esoteric of religious differences, sometimes even within the same religion, even though the commonalities among the monotheistic faiths far outweigh the theological disparities. Jews, Christians, and Muslims – or more precisely various sects within the three religions – believe that they have exclusive rights to heaven.

The majority of Jews, Christians, and Muslims are awaiting a savior: the Jews their Messiah, and Christians and Muslims the return of Jesus. It is incomprehensible that the gentle and peaceful Jesus, who reportedly said: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9), and who advised people who are smitten on one cheek to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29), would descend from heaven to save a select group and eradicate millions of innocent people. The “divinity / second coming of Jesus” theory may arguably qualify as the biggest hoax ever perpetrated on mankind, and there is a great danger that the “Rapture” or “Armageddon” could manifest itself as a “self-fulfilling prophecy.” Although a minority, hardliners from the three Abrahamic faiths – Jews, Christians, and Muslims – are trying to create an atmosphere of spiraling violence that could possibly lead to massive destruction and conflagration on our planet. If they get their way, there will be no savior on the horizon with a sword protruding from his mouth (somewhat paradoxical), but hundreds of millions of very disappointed – and possibly dead – people.

What Price the Uniqueness of Jesus?

To wrench Jesus out of his Jewish world destroys Jesus and destroys Christianity.

by Anthony J. Saldarini

When I was growing up in St. Kevin's Parish in the Dorchester section of Boston in the 1940s and '50s, Jesus was unquestionably a Christian. Even more strangely, in Germany during the Nazi era Jesus was an Aryan Christian. How did a first-century Galilean Jew become a Christian and, for some, an Aryan Christian at that?

Before we laugh at this foolishness from the supposed superior viewpoint of the late 20th century, we should remember that we have not one word written by Jesus and not one contemporary account of his activities. Instead, we have four late-first-century interpretations of Jesus: the Gospels. Each demands and has received constant reinterpretation. Though the risk of misinterpreting Jesus is great, every generation has no choice but to try to make sense of the Gospels.

We necessarily interpret as we read, but not all interpretations are created equal, despite the claims of some postmodern thinkers. A Christian Jesus is a parochial, self-serving myth and an Aryan Jesus a perverse one. But why then have Christians so persistently thought of Jesus as a Christian and resisted admitting the obvious, that Jesus was a Jew? Answer: the pervasive problem of uniqueness.

All religious traditions seek to present themselves as somehow special, better or primary, as irreplaceable or unique. For Christians this means that either Jesus as a person or his teachings and actions must stand out from his historical setting. For centuries the theological claim that Jesus is divine sufficed. In our empirical world of science and history, many Christian scholars take another tack; they seek to make Jesus dissimilar from the Judaism of his day and from the Greco-Roman world in which it was set.

As is often the case, contemporary historical and theological conflicts have their roots in the fertile scholarship of 19th-century Germany. The names Ferdinand Baur (1792–1860) and Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) may not immediately leap to mind, but a brief sketch of their activities will help illuminate Christian biases then and today.

Baur argued successfully that early Christianity had originated historically within Judaism and, less convincingly, that all of early Christian history reflected a struggle between a Jewish wing (led by Peter) and a gentile wing (led by Paul) until a synthesis was achieved. Subsequent scholarship has established that Paul was much more Jewish, and the conflicts among the early followers of Jesus much more complex, than Baur thought. But his fundamental point, the Jewish matrix of Christianity, endures.

A Jesus who taught like a Jew and an early Christian community that looked like a Jewish sect troubled many 19th-century German Lutheran scholars, who preferred to envision a Jesus who taught a new and unique doctrine that overthrew the established tradition. In reaction to Baur, Albrecht Ritschl "solved" the problem by attacking the Jews. For him, Jesus did not reform or transform Judaism, he condemned it. Jesus the Jew, in Ritschl's view, transcended Judaism by purifying Christianity of its Jewish elements. From the middle of the 19th century until World War II, numerous German scholars, including Adolf Harnack and Rudolf Bultmann, followed Ritschl's lead in one way or another. None were Nazis, but reading them after the Holocaust leaves us with an eerie sensation.

Ritschl protected the uniqueness of Jesus and extricated him from his Jewish setting by replacing the Jewish Jesus with a Romantic Jesus who had a supernatural, ineffable relationship with God, a relationship that superseded all historical influences. Deep personal relationships are the stuff of modern theology and spirituality, but separated from the weave and grit of historical reality, the personal Jesus quickly devolves into a personal projection disconnected from community and culture.

So we must face the crucial question: Does Jesus the Jew—as a Jew—have any impact on Christian theology and on Jewish-Christian relations? Or is Jesus' life as a Jew just accidental? After all, he had to be born something: Incan or

Ethiopian, Mongolian or whatever. Is Jesus' Jewishness superseded by his role as Christ, the Messiah (the "Anointed One"), sent by God to save all nations?

To wrench Jesus out of his Jewish world destroys Jesus and destroys Christianity, the religion that grew out of his teachings. Even Jesus' most familiar role as Christ is a Jewish role. If Christians leave the concrete realities of Jesus' life and of the history of Israel in favor of a mythic, universal, spiritual Jesus and an otherworldly kingdom of God, they deny their origins in Israel, their history, and the God who has loved and protected Israel and the church. They cease to interpret the actual Jesus sent by God and remake him in their own image and likeness. The dangers are obvious. If Christians violently wrench Jesus out of his natural, ethnic and historical place within the people of Israel, they open the way to doing equal violence to Israel, the place and people of Jesus. This is a lesson of history that haunts us all at the end of the 20th century.

["What Price the Uniqueness of Jesus"](#) by Anthony J. Saldarini originally appeared in *Bible Review*, Jun 1999, 17.



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HaGaon Rav Amram ben Sheshna

By: [Louis Ginzberg](#) from *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*

Head of the Sura Academy; died about 875. He was a pupil of Naṭronai II., Gaon of Sura, and was exceptionally honored with the title of [Gaon](#) within the lifetime of his teacher. Upon Naṭronai's death, about 857, the full title and dignities of the gaonate were conferred upon Amram, and he held them until his death. He is the author of about 120 responsa (the greater part published in Salonica, 1792, in the collection entitled "Sha'are Zedek") touching almost every department of Jewish jurisprudence. They are of great value in affording an insight into Amram's personality as well as into the religious conditions among the Jews of that period. The following decisions will serve in illustration: Interest may not be exacted even from non-Jews, nor even such minor profits as the Talmud designates as **אבק ריבית** ("the dust of interest"), these being allowed only when customary in non-Jewish business circles ("Sha'are Zedek," iv. 2, 20, 40). It is characteristic of Amram's method to avoid extreme rigor; thus he decides that a slave who has embraced Judaism, but desires to postpone the necessary circumcision until he feels strong enough for it, is not to be hurried (*ib.* iv. 6, 11). He combats superstition, and places himself almost in opposition to the Talmud, when he protests that there is no sense in fasting on account of bad dreams, since the true nature of dreams is not known (Ṭur, Oraḥ Ḥayyim, § 568). Amram's rules concerning the methodology of the Talmud are of considerable value (Mueller, "Maftaḥ," p. 123).

But the most important work of Amram, which marks him as one of the most prominent of the geonim before Saadia, is his "Prayer-book," the so-called "Siddur Rab Amram." Amram was the first to arrange a complete liturgy for use in synagogue and home. His book forms the foundation both of the Spanish-Portuguese and of the German-Polish liturgies, and has exerted great influence upon Jewish religious practise and ceremonial for more than a thousand years, an influence which to some extent is still felt at the present day. For Amram did not content himself with giving the mere text of the prayers, but in a species of running commentary added very many Talmudical and gaonic regulations relating to them and their allied ceremonies. His "Prayer-book," which was made familiar by the many extracts quoted from it by the liturgical writers of the Middle Ages, and which served as the model for Saadia's and Maimonides' own

prayer rituals, was published complete for the first time in Warsaw, in the year 6185, by N. N. Coronel, under the title, "Seder Rab Amram Gaon." The work as published is composed of two parts. The second part containing the *seliḥot* (propitiatory prayers) and *pizmonim* (liturgical poems) for the month of Elul, for New Year and the Day of Atonement, is certainly not the work of Amram, but appears to belong to a much later period. Even the first portion, which contains the prayers proper, is full of interpolations, some of which, as the "Q̄edushah" (Sanctification) for private prayer, are evidently later additions in the manuscripts. But not much weight can be attached even to portions of the book which are specifically given under the name of Amram; many of the explanations are certainly not by him, but by the academical copyists who appended his name to them, speaking of him in the third person. These explanations of the prayers make no reference to any authorities later than the following: Naṭronai II., Amram's teacher (17 times), Shalom, Naṭronai's predecessor in the gaonate (7 times), Judah, Paltoi, Zadok, and Moses, geonim before Amram (once each) Cohen Z̄edeḳ (twice), Nahshon and Z̄emaḥ, contemporaries of Amram (twice each), and Nathan of unknown date. The only authority mentioned of later date than Amram is Saadia (p. 4b). This indicates that the additions to the text of the prayers must have originated in Amram's time. Certainty on this head, however, can only be obtained by a comparison of the printed text with the manuscripts; that of Almanzi, according to the specimens given by Luzzatto, varies considerably from the printed text. Israel ben Todros (1305) mentions some *azharot* as having been composed by Amram; but no trace of these can now be found (see Neubauer, in "Jew. Quart. Rev." vi. 703).

L. G.

Geonim

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

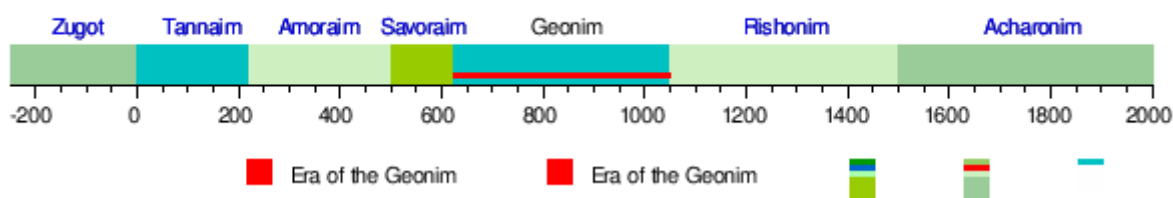
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For rabbis of different epochs bearing the "Gaon" title see [Gaon \(Hebrew\)](#).

Geonim ([Hebrew](#): גאונים; also [transliterated](#) *Gaonim*) were the presidents of the two great [Babylonian, Talmudic Academies](#) of [Sura](#) and [Pumbedita](#), in the [Abbasid Caliphate](#), and were the generally accepted spiritual leaders of the Jewish community world wide in the early [medieval](#) era, in contrast to the *Resh Galuta* ([Exilarch](#)) who wielded secular authority over the Jews in Islamic lands.

Geonim is the plural of גאון (*Gaon*), which means "pride" or "splendour" in [Biblical Hebrew](#) and since the 19th century "genius" as in modern [Hebrew](#). As a title of a Babylonian college president it meant something like "His Excellency."

The *Geonim* played a prominent and decisive role in the transmission and teaching of [Torah](#) and [Jewish law](#). They taught [Talmud](#) and decided on issues on which no ruling had been rendered during the period of the Talmud.



The period of the Geonim began in 589 ([Hebrew date: 4349](#)), after the period of the Sevara'im, and ended in 1038 (Hebrew date: 4798). The first gaon of Sura, according to [Sherira Gaon](#), was [Mar Rab Mar](#), who assumed office in 609. The last gaon of Sura was [Samuel ben Hofni](#), who died in 1034; the last gaon of Pumbedita was [Hezekiah Gaon](#), who was tortured to death in 1040; hence the activity of the Geonim covers a period of nearly 450 years.

There were two major Geonic academies, one in Sura and the other in Pumbedita. The Sura academy was originally dominant, but its authority waned towards the end of the Geonic period and the Pumbedita Gaonate gained ascendancy ([Louis Ginzberg](#) in *Geonica*).

Role in Jewish life

The Geonim officiated, in the last place, as directors of the [academies](#), continuing as such the educational activity of the [Amoraim](#) and [Saboraim](#). For while the Amoraim, through their interpretation of the [Mishnah](#), gave rise to the [Talmud](#), and while the Saboraim definitively edited it, the Geonim's task was to interpret it; for them it became the subject of study and instruction, and they gave religio-legal decisions in agreement with its teachings.

During the geonic period the Babylonian schools were the chief centers of Jewish learning; the Geonim, the heads of these schools, were recognized as the highest authorities in [Jewish law](#). Despite the difficulties which hampered the irregular communications of the period, Jews who lived even in most distant countries sent their inquiries concerning religion and law to these officials in Babylonia.

In the latter centuries of the geonic period, from the middle of the tenth to the middle of the eleventh, their supremacy lessened, as the study of the Talmud received care in other lands. The inhabitants of these regions gradually began to submit their questions to the heads of the schools in their own countries. Eventually they virtually ceased sending their questions to Babylonian Geonim.

The title "Gaon"

The title of **gaon** came to be applied to the heads of the two Babylonian academies of Sura and Pumbedita, though it did not displace the original title of [Rosh Yeshivah Ge'on Ya'akov](#) ([Hebrew](#), head of the academy, pride of Jacob). The [Aramaic](#) term used was *Resh metivta*.

The title *gaon* properly designated the office of head of the academy. The title became popular in use around the end of the 6th century. As the academies of Sura and Pumbedita were invested with judicial authority, the gaon officiated as supreme judge.

The organization of the Babylonian academies recalled the ancient [Sanhedrin](#). In many responsa of the Geonim, members of the schools are mentioned who belonged to the "great sanhedrin," and others who belonged to the "small sanhedrin." In front of the presiding gaon and facing him were seated seventy members of the academy in seven rows of ten persons each, each person in the seat assigned to him, and the whole forming, with the gaon, the so-called "great sanhedrin." Gaon Amram calls them in a responsum ("Responsa der Geonim," ed. Lyck, No. 65) the "ordained scholars who take the place of the great sanhedrin." (A regular ordination ("[semichah](#)") is of course not implied here: that did not exist in Babylonia, only a solemn nomination taking place.)

Gaon Zemaḥ refers in a responsum to "the ancient scholars of the first row, who take the place of the great sanhedrin." The seven masters, or "allufim" and the "ḥaberim," the three most prominent among the other members of the college, sat in the first of the seven rows. Nine sanhedrists were subordinated to each of the seven allufim, who probably supervised the instruction given during the entire year by their subordinates. The members of the academy who were not ordained sat behind the seven rows of sanhedrists.

Works of the Geonim

Responsa

Early in the Geonic era, the majority of the questions asked them were sent from Babylonia and the neighboring lands. Jewish communities in these regions had religious leaders who were somewhat acquainted with the Talmud, and who could on occasion visit the Jewish academies in Babylon. A literature of questions and answers developed, known as the [responsa](#) literature.

The questions were usually limited to one or more specific cases, while the responsum to such a query gave a ruling, a concise reason for it, together with supporting citations from the Talmud, and often a refutation of any possible objection.

More discursive were the responsa of the later geonim after the first half of the 9th century, when questions began to be sent from more distant regions, where the inhabitants were less familiar with the Talmud, and were less able to visit the Babylonian academies, then the only seats of Talmudic learning.

The later geonim did not restrict themselves to the Mishnah and Talmud, but used the decisions and responsa of their predecessors, whose sayings and traditions were generally regarded as authoritative. These responsa of the later geonim were often essays on Talmudic themes, and since a single letter often answered many questions, it frequently became book-length in size. Two important examples of such books are the [Siddur](#) of [Amram Gaon](#), addressed to the Jews of Spain in response to a question about the laws of prayer, and the

Epistle of [Sherira Gaon](#), which sets out the history of the [Mishnah](#) and the [Talmud](#) in response to a question from Tunisia.

Some of the responsa that have survived are in their original form, while others are extant only as quotations in later works. Many have been found in the [Cairo Genizah](#).

Examples of responsa collections are:

- *Halakhot Pesukot min ha-Geonim* (Brief Rulings of the Geonim): [Constantinople](#) 1516
- *Sheelot u-Teshuvot me-ha-Geonim*: [Constantinople](#) 1575
- *Shaare Tzedek* (Gates of Justice), edited by Nissim ben Hayyim: [Salonica](#) 1792, containing 533 responsa arranged according to subject and an index by the editor
- *Teshuvot Ha-Geonim*, ed. Mussafia: Lyck 1864
- *Teshuvot ha-Geonim: Shaare Teshuvah* with commentary *Iyye ha-Yam* by [Israel Moses Hazan](#): Livorno 1869; linked [here](#)
- *Shaare Teshuvah ha-Shalem*, ed. Leiter: New York 1946
- *Teshuvot Geone Mizrach u-Ma'arav*, ed. Mueller: Berlin 1888
- Lewin, B. M., *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries Following the Order of the Talmudic Tractates* (13 vols): Haifa 1928
- Assaf, Simhah, *Teshuvot ha-Geonim*: Jerusalem 1927 (second volume 1942).

Other works

Individual Geonim often composed treatises and commentaries. Three handbooks on Jewish law are:

- Halachot Pesukot of [Yehudai Gaon](#) (not to be confused with the responsa collection of the same name): this was the basis of many other abridgments
- She'iltot of [Achai Gaon](#)
- Halachot Gedolot, by [Simeon Kayyara](#).

The most notable author among the Geonim was [Saadia Gaon](#), who wrote Biblical commentaries and many other works: he is best known for the [philosophical](#) work [Emunoth ve-Deoth](#).

The Kallah

Two months of the year were denoted as *kallah* months, the [Hebrew months](#) of [Adar](#) and [Elul](#). During this time foreign students assembled in the [academy](#) for common study.

During the first three weeks of the kallah month the scholars seated in the first row reported on the [Talmud](#) treatise assigned for study during the preceding months; in the fourth week the other scholars and also some of the pupils were called upon. Discussions followed, and difficult passages were laid before the gaon, who also took a prominent part in the debates, and freely reproved any member of the college who was not up to the standard of scholarship. At the end of the kallah month the gaon designated the Talmudic treatise which

the members of the assembly were obliged to study in the months intervening till the next kallah should begin. The students who were not given seats were exempt from this task, being free to choose a subject for study according to their needs.

During the kallah, the gaon laid before the assembly a number of the questions that had been sent in during the year from all parts of the Diaspora. The requisite answers were discussed, and were finally recorded by the secretary of the academy according to the directions of the gaon. At the end of the kallah month the questions, together with the answers, were read to the assembly, and the answers were signed by the gaon. A large number of the geonic [responsa](#) originated in this way; but many of them were written by the respective geonim without consulting the kallah assemblies convened in the spring.

Individual geonim

- [Achai Gaon](#)
- [Amram Gaon](#)
- [Dodai ben Nahman](#)
- [Hai Gaon](#)
- [Saadia Gaon](#)
- [Sherira Gaon](#)

[Chananel Ben Chushiel](#) (Rabbeinu Chananel) and [Nissim Gaon](#) of [Kairouan](#), though not holders of the office of Gaon, are often ranked among the Geonim. Others, perhaps more logically, consider them as constituting the first generation of [Rishonim](#). [Maimonides](#) sometimes uses the term "Geonim" in an extended sense, to mean "leading authorities", regardless of what country they lived in.

Talmudic Academies in Babylonia

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The **Talmudic Academies in Babylonia**, also known as the [Geonic](#) Academies, were the center for [Jewish](#) scholarship and the development of [Jewish law](#) in [Mesopotamia](#) from roughly 589 CE to 1038 CE ([Hebrew dates](#): 4349 AM to 4798 AM). The key work of these academies was the compilation of the [Babylonian Talmud](#), started by [Rav Ashi](#) and [Ravina](#), two leaders of the Babylonian Jewish community, around the year 550. Editorial work by the [Savoraim](#) or *Rabbanan Savoraei* (post-Talmudic rabbis), continued on this text for the next 250 years; much of the text did not reach its final form until around 700.^[1] The two most famous academies were located at [Sura](#) and [Pumbedita](#); the [Sura Academy](#) was originally dominant, but its authority waned towards the end of the Geonic period and the [Pumbedita academy](#)'s Gaonate gained ascendancy.^[2] Major [yeshivot](#) were also located at [Nehardea](#) and [Mahuza](#).

For the Jews of late antiquity and the early [Middle Ages](#), the yeshivot of Babylonia served much the same function as the ancient [Sanhedrin](#), as a council of Jewish religious authorities. The academies were founded in pre-Islamic Babylonia under the [Zoroastrian Sassanid dynasty](#) and were located not far from the Sassanid capital of [Ctesiphon](#), which at that time was the largest

city in the world.^[3] The academies subsequently operated for four hundred years under the [Islamic caliphate](#) after the [conquest of Persia](#) in the 7th Century.

The first gaon of Sura, according to [Sherira Gaon](#), was [Mar Rab Mar](#), who assumed office in 609. The last gaon of Sura was [Samuel ben Hofni](#), who died in 1034; the last gaon of Pumbedita was [Hezekiah Gaon](#), who was tortured to death in 1040; hence the activity of the Geonim covers a period of nearly 450 years. The Geonim^[4] ([Hebrew](#): גאונים) were the presidents of the two great rabbinical colleges of Sura and Pumbedita, and were the generally-accepted spiritual leaders of the worldwide Jewish community in the early [medieval](#) era, in contrast to the *Resh Galuta* ([Exilarch](#)) who wielded secular authority over the Jews in [Islamic](#) lands.

The three centuries in the course of which the [Babylonian Talmud](#) was developed in the academies founded by Rav and Samuel were followed by five centuries during which it was zealously preserved, studied, expounded in the schools, and, through their influence, recognized by the whole diaspora. Sura and Pumbedita were considered the only important seats of learning: their heads and sages were the undisputed authorities, whose decisions were sought from all sides and were accepted wherever Jewish communal life existed.

History

Background

The [history of the Jews in Iraq](#) is largely unknown for the four centuries covering the period from [Ezra](#) (c. 5th Century BCE)^[5] to [Hillel](#) (1st Century CE); and the history of the succeeding two centuries, from [Hillel](#) to [Judah ha-Nasi](#) (2nd Century CE), furnishes only a few scanty items on the state of learning among the Babylonian Jews. In the chief source of information about the Babylonian schools, [Sherira Gaon](#) referred to those dark centuries in his famous letter: "No doubt, here in Babylonia public instruction was given in the [Torah](#); but besides the [exilarchs](#) there were no recognized heads of schools until the death of Rabbi [Judah]."^[citation needed]

The principal seat of Babylonian Judaism was [Nehardea](#), where there certainly was some institution of learning. A very ancient synagogue, built, it was believed, by King [Jehoiachin](#), existed in Nehardea. At [Huzal](#), near Nehardea, there was another synagogue, not far from which could be seen the ruins of Ezra's academy. In the period before [Hadrian](#), [Akiba](#), on his arrival at Nehardea on a mission from the Sanhedrin, entered into a discussion with a resident scholar on a point of matrimonial law (Mishnah Yeb., end). At the same time there was at [Nisibis](#), in northern Mesopotamia, an excellent Jewish college, at the head of which stood [Judah ben Bathyra](#), and in which many Judean scholars found refuge at the time of the persecutions. A certain temporary importance was also attained by a school at [Nehar-Pekod](#), founded by the Judean immigrant [Hananiah](#), nephew of [Joshua ben Hananiah](#), which school might have been the cause of a schism between the Jews of Babylonia and those of [Judea-Israel](#), had not the Judean authorities promptly checked Hananiah's ambition.

Founding of Academies

Among those that helped to restore Jewish learning, after Hadrian, was the Babylonian scholar Nathan, a member of the family of the exilarch, who continued his activity even under Judah ha-Nasi. Another Babylonian, [Hiyya bar Abba](#), belonged to the foremost leaders in the closing age of the Tannaim. His nephew, [Abba Arika](#), afterward called simply Rav, was one of the most important pupils of Judah. Rav's return to his Babylonian home, the year of which has been accurately recorded (530 of the [Seleucid](#), or 219 of the [common era](#)), marks an [epoch](#); for from it dates the beginning of a new movement in Babylonian Judaism—namely, the initiation of the dominant rôle which the Babylonian Academies played for several centuries. Leaving Nehardea to his friend [Samuel of Nehardea](#), whose father, Abba, was already reckoned among the authorities of that town, Rav founded a new academy in Sura, where he held property. Thus, there existed in Babylonia two contemporary academies, so far removed from each other, however, as not to interfere with each other's operations. Since Rav and Samuel were acknowledged peers in position and learning, their academies likewise were accounted of equal rank and influence. Thus both Babylonian rabbinical schools opened their lectures brilliantly, and the ensuing discussions in their classes furnished the earliest stratum of the scholarly material deposited in the Babylonian Talmud. The coexistence for many decades of these two colleges of equal rank originated that remarkable phenomenon of the dual leadership of the Babylonian Academies which, with some slight interruptions, became a permanent institution and a weighty factor in the development of Babylonian Judaism.

When [Odaenathus](#) destroyed Nehardea in 259 — twelve years after Rav's death, and five years after that of Samuel—its place was taken by a neighboring town, Pumbedita, where [Judah ben Ezekiel](#), a pupil of both Rav and Samuel, founded a new school. During the life of its founder, and still more under his successors, this school acquired a reputation for intellectual keenness and discrimination, which often degenerated into mere hair-splitting. Pumbedita became the other focus of the intellectual life of Babylonian Israel, and retained that position until the end of the gaonic period.

Nehardea once more came into prominence under [Amemar](#), a contemporary of [Ashi](#). The luster of Sura (also known by the name of its neighboring town, [Mata Mehasya](#)) was enhanced by Rav's pupil and successor, [Rav Huna](#), under whom the attendance at the academy reached unusual numbers. When Huna died, in 297, Judah ben Ezekiel, principal of the Pumbedita Academy, was recognized also by the sages of Sura as their head. On the death of Judah, two years later, Sura became the only center of learning, with [Rav Chisda](#) (died 309) as its head. Chisda had in Huna's lifetime rebuilt Rav's ruined academy in Sura, while Huna's college was in the vicinity of Mata Mehasya (Sherira). On Chisda's death Sura lost its importance for a long time. In [Pumbedita](#), [Rabbah bar Nahmani](#) (died 331), Joseph (died 333), and [Abaye](#) (died 339) taught in succession. They were followed by [Raba](#), who transplanted the college to his native town, [Mahuza](#). Under these masters the study of the Law attained a notable development, to which certain Judean-Palestinian scholars, driven from their own homes by the persecutions of [Roman](#) tyranny, contributed no inconsiderable share.

After Raba's death, in 352, [Pumbedita](#) regained its former position. The head of the academy was [Nahman bar Isaac](#) (died 356), a pupil of Raba. In his method of teaching may be discerned the

first traces of an attempt to edit the enormous mass of material that ultimately formed the [Babylonian Talmud](#). Not Pumbedita, however, but [Sura](#), was destined to be the birthplace of this work. After Raba's death, [Papa of Naresh](#), another of his pupils, founded a college in [Naresh](#), near Sura, which, for the time being, interfered with the growth of the Sura school; but after Papa's death, in 375, the college at Sura regained its former supremacy. Its restorer was [Rav Ashi](#), under whose guidance, during more than half a century (Ashi died 427), it attained great prominence, and presented such attractions that even the exilarchs came there, in the autumn of each year, to hold their customary official receptions. The school at Pumbedita recognized the preeminence of that of Sura; and this leadership was firmly retained for several centuries.

The unusual length of Ashi's activity, his undeniable high standing, his learning, as well as the favorable circumstances of the day, were all of potent influence in furthering the task he undertook; namely, that of sifting and collecting the material accumulated for two centuries by the Babylonian Academies. The final editing of the literary work which this labor produced did not, it is true, take place until somewhat later; but tradition rightly names Ashi as the originator of the Babylonian [Talmud](#). Indeed, Ashi's editorial work received many later additions and amplifications; but the form underwent no material modification. The Babylonian Talmud must be considered the work of the Academy of Sura, because Ashi submitted to each of the semiannual general assemblies of the academy, treatise by treatise, the results of his examination and selection, and invited discussion upon them. His work was continued and perfected, and probably reduced to writing, by succeeding heads of the Sura Academy, who preserved the fruit of his labors in those sad times of persecution which, shortly after his death, were the lot of the Jews of Babylonia. These misfortunes were undoubtedly the immediate cause of the publication of the Talmud as a complete work; and from the Academy of Sura was issued that unique literary effort which was destined to occupy such an extraordinary position in Judaism. [Ravina II](#) (R. Abina), a teacher in Sura, is considered by tradition the last amora; and the year of his death (812 of the Seleucidan, or 500 of the common era) is considered the date of the close of the Talmud. After his death the Jewish center moved to Pumbedita, where [Raba Yossi](#) was the head of the academy. Sura declined in this period as the Jews were persecuted. In Pumbedita the study continued and the academy became the leading one in Babylonia.

Exposition of Talmud

The three centuries in the course of which the [Babylonian Talmud](#) was developed in the academies founded by Rav and Samuel were followed by five centuries during which it was zealously preserved, studied, expounded in the schools, and, through their influence, recognized by the whole diaspora. Sura and Pumbedita were considered the only important seats of learning: their heads and sages were the undisputed authorities, whose decisions were sought from all sides and were accepted wherever Jewish communal life existed. In the words of the [aggadist](#) (Tan., Noah, iii.), "God created these two academies in order that the promise might be fulfilled, that the word of God should never depart from Israel's mouth" (Isa. lix. 21). The periods of Jewish history immediately following the close of the Talmud are designated according to the titles of the teachers at Sura and Pumbedita; thus we have "the time of the Geonim and that of the [Saboraim](#). The Saboraim were the scholars whose diligent hands completed the Talmud in the first third of the sixth century, adding manifold amplifications to its text. The title "gaon," which originally belonged preeminently to the head of the Sura Academy, came into general use in the

seventh century, under [Muslim](#) supremacy, when the official position and rank of the exilarchs and of the heads of the academy were regulated anew. But in order to leave no gaps between the bearers of the title, history must either continue the Saboraim into the seventh century or accept an older origin for the title of gaon. In point of fact, both titles are only conventionally and indifferently applied; the bearers of them are heads of either of the two academies of Sura and Pumbedita and, in that capacity, successors of the Amoraim.

The inherited higher standing of Sura endured until the end of the eighth century, after which Pumbedita came into greater importance. Sura will always occupy a prominent place in Jewish history; for it was there that [Saadia Gaon](#) gave a new impulse to Jewish lore, and thus paved the way for the intellectual regeneration of Judaism. Pumbedita, on the other hand, may boast that two of its teachers, Sherira and his son [Hai Gaon](#) (died 1038), terminated in most glorious fashion the age of the Geonim and with it the activities of the Babylonian Academies.

Organization of the academies

Since the academies were convened in certain months of the year, they were known as [metibta](#) ([Hebrew](#): מתיבתא), Aramaic for "session".^[6] Under the leadership of [Rav](#) and [Shmuel](#), the Academy of Sura was still called a *sidra*. Under [Rav Huna](#), the second dean of the Academy of Sura, the yeshiva began to be called a *metibta* and Huna was the first to bear the title of *resh metibta* (*rosh mesivta*, corresponding to [rosh yeshiva](#)).^[7] *Resh metibta* remained the official designation for the head of the academy until the end of the Geonic period.

The Kallah

At the side of the *resh metibta*, and second to him in rank, stood the *resh kallah* (president of the general assembly). The [kallah](#) (general assembly) was a characteristic feature of Babylonian Judaism altogether unknown in Judea. Owing to the great extent of Babylonia, opportunities had to be furnished for those living far from the academies to take part in their deliberations. These meetings of outside students, at which of course the most varying ages and degrees of knowledge were represented, took place twice a year, in the months [Adar](#) and [Elul](#). An account dating from the tenth century, describing the order of procedure and of the differences in rank at the *kallah*, contains details that refer only to the period of the Geonim; but much of it extends as far back as the time of the [Amoraim](#). The description given in the following condensed rendering furnishes, at all events, a curious picture of the whole institution and of the inner life and organization of the Babylonian Academies:

In the *kallah*-months, that is, in *Elul*, at the close of the summer, and in *Adar*, at the close of the winter, the disciples journey from their various abodes to the meeting, after having prepared in the previous five months the treatise announced at the close of the preceding *kallah*-month by the head of the academy. In *Adar* and *Elul* they present themselves before the head, who examines them upon this treatise. They sit in the following order of rank: Immediately next to the president is the first row, consisting of ten men; seven of these are *reshe kallah*; three of them are called 'haberim' [associates]. Each of the seven *reshe kallah* has under him ten men called '[aluflm](#)' [masters]. The seventy *aluflm* form the Sanhedrin, and are seated behind the above-mentioned first row, in seven rows, their faces being turned toward the president. Behind them are seated,

without special locations, the remaining members of the academy and the assembled disciples. The examination proceeds in this wise: They that sit in the first row recite aloud the subject-matter, while the members of the remaining rows listen in silence. When they reach a passage that requires discussion they debate it among themselves, the head silently taking note of the subject of discussion. Then the head himself lectures upon the treatise under consideration, and adds an exposition of those passages that have given rise to discussion. Sometimes he addresses a question to those assembled as to how a certain Halakah is to be explained: this must be answered only by the scholar named by the head. The head adds his own exposition, and when everything has been made clear one of those in the first row arises and delivers an address, intended for the whole assembly, summing up the arguments on the theme they have been considering. . . . In the fourth week of the kallah-month the members of the Sanhedrin, as well as the other disciples, are examined individually by the head, to prove their knowledge and capacity. Whoever is shown to have insufficiently prepared himself is reproved by the head, and threatened with the withdrawal of the stipend appropriated for his subsistence. . . . The questions that have been received from various quarters are also discussed at these kallah assemblies for final solution. The head listens to the opinions of those present and formulates the decision, which is immediately written down. At the end of the month these collective answers ([responsa](#)) are read aloud to the assembly, and signed by the head.

Siddur

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A *siddur* ([Hebrew](#): סידור; plural מִירוּדִים *siddurim*) is a [Jewish prayer book](#), containing a set order of [daily prayers](#). This article discusses how some of these prayers evolved, and how the *siddur*, as it is known today has developed. A separate article, [Jewish prayer](#), discusses the prayers that appear in the *siddur*, and when they are said.

History of the siddur

The earliest parts of Jewish prayer book are the [Shema Yisrael](#) ("Hear O Israel") ([Deuteronomy](#) 6:4 *et seq*), and the [Priestly Blessing](#) ([Numbers](#) 6:24-26), which are in the [Torah](#). A set of eighteen (currently nineteen) blessings called the *Shemoneh Esreh* or the [Amidah](#) ([Hebrew](#), "standing [prayer]"), is traditionally ascribed to the [Great Assembly](#) in the time of [Ezra](#), at the end of the Biblical period.

The name *Shemoneh Esreh*, literally "eighteen", is an historical anachronism, since it now contains nineteen blessings. It was only near the end of the [Second Temple](#) period that the eighteen prayers of the weekday Amidah became standardized. Even at that time their precise wording and order was not yet fixed, and varied from locale to locale. Many modern scholars believe that parts of the Amidah came from the [Hebrew apocryphal](#) work [Ben Sira](#).

According to the [Talmud](#), soon after the destruction of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#) a formal version of the Amidah was adopted at a rabbinical council in [Yavne](#), under the leadership of Rabban [Gamaliel II](#) and his colleagues. However, the precise wording was still left open. The order, general ideas, opening and closing lines were fixed. Most of the wording was left to the individual reader. It was not until several centuries later that the prayers began to be formally

fixed. By the [Middle Ages](#) the texts of the prayers were nearly fixed, and in the form in which they are still used today.

The siddur was printed by [Soncino](#) in Italy as early as 1486, though a siddur was first mass-distributed only in 1865^{[[citation needed](#)]}. The siddur began appearing in the [vernacular](#) as early as 1538. The first - unauthorized - English [translation](#), by Gamaliel ben Pedahzur (a [pseudonym](#)), appeared in London in 1738; a different translation was released in the United States in 1837.^[1]

Creating the siddur

Readings from the [Torah](#) (five books of Moses) and the [Nevi'im](#) ("Prophets") form part of the prayer services. To this framework various Jewish sages added, from time to time, various prayers, and, for festivals especially, numerous hymns.

The earliest existing codification of the prayerbook was drawn up by Rav [Amram Gaon](#) of Sura, Babylon, about 850 CE. Half a century later Rav [Saadia Gaon](#), also of Sura, composed a siddur, in which the rubrical matter is in [Arabic](#). These were the basis of Simcha ben Samuel's [Machzor Vitry](#) (11th century France), which was based on the ideas of his teacher, [Rashi](#). Another formulation of the prayers was that appended by [Maimonides](#) to the laws of prayer in his [Mishneh Torah](#): this forms the basis of the Yemenite liturgy, and has had some influence on other rites. From this point forward all Jewish prayerbooks had the same basic order and contents.

Two authoritative versions of the Ashkenazi siddur were those of Shabbetai Sofer in the 16th century and Seligman Baer in the 19th century; siddurim have also been published reflecting the views of [Jacob Emden](#) and the [Vilna Gaon](#).

Different Jewish rites

[Nusach Ashkenaz](#) Siddur prayer book from [Irkutsk](#), Russia, printed in 1918

There are differences among, amongst others, the [Sephardic](#) (including [Spanish and Portuguese](#)), [Teimani](#) (Yemenite), [Chasidic](#), [Ashkenazic](#) (German-Polish), [Bené Roma or Italkim](#) and [Romaniote](#) (Greek, once extending to Turkey and perhaps the southern Italian peninsula) liturgies: see further discussion in the articles on [Nusach](#) and [Minhag](#). Most of these are slight differences in the wording of the prayers; for instance, Oriental Sephardic and some Hasidic prayer books state "תעזרנו הניב המכח תתאמ וננה", "Graciously bestow upon us from You wisdom ([hochmah](#)), understanding ([binah](#)) and knowledge ([daat](#))", in allusion to the [Kabbalistic sefirot](#) of those names, while the Nusach Ashkenaz, as well as Western Sephardic and other Hasidic versions retain the older wording "לכשהו הניב העד תתאמ וננה", "Graciously bestow upon us from You knowledge, understanding, and reason". In some cases, however, the order of the preparation for the Amidah is drastically different, reflecting the different halakhic and kabbalistic formulae that the various scholars relied on in assembling their siddurim, as well as the minhagim, or customs, or their locales.

Some forms of the Sephardi rite are considered to be very overtly [kabbalistic](#), depending on how far they reflect the ritual of [Isaac Luria](#). This is partly because the [Tetragrammaton](#) frequently appears with varying vowel points beneath the letters (unpronounced, but to be meditated upon) and different Names of God appear in small print within the final hei (ה) of the Tetragrammaton. In some editions, there is a Psalm in the preparations for the [Amidah](#) that is printed in the outline of a [menorah](#), and the worshipper meditates on this shape as he recites the psalm.

The Ashkenazi rite is more common than the Sephardi rite in America, and it appears that most American congregations follow the order presented in the Nusach Ashkenaz Siddur printed by Mesorah Publications. While Nusach Ashkenaz does contain some kabbalistic elements, such as acrostics and allusions to the sefirot ("To You, God, is the greatness [gedullah], and the might [gevurah], and the glory [tiferet], longevity [netzach],..." etc.), these are not easily seen unless the reader is already initiated. It is notable that although many other traditions avoid using the poem "Anim Zemirot" on the Sabbath, for fear that its holiness would be less appreciated due to the frequency of the Sabbath, the poem is usually sung by Ashkenazi congregations before concluding the Sabbath [Musaf](#) service with the daily psalm. The ark is opened for the duration of the song.

[Nusach Ari](#) refers to the order of the prayers set by [Rabbi Isaac Luria](#), often called "Ari HaKadosh", or "The Holy Lion", and it is generally used by Hasidim. Although the Ari himself was born Ashkenazi, he borrowed many elements from Sephardi and other traditions, since he felt that they followed Kabbalah and [Halacha](#) more faithfully. The Nusach HaAri Siddur from Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch notes that he did not publish his siddur, but orally transmitted it to his students with interpretations and certain meditations matched with it. In 1803, Rabbi [Schneur Zalman of Liadi](#) compiled an authoritative siddur from the sixty siddurim that he checked for compliance with Hebrew grammar, Jewish law, and Kabbalah. Those that use Nusach HaAri claim that it is an all-encompassing nusach that is valid for any Jew, no matter what his ancestral tribe or identity, a view attributed to the [Maggid of Mezeritch](#).

The [Mahzor](#) of each rite is distinguished by hymns ([piyyutim](#)) composed by authors ([payyetanim](#)) of the district. The most important writers are [Yosef ben Yosef](#), probably in the 6th century, chiefly known for his compositions for [Yom Kippur](#); [Eleazar Qalir](#), the founder of the payyetic style, perhaps in the 7th century; [Saadia Gaon](#); and the Spanish school, consisting of [Joseph ibn Abitur](#) (died in 970), [ibn Gabirol](#), [Isaac Gayyath](#), [Moses ibn Ezra](#), [Abraham ibn Ezra](#) and [Judah ha-Levi](#), Moses ben Nahman ([Nahmanides](#)) and [Isaac Luria](#). In the case of Nusach HaAri, however, many of these High Holiday piyyutim are absent, since they were created or added to the liturgy after Rabbi Isaac Luria composed and finalized his siddur.

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כג. ויורד שליה צמר ואוסר אבות ומזרות. ואוסר בתר יתנו לך כו'.
ואוסר קדושת השם וקדושת היום. ישעה טענה. ואוסר עבודה
והוראה וזכרת בתנים ושם שלום. ואוסר קדיש (א) [עד עשיה שלום
במזמורין].

שנוי ומתחנות ודמיונות מנן חאלף

עצן חתול:

הוצאת ספרים : (א) מ"ד יהודה ; מקום : סבת חמד :

[illegible]

ת [ה'ב]

12

וישמחה שמך לעד מלכנו האל המלך הגדול ותקדוש
 בשמים ובארץ כי ירד נא " אלינו ואלהי אבותינו שיר
 ושמחה סגל וזמרה עו וימשיכה נצח גדלה וקבוצה תהלה
 ותפארת תדשה וטלכות. ברכות וחודאות מעתה ועד
 עולם: ברוך אתה " אל מלך גדול בתשבותות אל
 החודאות ארון תפלות המוסר בשירי זמרה קולך אל מי
 העולמים: חק

קחל יחזן פרייף יתנה האברק לעולם ועד :

כתוב ויחזק כחול חזק (לשון חזק דף ע"ב)

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2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Moses Mendelssohn



What is the meta-story of Moses Mendelssohn?

We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who created and changed Judaism?

When did they become 'enlightened'?

What does their very existence say about Judaism?

What was the alternative?

Moses Mendelssohn (6 September 1729^[1] – 4 January 1786) was a [German Jewish philosopher](#) to whose ideas the renaissance of European Jews, [Haskalah](#) (the Jewish Enlightenment) is indebted. Although himself a practising orthodox Jew, he has been referred to as the father of Reform Judaism.^[2] Born to a poor Jewish family in [Dessau](#) and originally destined for a [rabbinical](#) career, Mendelssohn educated himself in [German](#) thought and literature and from his writings on philosophy and religion came to be regarded as a leading cultural figure of his time by both [Germans](#) and Jews. He also established himself as an important figure in the Berlin [textile](#) industry, which was the foundation of his family's wealth.

Moses Mendelssohn's descendants include the composers [Fanny](#) and [Felix Mendelssohn](#) and the founders of the [Mendelssohn & Co.](#) banking house.

Youth

Moses Mendelssohn was born in [Dessau](#). His father's name was Mendel and he later took the surname Mendelssohn ("Mendel's son"). Mendel Dessau was a poor [scribe](#) — a writer of [torah](#) scrolls — and his son Moses in his boyhood developed curvature of the [spine](#). His early education was cared for by his father and by the local rabbi, [David Fränkel](#), who besides teaching him the [Bible](#) and [Talmud](#), introduced to him the philosophy of [Maimonides](#). Fränkel received a call to [Berlin](#) in 1743. A few months later Moses followed him.

A refugee [Pole](#), Zamoszcz, taught him [mathematics](#), and a young Jewish [physician](#) taught him [Latin](#). He was, however, mainly self-taught. He learned to spell and to philosophize at the same time (according to the historian [Graetz](#)). With his scanty earnings he bought a Latin copy of [John Locke's](#) *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, and mastered it with the aid of a Latin dictionary. He then made the acquaintance of [Aaron Solomon Gumperz](#), who taught him basic French and English. In 1750, a wealthy [silk](#)-merchant, Isaac Bernhard, appointed him to teach his children. Mendelssohn soon won the confidence of Bernhard, who made the young student successively his bookkeeper and his partner.

Either Gumperz or Hess (it is not known which) introduced Mendelssohn to [Gotthold Ephraim Lessing](#) in 1754, who became one of his greatest friends. The story goes that the first time Mendelssohn met Lessing, they played [chess](#); therefore, in Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* Nathan and [Saladin](#) first meet during a game of chess.

The Berlin of the day – the day of [Frederick the Great](#) – was in a moral and intellectual ferment. Lessing had recently produced the drama *Die Juden*, whose moral was that a Jew can possess nobility of character. This notion was then generally ridiculed as untrue. Lessing found in Mendelssohn the realization of his dream. Within a few months of the same age, the two became brothers in intellectual and artistic camaraderie. Lessing also brought Mendelssohn to public attention for the first time: Mendelssohn had written an essay attacking Germans' neglect of their native philosophers (principally [Gottfried Leibniz](#)), and lent the manuscript to Lessing. Without consulting the author, Lessing published Mendelssohn's *Philosophical Conversations* (*Philosophische Gespräche*) anonymously in 1755. In the same year there appeared in [Danzig](#) (Gdańsk) an anonymous satire, *Pope a Metaphysician* (*Pope ein Metaphysiker*), which turned out to be the joint work of Lessing and Mendelssohn.

Early prominence as philosopher and critic

Mendelssohn became (1756–1759) the leading spirit of [Friedrich Nicolai's](#) important literary undertakings, the *Bibliothek* and the *Literaturbriefe*, and ran some risk (which Frederick's good nature mitigated) by criticizing the poems of the King of Prussia. In 1762 he married Fromet Guggenheim, who survived him by twenty-six years. In the year following his marriage Mendelssohn won the prize offered by the Berlin Academy for an essay on the application of mathematical proofs to metaphysics, *On Evidence in the Metaphysical Sciences*; among the competitors were [Thomas Abbt](#) and [Immanuel Kant](#) (who came second).^[3] In October 1763 the king granted Mendelssohn, but not his wife or children, the privilege of Protected Jew (*Schutzjude*) – which assured his right to undisturbed residence in Berlin.^[4]

As a result of his correspondence with Abbt, Mendelssohn resolved to write on the Immortality of the Soul. [Materialistic](#) views were at the time rampant and fashionable, and faith in immortality was at a low ebb. At this favourable juncture appeared the *Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele* (*Phädon or On the Immortality of Souls*; 1767). Modelled on [Plato's](#) dialogue of the [same name](#), Mendelssohn's work possessed some of the charm of its Greek exemplar and impressed the German world with its beauty and lucidity of style. The *Phädon* was an immediate success, and besides being often reprinted in [German](#) was speedily translated into nearly all the European languages, including [English](#). The author was hailed as the "German Plato," or the "German Socrates"; royal and other aristocratic friends showered attentions on him, and it was said that "no stranger who came to Berlin failed to pay his personal respects to the German Socrates."

Haskalah

Be a Jew at home and a man on the street.

By [Rabbi Louis Jacobs](#)

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Haskalah, “[the] Enlightenment,”[is] the movement which originated in eighteenth-century Germany with the aim of broadening the intellectual and social horizons of the Jews to enable them to take their place in Western society. The term Haskalah, in medieval Jewish literature, is from the Hebrew word *sekhel*, “the intellect,” but, as here applied, refers to the attitude of attraction to general knowledge, secular learning, and Western culture.

The followers of the Haskalah movement were called maskilim. This latter term is found in the verse: “And the intelligent [*hamaskilim*] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament” (Daniel 12:3), although, in this verse, the meaning of maskilim is simply “the wise,” the men of wisdom. These terms did not become prominent until the middle of the nineteenth century, though the trend they represent began a century earlier.

When Did the Middle Ages End?

The historian Leopold Zunz remarked that the Jewish Middle Ages did not come to an end until the French Revolution, when the new ideas of liberty were reflected in the German *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment]. During the eighteenth century, a number of middle-class German Jews had begun to shake off the intellectual fetters, as they saw it, of the ghetto and had begun to take their place in German society, often meeting with hostility and having to fight against prejudice. There was, of course, considerable intellectual activity in the life of the ghetto but this was in the traditional mode of study, chiefly the study of the Talmud and the Codes, with no desire for instruction in the new learning that followed on the Renaissance, to which the Jews, with few exceptions, had no access.

Nevertheless, there were a number of German Jews in the middle of the eighteenth century who had managed to acquire a degree of general education and “enlightenment.” Out of their ranks the Haskalah emerged. The central figure here is Moses Mendelssohn, the great thinker who was an observant Jew fully trained in the traditional Jewish learning, and yet thoroughly at home in German philosophy and culture. A group of enthusiastic seekers gathered around Mendelssohn in Berlin, to be guided by him in the pursuit of the new knowledge.

It is not, therefore, correct to speak of Mendelssohn as the founder of the Haskalah movement. He has been more accurately described as the “Father of the Haskalah,” the central figure who helped to organize the movement and who, together with his associates, encouraged its spread.

A Complicated Set of Goals and Ideals

One of the aims of the maskilim was to help Jews to acquire equal rights in German society. This, they maintained, was impossible and would not be granted by the German government, unless the blinkers of the ghetto mentality had been removed from Jewish eyes. As part of their educational program, the maskilim sought to encourage Jews to substitute for the Yiddish they commonly spoke the German language of culture, a language that would give them access to German and other European literature and open their minds to new ideas.

But, aware that this aim could easily lead to a rejection of the rich Jewish literary heritage, the maskilim also stressed the need to cultivate the Hebrew language of the Bible, so that Judaism could be expressed on its own terms as a philosophy of life in no sense inferior to that of their neighbour. The program required Jewish schools to be established in which the children would be taught both Hebrew and general science and literature.

An associate of Mendelssohn, Naftali Herz Wessely (1725-1805), published his *Divrei Shalom Ve'emet* (Words of Peace and Truth), often described as the manifesto of the Haskalah, in which he made a typical Haskalah distinction

between “the law of man” and the “law of God”; the former denoted Western patterns of life and secular learning, the latter, the traditional Jewish way of religious life and study. The maskilim had to struggle for the realization of these two, often conflicting, aims.

As late as the mid-nineteenth century the Russian maskil, Judah Leib Gordon, could still proclaim as the Haskalah ideal: “Be a Jew in your home and a man outside it,” as if a Jew could only make his way as a “man” by concealing his Jewish identity when associating with his non-Jewish neighbours. The tensions arising out of the virtually overnight emergence of the Jew from the confines of the ghetto were bound to be acute. Jews had to try to achieve an accommodation with modernity in a single generation, a task in which their Christian neighbours had been involved for several centuries.

The German Jews found themselves suddenly precipitated from medievalism into the modern world with hardly any time to reflect on the totally unfamiliar, new situation in which they found themselves. No wonder the efforts of the maskilim were often fraught with peril. No wonder the more traditional saw the Haskalah as subversive and preferred to remain within the confines of the old ways in all their coziness and with all their certainties.

Mendelssohn's Bible Taught Both German and Critical Reading

The first major contribution of the Haskalah to modernization was the translation of the Bible into German by Mendelssohn, provided with a Hebrew commentary by a number of his associates called the *Bi'ur (Commentary)*. Through the translation, Jews, familiar with the Hebrew of the Bible, acquired a fair knowledge of the German language. Through the *Commentary*, they were introduced to a new approach to the Bible since the *Commentary* departed radically from the fanciful homiletical style, popular for centuries, in favour of what they felt was the plain meaning of the biblical text.

This is not to say that the *Commentary* is truly iconoclastic. Writing before the rise of Biblical Criticism, the Biurists adopted a stance that was completely traditional with regard to such things as the authorship of the biblical books, and was in fact fully in line with the exegesis of the medieval commentators such as Abraham Ibn Ezra and Rashbam, who tried to understand the Bible on its own terms unencumbered by midrashic elaborations. In further pursuit of their aim, the maskilim arranged for the first modern Jewish school to be opened in Berlin in 1778 and, in 1784, the periodical *Hame'asef* (The Gatherer) began to be published.

The Traditional Community Saw Danger Ahead

The German Haskalah may have been welcomed by some of the traditional Rabbis but when they observed that the new tendency led many to a rejection of Judaism and even to apostasy they opposed it vehemently, forbidding any devout Jew to read the *Biur*, for example. The Rabbis saw clearly that the Haskalah was engaged in a transformation of Judaism, a shifting of its centre from the religious ideal of Torah study “for its own sake,” with secular learning at the most an adjunct, to secular learning “for its own sake” with the study of the Torah as an adjunct. The Rabbis perceived the Haskalah as a modern version of the old struggle between Judaism and Hellenism, as in one sense it was. The maskilim were repeating in new form the medieval attempt to reconcile Judaism with Greek philosophy, with all the dangers to faith in the enterprise. The maskilim admitted the charge. It was no accident that Maimonides was the great hero of the maskilim, who were seeking to do for their age what the sage did for his.

From the Jewish Review of Books:

The Martyr of Reason

by [JEROME E. COPULSKY](#)

On Saturday evening, December 31, 1785, the eminent Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn left his house to deliver a manuscript. He had finished it on Friday afternoon but, as an observant Jew, Mendelssohn waited until the Sabbath concluded to bring it to his publisher. So, at nightfall, he rushed out into the cold Berlin air without waiting for a carriage or stopping to put on a coat, though his wife Fromet begged him to do so. The manuscript he

held was entitled *To Lessing's Friends*, and it was a pained yet characteristically elegant response to a critic named Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

Mendelssohn himself was the most famous of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's friends, since their close relationship was widely taken to symbolize the religious tolerance and social possibilities of the German Enlightenment. Lessing had died in 1781, and Mendelssohn had intended to write a biography or memoir of his friend. But before he could do so, Jacobi had written to him with a shocking revelation: A few months before he had died, the great Enlightenment dramatist, critic, and man of letters had confessed to him that he knew no philosophy to be true but Spinoza's *hen kai pan* ("all is one"). This was, if true, scandalous. The "accursed Spinoza" was still an anathema in the 18th century. His denial of a transcendent deity and his teaching of the unity of God and the world (*Deus sive Natura*) was held to be the philosophical expression of a thoroughgoing atheism. For Jacobi, Lessing's Spinozism showed that the moderate Enlightenment endorsed by Mendelssohn and his circle was philosophically superficial and both politically and theologically dangerous. When carefully thought through, the rational religion of Mendelssohn, Jacobi alleged, collapses into nihilism (a term that Jacobi himself coined).

Mendelssohn and Jacobi corresponded with increasing heat and then in 1785—in what Mendelssohn regarded as an unforgivable breach of etiquette—Jacobi published their exchange with his own commentary under the title *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn*. With the public disclosure of Lessing's confession, Jacobi launched what has come to be known as the *Pantheismusstreit* (the Pantheism Controversy). On the face of it, what Jacobi had initiated was a quarrel over the intelligibility and desirability of the moderate Enlightenment. Yet Mendelssohn understood that Jacobi's challenge was not just directed at his circle's intellectual project but also at what their confidence in reason and rational theism endorsed—religious toleration and increased sociability between Christians and Jews. Mendelssohn perceived in Jacobi's challenge a not-so-hidden agenda—it was yet another attempt to push him into the bosom of Christianity. By publicly exposing Lessing's professed "Spinozism," Jacobi was, in truth, undertaking an assault upon Mendelssohn's "Judaism."

Mendelssohn returned from his publisher feeling ill, and never recovered. He died a few days later on January 4, 1786, at the age of 56. His funeral was attended by hundreds of mourners, Jewish and Christian; shops and businesses in the city were closed; newspaper articles and letters eulogized the man who stood as a symbol of the new age and a casualty of the fight against the forces of reaction, fanaticism, and intolerance. As Shmuel Feiner writes towards the end of his newly-translated biography, "In the eyes of his admirers he was depicted as a martyr of the Enlightenment who gave his life for its principles, and as a victim of the plot laid against him by his enemies."

Indeed, Mendelssohn's public image as the model of the cultured, accomplished Jew and a martyr to the Enlightenment vision of reason, tolerance, and humanitarian politics was arguably more important than his contributions to German philosophy or the renaissance of Hebrew literature. Mendelssohn's "Jewish and Christian contemporaries alike," Feiner reminds us, "earmarked [sic] him as the man who could lead the Jewish transition from the old world of the 'ghetto'—of cultural and social isolation—to the new world of Europe." Yet, within a century of his death, counter-images emerged to challenge this heroic myth. In conservative quarters, Mendelssohn was denounced for unleashing the destructive forces of modernity: challenges to rabbinic authority, the disintegration of traditional community, social permissiveness, assimilation, and conversion. (It did not go unnoticed by his detractors that four out of his six surviving children eventually converted to Christianity, and that his grandson, the famous musician Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, was brought up Lutheran.) On the other side of the religious spectrum, liberal Jews claimed that Mendelssohn's reforms failed to go far enough, charging him with sentimentally clinging to tradition rather than articulating a real reform of Judaism. Later, Jewish nationalists such as Peretz Smolenskin castigated Mendelssohn for undermining Jewish national consciousness.

In addition to Shmuel Feiner's readable volume in Yale's "Jewish Lives" series, we now have Michah Gottlieb's challenging new study, *Faith and Freedom: Moses Mendelssohn's Theological-Political Thought*. Both books provide material for rethinking the German philosopher and Jewish enlightener.

Though it neither breaks new ground nor incorporates the most recent scholarship, Feiner's *Moses Mendelssohn* serves as a useful introduction to this complex figure, and fills a longstanding need for a short, accessible biography. (In his nearly 900 pages magnum opus, Alexander Altmann filled the need for a definitive biography for the foreseeable future.) A scholar of early modern Jewish history and author of several seminal works on the subject

including *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness* and *The Jewish Enlightenment*, Feiner seeks to recover "the historical Mendelssohn" by considering the philosopher's achievements and limitations within the social, economic, and political situation of the Jews of Berlin in the mid-18th century. "To scrutinize Mendelssohn's soul," Feiner writes, "is to discover a tragic tension between, on the one hand, the Enlightenment's liberal fighter, who took aim against religious fanaticism, political oppression, and superstition in the name of reason, morality, and humanism, and, on the other hand, the sensitive, vulnerable man who felt helpless in the face of invincible forces of what he called 'the specters of the dead.'" In Feiner's telling, Mendelssohn's life vividly demonstrates the possibilities and limitations that Jews encountered at the dawn of the age of Emancipation.

The son of Menachem (Mendel) Heymann, a Torah scribe, synagogue treasurer, and teacher, Moses Mendelssohn was born in Dessau on September 6, 1729. His mother, Bella Rachel Sarah, was a descendent of Rabbi Moses Isserles of Crakow, author of the great Ashkenazi supplement to Rabbi Joseph Karo's *Shulchan Arukh*. She was also related to Moses Benjamin Wulff, one of Dessau's most illustrious Jews, and her son was most likely named after these two prestigious relatives. In Dessau, the young Moses received a traditional Jewish education, studying under Rabbi David Fränkel. He might have grown up to become an eminent rabbi himself, but in 1743, at the age of 14, the talented pupil followed his teacher to Berlin, where Fränkel had been appointed Chief Rabbi.

In Berlin, Mendelssohn would be exposed to vistas of culture unheard of in Dessau. Under the enlightened rule of Frederick II ("the Great") of Prussia, Berlin was fast becoming a leading center of European culture. But "enlightenment" first came to Mendelssohn in a distinctly Jewish form. Mendelssohn fell under the tutelage of Israel Samoscz, a Galician scholar who was engaged in the recovery of the medieval Jewish philosophical tradition, penning commentaries on such works as Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* and Bahya ibn Paquada's *Duties of the Heart*. Samoscz introduced the young savant to Maimonides, whose monumental philosophical work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, had recently been republished. (Mendelssohn would later claim that his hunchback was a legacy of his long hours bent over studying *The Guide*).

His mind now attuned toward speculative topics, Mendelssohn began to associate with a group of young Jewish intellectuals who fed his interest in philosophy and helped introduce him to the study of classical and modern languages. Soon, the son of Dessau's Torah scribe was immersing himself in the works of Newton, Locke, Leibniz, and Wolff. Though largely self-taught in these subjects—he never attended a university—the young Torah scholar turned early *maskil* was on his way to becoming a leading light in German letters.

Mendelssohn's nascent philosophical career was helped along by his growing friendship with Lessing, to whom he was introduced in 1753, at the age of 24. In 1755, he published his *Philosophical Dialogues* and *On the Sentiments*, and, in 1763, his essay "On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences" was awarded first prize in the Prussian Royal Academy of Sciences competition (beating the submission of a young Immanuel Kant). His philosophical dialogue *Phädon, or on the Immortality of the Soul* was published in 1767 to international acclaim and became a bestseller. In it, Mendelssohn updated Socrates' (or rather Plato's) arguments for the immortality of the soul, earning himself the moniker "the German Socrates." In 1771, Mendelssohn was elected a fellow of the Royal Academy (although the Academy's decision to award a Jew its highest honor was ultimately vetoed by King Frederick the Great).

Yet, to many, the man himself remained a perplexity. To the astonishment and consternation of many of his enlightened interlocutors, Mendelssohn maintained his commitment to the faith of his fathers and strove to lead his fellow Jews out of superstition and civic exclusion into a fruitful engagement with modern culture. Working in concert with other members of the emerging Haskalah, he cautiously sought to promote a Jewish renaissance, advocating the revival of Hebrew, translating the Pentateuch into German, and editing a commentary on it, the *Bi'ur*. On account of his standing in the European Republic of Letters, Mendelssohn was frequently asked to intercede by Jewish communities of Berlin and beyond, which he did often and effectively. Nonetheless, he came under suspicion of rabbinic authorities for his seemingly heterodox opinions and activities.

Mendelssohn's activities made him the target of a number of public challenges, the Jacobi affair being just the last and most tragic. It was in the course of these controversies that Mendelssohn clarified his conception of Judaism and its place in modern society. In 1769, Johann Caspar Lavater, a young Swiss Lutheran pastor inspired by millennial hopes, translated a section of Charles Bonnet's work, *La palingénésie philosophique, ou idées sur l'état passé futur*

des êtres vivants, and published it with a dedicatory epistle to Mendelssohn. Encouraged by Bonnet's arguments in support of the Christian revelation, Lavater challenged Mendelssohn to accept or refute Christianity.

In his response, Mendelssohn stressed the need of a member of a religious minority to act prudently in such matters, while insisting that his philosophical studies had not led him away from his belief in the truth of his religion. Mendelssohn declined to engage Bonnet's arguments in favor of Christianity, writing simply that he did not find them compelling. Moreover, he argued that the religious truths proclaimed by Judaism—the existence of God, providence, reward and punishment—were identical to those of natural religion, truths accessible to the unassisted human reason of all people at all times in all places, and demonstrated by modern philosophy. In Judaism, as opposed to Christianity, revelation was of law, practices to follow rather than dogmas to be believed. And, since it restricted the ceremonial law to those of the Jewish faith and did not seek out proselytes, Judaism was fundamentally a religion of tolerance.

Mendelssohn's most famous and enduring work, *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism*, was also composed in response to a public challenge. In 1782, publicly joining the movement for the granting of civil rights to the Jews, Mendelssohn published a preface to a translation of the 17th-century Dutch rabbi Menasseh ben Israel's work *Vindiciae Judaeorum* advocating for the Jews' readmittance into England. In this text, Mendelssohn argued, among other things, that Jewish authorities ought to relinquish their power of excommunication. Soon, an anonymously written pamphlet entitled "The Searching for Light and Right in a Letter to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn Occasioned by his Remarkable Preface to Menasseh ben Israel" charged Mendelssohn with clandestinely abandoning Judaism. According to its anonymous author, Judaism is "ecclesiastical law" backed by coercive force. If Mendelssohn rejects Judaism's "ecclesiastical power," the author inquired, is he not rejecting Judaism's very foundation? And if he is rejecting this foundation, how can he still consider himself a faithful Jew? In short, if Judaism is law, did this not entail that the Jews could only enter into modern society by relinquishing Judaism?

Mendelssohn took up the challenge of "the Searcher" to stake his position on the theological-political problem, the tension between claims of the state and the claims of religious belief. *Jerusalem* is both a manifesto for religious toleration and a bold articulation of Mendelssohn's unique understanding of the Jewish religion. The treatise opens with a discussion of the relationship between the state and religious authority in conversation with Hobbes and Locke (and Spinoza, who, though not engaged directly, haunts Mendelssohn's treatise.) The conflict between the two, Mendelssohn maintained, was more illusory than real. Rather than subordinating the church to the state (as in Hobbes and Spinoza) or attempting an (impossible) separation of realms (as in Locke), Mendelssohn argued that if the nature of the state and the church are correctly understood, there is no tension, that the two institutions would work in concert to promote the temporal and eternal happiness of human beings.

In the second part of *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn pivoted to develop his conception of Judaism. Judaism, Mendelssohn maintained, proclaimed no metaphysical truths other than those of natural religion. What distinguished it from other positive religions was its revealed law and the historical truths taught by the Torah. And, although Judaism was a religion of law, since the destruction of the Hebrew commonwealth this law was no longer political (that is, coercive) in nature. The rituals prescribed by the law, however, retained the unique ability to promote and preserve the metaphysical truths of natural religion. In Mendelssohn's view, Judaism was therefore the most reasonable of religions, distinctly suited to the modern, enlightened era.

Jerusalem had two audiences: Mendelssohn's fellow Enlightenment intellectuals and his fellow Jews. Mendelssohn had hoped that his conception of Judaism would be embraced by his co-religionists. But his depiction of Judaism as a non-coercive religion of law found few takers. In subsequent years, Jews interested in forging a synthesis between Judaism and modern culture did so in doctrinal terms. Ironically, while it had little effect on future Jewish reformations, *Jerusalem* had a significant influence on philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel in their assessments of Judaism as a one-sidedly legalistic and political religion.

Feiner is especially good at positioning the development of Mendelssohn's thought within the contours and challenges of his times: an emerging Jewish bourgeoisie, with its attendant interest in salons, modern education, fashion, and the arts; a rabbinic establishment still reeling from the aftereffects of the Sabbatean debacle, suspicious of change, and jealous of its waning authority; the increasing prestige of liberal ideas that would sponsor the extension of new opportunities to Jews.

Throughout, Feiner also provides a fascinating glimpse of Mendelssohn's private life—his close friendships with fellow intellectuals such as Lessing, his courtship of Fromet Gugenheim, the births and deaths of his children, and the long illness that sidetracked his philosophical career. Feiner is keenly attuned to the tragic dimension of Mendelssohn's life: despite the great renown that he achieved during his lifetime, Mendelssohn was always subject to prejudice and humiliation, which he endured publicly with an almost superhuman poise, and privately, in letters to his confidants, with a disappointment and frustration that sometimes bordered on despair. As if to underscore this sad aspect of Mendelssohn's life, Feiner frames his biography with an incident in which his family was taunted by a gang of youths with cries of "*Juden! Juden!*" and a hail of stones. Distressed and helpless, the philosopher renowned across Europe could only mutter to himself, "People, people, when will you stop this?"

Although Mendelssohn was regarded as an icon by a younger generation of Jewish enlighteners, Feiner judges that his role in "the cultural project of modernization of the Jews" was in the end a marginal one. The author of *Jerusalem* neither led a movement nor founded a lasting ideology. He did not stand at the vanguard of the struggle for emancipation. Nor did he advocate for any significant modifications in Jewish law or practice. (Even as he was suspicious of rabbinic authority, Mendelssohn lived according to the strictures of *halakha*.) "The story of his life," Feiner concludes, "gives expression to the dilemmas posed to the Jews by the 'modern condition' . . . he exemplifies the rise of a modern Jewish intellectual elite no longer identical to the rabbinical elite, and not restricted in its knowledge to traditional Jewish sources. His thought marks the beginning of a liberal Jewish philosophy seeking to promote such values as the love of man, religious tolerance, and a multicultural society that interprets Judaism according to rationalistic and moral criteria."

In the end, Feiner regards and celebrates Mendelssohn as "the first real Jewish humanist."

From Review of Moses Mendelssohn, Hazzan Rob Menes

What are the strengths of Mendelssohn's approach in the historical situation? Does Mendelssohn's analysis (reason) describe all of Judaism? Where do you stand?

Mendelssohn brought Judaism into the world at large rather than keeping it a hidden, unknown cult. Judaism's separate and private nature was both a way of self-preservation, and elevation, an expression of special-ness. However, in an age where discussion is possible, separation, particularly in **an** intellectual sense, leads to distrust and amplifies fear. Mendelssohn, by bringing Judaism into the non-Jewish intellectual world demystified it and enabled the acceptance of Jews into society. Unfortunately, he also enabled the acceptance of society into Judaism. However, the way in which he brought Judaism into society was appropriate for the time -through the application of reason, he could show that a) Judaism was not superstition b) that there was some way in which it made sense and c) the Jews could be valuable citizens in secular society. Thus, the non-Jew could actually consider the acceptance of the Jew. The reality of the religion, though, is that it is not all rational, and that, certainly, there are some concepts which are mystical. In addition, the boundary between allegiance to a state and allegiance to the religion is not clear. A full description of the religion, along with the historical herpolhodes would not have served Mendelssohn's purpose. I believe that a large part of the religion is not rational, and that that part is important to the religion. Today, we can discuss that part of the religion as well.

Who is the successor to Mendelssohn?

Mendelssohn succeeded in bringing Jews into mainstream society, but sacrificed some of the tradition in exchange. The emphasis on reason, the recognition that Jews must live in the modern world, and the elimination of the rabbinical legal authority points towards the Reform movement as the successor to Mendelssohn. However, he didn't discard halacha. Rather, he suggested that halacha doesn't conflict with the modern world. Therefore, depending on the remaining authority of the rabbis, one could maintain that Hirsch and modern orthodoxy are the successors. Ultimately, I think Mendelssohn was truly the patriarch of the Conservative movement, since he carefully walked the line between living in the modern world and yet preserving Jewish tradition. His use of scholarship to maintain his credibility, and the preservation of halacha while recognizing the need to stay in the modern world are signposts for the Conservative movement

Success or failure? What did he accomplish?

The use of reason as a basis for the religion, and thus as common ground with an enlightened society, cannot preserve all of the religion. By weakening the rabbinate, and by advocating the coexistence of Judaism with secular (and Christian) society, he helped emancipate the Jews, but he also greatly aided the assimilation of Jews. It was possible to be Jewish and not be separate from society (either by choice or by force). Judaism did become fractured and Jews did assimilate, but the Jewish population did not decrease. Through the 1800's the population increased significantly, and Jewish culture thrived. Ultimately, I believe enabling Jews to take part in mainstream society was more important than preserving separate, but traditional modes of Jewish behavior.

Moses, the Son of Mendel

Commentary by Dr. Gerhard Falk

Moses Mendelssohn was born in 1729 and died in 1786. Because of his brilliant reputation he was appointed court philosopher by Frederick II, the king of Prussia. At that time Prussia was the most enlightened state in Europe. Jews were welcomed and Frederick, a learned man and musical composer, enjoyed the company of scholars including Voltaire and others. He corresponded with George Washington and made every effort to allow his "subjects" more freedom than anywhere in the then existing world outside of the United States. That Prussian tradition continued into the eighteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century when the arrogance of William II destroyed the Prussian tradition and promoted the advent of Hitler.

Moses Mendelssohn had three children. Two daughters, Dorothea and Henrietta, who converted to Catholicism and a son, Abraham, who induced his children to become Christians for he believed that "it (Christianity) is the conviction of most well-bred human beings."

It is well known that Moses Mendelssohn's entire progeny left the Jewish fold because his famous grandson, the composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was a nominal Christian as were so many successful German Jews during the nineteenth century and until the time of Hitler and his exterminators. Because this is so well known there are those who regard Moses Mendelssohn as an apostate and one who sought to renounce his Judaism for favors available from the Prussian government. The orthodox have accused him, the rationalist, of abandoning belief in the revelation of Judaism and equally resented his effort to connect the Bible to the German language; reformers resent his adherence to Jewish rituals; nationalists and Zionists cannot understand his rejection of a Jewish state. Yet, Moses Mendelssohn, a "Torah true" Jew, became the object of considerable hostility from traditional Jews because he translated the Torah into German. Mendelssohn published this translation in Hebrew script. This means that the words were German but Hebrew letters were used to spell the German words, thus making the translation accessible to the vast majority of German Jews who could not read the Gothic German then in use. Traditional rabbis feared that this translation would lead to the neglect of Hebrew studies, thus leading to the abandonment of Judaism whether intended or not. That Mendelssohn did not intend the abandonment of Judaism is certain. That apostasy became frequent after his death is certain as well. The reason for this unintended outcome of Mendelssohn's efforts was that he had become admired by the German Christian upper classes and intelligentsia and had become a role model ".....and encouraged Jews to think that they too could achieve the status to which they aspired." Thus, it can well be said that Mendelssohn did indeed participate in the re-formation of Judaism in the sense that his contributions reflected the social trends of his time. It is however simplistic and devoid of sociological understanding to either credit or blame Mendelssohn for the secularization of Judaism in the years following his life because "political, socio-economic and demographic factors," not one person or one writer, can ever be considered responsible for any major social movement.

In fact, *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn's defense of traditional Judaism, indicates without a doubt that he devoted his life to living in both the world of the "Enlightenment" and the world of Jewish orthodoxy. Thus, *Jerusalem* has been called "....a remarkable synthesis of Mendelssohn's twin commitments, to Judaism and to reason." It was this double commitment which distinguishes Mendelssohn's contribution to the advancement of secularization in the 18th century from Spinoza's teachings in the 17th century. For although Spinoza never claimed to be an atheist, his excommunication and his subsequent naturalism resulted in an attack on Judaism by him and his followers. Therefore, Mendelssohn was most concerned in distancing himself from Spinoza, as shown by the

famous controversy which erupted after the death of Mendelssohn's friend Lessing who was posthumously identified as a Spinozist, a label Mendelssohn would not accept either for himself or for Lessing.

The reason for the vehemence with which Mendelssohn rejected the possibility that Lessing was a Spinozist was the belief among many people that Spinoza, no matter his thin defense of revelation, was an atheist.

"Spinoza's philosophy stood for radical scientific naturalism.....and the consequences of Spinoza's philosophy, if it were to delete its superfluous religious language, was atheism and fatalism." Yet, even as Mendelssohn rejected atheism and tried to show how we could rationally conclude that there is a God, that there is immortality of the soul, that there is revelation and providence, Mendelssohn defended Spinoza's rationalism without permitting this attitude to lead him, like Spinoza, to reject religious beliefs as man-made. Thus, Mendelssohn recognized with Spinoza that the consistency and order of the universe is replicated by human reason even while he, Mendelssohn, held the Jewish ceremonial law as revealed and hence applicable in his own day and at all times.

Unlike Spinoza, who held that the laws of nature were the only laws God had given man, Mendelssohn held that the rabbinic laws were revealed truth. Nothing illustrates Mendelssohn's devotion to traditional Judaism more than his principal work, *Morgenstunden* or Morning Hours. Candidly borrowing from Kant, Mendelssohn argues that no object can be real unless it conforms to a concept. Here Mendelssohn also borrows from Descartes and agrees with that writer that "My own thoughts I know to be real while I myself, as the subject in which these thoughts occur, am real in an unqualified sense."

The sum of Mendelssohn's metaphysical arguments are these: First that there is an external reality to which our senses testify; second, there is cognition consisting of experience, rational knowledge and reasoning; third, there is a close relationship between reason and common sense; fourth, there is a difference between imagination and objective reality so that we can be misled; five, external reality is an association of ideas reflecting cause and effect in accordance with the laws of nature (a Spinozian notion), sixth, that the difference between the ideal and the real is much narrower than usually assumed and seventh, that Kant's *Ding an sich*, the thing in itself, can only be explained by what a thing effects and how it is affected. This argument would no doubt be understood by sociologists today but falls short of the work of Kant who argued that since we know a thing only in its spatial relations it was quite legitimate to ask what it was in itself. According to Mendelssohn, however, only God knows the "thing in itself." Thus, Mendelssohn held that the endless controversy between idealists and realists was only semantic and not a matter of substance. Mendelssohn also taught that the first source of knowledge is the study of man himself. Like Alexander Pope (1688-1744) before him he believed that "the proper study of mankind is man."

From these preliminary statements Mendelssohn derives his proof of the existence of God. This, he said, is derived from the reality of a sensible world outside ourselves. Mendelssohn seeks then to root his beliefs in common sense.

"Experience has taught me," he wrote, "that common sense is usually right." He thought that "what no thinking being conceives as possible is in fact not possible, and what no thinking being thinks is real is in fact not real."

Then, as now, there were and are those who find Mendelssohn's adherence to Jewish law contradicts his rejection of ecclesiastical power and his commitment to the principles of the enlightenment. Mendelssohn insisted on supporting reason at all times but would not permit himself to conclude that such a Spinozist position bore within it the rejection of revealed religion. Instead he insisted that both reason and rabbinic Judaism could be supported even though most enlightened Christians held rabbinic Judaism to be an obstacle to the acceptance of Jews in Prussian and general European society. Mendelssohn argued that Jews, born to accept the Law, did not have the authority to abrogate it and that therefore rabbinic law was also revealed and permanent. Yet, he demanded the acceptance of Jews in European society even while observing the details of rabbinic Law. He had achieved this for himself. Now he insisted that his Jewish brethren be given the same privilege.

Mendelssohn believed that acceptance of Jews would come first in Germany and he strove for the development of Jewish culture within the borders of Germany. Mendelssohn loved Germany and German civilization as did so many of his co-religionists who insisted on believing in the humaneness of their German brethren. Mendelssohn sought to develop "Jewish Prussians" rather than Prussian Jews and, for a short time after his death, succeeded. Thus, a limited amount of fraternity between Jews and Christians in the upper classes of German society did develop at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly because there were some leading Christians who sought to facilitate the entrance of the Jews into German social life. Others, again, were vehemently opposed to such a possibility so that there was never a clear cut German attitude towards Mendelssohn's proposals.

Moses Mendelssohn

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Moses Mendelssohn (b. 1729, d. 1786) was a creative and eclectic thinker whose writings on metaphysics and aesthetics, political theory and theology, together with his Jewish heritage, placed him at the focal point of the German Enlightenment for over three decades. While Mendelssohn found himself at home with a metaphysics derived from writings of Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten, he was also one of his age's most accomplished literary critics. His highly regarded pieces on works of Homer and Aesop, Pope and Burke, Maupertuis and Rousseau — to cite only a fraction of his numerous critical essays — appeared in a series of journals that he co-edited with G. E. Lessing and Friedrich Nicolai. Dubbed “the Jewish Luther,” Mendelssohn also contributed significantly to the life of the Jewish community and letters in Germany, campaigning for Jews' civil rights and translating the Pentateuch and the Psalms into German. Not surprisingly, as a Jew with an unwavering belief in the harmonizing effects of rational analysis and discourse, Mendelssohn rankled both institutional and self-appointed advocates of Christianity as well as Judaism. Thus, Johann Lavater famously challenged him to refute the arguments of the Pietist theologian, Charles Bonnet, or convert to Christianity (a challenge that Mendelssohn effectively disabled with a plea for tolerance and a series of reasons for refraining from such religious controversy). Similarly, some Jewish thinkers took exception to Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* and its argument for conceiving Judaism as a religion founded upon reason alone. In addition to the “Lavater affair” and his work as editor and critic, Mendelssohn was probably best known to his contemporaries for his penetrating accounts of the experience of the sublime, for lucid arguments for the soul's immortality and God's existence, for his close association with G. E. Lessing and, in the protracted “pantheism dispute” (*Pantheismusstreit*) with Jacobi during the 1780s, for his insistence that Lessing was not the Spinozist that Jacobi portrayed him to be. To posterity he is perhaps best known as the model for *Nathan der Weise*, the protagonist in Lessing's famous play of the same name, championing religious tolerance.

1. Life and career

- 1729 born September 6 in Dessau, Anhalt-Dessau, Germany
- 1743 follows Rabbi Frankel to Berlin and studies with the Maimonides scholar, Israel Samoszcz
- 1754 becomes accountant for firm of silk manufacturer, Isaak Bernhard; begins lifelong friendship with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
- 1755 publishes anonymously “Philosophical Dialogues,” “On Sentiments,” and (with Lessing) *Pope, a Metaphysician!*
- 1756 publishes anonymously *Thoughts on Probability* and a translation with critical evaluation of Rousseau's second *Discours*
- 1757 publishes anonymously “Considerations on the Sources and the Connections of Fine Arts and Sciences” in *Library of Fine Sciences and Fine Arts* which he co-edits with Lessing and Friedrich Nicolai

- 1758 publishes anonymously “Considerations of the Sublime and the Naïve in the Fine Sciences” in *Library of Fine Sciences and Fine Arts*
- 1760 composes Hebrew commentary on Moses Maimonides' *Logical Terms*
- 1761 publishes *Philosophical Writings*, containing his previously published essays together with a new essay, “Rhapsody or Additions to the Letters on the Sentiments”
- 1762 marries Fromet Gugenheim
- 1763 awarded prize by the Royal Academy of Sciences for “On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences” (published a year later)
- 1767 publishes *Phaedo: or On the Immortality of the Soul, in Three Dialogues*
- 1768 completes Hebrew commentary on *Ecclesiastes*; assumes co-management of Bernhard firm with Bernhard's widow
- 1769 publishes *Letter to Lavater* in response to Lavater's challenge to refute or embrace Charles Bonnet's arguments for Christianity
- 1771 publishes second edition of *Philosophical Writings*; onset of illness; denial of membership in Royal Academy
- 1777 publishes third edition of *Philosophical Writings*; intervenes successfully in Dresden to prevent expulsion of needy members of Jewish community
- 1780 publishes translation of *Genesis*
- 1781 publishes translation of *Exodus*
- 1783 publishes *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* and translations of *Pentateuch* and *Psalms*
- 1784 publishes “On the Question: What does ‘to enlighten’ mean?”
- 1785 publishes *Morning Hours or Lectures on the Existence of God*
- 1786 dies January 4; final publication *To the Friends of Lessing: An Appendix to Mr. Jacobi's Correspondence on the Doctrine of Spinoza* appears January 26

2. Metaphysics and epistemology

Mendelssohn's “On Evidence in Metaphysical Sciences” (the so-called *Prize Essay*) garnered first prize in the contest staged by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences on the question of whether metaphysical truths are able to have the same sort of evidence as mathematical truths. (An essay by Immanuel Kant came in second place.) In the essay, published in 1763, Mendelssohn argues that metaphysics pursues its subject matter by applying the same method that mathematics does: conceptual analysis. As he puts it, “The analysis of concepts is for the understanding nothing more than what the magnifying glass is for sight” (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 258). But Mendelssohn then proceeds to differentiate the kinds of evidence in mathematics and in metaphysics in the following way. Like calculus, but unlike geometry, metaphysics works with concepts that are no less certain than those of geometry, but lack the transparency and imaginative resources available to the geometer's concepts. The difference

between mathematics and metaphysics lies in the difference in the content of the concepts, namely, the difference between quantity and quality. At the same time, there is a basic harmony between the two disciplines since quantity and quality are both intrinsic characteristics of finite things and neither quantity nor quality exists without the other (though qualities and not quantities are allegedly conceivable without some other thing).

Mendelssohn acknowledges that, despite the fact that the method is the same and the content in each case (mathematics and metaphysics) is an intrinsic character of things, progress in metaphysics has lagged far behind that in mathematics. He suggests three “objective” reasons for this lag: first, metaphysics' greater reliance upon arbitrary signs (signs that do not essentially coincide with what is signified); second, the holistic content of metaphysics (no quality can be defined without an adequate insight into the others); and third, metaphysics' need to establish the actual existence of what corresponds to the analyzed concepts. Thus, for Mendelssohn, mathematical truths need not suppose more than the appearances of things as long as a distinction is maintained between constant and inconstant appearances or, equivalently, between appearances that have their basis in the intrinsic, essential constitution of our senses and those that do not (e.g., those due to sickness or a faulty perspective). “Thus, even in the system of a doubter or an idealist, the value of not only pure, theoretical mathematics but even practical and applied mathematics remains, and it retains its undeniable certainty” (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 268). Metaphysics, by contrast, requires a resolution of the problem of idealism.

Twenty-five years after the *Prize Essay*, Mendelssohn continues to struggle with the issue of idealism in *Morning Hours*, his final metaphysical work. Although he espouses a theism that is compatible with a realist position (what he dubs “dualism” as opposed to idealism, materialism, and skepticism), he appears to be moving toward a position that straddles an idealist/non-idealist divide. He views inquiry into something “extra-conceptual” as tantamount to “investigating a concept that is actually not supposed to be a concept and thus must be something contradictory” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, pp. 60f). A further tilt in the direction of idealism is apparent in his rejection of the traditional definition of truth as an agreement of things with thoughts, on the ground that the copy (the thought) cannot be compared with original (the thing). Since thoughts can be compared with one another, he turns to them for a determination of truth, though it is not clear how this move can avoid idealism. At the same time, however, he contrasts *certain truths* consisting in the agreement of thoughts with themselves from *actual truths*, determined by adherence to principles of induction and analogy in addition to the principle of noncontradiction. The latter truths are truths about facts outside us or about a causal connection, though they are relative to certain factors: the number of sensations of a single sort that agree with one another, the number of different sorts of sensations that concur, and the number of times our assessment agrees with those of others, of other species, and of even “higher entities” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, pp. 15f, 54f, 59). Echoing Descartes, Mendelssohn maintains that demonstration of God's existence is necessary to certify the actual existence of things outside us.

This ambivalence can perhaps be traced to the mature Mendelssohn's growing suspicions that the entire issue separating idealists and those supporting contrasting positions is misbegotten, a product of linguistic confusion (see the discussion of Mendelssohn's views on language below). “I fear that, in the end, the famous debate among materialists, idealists, and dualists amounts to a merely verbal dispute that is more a matter for the linguist than for the speculative philosopher”

(*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 61). Mention has already been made of Mendelssohn's view in the *Prize Essay* that metaphysics' necessary reliance upon artificial signs is one reason why its difficulties are more intractable than those of mathematics. In 1785, in *Morning Hours*, he goes further: "You know how much I am inclined to explain all disputes among philosophical schools as merely verbal disputes or at least to derive them originally from verbal disputes" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 104). In keeping with these advancing suspicions about the origin and the efficacy of the issue over idealism and dualism (realism), Mendelssohn eventually comes to assign reason a mediating role in disputes between common sense and speculation. Common sense is usually but not invariably right, he contends, and hence reason's task is to present a defense of speculation when it departs from common sense. (This appeal to reason to mediate and, if necessary, to rein in speculation also plays a significant role in Mendelssohn's account of a "refined" or "purified" pantheism in *Morning Hours*. On this point, see below "8. Controversy with Jacobi over Lessing's alleged pantheism").

3. Rational psychology

In *Phaedo* or *On the Immortality of the Soul*, loosely modeled on Plato's dialogue, Mendelssohn combines a paean to Socrates with an elaboration of the dreadful personal, moral, and political implications if a person's life is her "highest good." A best-seller of its time, running through three editions, this "classic of rational psychology," as Dilthey put it, also contains an argument for the simplicity and immortality of the human soul, explicitly singled out for criticism by Kant in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Mendelssohn supports the notion that the soul is simple and thus indestructible by noting that certain features of the soul, namely, the unifying character of consciousness and the identity of self-consciousness, cannot be derived from anything composite, whether those composite parts be capable or not of thinking. "We would be able neither to remember nor to reflect nor to compare nor to think, indeed, we would not even be the person who we were a moment ago, if our concepts were divided among many and were not to be encountered somewhere together in their most exact combination. We must, therefore, assume at least one substance that combines all concepts of the component parts.... There is, therefore, in our body at least one sole substance that is not extended, not composed, but instead is simple, has a power of presentation, and unites all our concepts, desires, and inclinations in itself" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/1, pp. 96f). As for the human soul's fate after death, Mendelssohn appeals to divine goodness and providence, which perhaps explains why, following the publication of the *Phaedo*, he finds himself needing to revisit the proofs for God's existence.

4. Natural Theology

From the beginning of his career to the end, Mendelssohn consistently upheld the demonstrability of God's existence. However, not all arguments were equally compelling in his view. In the *Prize Essay* he contends that probable arguments for God's existence based upon beauty, order, and design are more eloquent and edifying but less certain and convincing than strict demonstrations. Similarly, in *Morning Hours*, he cites the argument that the external senses' testimony to an external world is unthinkable without a necessary, extra-worldly being, but adds that this sort of argument would hardly convince an idealist, sceptic, or solipsist. There are, however, at least two ways in which, according to Mendelssohn, God's existence can be

established with certainty. The first way is through application of the principle of sufficient reason to the certain existence of contingent things. The inner testimony of one's own cogito attests to the existence of something contingent. Since the sufficient reason for the existence of contingent things must "indirectly" be a necessary being, a necessary being exists. Hence, Mendelssohn sums up this argument by saying: "I am, therefore there is a God." (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 289; *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, pp. 78, 83f).

Mendelssohn's second way of proving God's existence is based upon consideration of the idea of God together with the conditions of nonexistence. If something does not exist, then it is either impossible or merely possible. To say that something nonexistent is impossible is to say that its intrinsic properties are contradictory, e.g., a square circle. To say that something nonexistent is possible is to say that its intrinsic properties are insufficient to determine that it exists or, in other words, to say that it is contingent upon extrinsic factors that do not obtain. If God does not exist, then it is either because the idea of God is impossible or because it is merely possible, i.e., contingent. Since contingency entails dependency and independence is greater than dependence, it would contradict the essence of a perfect being for that being to be contingent. Hence, the idea of a perfect being cannot be the idea of something merely possible. But the idea of a perfect being also does not contain determinations that must be affirmed and denied at the same time; in other words, the idea is not impossible. In this way Mendelssohn concludes that God exists from the consideration that the idea of God cannot be the idea of something nonexistent. While we can conceive finite, contingent, entities as nonexistent, we cannot conceive as nonexistent an infinite, necessary entity, namely, an entity that combines all affirmative features and properties to the highest degree. "It can either not be thought at all or not be thought other than with the predicate of actual existence" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 154). In this connection, it deserves mention that Mendelssohn rejects as quibbling the objection that existence is not a predicate. A concept of existence, he maintains, emerges in all of us in a similar way as we search for what is common to what we do and undergo, thereby enjoying a universality that is not further analyzable. Thus, Mendelssohn will allow that existence is not a predicate, that it is different from all features and properties of things, and, hence, cannot be merely added to the list of properties of the most perfect entity. Nevertheless, whether existence is the "position" of all properties of a thing or something inexplicable, Mendelssohn stands by his claim that we can only think something contingent without it. As he sums up the inference: "A God is thinkable, therefore a God is also actually present" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 78).

Towards the end of *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn introduces a further proof for God's existence, based upon our certainty of "the imperfectness of our self-knowledge" (*Gesammelte Schriften* 3/2, p. 147). We have certain knowledge, Mendelssohn contends, not only of ourselves but also of the limited scope of this knowledge. "I am not merely what I distinctly know of myself or, what amounts to the same, there is more to my existence than I might consciously observe of myself; and even what I know of myself is in and for itself capable of far greater development, greater distinctness, and greater completeness than I am able to give it" (*Gesammelte Schriften* 3/2, p. 141). From the limitations of our knowledge of ourselves (or, for that matter, of anything actual existing) together with the less plausible assumption that "that everything actual must be thought to be actual by some thinking being," Mendelssohn infers that there is "an infinite intellect" that does represent everything to itself (*Gesammelte Schriften* 3/2, pp. 141ff).

5. Aesthetics

In *On the Main Principles of the Fine Arts and Sciences*, Mendelssohn sets out from the assumption that the human spirit has learned to imitate beauty, “the self-empowered mistress of all our sentiments,” in works of art. He then proceeds to ask what the arts have in common or, in other words, what beauty is. Batteux's thesis that art consists in the imitation of nature merely defers the question or, better, requires its revision to the effect that we ask what the beauties of nature and of art have in common. After rejecting Hutcheson's appeal to an aesthetic sense as a *deus ex machina* that forecloses inquiry, Mendelssohn contends that the common feature is a sensuously perfect representation (a contention that can be traced back to Sulzer and Baumgarten). “Sensuous” in this connection stands not simply for the fact that an object is sensed by the external senses, but also for the fact that an entire array of an object's features is perceived all at once. Unlike the distinct representation of a triangle whereby the intellect distinguishes parts and aspects of the triangle from one another, a sensuous representation is clear but indistinct, that is to say, to have a sensuous representation is to perceive something without intellectually distinguishing its parts or aspects. But we can sensuously perceive an order or harmony to those aspects without intellectually distinguishing them. Beauty or the perfect sensuous representation — whether in nature or in art — accordingly pertains to forms, orders, harmonies, and “indeed, everything capable of being represented to the senses as a perfection” (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 172). On this definition of art, what is represented can be ugly or repugnant as long as the representation is sensuously perfect (though Mendelssohn does address, as discussed below, the mixed sentiment that accrues when the object represented is unpleasant). From these considerations, Mendelssohn derives two necessary conditions of fine art and letters: faithfulness of the representation (“imitation”) and, far more importantly, the artistry, even “genius,” involved. In this connection, he argues that, as far as individual beauties in nature are concerned, they are inferior to the beauties produced by arts. In *On the Main Principles* Mendelssohn also establishes the general distinction between fine arts and fine science along the lines of the difference between natural and artificial signs. Whereas the “fine arts” (*beaux arts*) — music, dance, painting, sculpture, and architecture — predominantly work with natural signs, the “fine sciences” (*belles lettres*) — poetry and rhetoric — typically employ artificial signs. The distinction is hardly ironclad, however, and Mendelssohn ends *On the Main Principles* with a discussion of ways the arts may borrow from one another (e.g., allegorical painting) or combine (e.g., opera).

At one point in the dialogue *On Sentiments* (Mendelssohn's second publication but first publication on aesthetic matters), one of the protagonists differentiates three sorts of pleasure: sensuous, beautiful, and intellectual (a differentiation which approximates respectively the three sorts of perceptions elaborated by Leibniz and Wolff, among others, namely, confused, clear, and distinct). In this context, Mendelssohn explains how beauty affords a distinctive pleasure precisely as the unity of the multiplicity of things taken in by the senses (a view subsequently iterated, as we have seen, in *On the Main Principles*). Unaddressed by this differentiation of pleasures, however, are the so-called “mixed sentiments” that we seem to experience sometimes in viewing what is otherwise painful, terrifying, or, at any rate, does not exhibit the harmony or order typical of beauty. At first (namely, in *On Sentiments*) Mendelssohn thought that problem could still be handled by identifying some perfection in the object — e.g., the skillfulness of the gladiator, the virtue of the tragic figure — as the source of the pleasure that we feel. Six years

later, in *Rhapsody or additions to the Letter on sentiments*, he revises his explanation of these mixed sentiments by noting that each individual representation has a subjective and an objective component. Subjectively or “as a determination of the soul,” the representation can affirm some perfection in the soul and thus be pleasing, even though objectively or “as a picture of the object,” we might find it repugnant. Tragedy is more complicated since the sympathy that we feel for the tragic figure is based upon both objective and subjective perfections (i.e., in him or her and us) as well as upon objective imperfection, the pain and injustice that befall him or her.

Mendelssohn gives another twist to his interpretation of “mixed sentiments” in the *Rhapsody* and then later in “On the Sublime and the Naïve in the Fine Sciences.” Experiences of the sheer immensities of things — “the unfathomable world of the sea, a far-reaching plain, the innumerable legions of stars, the eternity of time, every height and depth that exhausts us” (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 144) — sometimes make us tremble, but we still find them alluring. It is gratifying to experience them, though they confirm an imperfection as well as a perfection in us. In “On the Sublime,” Mendelssohn further distinguishes beauty as something bounded from immensity as something unbounded. He then distinguishes extended from non-extended (intensive) immensity. The sea’s unfathomableness would be an example of extended immensity in nature; uniform repetition of temporal intervals in music would be an example of an attempt to represent the experience of an extended immensity in art. But Mendelssohn seems to be more interested in the non-extended or intensive immensities. “Power, genius, virtue have their unextended immensity that likewise arouses a spine-tingling sentiment but has the advantage of not ending, through tedious uniformity, in satiation and even disgust, as generally happens in the case of the extended immensity” (*Philosophical Writings*, p. 194). Mendelssohn then introduces the category of sublimity for the perfect representation of such intensive immensity, a representation that produces awe precisely because it passes beyond our customary expectations.

There is one last aspect of Mendelssohn’s aesthetics that deserves mention, not least for its bearing on subsequent developments in aesthetics. It has already been noted that the pleasures of beauty and sublimity are not to be identified as purely sensuous or purely intellectual pleasures. In keeping with this differentiation, Mendelssohn differentiates the sort of approval involved in aesthetic experiences from knowledge or desire, though he insists that aesthetic feelings of pleasure can, nonetheless, serve “as the transition (*Uebergang*) as it were from knowing to desiring” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, pp. 61f; *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 169, 307–310). In his adoption of three distinct capacities of the mind and in his appraisal of the aesthetic dimension as providing a bridge between matters of truth and falsity (capacities of knowing) and matters of good and evil (capacities of desiring), Mendelssohn plainly anticipates central aspects of Kant’s mature, critical philosophy. A further, though less precise similarity also deserves mention, namely, the likeness between Kant’s conception of the disinterested character of experience of the beautiful and Mendelssohn’s conception of the experience as something affording us a pleasure that is neither simply sensuous or intellectual. “We consider the beauty of nature and art with pleasure and satisfaction, without the slightest movement of desire. Instead, it appears to be a particular mark of beauty that it is considered with tranquil satisfaction; that it pleases if we also do not possess it and we are still far removed from demanding to possess it” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 61; *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 34–51).

6. Political theory

In *Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism* Mendelssohn distinguishes church and state in order to demonstrate the salutary harmony between them and thus the need for tolerance. In the first part of the essay he accordingly argues that neither the state nor religion can legitimately coerce human conscience and, in the second part, he maintains that this argument against “religious power” is supported by Judaism. The second point was no less controversial than the first, especially since many Jewish elders and rabbis maintained a right to excommunicate. But Mendelssohn counters — apparently erroneously — that the practice is not inherent in “ancient, original Judaism” but rather borrowed in the course of time from Christianity.

Far from separating temporal and spiritual concerns to distinguish state and church (as Locke did), Mendelssohn insists that “our welfare in this life is ... one and the same as [our] eternal felicity in the future” (*Jerusalem*, p. 39). Nor does he base the distinction between church and state on the difference between convictions and actions. “Both state and church have as their object actions as well as convictions, the former insofar as they are based on the relations between man and nature, the latter insofar as they are based on the relations between nature and God” (*Jerusalem*, p. 56f). As far as convictions are concerned, neither church nor state can coerce; “for here,” as noted earlier, “the state has no other means of acting effectively than the church does. Both must teach, instruct, encourage, motivate” (*Jerusalem*, p. 61). What contributes mightily to their potential for mutual reinforcement is the fact that there is also no difference in the make-up of the convictions and duties themselves. The only difference between church and state in the matter of convictions is their ultimate sanction. Thus, the moral philosopher will arrive at the same system of duties as the person who sees them as expressions of the divine; religion “only gives those same duties and obligations a more exalted *sanction*” (*Jerusalem*, p. 58). Matters are different when it comes to actions where the state can and must coerce, namely, when society's size and complexity “make it impossible to govern by convictions alone, [and] the state will have to resort to public measures, coercive laws, punishments of crime, and rewards of merit” (*Jerusalem*, p. 43). Herein lies for Mendelssohn the basic difference between state and church: civil society has, as the product of a social contract, the right to coercion, religious society has no such right. “The state has *physical power* and uses it when necessary; the power of religion is *love and beneficence*” (*Jerusalem*, p. 45).

In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn argues that Judaism is, at bottom, a natural religion, containing no revealed truths not available to unaided reason. Occasionally, as Allan Arkush points out (*Jerusalem*, p. 20), he speaks more guardedly, restricting this claim to the “essentials” of Judaism. Even with such qualifications, however, it is apparent that Mendelssohn approaches Judaism and its history with a more or less Deist view that the original, ancient faith confirmed nothing more than rational truths. Nonetheless, he combines this rationalist approach with a conception of revelation that underscores the distinctiveness of Judaism and secures Jewish believers their destiny as God's chosen people. For, while the Sinaitic revelation contains no supernatural truths, it does prescribe a way of life, the practice of which stands to benefit all mankind. (The interpretation of revelation strictly as legislation and not as adding to the store of truths is very likely borrowed, with qualifications, from Spinoza). “Judaism boasts of no *exclusive* revelation of eternal truths that are indispensable to salvation, of no revealed religion in

the sense in which that term is usually understood. Revealed *religion* is one thing, revealed *legislation*, another” (*Jerusalem*, p. 97).

7. Language

Mendelssohn's main treatments of language can be found in two places, at the beginning and at the end of his career of writing. At the outset he critically addresses Rousseau's views on the origin of language in the context of the Berlin Academy's essay competitions on language (see *Sendschreiben an den Herrn Magister Lessing in Leipzig*, the appendix to the translation of Rousseau's *Discours sur les origines de l'inégalité* (1756), and Mendelssohn's review of Michaelis' prize-winning essay (1759) in *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend* and “Über die Sprache” (circa 1759)). Michaelis won the Academy's prize for answering its question: “Quelle est l'influence réciproque des opinions d'un peuple sur le langage et du langage sur les opinions?”). Mendelssohn takes issue both with Rousseau's attempt to explain the origin of human language on the basis of a description of the natural condition that human beings share with other animals and with his neglect of any consideration of the providential character of the development of language (*Gesammelte Schriften* 6/2, p. 27). In these early writings on language, Mendelssohn emphasizes the interdependence of language and its development with the development of innate, divinely-endowed capacities. These capacities include not only reason as the ability to grasp conceptual connections and employ arbitrary signs (*Gesammelte Schriften* 6/2, pp. 9f), but also — in tandem with the development of rational capacities — the capacity for compassionate interaction in familial and social settings. Thus, on the one hand, the recurrence of auditory, visual, and gesticular phenomena enables reason to signify phenomena bearing no resemblance to them and, indeed, to do so in a way decidedly different from how other animals instinctively employ natural, imitative signs (*Gesammelte Schriften* 6/2, p. 10). In this manner Mendelssohn underlines the interdependence of reason and language, understood as the use of arbitrary signs. On the other hand, language develops within a process that is social as well as cognitive and the starting point for the investigation of its origins is the family rather than the individual. Borrowing from Condillac and challenging Rousseau's view of language as primarily a tool for socialization, Mendelssohn writes: “The drive to social life is equally innate in human beings and leads immediately to the occasion for exercising the capacity for language” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 6/2, p. 8).

In *Jerusalem*, toward the end of his career, Mendelssohn returns to the subject of language in the context of articulating the sense in which Judaism is — for good reasons — a religion of the spoken rather than the written word, relying on an a living tradition to transmit and interpret divine legislation. In this context Mendelssohn again emphasizes the fundamentally social character of language in the context of the performance of rituals, while calling attention to the insecurity of reference over time and the feebleness of ostensive definition. In the course of arguing that human reason does not need supernatural revelation in order to recognize the eternal truths indispensable to its happiness, Mendelssohn notes that Judaism relies, not upon written phrases or formulations that are “established forever, immutable,” but instead upon a “living tradition passed on by oral instruction,” capable of keeping pace with changing times and circumstances (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, pp. 160, 168). Judaism is thus for Mendelssohn primarily a religion of the spoken word precisely as a means of maintaining its relevance to real

life in changing, historical contexts and maintaining the personal bonds and Jewish identity among its members.

Mendelssohn adds a further reason for insisting that Judaism is a religion of the spoken word, precisely as a supernatural legislation rather than a revealed religion. The constant attention paid to the written word not only can isolate human beings from one another and speculation from practice, but also can induce a kind of idolatry. Frozen in time, the written word can become an idol itself, obscuring the distinction between itself and what it is meant to signify.

In this connection Mendelssohn conjectures that written language emerged in the course of the development of visible signs, beginning with a form of synecdoche where a concrete object reawakens the thought of a particular characteristic, e.g., a dog as a sign of fidelity. While the move from these objects to images of them and ultimately to hieroglyphics seems natural enough, Mendelssohn muses that the transition from hieroglyphics to a written alphabet “required a leap,” far beyond ordinary human powers (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, p. 174). Nonetheless, it is written language’s hieroglyphic origins that Mendelssohn credits with the potential for superstition, idolatry, and speculative excess. Because hieroglyphic signs have no prototype in nature, they provided potent material for superstition and, indeed, Mendelssohn refers to the need for written signs as “the first occasion for idolatry” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, p. 179).

In the second chapter of *Jerusalem*, this general account of language and its development figures prominently in an argument that Judaism is a form of supernatural legislation rather than revelation. By regarding language as primarily a living dialogue between persons, Judaism does not lose sight of its communicative function for the sake of thought. As a result, theory and speculation remain tied to historical practice and concrete action. Not coincidentally, the language of Judaism is primarily prescriptive rather than descriptive; even its written prescriptions are “largely incomprehensible without unwritten commentaries . . . transmitted by oral instruction.” Hence, the use of language in Judaism — its script and ceremonial laws — fends off the all too human tendency to idolize the language itself.

The appeal to tradition (oral instruction) is necessary, Mendelssohn adds, given the fact that, over the course of time, the laws themselves become unintelligible “since no words or letters retain their sense unchanged from one generation to the next” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, p. 193). In chapter 1 of *Jerusalem* he makes a similar claim after noting (a) the elusiveness of inner perceptions to the perceiver herself and (b) the impossibility of two people using the same words to express the same “inner perceptions” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, pp. 133f). Where the words in question designate inner perceptions, there is no possibility of ostensive definition, no more when uttered today than when uttered ages ago. Indeed, in a passage that suggests both the inscrutability and endless deferral of reference, Mendelssohn observes that “words cannot be explained [*erläutert*] by *things*. Instead, we must again have recourse to signs and words and, ultimately, to metaphors” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8, pp. 133f). Nonetheless, Mendelssohn is more confident about words designating objects of external perceptions and about the prospects for mutual understanding in regard to them. Not incidentally, ceremonial law’s ritualized character calls for a recurrent context (including specific objects and persons) available to external perception in the course of an exchange between persons (including God). Notably, ‘you’ and

‘we’ take precedence over ‘I’ and ‘it’ in such contexts, as the living references of the former indexicals enables one to refer effectively to oneself and to things generally.

Thus, in *Jerusalem* Mendelssohn stresses the ritual and performative character of language, thereby complementing his view of the inextricability of language and a reason that tempers speculation with common sense. The mature Mendelssohn, keenly aware of the perils of ostension in determining reference, tempers the claims of speculation with those of common sense and is more concerned with bridging theory and practice in the rites of language than in the claims of pure theory. Nor should it be forgotten that Mendelssohn's recognition of language's basically ritualistic and empathic character, as a springboard to reason, is rooted in what he regards as the possibilities of Judaism.

8. Controversy with Jacobi over Lessing's alleged pantheism

Mendelssohn enjoyed, as noted at the outset, a lifelong friendship with G. E. Lessing. In addition to their work as co-editors, Lessing anonymously published Mendelssohn's earliest works and collaborated with him on the piece: *Pope, a Metaphysician!* Through his popular plays, his influential work as a dramaturg, and his stormy public debates with orthodox Lutheran clergy, Lessing was a particularly daunting and engaging spokesman for the German Enlightenment, making him all the more dangerous to its opponents. His final work, *Nathan the Wiseman*, fittingly portrays a Jewish sage (presumably modeled on Mendelssohn) who makes a poignant plea for tolerance by arguing that the differences among religions are essentially matters of history and not reason. Along with Mendelssohn, Lessing embraced the idea of a purely rational religion and would endorse Mendelssohn's declaration: “My religion recognizes no obligation to resolve doubt other than through rational means; and it commands no mere faith in eternal truths” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume 3/2, p. 205). To pietists of the day, such declarations were scandalous subterfuges of an Enlightenment project of assimilating religion to natural reason. Mention has already been made of Lavater's attempt to draw Mendelssohn into religious debate. While Mendelssohn skillfully avoided that confrontation, he found himself reluctantly unable to remain silent when, after Lessing's death, F. H. Jacobi contended that Lessing embraced Spinoza's pantheism and thus exemplified the Enlightenment's supposedly inevitable descent into irreligion.

Following private correspondence with Jacobi on the issue and an extended period when Jacobi (in personal straits at the time) did not respond to his objections, Mendelssohn attempted to set the record straight about Lessing's Spinozism in *Morning Hours*. Learning of Mendelssohn's plans incensed Jacobi who expected to be consulted first and who accordingly responded by publishing, without Mendelssohn's consent, their correspondence — *On the Teaching of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn* — a month before the publication of *Morning Hours*. Distressed on personal as well as intellectual levels by the controversy over his departed friend's pantheism, Mendelssohn countered with a hastily composed piece, *To the Friends of Lessing: an Appendix to Mr. Jacobi's Correspondence on the Teaching of Spinoza*. According to legend, so anxious was Mendelssohn to get the manuscript to the publisher that, forgetting his overcoat on a bitterly cold New Year's eve, he delivered the manuscript on foot to the publisher. That night he came down with a cold from which he died four days later, prompting his friends to charge Jacobi with responsibility for Mendelssohn's death.

The sensationalist character of the controversy should not obscure the substance and importance of Mendelssohn's debate with Jacobi. Jacobi had contended that Spinozism is the only consistent position for a metaphysics based upon reason alone and that the only solution to this metaphysics so detrimental to religion and morality is a leap of faith, that *salto mortale* that poor Lessing famously refused to make. Mendelssohn counters Jacobi's first contention by attempting to demonstrate the metaphysical inconsistency of Spinozism. He takes aim at Jacobi's second contention by demonstrating how the "purified Spinozism" or "refined pantheism" embraced by Lessing is, in the end, only nominally different from theism and thus a threat neither to religion nor to morality.

Mendelssohn's criticisms of Spinoza are discussed below but first the complexity of his relationship to Spinoza should be noted. In his first publication, *Dialogues* (1761) he argued that many of Spinoza's views were compatible with "true philosophy and religion." In Mendelssohn's mind, Leibniz may have given that "true philosophy" its sharpest formulation but in all likelihood by deriving its central idea of a preestablished harmony from Spinoza. Moreover, as Mendelssohn puts it, Spinoza does not so much deny the distinctiveness of the actual world as construe it as it is in the mind of God before the creation, existing only as a part of God (*Philosophical Writings*, 102ff, 108ff). A quarter of a century later, Mendelssohn recapitulates the latter argument as the key to understanding a "purified" or "refined" Spinozism that Lessing, at least in the realm of philosophical debate, would not have dismissed out of hand.

Nevertheless, as noted above, part of his response to Jacobi consists in demonstrating the shortcomings of Spinoza's philosophy. As might be expected, he criticizes Spinoza's idea that there is only one, infinite, and necessary substance. The idea is arbitrary, Mendelssohn contends, since one can legitimately distinguish between what is independent or self-standing (*das Selbständige*) and what obtains or persists for itself (*das Fürsichbestehende*). "Instead of proving that everything obtaining for itself is only one, he [Spinoza] establishes in the end only that everything independent is one. Instead of demonstrating that the entire aggregate of everything finite constitutes a single self-standing substance, he merely shows that this aggregate must depend upon the sole infinite substance" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 107).

On a "deeper level," as Mendelssohn puts it, he also takes issue with Spinoza for failing to account for what Mendelssohn deems the "formal" aspects of both corporeal and spiritual worlds. Thus, Spinoza's conception of extension in terms of impenetrability may explain "the essence of matter," but it leaves unexplained, Mendelssohn contends, the particular organization and movement of bodies. What is unclear to Mendelssohn is how parts can be in motion if the whole upon which they completely depend (Spinoza's substance) is not in motion. Similarly, he wants to know how, on the basis of Spinoza's account of the supposedly underlying attribute of extension, those parts come to have the particular form and organization of motions and forces that they have, that is to say, as organic, self-regulating entities. "Where can the origin of this [motion and form] be found?" he asks. "Not in the whole, since the whole has no movement. The sum [*Sämmtliche*] of all bodies, untied into a single substance, cannot change place and has neither organization nor figure.... Whence the form in the parts, if the whole provides no source for this?" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 108).

Just as Spinoza explains the matter but not the form of the physical world, so, too, Mendelssohn charges, he gives an account of the matter but not the form of the spiritual world. In this connection it is helpful to recall Mendelssohn's differentiation of knowing, approving, and desiring from one another. Truth and falsity, corresponding to knowing, provide the matter of the spiritual world. While they may, as Spinoza maintains, have their origin in thought as the attribute of a single, infinite substance, categories corresponding not to knowledge but to approving or desiring must have some other source. Thus, according to Mendelssohn, Spinoza leaves unexplained "the difference between good and evil, desirable and undesirable, pleasure and pain" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, III/2, p. 109).

Yet, while some of these criticisms of Spinoza may be compelling, they do not, Mendelssohn recognizes, carry the day for a refined Spinozist or pantheist. Mendelssohn observes that the Spinozist's inability to explain how movement and values derive from the attributes of the one, infinite substance does not automatically establish the theist explanation. Accordingly, in *Morning Hours* Mendelssohn casts Lessing as the spokesperson for a refined pantheism — a move that figures prominently in this contribution to the *Pantheismusstreit*. Lessing is portrayed as someone who, while agreeing with Mendelssohn's theist position, has a knack for giving every reasonable argument its full due. In this context Lessing presents a pantheism that characterizes the one and only substance, not only as a source of motion and desire, but also as capable of representing every possibility to itself and approving that possibility that constitutes "the best and most perfect series of things" (*Gesammelte Schriften* 3/2, p. 115). In other words, refined pantheism includes every aspect of the entire metaphysical system of theism but casts it solely as the object of divine intellect. As a result, a refined Spinozist might wonder how different the positions are since the theist purports to explain these seemingly recalcitrant phenomena merely by appealing to the divine will. A refined pantheist might accept the difference between the world (thought) and God (thinker) at a certain level, but insist that, in the end, it is a level of mere abstraction since thinking and thought can only be distinguished as long as one is not actually thinking. After all, "who is to tell us that we ourselves and the world surrounding us have something more to them than the thoughts of God and modifications of his original power?" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 116). To pretend to show that there is something that can be predicated of things outside God that cannot be predicated of the divine thoughts of those things is to deny divine omniscience.

But, without further qualifications, this pantheist line of reasoning is faulty, Mendelssohn submits, for at least three reasons. In the first place, it abolishes a distinction presupposed by any truthful statement, i.e., the distinction between original and copy. Secondly, there are indefeasible marks that distinguish a finite self-consciousness (as an object and original) from the divine representation (copy) of it. "Consciousness of myself, combined with complete ignorance of everything that does not fall within my sphere of thinking, is the most telling proof of my substantiality outside God, of my original existence" (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 118). Finally, the pantheist confuses divine knowledge with divine approval. God knows perfectly well my shortcomings without approving them and requiring their existence. Moreover, that they are thinkable hardly explains their existence since the opposite of them is just as thinkable. The problem for the pantheist, Mendelssohn submits, is explaining their existence, i.e., explaining what privileges some divine thoughts over others.

For the theist, by contrast, there is a ready solution to the problem. “The thoughts of God that come to reality to the exclusion of the rest will have this prerogative by virtue of their relative goodness and purposiveness, insofar, namely, as they correspond thus and not otherwise, here and now, to the idea of the perfect and best” (*Gesammelte Schriften* 3/2, p. 122).

Still, the difference between the theist and a refined pantheist is by no means this simple, Mendelssohn is quick to add. To be sure, Spinoza conceived intellect and will as one and the same. Nevertheless, at least as Lessing understood him, Spinoza also differentiated acquaintance with what is true from acquaintance with what is good and identified knowledge of the good with the “will” insofar as through it one thought does have a prerogative over another. Pantheism, so refined, secures religion and morality no less than theism does, leading Mendelssohn to ask: “where then does the system defended by my friend [Lessing] differ from ours?” (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 3/2, p. 123). Seen in this light, the difference between theism and refined pantheism turns in the end, on a speculative subtlety without practical consequences, namely, on different interpretations of the metaphor of divine light. Mendelssohn accordingly concludes that, like many another dispute in metaphysics and epistemology, the dispute between refined pantheists and traditional theists is purely verbal.

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(1729-1786)

By Shira Schoenberg

Moses Mendelssohn was the first Jew to bring secular culture to those living an [Orthodox](#) Jewish life. He valued reason and felt that anyone could arrive logically at religious truths. He argued that what makes [Judaism](#) unique is its divine revelation of a code of law. He wrote many philosophical treatises and is considered the father of the [Jewish Enlightenment](#).

Moses Mendelssohn was born in Dessau, a city in the state of Anhalt-Dessau in Germany, on September 6, 1729. As a child, he suffered from a disease that left him with a curvature of the spine. He was the son of a [Torah](#) scribe and his family was poor but learned. He began a traditional Jewish education under David Fraenkel, the rabbi of Dessau. When Fraenkel became rabbi of Berlin, the 14-year-old Mendelssohn followed him and studied in Fraenkel's yeshiva in Berlin. He soon became a promising scholar of [Talmud](#) and Rabbinics. He is a relative of [Samson Raphael Hirsch](#). He received free meals from neighborhood families and took on odd tutoring jobs.

In addition to learning German and Hebrew in Berlin, Mendelssohn also studied some French, Italian, English, Latin and Greek. He took up other secular subjects, in which he excelled, including mathematics, logic and philosophy. In the mid-1750s, he developed friendships with the philosopher Immanuel Kant and also with Gotthold Lessing, a dramatist, literary critic and advocate of enlightened toleration in Germany. With Lessing's encouragement, Mendelssohn began to publish philosophical essays in German.

In 1750, Mendelssohn began to serve as a teacher in the house of Isaac Bernhard, the owner of a silk factory. That same year, Frederick the Great gave him the status of "Jew under extraordinary protection." In 1763, the Prussian Academy of Sciences awarded him a prize for his treatise on "evidence in the metaphysical sciences." Four years later, he became the bookkeeper of Bernhard's firm and eventually a partner. Throughout his life, he worked as a merchant while continuing to write. In 1779, Lessing wrote the play *Nathan the Wise* in which a Jewish hero, modeled after Mendelssohn, appears as a spokesman for brotherhood and love of humanity.

Mendelssohn modeled his philosophy after that of Christian Wolff (a prominent philosopher of the Enlightenment) and Gottfried Leibnitz (a European rationalist). He wrote some general philosophical works, including many dealing with the theory of art, but his most well known writings deal with [Judaism](#). Mendelssohn conceived of [God](#) as a perfect Being and had faith in God's wisdom, righteousness, mercy and goodness. He argued that, "the world results from a creative act through which the divine will seeks to realize the highest good." He accepted the existence of miracles and revelation as long as belief in God did not depend on them. He also believed that revelation could not contradict reason. Like the deists, he claimed that reason could discover the reality of God, divine providence and immortality of the soul. He was the first to speak out against the use of excommunication as a religious threat.

At the height of his career, in 1769, Mendelssohn was publicly challenged by a Christian apologist, a Zurich pastor named John Lavater, to defend the superiority of Judaism over Christianity. From then on, he was involved in defending Judaism in print. In 1783, he published *Jerusalem, or On Religious Power and Judaism*. This study posited that no religious institution should use coercion and emphasized that Judaism does not coerce the mind through dogma. He argued that through reason all people could discover religious philosophical truths, but what made Judaism unique was its divinely revealed code of legal, ritual and moral law. He said that Jews must live in civil society but only in a way that their right to observe religious laws is granted. He recognized the necessity of multiple religions and respected each one.

Mendelssohn wanted to take the Jews out of a ghetto lifestyle and into secular society. He translated the [Bible](#) into German, although it was written in Hebrew letters, with a Hebrew commentary called the *Biur*. He campaigned for emancipation and instructed Jews to form bonds with the gentile governments. He tried to improve the relationship between Jews and Christians as he argued for tolerance and humanity. He became the symbol of the Jewish Enlightenment, the [Haskalah](#).

Mendelssohn's own descendents, the most famous being the composer [Felix Mendelssohn](#), left Judaism for Christianity.

Moses, the Son of Mendel

Commentary by Dr. Gerhard Falk

Moses Mendelssohn was born in 1729 and died in 1786. Because of his brilliant reputation he was appointed court philosopher by Frederick II, the king of Prussia. At that time Prussia was the most enlightened state in Europe. Jews were welcomed and Frederick, a learned man and musical composer, enjoyed the company of scholars including

Voltaire and others. He corresponded with George Washington and made every effort to allow his "subjects" more freedom than anywhere in the then existing world outside of the United States. That Prussian tradition continued into the eighteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century when the arrogance of William II destroyed the Prussian tradition and promoted the advent of Hitler.

Moses Mendelssohn had three children. Two daughters, Dorothea and Henrietta, who converted to Catholicism and a son, Abraham, who induced his children to become Christians for he believed that "it (Christianity) is the conviction of most well-bred human beings."

It is well known that Moses Mendelssohn's entire progeny left the Jewish fold because his famous grandson, the composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was a nominal Christian as were so many successful German Jews during the nineteenth century and until the time of Hitler and his exterminators.

Because this is so well known there are those who regard Moses Mendelssohn as an apostate and one who sought to renounce his Judaism for favors available from the Prussian government. The orthodox have accused him, the rationalist, of abandoning belief in the revelation of Judaism and equally resented his effort to connect the Bible to the German language; reformers resent his adherence to Jewish rituals; nationalists and Zionists cannot understand his rejection of a Jewish state.

Yet, Moses Mendelssohn, a "Torah true" Jew, became the object of considerable hostility from traditional Jews because he translated the Torah into German. Mendelssohn published this translation in Hebrew script. This means that the words were German but Hebrew letters were used to spell the German words, thus making the translation accessible to the vast majority of German Jews who could not read the Gothic German then in use. Traditional rabbis feared that this translation would lead to the neglect of Hebrew studies, thus leading to the abandonment of Judaism whether intended or not. That Mendelssohn did not intend the abandonment of Judaism is certain. That apostasy became frequent after his death is certain as well. The reason for this unintended outcome of Mendelssohn's efforts was that he had become admired by the German Christian upper classes and intelligentsia and had become a role model ".....and encouraged Jews to think that they too could achieve the status to which they aspired."

Thus, it can well be said that Mendelssohn did indeed participate in the re-formation of Judaism in the sense that his contributions reflected the social trends of his time. It is however simplistic and devoid of sociological understanding to either credit or blame Mendelssohn for the secularization of Judaism in the years following his life because "political, socio-economic and demographic factors," not one person or one writer, can ever be considered responsible for any major social movement.

In fact, *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn's defense of traditional Judaism, indicates without a doubt that he devoted his life to living in both the world of the "Enlightenment" and the world of Jewish orthodoxy. Thus, *Jerusalem* has been called "....a remarkable synthesis of Mendelssohn's twin commitments, to Judaism and to reason."

It was this double commitment which distinguishes Mendelssohn's contribution to the advancement of secularization in the 18th century from Spinoza's teachings in the 17th century. For although Spinoza never claimed to be an atheist, his excommunication and his subsequent naturalism resulted in an attack on Judaism by him and his followers. Therefore, Mendelssohn was most concerned in distancing himself from Spinoza, as shown by the famous controversy which erupted after the death of Mendelssohn's friend Lessing who was posthumously identified as a Spinozist, a label Mendelssohn would not accept either for himself or for Lessing.

The reason for the vehemence with which Mendelssohn rejected the possibility that Lessing was a Spinozist was the belief among many people that Spinoza, no matter his thin defense of revelation, was an atheist.

"Spinoza's philosophy stood for radical scientific naturalism.....and the consequences of Spinoza's philosophy, if it were to delete its superfluous religious language, was atheism and fatalism." Yet, even as Mendelssohn rejected atheism and tried to show how we could rationally conclude that there is a God, that there is immortality of the soul, that there is revelation and providence, Mendelssohn defended Spinoza's rationalism without permitting this attitude to lead him, like Spinoza, to reject religious beliefs as man-made. Thus, Mendelssohn recognized with Spinoza that the consistency and order of the universe is replicated by human reason even while he, Mendelssohn, held the Jewish ceremonial law as revealed and hence applicable in his own day and at all times.

Unlike Spinoza, who held that the laws of nature were the only laws God had given man, Mendelssohn held that the rabbinic laws were revealed truth. Nothing illustrates Mendelssohn's devotion to traditional Judaism more than his principal work, *Morgenstunden* or *Morning Hours*. Candidly borrowing from Kant, Mendelssohn argues that no object can be real unless it conforms to a concept. Here Mendelssohn also borrows from Descartes and agrees with that writer that "My own thoughts I know to be real while I myself, as the subject in which these thoughts occur, am real in an unqualified sense."

The sum of Mendelssohn's metaphysical arguments are these: First that there is an external reality to which our senses testify; second, there is cognition consisting of experience, rational knowledge and reasoning; third, there is a

close relationship between reason and common sense; fourth, there is a difference between imagination and objective reality so that we can be misled; five, external reality is an association of ideas reflecting cause and effect in accordance with the laws of nature (a Spinozian notion), sixth, that the difference between the ideal and the real is much narrower than usually assumed and seventh, that Kant's *Ding an sich*, the thing in itself, can only be explained by what a thing effects and how it is affected. This argument would no doubt be understood by sociologists today but falls short of the work of Kant who argued that since we know a thing only in its spatial relations it was quite legitimate to ask what it was in itself. According to Mendelssohn, however, only God knows the "thing in itself." Thus, Mendelssohn held that the endless controversy between idealists and realists was only semantic and not a matter of substance. Mendelssohn also taught that the first source of knowledge is the study of man himself. Like Alexander Pope (1688-1744) before him he believed that "the proper study of mankind is man."

From these preliminary statements Mendelssohn derives his proof of the existence of God. This, he said, is derived from the reality of a sensible world outside ourselves. Mendelssohn seeks then to root his beliefs in common sense. "Experience has taught me," he wrote, "that common sense is usually right." He thought that "what no thinking being conceives as possible is in fact not possible, and what no thinking being thinks is real is in fact not real." Then, as now, there were and are those who find Mendelssohn's adherence to Jewish law contradicts his rejection of ecclesiastical power and his commitment to the principles of the enlightenment. Mendelssohn insisted on supporting reason at all times but would not permit himself to conclude that such a Spinozist position bore within it the rejection of revealed religion. Instead he insisted that both reason and rabbinic Judaism could be supported even though most enlightened Christians held rabbinic Judaism to be an obstacle to the acceptance of Jews in Prussian and general European society. Mendelssohn argued that Jews, born to accept the Law, did not have the authority to abrogate it and that therefore rabbinic law was also revealed and permanent. Yet, he demanded the acceptance of Jews in European society even while observing the details of rabbinic Law. He had achieved this for himself. Now he insisted that his Jewish brethren be given the same privilege.

Mendelssohn believed that acceptance of Jews would come first in Germany and he strove for the development of Jewish culture within the borders of Germany. Mendelssohn loved Germany and German civilization as did so many of his co-religionists who insisted on believing in the humaneness of their German brethren. Mendelssohn sought to develop "Jewish Prussians" rather than Prussian Jews and, for a short time after his death, succeeded. Thus, a limited amount of fraternity between Jews and Christians in the upper classes of German society did develop at the end of the eighteenth century, particularly because there were some leading Christians who sought to facilitate the entrance of the Jews into German social life. Others, again, were vehemently opposed to such a possibility so that there was never a clear cut German attitude towards Mendelssohn's proposals.

Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Joseph ben Ephraim Karo



What is the meta-story of Joseph Karo?
We need to answer these questions:

What do we learn about the people who created and changed
Judaism?

When did they become 'enlightened'?
What does their very existence say about Judaism?
What was the alternative?

Joseph ben Ephraim Karo, also spelled Yosef Caro, or Qaro, ([Toledo](#), 1488 – [Safed](#), 1575)^[1] was author of the last great codification of Jewish law, the [Shulchan Aruch](#), which is still authoritative for all [Jews](#) pertaining to their respective communities. To this end he is often referred to as **HaMechaber** ([Hebrew](#): "The Author") and as **Maran** ([Aramaic](#): "Our Master").^[2]

Early life

Karo was born in Toledo, Spain in 1488.^[2] In 1492, aged four years old, he was forced to [flee Spain](#) with his family and the rest of Spanish Jewry because of Jewish expulsion from the [Alhambra Decree](#) and subsequently settled in [Portugal](#).^[3] After the [expulsion of the Jews from Portugal](#) in 1497, Karo went with his parents to [Nikopolis](#) in current day [Bulgaria](#), where he received his first instruction from his father, who was himself an eminent [Talmudist](#). He married,

first, Isaac Saba's daughter, and, after her death, the daughter of [Hayyim Albalag](#), both of these men being well-known Talmudists. After the death of his second wife he married the daughter of [Zechariah Sechsel](#) (or perhaps Sachsels), a learned and wealthy Talmudist.

Already as a young man, he gained a reputation as a brilliant Torah scholar. He began by writing an explanation on the [Rambam's Mishneh Torah](#). He called his work the *Kesef Mishnah*. Here he cited and explained Rambam's sources.

Between 1520 and 1522 Karo settled at [Adrianople](#). He later emigrated to the [Land of Israel](#), where he arrived about 1535, having en route spent several years at [Salonica](#) (1533) and [Constantinople](#).

Authority recognized

After his first wife died at a young age, he married the daughter of Rabbi Yitzchak Sabba. For a short while he lived in Nikopol, Bulgaria, but decided to make his way to the [Holy Land](#) so that he could immerse himself in its sanctity and complete his written works. Passing through Salonica, he met the great [kabbalist Joseph Taitazak](#). He continued his journey to the Holy Land via Egypt and eventually settled in [Safed](#).

At Safed he met [Jacob Berab](#) and was soon appointed a member of his rabbinical court. Berab exerted a great influence upon him, and Karo became an enthusiastic supporter of Berab's plans for the restitution of [semicha](#) (rabbinical ordination) which had been in abeyance for over 11 centuries. Karo was one of the first he ordained and after Berab's death, Karo tried to perpetuate the scheme by ordaining his pupil [Moses Alshech](#), but he finally gave up his endeavors, convinced that he could not overcome the opposition to ordination. Karo also established a [yeshiva](#) where he taught [Torah](#) to over 200 students. **[GOTO the section on semikha]**

When Jacob Berab died, Karo was regarded as his successor, and together with Rabbi [Moshe of Trani](#) he headed the Rabbinical Court of Safed. In fact, by this time, the Rabbinical Court of Safed had become the central rabbinical court in all of Palestine, and indeed of the [diaspora](#) as well. Thus there was not a single matter of national or global importance that did not come to the attention and ruling of the Safed Beth Din. Its rulings were accepted as final and conclusive, and Karo's halachic decisions and clarifications were sought by sages from every corner of the diaspora. He came to be regarded as the leader of the entire generation

Karo's grave in Safed

In a dramatic testimonial, Rabbi [Shlomo Alkabetz](#) testified that in Salonica, Karo had become one of the rare individuals who merited to be instructed by a *maggid* - a private angelic teacher who revealed to him many kabbalistic teachings. The *maggid* exhorted Karo to sanctify and purify himself, and he revealed to him events that would take place in the future. In *Shaarei Kedusha*, Rabbi [Chaim Vital](#) explains that visitation by a *maggid* is a form of Divine Inspiration (*ruach hakodesh*). The teachings of the *maggid* are recorded in his published work titled *Maggid Meisharim*, although Rabbi [Chaim Joseph David Azulai](#) notes that only about one fiftieth of the manuscript was ever published, (see *Works*). However, in numerous places in *Maggid*

Meisharim it is stated that, "I am the Mishna that speaks in your mouth," indicating that the Oral Torah itself (of which the Mishna is the fundamental part) spoke within him. (However, these two explanations are not necessarily contradictory—in the merit of the Mishna Karo constantly reviewed, he was worthy of an angelic teacher).

The Maggid promised him that he would have the merit of settling in the [Land of Israel](#), and this promise was fulfilled. Another promise, that he would merit to die a martyr's death sanctifying God's Name like Rabbi Shlomo Molcho had merited, did not transpire for an unspecified reason.

His reputation during the last thirty years of his life was greater than that of almost any other rabbi since [Maimonides](#). The Italian [Azariah dei Rossi](#), though his views differed widely from Karo's, collected money among the rich Italian Jews for the purpose of having a work of Karo's printed; and [Moses Isserles](#) compelled the recognition of one of Karo's decisions at [Kraków](#), although he thought Karo was wrong.

When some members of the community of [Carpentras, France](#), believed themselves to have been unjustly treated by the majority in a matter relating to taxes, they appealed to Karo, whose letter was sufficient to restore to them their rights (Rev. Etudes Juives 18:133-136). In the East, Karo's authority was, if possible, even greater. His name heads the decree of excommunication directed against Daud, [Joseph Nasi](#)'s agent; and it was Karo who condemned [Dei Rossi](#)'s *Me'or Enayim* to be burned. Several funeral orations delivered on that occasion have been preserved (Moses Albelda, *Darash Mosheh*; Samuel Katzenellenbogen, *Derashot*), as well as some elegies from Karo's passing.

Karo published during his lifetime:

[Beth Yosef](#) (רס"י תיב), a commentary on [Arba'ah Turim](#), the current work of [Jewish law](#) in his days; [Shulchan Aruch](#) (דורע וְחלוש), a condensation of his decisions in *Beth Yosef*; *Kesef Mishneh* (הנשמ רס"כ) ([Venice](#), 1574-5), a commentary of [Mishneh Torah](#) by [Maimonides](#);

Karo also left a commentary upon the [Mishnah](#), as well as supercommentaries to [Rashi](#)'s and [Nahmanides](#)' commentaries on the [Torah](#), which have, apparently, not been preserved.

Karo's characteristics

Karo's mysticism was not speculative in nature; and he devoted time to the [Kabbalah](#), his maggid often exhorted him not to neglect the study of it (*Maggid Mesharim*, p. 57b). The catastrophe that came upon the Pyrenean Jews made such an impression upon the minds of the best among them that many saw therein the signs of Messianic travail, (compare [Jacob Berab](#)); and Karo, according to a contemporary, took this dark view throughout his life. While men like Molcho and David Reubeni were led to commit extravagant and foolish deeds under the influence of this idea. Berab's and Karo's nobility of nature came to the fore. If Karo indulged in mystical visions, and, half dreaming, thought he heard heavenly voices in his soul, they served always as reminders to him that his life, his actions, and his accomplishments must surpass those of other people (ib. *Toledot*, p. 9; *Azharot*, p. 3b, and passim). He died on the 13 [Nisan](#) 5335 (1575 CE) aged of 87.

Semikhah – Becoming a Rabbi

Semikhah ([Hebrew](#): סמיכה, "leaning [of the hands]"), also *semichut* ([Hebrew](#): סמיכות, "ordination"), or *semicha lerabbanut* ([Hebrew](#): סמיכה לרבנות, "rabbinical ordination") is derived from a Hebrew word which means to "rely on" or "to be authorized". It generally refers to the [ordination](#) of a [rabbi](#) within [Judaism](#). In this sense it is the "transmission" of rabbinic authority to give advice or judgment in [Jewish law](#). Although presently most functioning [synagogue](#) rabbis hold *semikhah* by some rabbinical institution or academy, this was until quite recently not always required, and in fact many [Haredi](#) rabbis may not be required to hold a "formal" *semikhah* even though they may occupy important rabbinical and leadership positions.

Classical *semikhah* refers to a specific type of ordination that, according to traditional Jewish teaching, traces a line of authority back to [Moses](#) and the seventy elders. The line of classical *semikhah* seems to have died out in the 4th or 5th century CE but it is widely held that the line of Torah conferment remains unbroken. Some believe evidence exists that classical *semicha* was existent during the 12th century when *semuchim* from Lebanon and Syria were traveling to Israel in order to pass on *semikhah* to their students.^[1] Others, such as Rav [Yisroel of Shklov](#) (1770–1839), believed it may not have been broken at all but that it continued outside of the land of Israel. Today many believe in the existence of an unbroken chain of authority dating back to the time of Moses and Joshua^{[2][3]} (See "The Unbroken Chain of Torah" below).

A third and distinct meaning of *semikhah* is the laying of hands upon an offering of a [korban](#) ("sacrifice") in the times of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), see [Semicha in sacrifices](#).

Hebrew Bible

According to the [Hebrew Bible](#), [Moses](#) ordained [Joshua](#) through *semikhah*. ([Num 27:15-23](#), [Deut 34:9](#)). Moses also ordained the 70 elders ([Num 11:16-25](#)). The elders later ordained their successors in this way. Their successors in turn ordained others. This chain of hands-on *semikhah* continued through the time of the [Second Temple](#), to an undetermined time.^{[original research?][citation needed]}

Traditionally Moses is also assumed to be the "first rabbi" of the [Children of Israel](#). He is still known to most Jews as *Moshe Rabbeinu* ("Moses our Teacher"). Moses was also a [prophet](#) and is considered to be the greatest of all the [Hebrew Bible](#)'s prophets. Moses passed his leadership on to Joshua as commanded by God in the [Book of Numbers](#) where the subject of *semikhah* ("laying [of hands]" or "ordination") is first mentioned in the Torah:

- [Book of Numbers](#): "Moses spoke to God, saying, 'Let the Omnipotent God of all living souls appoint a man over the community. Let him come and go before them, and let him bring them forth and lead them. Let God's community not be like sheep that have no shepherd.' God said to Moses, 'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and **lay your hands on him**'. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the entire community, and let them see you commission him. Invest him with some of your splendor so that the entire

Israelite community will obey him. Let him stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall seek the decision of the Urim before God on his behalf. By this word, along with all the Israelites and the entire community shall he come and go.' Moses did as God had ordered him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the entire community. **He then laid his hands on him and commissioned him as God had commanded Moses.**" ([Num 27:15-23](#)) *[Book of Deuteronomy](#): "Joshua son of Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom, because **Moses had laid his hands on him**. The Israelites therefore listened to him, doing as God had commanded Moses." (Deuteronomy 34:9)

Mishnah and Talmud

Despite the name, the classical semikhah did not actually require a literal laying on of hands; the operative part of the ceremony consisted of a court of three, at least one of whom himself had semikhah, conferring the authority on the recipient.^[4] Both the givers and the recipient had to be in the Land of Israel, but they did not have to be in the same place.^[5] In the Mishnaic era it became the law that only someone who had *semikhah* could give religious and legal decisions.^[6]

The title *ribbi* (or "rabbi") was reserved for those with semikhah. The sages of the Babylonian Jewish community had a similar religious education, but without the semikhah ceremony they were called *rav*. The Talmud also relates that one can obtain the title of Rabbi by those to whom he teaches or counsels.

After the failed [revolution](#) by [Bar Kokhba](#) in 132–135 CE, the Romans put down the revolt, and the emperor [Hadrian](#) tried to put a permanent end to the [Sanhedrin](#), the supreme legislative and religious body of the Jewish people. According to the Talmud, Hadrian decreed that anyone who gave or accepted semikhah would be killed, any city in which the ceremony took place would be razed, and all crops within a mile of the ceremony's site would be destroyed. The line of succession was saved by Rabbi Yehuda ben Bava's martyrdom: he took no other rabbis with him, and five students of the recently martyred Rabbi Akiva, to a mountain pass far from any settlement or farm, and this one Rabbi ordained all five students. These new Rabbis were: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi Yehudah (ben Ilai), Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua – an entire generation of Torah leadership. When the Romans attacked them, Rabbi Yehuda blocked the pass with his body allowing the others to escape and became one of Judaism's ten Rabbinic Martyrs himself by being speared 300 times. Hence, semikhah is also granted from one Rabbi to a new Rabbi, without the need of two witnesses, and the above five Rabbis carried on this tradition. The footnote gives a page of Talmud in Aramaic. See Sanhedrin 14a.^[7]

The exact date that the original *semikhah* succession ended is not certain. Many medieval authorities believed that this occurred during the reign of Hillel II, around the year 360 CE.^[8] However, [Theodosius I](#) forbade the Sanhedrin to assemble and declared [ordination](#) illegal. (Roman law prescribed capital punishment for any Rabbi who received ordination and complete destruction of the town where the ordination occurred).^[9] It seems to have continued until at least 425, when [Theodosius II](#) executed [Gamaliel VI](#) and suppressed the [Patriarchate](#) and Sanhedrin.^[citation needed]

The formula

The ancient formula for Semikhah was 'Yoreh Yoreh. Yaddin Yaddin' ('May he decide? He may decide! May he judge? He may judge!'); and in the early days of rabbinical Judaism any ordained teacher could ordain his students.

The unbroken chain of Torah

Classical semikhah was granted by a court of three judges (Mishnah Sanhedrin 2a), and it later required the participation of at least one who had attained this status, himself. According to Rambam (hil. Sanherin 4:3) the other two did need not be semukhim. Semikhah represents an unbroken chain of tradition and authority dating back to the time of Moshe and Yehoshua. ^[10] It is believed that Hashem taught the [Torah](#) to [Moshe Rabbeinu](#) on Mt. Sinai in 1312 BCE and that since that time, the knowledge of Torah has been passed from generation to generation by the conferment of semikhah, rabbinic ordination, or the unbroken transmission of authority dating back to the time of Moshe. This unbroken chain of tradition is believed by many to have continued for over 3,300 years and continues to this day. ^{[2] [3]}

Types

The Talmud lists three classes of *semikhah* issued: ^[6]

Yoreh Yoreh

The recipient of this *semikhah* demonstrated sufficient education and proper judgment to be able to render [halakhic](#) judgments on matters of religious law as it pertains to daily life such as [kashrut](#), [nidda](#), and permissible or forbidden activities on [Shabbos](#) or [Yom Tov](#).

Yadin Yadin

The recipient of this *semikhah* demonstrated sufficient education and proper judgment to be able to render [halakhic](#) judgments on matters of religious law as it pertains to monetary and property disputes.

Yatir Bechorot Yatir

The recipient of this *semikhah* demonstrated sufficient education and proper judgment to determine the ritual status of firstborn animals that have developed a blemish. This degree required extensive veterinary knowledge.

While the first two classes are still issued today, the last one is not.

Post-Talmudic

The decline of classical *semikhah*

The original line of succession seems to have died out in the 4th or 5th centuries. The [Geonim](#), early medieval Jewish sages of Babylon, did not possess semikhah, and did not use the title "rabbi". They were formally known as "rav" and were entrusted with authority to make legal and religious decisions.

Some believe that classical semikhah may have even survived until the 12th century when semuchim from Lebanon and Syria were traveling to Israel in order to pass on semicha to their students.^[1]

Sometime after the [Black Death](#) struck Europe, the Jewish community was influenced by the formal issuing of diplomas conferred by European Christian universities. In the areas today known as [France](#) and [Germany](#), [Ashkenazic](#) Jews began using the term *semikhah* again, this time using it to refer to a formal "diploma" conferred by a teacher on his pupil, entitling the pupil to be called *Mori* (my teacher). This practice was at first frowned upon by [Sephardi Jews](#), who viewed the practice as "presumptuous and arrogant", and an imitation of [gentile](#) customs (in this case, the university doctorate); eventually however this practice was adopted by the Sephardic Jewish community as well.

Attempts to revive classical semikhah

[Maimonides](#), in his [Mishneh Torah](#), rules that "if all the sages In Israel would unanimously agree to appoint and ordain judges, then these new ordinants would possess the full authority of the original ordained judges" (Hilchoth Sanhedrin 4:11). His code of law was accepted as normative by the majority of Jewish scholars since that time, though this section was mainly viewed as theoretical, especially because he concludes that "the matter needs deciding". The Sanhedrin of Rabbi Jacob Berab purported to enact this into practical [law](#), changing minor details. However, since the legal existence of this Sanhedrin depends on the validity of Maimonides' view, the question is circular.

Attempt by Rabbi Jacob Berab, 1538

In 1538 Rabbi [Jacob Berab](#) of [Safed](#), [Land of Israel](#), attempted to restore the traditional form of Semikhah. His goal was to unify the scattered Jewish communities through the re-establishment of the [Sanhedrin](#). At his prompting, 25 rabbis from the land of Israel convened; they ordained Jacob Berab as their "[chief rabbi](#)". Berab then conferred semikhah through a laying on of hands to four rabbis, including [Joseph Karo](#), who was later to become the author of the [Shulchan Aruch](#), widely viewed as the most important code of Jewish law from the 17th century onwards.

In 1541, Karo succeeded Berab and he perpetuated the tradition by ordaining [Moshe Alshich](#), [Elisha Gallico](#) and [Jacob Berab II](#). In the 1590s, Alshich ordained [Hayyim Vital](#), and between the years 1594 and 1599, [Jacob Berab II](#) ordained seven more scholars: [Moses Galante](#), [Elazar Azikri](#), [Moses Berab](#) (Jacob's brother), [Abraham Gabriel](#), [Yom Tov Tzahalon](#), [Hiyya Rofe](#) and [Jacob Abulafia](#).^[11]

Berab made an error in not first obtaining the approval of the chief rabbis in [Jerusalem](#), which led to an objection to having a Sanhedrin at that time. One should note that this was not an objection to the semikhah, but to reinstituting a Sanhedrin. [Levi ibn Habib](#), the chief rabbi in Jerusalem, wrote that when the nascent Sanhedrin took the authority of a Sanhedrin upon itself, it had to fix the calendar immediately. However, by delaying in this matter, it invalidated itself. Rabbi [David ibn abi Zimra](#) (*Radvaz*) of [Egypt](#) was consulted, but when Berab died in 1542 the renewed form of semikhah gradually ground to a halt.

Status of current rabbis

Although presently most functioning [synagogue](#) (i.e. "[pulpit](#)") rabbis hold *semikhah*, this was until quite recently not always required, and in fact many [Haredi](#) rabbis may possibly not be required to hold a "formal" *semikhah* even though they may occupy important rabbinical and leadership positions. The reasons being that what is prized in the communities they serve and lead is most of all a supreme mastery of the [Talmud](#) with a vast knowledge of the commentaries of the [Rishonim](#) and [Acharonim](#) and [Responsa](#), added to knowledge of the [Shulchan Aruch](#) and [Halakha](#) ("Jewish Law"). Many [Hasidic rebbes](#) and [Rosh yeshivas](#) of major Orthodox [yeshivas](#) are not required to "prove" to their flocks that they do or do not hold formal *semikhah* because their reputations as Torah-scholars and sages is unquestioned and esteemed based on the recommendations of trusted sages, and the experiences and interactions that many knowledgeable Torah-observant Jews have with them, which thus gives practical testimony based on experience that these great rabbis are indeed worthy to be called as such. For example, Rabbi [Yisrael Meir Kagan](#), also known as the *Chafetz Chayim*, probably one of the most famous rabbis of the early 20th century, was trained and recognized as a rabbi, but did not hold *semikhah* until he had to apply for a [passport](#). He realized that unless he obtained a written document of *semikhah*, he could not technically enter "rabbi" as an [occupation](#) without lying. He then received his *semikhah* by [telegraph](#) from Rabbi [Chaim Ozer Grodzinski](#) of [Wilna](#), an unusual arrangement - especially in the early 20th century.

Most current [poskim](#), however, do have *semikhah*. Just as a debate exists about who is a Jew, there is little consensus as to who is a rabbi. The Reform movement in a Responsa states that for their Temples, pulpit rabbis need to attend and complete their academic program at the Reform movement's Rabbinic schools. But they further state that this does not negate other sects of Judaism from accepting the time-honored *semikhah* of one-on-one. Nor do they deal with the issue of rabbis who are not pulpit rabbis but teach, study, and do research. They do say that the need for three rabbis is unneeded as the two additional rabbis are just witnesses and cannot attest to the new rabbi's knowledge. Orthodox Jews do not see Conservative or Reform Rabbis as being "Rabbis", and are usually careful to qualify the title with the movement from which it originated. A "Rabbi" without qualified is assumed to be Orthodox, and hence, legitimate.

In the UK, a communal minister who does not have *semikhah* has the title "Reverend" rather than "Rabbi".

Shulchan Aruch

The ***Shulchan Aruch*** ([Hebrew](#): שולחן ערוך, literally: "Set Table")^[1] also known as the **Code of Jewish Law**, is the most authoritative [legal code](#) of Judaism. It was authored in [Safed, Israel](#), by [Yosef Karo](#) in 1563 and published in [Venice](#) two years later.^[2] Together with its commentaries, it is the most widely accepted compilation of [Jewish law](#) ever written.

The [halachic](#) rulings in the Shulchan Aruch generally follow [Sephardic law and customs](#) whereas [Ashkenazi Jews](#) will generally follow the halachic rulings of [Moses Isserles](#) whose glosses to the Shulchan Aruch note where the Sephardic and Ashkenazic customs differ. These glosses are widely referred to as the *mappah* (literally: the "tablecloth") to the Shulchan Aruch's "Set Table". Almost all published editions of the Shulchan Aruch include this gloss, and the term "Shulchan Aruch" has come to denote *both* Karo's work as well as Isserles', with Karo usually referred to as "the *mechaber*" ("author") and Isserles as "the Rema".

Structure

The *Shulchan Aruch* (and its forerunner, the [Beit Yosef](#)) follow the same structure as [Arba'ah Turim](#) by Rabbi [Jacob ben Asher](#). These books were written from the standpoint of Sephardi [Minhag](#), other works entitled Shulchan Aruch or Kitzur Shulchan Aruch cited below are written from the standpoint of Ashkenazi Minhag. There are four sections, each subdivided into many chapters and paragraphs.

1. [Orach Chayim](#) - laws of [prayer](#) and [synagogue](#), [Sabbath](#), [holidays](#);
2. [Yoreh De'ah](#) - laws of [kashrut](#); [religious conversion](#); Mourning; Laws pertaining to Israel; Laws of family purity
3. [Even Ha'ezer](#) - laws of [marriage](#), [divorce](#) and related issues;
4. [Choshen Mishpat](#) - laws of finance, financial responsibility, [damages](#) (personal and financial), and the rules of the [Bet Din](#), as well as the laws of witnesses

Beth Yosef

Its premise and style

The *Shulchan Aruch* is largely based on an earlier work by Karo, titled *Beth Yosef* (Hebrew: "House of Joseph"). The latter is a vast and comprehensive commentary on [Jacob ben Asher's](#) (1269–1343) [Arba'ah Turim](#) ("*Tur*"), often citing and analyzing the Talmudic, Geonic, and major subsequent halachic authorities. This work analyzes the theories and conclusions of those authorities cited by the *Tur*, and also examines the opinions of authorities not mentioned by the latter. Karo began the *Beth Yosef* in 1522 at [Adrianople](#), finished it in 1542 at [Safed](#) in the [Land of Israel](#); he published it in 1550-59.

Thirty-two authorities, beginning with the Talmud and ending with the works of Rabbi [Israel Isserlein](#) (1390–1460 and known as the *Terumath ha-Deshen*), are summarized and critically discussed in *Beth Yosef*. No other rabbinical work compares with it in wealth of material. Karo

evidences not only an astonishing range of reading, covering almost the entire [rabbinic literature](#) up to his time, but also remarkable powers of critical investigation. He evidences no inclination to simply accept the opinions of ancient authorities, notwithstanding his great respect for them.

In the introduction to his monumental compilation, Karo clearly states the necessity of, and his reasons for undertaking such a work. The expulsion of the [Jews](#) from the Iberian peninsula and the invention of printing had endangered the stability of religious observances on their legal and ritual sides. By the 15th century, the [Jews in Spain](#) and the [Jews of Portugal](#) followed two main traditions: the older tradition of Maimonides, whose school of thought is heir to the Talmudic academies of Babylonia via the scholars of North Africa; and the Ashkenazi school of the [Tosafists](#) whose tradition is based on analytical thinking (related to [pilpul](#)), a methodology that was developed in the yeshivot of France and Germany that taught the importance of the [minhagim](#) or "customs" of the country. Jews then living in the different kingdoms of Spain had their standard authorities to which they appealed. The most prominent of these were [Maimonides](#) (Rambam), whose opinions were accepted in Andalusia, Valencia, Israel and the Near East; [Nahmanides](#) and [Solomon ben Adret](#), whose opinions were accepted in Catalonia; and [Asher ben Jehiel](#) and his family, of German origin, whose opinions were accepted in Castile. When the Spanish-Portuguese exiles who were followers of Rambam came to the various communities in the East and West, where usages entirely different from those to which they had been accustomed prevailed, the question naturally arose whether the newcomers, some of whom were men of greater learning than the members of the host communities in Europe, should be ruled by the latter, or vice versa. The proliferation of printed books, moreover, dramatically increased the availability of halakhic literature; so that many half-educated persons, finding themselves in possession of legal treatises, felt justified in following any ancient authority at will. Karo undertook his *Beth Yosef* to remedy this problem, quoting and critically examining in his book the opinions of all the authorities then known.

Although the *Shulchan Aruch* is largely a codification of the rulings of the *Beth Yosef*, it includes various rulings that are not mentioned at all in the *Beth Yosef*, because after completing the *Beth Yosef* Karo read opinions in books he hadn't seen before, which he then included in the *Shulchan Aruch*.^[3]

The standard authorities

Karo initially intended to rely on his own judgment relating to differences of opinion between the various authorities, especially where he could support his own view based on the Talmud. But he abandoned this idea because, as he wrote:^[4] "Who has the courage to rear his head aloft among mountains, the heights of [God](#)?" and also because he may have thought, though he does not mention his conclusion, that he could gain no following if he set up his authority against that of the ancient scholars^[citation needed]. Hence Karo adopted the *Halakhot* of Rabbi [Isaac Alfasi](#) (the *Rif*), [Maimonides](#), and [Asher ben Jehiel](#) (the *Rosh*) as his standards, accepting as authoritative the opinion of two of the three, except in cases where most of the ancient authorities were against them or in cases where there was already an accepted custom contrary to his ruling.^[5] The net result of these last exceptions is that in a number of cases Karo rules in favour of the Catalanian school of Nahmanides and ben Adret, thus indirectly reflecting Ashkenazi opinions, even against the consensus of Alfasi and Maimonides. Karo very often decides disputed cases without

necessarily considering the age and importance of the authority in question, expressing simply his own views. He follows Maimonides' example, as seen in [Mishneh Torah](#) (the *Yad Hachazakah*), rather than that of Jacob ben Asher, who seldom decides between ancient authorities.

Several reasons induced Karo to connect his work with the "*Tur*", instead of Maimonides' code. In the first place, the "*Tur*", although not considered as great an authority as Maimonides' code, was much more widely known; the latter being recognized only among the Spanish Jews, while the former enjoyed a high reputation among the [Ashkenazim](#) and [Sephardim](#), as well as the [Italian Jews](#). Secondly, it was not Karo's intention to write a code similar in form to Maimonides' work; he intended to give not merely the results of his investigations, but also the investigations themselves.^[6] He wished not only to aid the officiating [rabbi](#) in the performance of his duties, but also to trace for the student the development of particular laws from the Talmud through later rabbinical literature. Unlike the *Tur*, Maimonides' code includes all fields of Jewish law, of both present-day relevance and those dealing with prior and future times (such as laws of sacrifices, Messiah, Kings, etc.). For Karo, whose interest lay in ruling on the practical issues, the *Tur* seemed a better choice.

Parallel Halachic developments

The "Rema" ([Moses Isserles](#)) started writing his commentary on the [Arba'ah Turim](#), Darkhei Moshe, at about the same time as Yosef Karo. Karo finished his work "*Bet Yosef*" first, and it was first presented to the Rema as a gift from one of his students. Upon receiving the gift, the Rema could not understand how he had spent so many years unaware of Karo's efforts. After looking through the *Bet Yosef*, the Rema realized that Karo had mainly relied upon Sephardic [poskim](#).

In place of Karo's three standard authorities, Isserles cites "the later authorities" (chiefly based on the works of [Yaakov Moelin](#), [Israel Isserlein](#) and [Israel Bruna](#), together with the Franco-German [Tosafists](#)) as criteria of opinion (*Darkhei Mosheh* to *Yoreh De'ah*, 35). While the *Rosh* on many occasions based his decision on these sources, Isserles gave them more prominence in developing practical legal rulings. By incorporating these other opinions, Isserles actually addressed some major criticisms regarding what many viewed as the arbitrary selection of the three authorities upon whose opinions Karo based his work.^[7]

After realizing this, the Rema shortened his work, *Darkhei Moshe*, on *Tur* focusing only on rulings which differ from *Bet Yosef*.

The halachic rulings in the *Shulchan Aruch* generally follow the Sephardic custom. The Rema added his glosses and published them as a comments on the *Shulchan Aruch*, specifying whenever the Sephardic and Ashkenazic customs differ. These glosses are referred to as the *mappah*, literally, the 'tablecloth,' to the *Shulchan Aruch*'s 'Set Table.' Almost all published editions of the *Shulchan Aruch* include this gloss.

The importance of the [minhag](#) ("prevailing local custom") is also a point of dispute between Karo and Isserles: while Karo held fast to original authorities and material reasons, Isserles

considered the *minhag* as an object of great importance, and not to be omitted in a codex. This point, especially, induced Isserles to write his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch*, that the customs (*minhagim*) of the Ashkenazim might be recognized, and not be set aside through Karo's reputation.

Shulchan Aruch

Karo wrote the *Shulchan Aruch* in his old age, for the benefit of those who did not possess the education necessary to understand the *Beth Yosef*. The format of this work parallels that adopted by Jacob ben Asher in his *Arba'ah Turim*, but more concisely; without citing sources. This book, which for centuries was, and essentially still is, "the code" of [Rabbinical Judaism](#) for all ritual and legal questions that arose after the destruction of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), has a remarkable history. The author himself had no very high opinion of the work, remarking that he had written it chiefly for "young students" (*Shulchan Aruch*, Introduction). He never refers to it in his [responsa](#), but always to the *Beth Yosef*. The *Shulchan Aruch* achieved its reputation and popularity not only against the wishes of the author, but, perhaps, through the very scholars who criticized it.

The history of the *Shulchan Aruch* is, in a way, identical with the history of rabbinical literature of the [Jews in Poland](#) for a period of two centuries. Recognition or denial of Karo's authority lay entirely with the Polish Talmudists. [German Jewish](#) authorities had been forced to give way to Polish ones as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Karo had already been opposed by several Sephardic contemporaries, Yom-Tob Zahalon, who designated the *Shulchan Aruch* as a book for "children and ignoramuses" (in his responsa, no. 67, beginning), and Jacob Castro, whose work *Erekh ha-Shulchan* consists of critical glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch*. [Moses Isserles](#) and Solomon Luria - the [Maharshal](#), were Karo's first important adversaries in Eastern Europe.

Further in response to those who wished to force the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch* upon those communities following [Rambam](#), Karo wrote:

"Who is he whose heart conspires to approach forcing congregations who practice according to the RaMBaM [Maimonides] of blessed memory, to go by any one of the early or latter-day Torah authorities?! ... Is it not a case of *a fortiori*, that regarding the [School of Shammai](#) — that the halakhah does not go according to them—they [the Talmudic Sages] said 'if [one practices] like the School of Shammai [he may do so, but] according to their leniencies and their stringencies': The RaMBaM, is the greatest of all the Torah authorities, and all the communities of the Land of Israel and the Arab-controlled lands and the West [North Africa] practice according to his word, and accepted him upon themselves as their Chief Rabbi. Whoever practices according to him with his leniencies and his stringencies, why coerce them to budge from him? And all the more so if also their fathers and forefathers practiced accordingly: for their children are not to turn right or left from the RaMBaM of blessed memory. And even if communities that practice according to the [Rosh](#) or other authorities like him became the majority, they cannot coerce the minority of congregations practicing according to the RaMBaM of blessed memory, to practice like they do. And there is no issue here concerning the prohibition

against having two courts in the same city ['lo tithgodedu'], since every congregation should practice according to its original custom..." Similarly, many later halachic authorities predicated the acceptance of the authority of the Shulchan Aruch on the lack of an existing and widely accepted custom to the contrary.^[8]



Eventually though, the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch became the accepted standard not only in Europe and the diaspora, but even in the land of Israel where they had previously followed other authorities.^[9]

Page layout

Page of Shulchan Aruch, with Karo's and Isserlis's combined text in the center of the page, top

Since the 17th century, the *Shulchan Aruch* has been printed with Isserles' annotations in small print interspersed with Karo's text. As commentaries on the work proliferated, more sophisticated printing styles became required, similar to those of the Talmud.

References are given in two ways; those to the *Shulchan Aruch* are found in the later work *Be'er ha-Golah*, and those to Isserles' work are in brackets after the latter's comments. There is disagreement

on the authorship of the references to Isserles' remarks, as they are occasionally incorrect.

Criticism by Karo's contemporaries

Following its initial appearance, many rabbis criticised the appearance of this latest code of Jewish law, echoing similar criticisms of [previous codes of law](#).

[edit] Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel

Rabbi [Judah Loew ben Bezalel](#) (1520–1609), known as the "Maharal", (1520–1609) writes in *Netivot Olam*:

“ To decide *halakhic* questions from the codes without knowing the source of the ruling was not the intent of these authors. Had they known that their works would lead to the abandonment of [Talmud](#), they would not have written them. It is better for one to decide on the basis of the Talmud even though he might err, for a scholar must depend solely on his understanding. As such, he is beloved of ”

God, and preferable to the one who rules from a code but does not know the reason for the ruling; such a one walks like a blind person.

Rabbi Shmuel Eidels

Rabbi [Shmuel Eidels](#) (1555–1631), known as the "Maharsha", criticizes those who rule directly from the *Shulchan Aruch* without being fully conversant with the Talmudic source(s) of the ruling. He writes that "In these generations, those who rule from the *Shulchan Aruch* without knowing the reasoning and Talmudic basis..... are among the 'destroyers of the world' and should be protested"^[10]

Rabbi Yoel Sirkis

Another prominent critic of the *Shulchan Aruch* was Rabbi [Yoel Sirkis](#) (1561–1640), author of a commentary to the *Arba'ah Turim* titled *Bayith Chadash*, commonly abbreviated as *Bach*, and Rabbi Meir ben Gedaliah. He wrote that "It is impossible to rule (in most cases) based on the *Shulchan Aruch*, as almost all his words lack accompanying explanations, particularly (when writing about) monetary law. Besides this, we see that many legal doubts arise daily, and are mostly the subject of scholarly debate, necessitating vast wisdom and proficiency to arrive at a sufficiently sourced ruling...."^[11]

Other criticisms

The strongest criticism against all such codes of Jewish law is the contention that they inherently violate the principle that halakha must be decided according to the *later* sages; this principle is commonly known as *hilkheta ke-vatra'ei* ("the *halakha* follows the later ones").

A modern commentator, Rabbi [Menachem Elon](#) explains:

“ This rule dates from the [Geonic](#) period. It laid down the law and states that "until the time of Rabbis [Abbaye](#) and [Rava](#) (4th century) the Halakha was to be decided according to the views of the earlier scholars, but from that time onward, the halakhic opinions of post-talmudic scholars would prevail over the contrary opinions of a previous generation" (see *Piskei Ha'Rosh*, Bava Metzia 3:10, 4:21, Shabbat 23:1 and also the Rif writing at the end of Eruvin Ch.2.) ”

“ If one does not find their statements correct and sustain his own views with evidence that is acceptable to his contemporaries...he may contradict the earlier statements, since all matters that are not clarified in the Babylonian Talmud may be questioned and restated by any person, and even the statements of the [Geonim](#) may be differed from him...just as the statements of the [Amoraim](#) differed from the earlier ones. On the contrary, we regard the statements of later scholars to be more authoritative because they knew the reasoning of the earlier scholars as well as their own, and took it into consideration in making their decision (*Piskei* ”

Ha'Rosh, Sanhedrin 4:6, responsa of the [Rosh](#) 55:9).

The controversy itself may explain why the *Shulchan Aruch* became an authoritative code, despite significant opposition, and even against the will of its author, while [Maimonides](#) (1135–1204) [Mishneh Torah](#) rulings were not necessarily accepted as binding among the Franco-German Jews, perhaps owing to [Abraham ben David's](#) (1110–1180) (known as the "Ravad") criticism and influence. The answer may lie in the fact that the criticism by Ravad undermined confidence in Maimonides' work, while Isserles (who actually corresponded with Karo) does not simply criticize, but supplements Karo's work extensively, with the result that the Ashkenazim then accepted the *Shulchan Aruch*, assuming that together with Isserles' glosses it was a reliable authority. This then became broadly accepted among Jewish communities around the world as the binding Jewish legal code.^[12]

Major Commentaries

A large body of commentaries have appeared on the *Shulchan Aruch*, beginning soon after its publication. The first major gloss, 'Hagahot' by "Rema" ([Moses Isserles](#)) was published shortly after the *Shulchan Aruch* appeared. Isserles' student, Rabbi Yehoshua Falk HaKohen published *Sefer Me'irath Enayim* (on *Choshen Mishpat*, abbreviated as *Sema*) several decades after the main work. Important works by the later authorities ([acharonim](#)) include:

- *Magen Avraham* ("Abraham's shield") by Rabbi [Avraham Gombiner](#) (on *Orach Chayim*)
- *Turei Zahav* ("Rows of Gold", abbreviated as *Taz*) by Rabbi [David HaLevi Segal](#) (on *Orach Chayim*, *Yorei Deah* and *Even ha-Ezer*)
- *Sifthei Kohen* ("The Lips of the Kohen", abbreviated as *Shach*) by Rabbi [Shabbatai ha-Kohen](#) (on *Yorei Deah* and *Choshen Mishpat*)
- *Beth Shmuel* and *Chelkath Mechokek* (on *Even ha-Ezer*)
- *Machatzit HaShekel* ("The collection of a yearly coin for the purpose of a census in ancient Israel") by Rabbi [Samuel Neta HaLevi](#).

While these major commentaries enjoy widespread acceptance, some early editions of the *Shulchan Aruch* were self-published (primarily in the late 17th and early 18th centuries) with commentaries by various rabbis, although these commentaries never achieved significant recognition. A wealth of later works include commentary and exposition by such halachic authorities as the *Ketzoth ha-Choshen* and *Avnei Millu'im*, *Netivoth ha-Mishpat*, the [Vilna Gaon](#), Rabbi [Yechezkel Landau](#) (*Dagul Mervavah*), Rabbis [Akiva Eger](#), [Moses Sofer](#), and [Chaim Joseph David Azulai](#) (*Birkei Yosef*) whose works are widely recognized and cited extensively in later halachic literature.

Later collations

In the late 18th century, there were several attempts to recompile the major halakhic opinions into a simpler, more accessible form.

Rabbi [Shneur Zalman of Liadi](#) wrote a [Shulchan Aruch](#) at the behest of the [Hasidic](#) leader, Rabbi [Dovber of Mezeritch](#). To distinguish this work from Karo's, it is generally referred to as *Shulchan Arukh Harav*. Rabbi [Abraham Danzig](#) was the first in the [Lithuanian Jewish](#) community to attempt a summary of the opinions in the abovementioned works in his [Chayei Adam](#) and [Chochmath Adam](#). Similar works are *Ba'er Heitev* and *Sha'arei Teshuvah/Pitchei Teshuvah* (usually published as commentaries in most editions of the *Shulchan Aruch* as well as [Kitzur Shulchan Aruch](#) (by Rabbi [Shlomo Ganzfried](#) of Hungary). Danzig's and Ganzfried's works do not follow the structure of the *Shulchan Aruch*, but given their single-voiced approach, are considered easier to follow for those with less background in [halacha](#).

The [Mishna Berura](#), the main work of *halakha* by Rabbi [Yisrael Meir Kagan](#) (the "*Chafetz Chaim*") is a collation of the opinions of [later authorities](#) on the *Orach Chayim* section of the *Shulchan Aruch*. [Aruch HaShulchan](#), by Rabbi [Yechiel Michel Epstein](#), is a more analytical work attempting the same task from a different angle, and covering all sections of the *Shulchan Aruch*. The former, though narrower in scope, enjoys much wider popularity and is considered authoritative by many adherents of [Orthodox Judaism](#), especially among those typically associated with Ashkenazic [yeshivas](#). The *Ben Ish Chai*, *Kaf Ha'Chaim*, and much more recently, the [Yalkut Yosef](#) are similar works by [Sephardic](#) Rabbis for their communities.



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2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes



Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai from Cahn, *The Philosophy of Judaism*, 1962

The Second Generation of the Second Tannaim—The Disciples of Hillel and Shammai—The Price for Surrender—The Academy at Yavneh—The New Sanhedrin—Prayer Instead of Sacrifice

The second group of Tannaim lived and worked over a period of about two hundred and ten years, that is, from about sixty years prior to the fall of Jerusalem until about one hundred fifty years after the destruction of the Temple.

The era of these Tannaim is divided into five generations (or six, according to other historical schools). Each generation produced a certain group of leaders who put their stamp upon the time in which they lived. Let us, therefore, study the lives and achievements of some of these principal Tannaim and see what role they played in Jewish history, not only as a group, but also as great personalities. The second group of Tannaim numbered one hundred and seventy-five scholars. Others place their number at more than one hundred and fifty and still others as high as two hundred. We shall confine ourselves to the study of the most eminent among them.

The group known as the “first generation” was composed chiefly of the disciples of Hillel and Shammai, but also included a few other scholars of note who were members of neither school.

The students of Hillel and Shammai were many; their ranks also included disciples who had been taught by the pupils of Hillel and Shammai but who themselves had never met the original masters. This was a difficult period in Jewish history, as it was also the very beginning of the Christian era. Besides this, Rome had taken over Palestine, and the land was filled with Roman soldiers. On Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, when Jewish pilgrims from all over the country converged upon Jerusalem, the Roman soldiers would not hesitate to show their contempt for the defeated nation and no such holiday passed without some bloodshed. The Sanhedrin, though still in existence, had been stripped of most of its autonomous powers. As early as twenty years after the death of Hillel, the Sanhedrin had already been divested of its authority to pass and execute death sentences.

In the meantime, the disciples of Hillel and Shammai were engaged in academic warfare as to the interpretation of Jewish law. In general, the School of Shammai was most conservative and its views were much stricter and narrower than those of the School of Hillel.

One of the outstanding personalities of that era was Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai. He was the youngest of the disciples of Hillel, and none other than Hillel himself had said of him that he would be "the father of wisdom and the shining light of generations to come." This prophecy came true in full measure, for it was he who built up new, firm pillars for the spiritual edifice of Judaism when its Temple was destroyed. When the priests had been dispersed and Judaism had lost its Temple, ben Zakkai pointed out that Israel still had its Law, and henceforth the Law became the spiritual rallying point of the Jewish people. Even as the Ark had accompanied the children of Israel through their wanderings in the wilderness at the time of the Exodus, said Johanan, so would the Law now travel with them wherever they might be scattered.

Ben Zakkai carefully planned the course he was to take. When Rome laid siege to Jerusalem and no one could leave the blockaded city, ben Zakkai managed to get out and to see the Roman commander Vespasian whose encampment was located directly outside Jerusalem. He told Vespasian that all the teachers and intellectual elements of the Jewish people would be willing to submit to Roman authority, without further resistance, if only Vespasian would grant him one request. Vespasian prepared himself for some kind of trick on the part of the Jew, but before he could think of a reply, ben Zakkai stated his terms.

"Let me have Yavneh with the scholars that dwell here," he said. "All I want of you is that you let no harm come to the scholars who study at the Academy of Yavneh. If you fulfill this my request, all my disciples will be ready to do your bidding."

The Roman soldier did not believe his ears. That the great leader of the Jews would be willing to surrender to Rome in return for one paltry village school seemed to him incredible. But Rabbi Johanan knew better. It was his plan to take this little school, which had already attained note as an institution of Jewish learning, and make it a center to which all Jews would be able to turn for spiritual guidance, and which would train teachers who would follow their people into exile and expound the Law to the sons of Israel wherever they would be scattered.

The village of Yavneh is not far from the Mediterranean. It is situated between Jaffa and the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod. It was to this place that Johanan summoned all the scholars of the Law and, indeed, hundreds of them followed his call, and a new center of Judaism was born. But even as they all labored to perpetuate the Law, they were filled with anxiety for the future, and their worst fears were soon confirmed by the news that the Temple had been burned, Jerusalem destroyed, and thousands of dead were lying in the streets of the City of the Lord.

Johanan ben Zakkai rent his garments, and he and his disciples wept aloud for the fallen glory of Israel. The first to speak was Rabbi Akiba, who

said: "Alas for us that the place where our sins were forgiven is laid waste."

But Rabbi Johanan replied: "Do not despair, my son. We shall do something which will serve even better for the atonement of our sins. Let us deal kindly with one another. This will be sufficient, for has not the prophet said in the name of the Lord,⁶ 'For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

Then one of the disciples asked how the sacrifices would be offered now that the Temple was no more.

And ben Zakkai replied: "The Lord, God, needs no offerings. All He requires of us is prayer. See to it that your prayers come from a humble and contrite heart, for the Lord will hear only the prayers of those who come before Him humbly and in sincerity."

Thus Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai proceeded to turn Yavneh into a fortress of Judaism. He established a Sanhedrin of which he himself became chief justice, for Rabbi Gamaliel, the son of the last president of the original Sanhedrin, was still too young to hold that exalted office. Johanan was so zealous for the prestige of the new spiritual center he had created that he always referred to the new Sanhedrin as the "Great Court of the Law."

Rabbi Johanan realized, however, that certain changes had to be made in the form of Judaism if it were to survive under these new conditions, and he proceeded to set aside certain laws which seemed impossible to fulfill under the prevailing circumstances.

Of Johanan's many disciples there were five outstanding scholars: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah, Rabbi Jose the Priest, Rabbi Simon ben Nathanel, and Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah. Johanan had words of high praise for every one of them. Of Rabbi Eliezer he said that his memory was like a cistern which retained every drop of water that was ever poured into it and let nothing seep out. Of Rabbi Joshua he said, "Happy is the woman who bore him." He praised Rabbi Jose for his fear of the Lord and Rabbi Simon for his dread of sin. Of Rabbi Eleazar, Johanan said that he was like a mighty stream, growing stronger in wisdom and virtue as the years went by.

And yet, despite all his active work in behalf of Judaism, Johanan ben Zakkai never ceased to mourn for Jerusalem and the Temple. One day, as he rode through Jerusalem on a horse to visit a friend in the territory of Judah, he beheld the daughter of the man who had formerly been the wealthiest of the land gathering up grains of barley from the ground to satisfy her hunger. Rabbi Johanan, seeing this, cried out bitterly to his disciples.

"Do you see this woman gathering up barley there? I myself signed her marriage contract. Alas, in those days she was a wealthy maiden. She brought 1000 golden trinkets as dowry from her father's house, and this in addition to the gifts she received from her father-in-law. Alas, my poor people, you refused to serve the Lord and now you must be slaves to Rome. You were loath to donate half a shekel as your contribution to the Temple, now

you must pay fifteen shekels as tribute to Rome; you declined to clean the land at festival time, now you must scrub the streets for the conquering soldiers. Ah, it is written 'Because thou didst refuse to serve the Lord thy God with joy, thou art now compelled to serve thy enemies with sorrow.' "

Yet the situation was not hopeless. Israel still had its own king, Agrippa II, whose sister Berenice had captured the heart of no less a person than the Roman Emperor Titus himself, and it appeared that Berenice might even become the Empress of Rome. In those days Rome did not oppress the vassal state of Judea too severely and even allowed it a certain amount of autonomy in managing its affairs. Eventually, however, Berenice lost the favor of Titus and had to leave his court, and then things changed rapidly for the worse in Palestine. No one knows what became of the remaining members of the royal family of Judea. Legend has it that the Jewish princes and princesses went abroad and married into the ruling houses of other nations.

We do not know exactly how long Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was able to carry on his work at Yavneh. It was probably a period of less than ten years. But even during that short time he managed to accomplish what he had set out to do, that is, to build up a new spiritual center to replace Jerusalem and a new abode for the Law to replace the Sanctuary. In years to come, centers modeled upon the pattern of Yavneh were to spring up not only in many cities of Palestine itself, but in Jewish communities throughout the world, even in those countries where Jews were persecuted and paid dearly for their persistence in retaining the faith of their fathers. It was all attributable to the farsighted action of Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai who, even in his lifetime, was known as the "Light of Israel" because he gave his people a new spiritual foundation built upon the ruins of the old.

Legend has it that Rabbi Johanan lived one hundred and twenty years. Before his death he told his assembled disciples, "It is my wish that you fear the Lord no less than you would a king of flesh and blood." His passing was widely mourned and it was said that when he died the beauty of wisdom vanished from the earth.

Johanan's approach to Jewish Law and its practical application was much like that of Hillel. His outlook was broad and liberal. Many of the interpretations formulated by Johanan ben Zakkai are still the basis of decisions rendered by the expounders of the Law.

Now came a new generation of scholars who carried on the work begun by their teacher. They were: Rabbi Chananiah; Rabbi Zadok who was a disciple of the School of Shammai; Rabbi Nahum who had been a member of the religious court of Jerusalem prior to the fall of the Temple; Rabbi Dossa ben Hyrcanus, an outstanding adherent of the School of Hillel, a man of great wealth, and a profound thinker; Abba Saul ben Batnith, a Tanna who sold wine for a living; and Rabbi Nechuniah ben Hakana. Finally there was

Rabbi Nahum of Gimso who was well known for his firm faith and persistent optimism. Over and over again he would avow his conviction that all things were for the best. But most outstanding among them all was Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Simon, a giant intellect who was better known as Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh.

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Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Theodor Herzl



How did Herzl change Judaism?

At what point did Herzl recognize his calling?

Why did we have a leader like Herzls?

1. Vision for homeland
2. Political plan of action
3. Defines modern nation

Theodore Herzl

Theodor Herzl ([Hebrew](#): תאודור הרצל, [Hungarian](#): Herzl Tivadar; May 2, 1860 – July 3, 1904), born **Benjamin Ze'ev Herzl** ([Hebrew](#): בנימין זאב הרצל, also known as חוזה המדינה, *Hozeh HaMedinah*, lit. "Visionary of the State") was an [Ashkenazi Jewish Austro-Hungarian journalist](#) and the father of modern political [Zionism](#) and in effect the [State of Israel](#).

Early life

He was born in [Pest, Hungary](#), to an [Ashkenazi Jewish](#) family originally from Zimony (today [Zemun, Serbia](#)), which was then part of [Austria-Hungary](#). He was second child of Jeanette and Jakob Herzl, who were German-speaking, assimilated Jews. A precocious, moody daydreamer, he aspired to follow the footsteps of [Ferdinand de Lesseps](#), builder of the [Suez Canal](#). He did not succeed in the sciences, and he developed a growing enthusiasm for poetry and the humanities. This passion would later develop into a successful career in journalism and a less celebrated pursuit of play-writing.^[1]

Herzl had minimal interest in religious Judaism as a child, consistent with his parents' lax adherence to the Jewish tradition. His mother relied more on German humanist *Kultur* than Jewish ethics. Instead of a [Bar Mitzvah](#), Herzl's thirteenth birthday was advertised as a "[confirmation](#)". He grew up as a "thoroughly emancipated, antitraditional, secular, would-be German boy" who dismissed all religion, and spoke of Judaism with "mocking cynicism." He exhibited a secularist disdain toward religion, which he saw as uncivilized. Even after becoming interested in The Jewish question, Herzl's writing retained traces of Jewish self-contempt, according to Elon.^[2]

In 1878, after the death of his sister, Pauline, Herzl's family moved to [Vienna](#), Austria-Hungary. There, Herzl studied law.

As a young law student, Herzl became a member of the German nationalist [Burschenschaft](#) (fraternity) Albia, which had the motto *Ehre, Freiheit, Vaterland* ("Honor, Freedom, Fatherland"). He later resigned in protest of the organisation's anti-Semitism.

After a brief legal career in Vienna and [Salzburg](#),^[3] he devoted himself to [journalism](#) and [literature](#), working as a correspondent for the [Neue Freie Presse](#) in Paris, occasionally making special trips to London and [Constantinople](#). Later on, he became literary editor of *Neue Freie Presse*, and wrote several comedies and dramas for the Viennese stage. His early work did not focus on Jewish life. It was of the [feuilleton](#) order, descriptive rather than political.

Zionist leader

As the Paris correspondent for *Neue Freie Presse*, Herzl followed the [Dreyfus Affair](#), a notorious [anti-Semitic](#) incident in France in which a [French Jewish](#) army captain was falsely convicted of spying for Germany. He witnessed mass rallies in Paris following the Dreyfus trial where many chanted "Death to the Jews!" Herzl came to reject his early ideas regarding [Jewish emancipation](#) and [assimilation](#), and to believe that the Jews must remove themselves from Europe and create their own state.^[4] There is, however, some debate on the extent of which Herzl was really influenced by the Dreyfus Affair. Indeed, some claim, such as Kornberg, that this is a myth that Herzl did not feel necessary to deflate, and that he also believed that Dreyfus was guilty.^[5]

June, 1895, he wrote in his diary: "In Paris, as I have said, I achieved a freer attitude toward anti-Semitism... Above all, I recognized the emptiness and futility of trying to 'combat' anti-Semitism." However, in recent decades historians have downplayed the influence of the [Dreyfus Affair](#) on Herzl, even terming it a myth. They have shown that, while upset by anti-Semitism evident in [French society](#), he, like most contemporary observers, initially believed in Dreyfus's guilt and only claimed to have been inspired by the affair years later when it had become an international [cause celebre](#). Rather, it was the rise to power of the anti-Semitic demagogue [Karl Lueger](#) in Vienna in 1895 that seems to have had a greater effect on Herzl, before the pro-Dreyfus campaign had fully emerged. It was at this time that he wrote his play "The New Ghetto", which shows the ambivalence and lack of real security and equality of emancipated, well-to-do Jews in Vienna. Around this time Herzl grew to believe that anti-Semitism could not be defeated or cured, only avoided, and that the only way to avoid it was the establishment of a Jewish state.^[6]

Beginning in late 1895, Herzl wrote [*Der Judenstaat*](#), (*The Jewish State*). It was published February, 1896 to immediate acclaim and controversy. In the book he outlines the reasons for the Jewish people, who so desire, to leave Europe, either for Argentina or for their historic homeland, Palestine, which he seems to prefer. The book and Herzl's ideas spread very rapidly throughout the Jewish world and attracted international attention. Supporters of existing Zionist movements such as the [Hovevei Zion](#) were immediately drawn to, and allied with, Herzl. Controversially, Herzl and his ideas are vilified by establishment Jewry who perceive his ideas both as threatening to their efforts at acceptance and integration in their resident countries and as rebellion against the will of God.

[MY NOTE: Recognize the conflicts between Zionism and 1. Religious concepts of the Moshiach and 2. Life in the diaspora]

In [*Der Judenstaat*](#) he writes:

“ The Jewish question persists wherever Jews live in appreciable numbers. Wherever it does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted, and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. This is the case, and will inevitably be so, everywhere, even in highly civilised countries—see, for instance, France—so long as the Jewish question is not solved on the political level. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America.”^[7]

Herzl begins to energetically promote his ideas, continually attracting supporters, Jewish and non-Jewish. Norman Rose writes that Herzl "mapped out for himself the role of martyr... as the [Parnell](#) of the Jews".^[8]

March 10, 1896, Herzl is visited by Reverend [William Hechler](#), the Anglican minister for the British Embassy. Hechler had read Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*. The meeting would be central to the eventual legitimization of Herzl and Zionism.^[9] Herzl later wrote in his diary "Next we came to the heart of the business. I said to him: (Theodor Herzl to Rev. William Hechler) I must put myself into direct and publicly known relations with a responsible or non responsible ruler – that is, with a minister of state or a prince. Then the Jews will believe in me and follow me. The most suitable personage would be the German Kaiser."^[10] Hechler arranged an extended audience with [Frederick I, Grand Duke of Baden](#), April, 1896. The Grand Duke was the uncle of Kaiser [Wilhelm II](#) of Germany. Through the efforts of Hechler and the Grand Duke, Herzl publicly met the Kaiser in 1898. The meeting significantly advanced Herzl's and Zionism legitimacy in Jewish and world opinion.^[11]

May, 1896, the English translation of his *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State*) appears in London. Herzl earlier had confessed to his friend [Max Bodenheimer](#), that he "wrote what I had to say without knowing my predecessors, and it can be assumed that I would not have written it, (*Der Judenstaat*) had I been familiar with the literature".^[12]

Constantinople, Turkey, June 15, 1896; Herzl sees an opportunity. With the assistance of Count Philip Michael Newleński, a sympathetic [Polish](#) émigré with political contacts in the Ottoman Court, Herzl attempted to meet the Sultan [Abdulhamid II](#). Herzl wanted to present his solution to the Jewish State to the Sultan directly. He failed to obtain an audience with the Sultan. He did succeed in visiting a number of highly placed individuals, including the Grand Vizier who received him as a journalist representing the *Neue Freie Presse*. Herzl presented his proposal to the Grand Vizier that the Jews would pay the Turkish foreign debt, and attempt to help regulate Turkish finances, if they were given Palestine as a Jewish homeland under Turkish rule. Prior to leaving Constantinople, June 29, 1896, Nevlenski obtained for Herzl a symbolic medal of honor.^[13] The medal was a public relations affirmation for Herzl, and the Jewish world, of the seriousness of the negotiations, the "Commander's Cross of the [Order of the Medjidie](#)".

Five years later, May 17, 1901, Herzl did meet with Sultan [Abdulhamid II](#).^[14] The Sultan refused Theodor Herzl's offers to consolidate the Ottoman debt in exchange for a charter allowing the Zionists access to [Palestine](#).

Returning from Constantinople, Herzl traveled to London, to report back to the [Maccabeans](#), a proto-Zionist group of established English Jewry led by Colonel [Albert Goldsmid](#). November, 1895, they had received him with curiosity, indifference and coldness. [Israel Zangwill](#) bitterly opposed Herzl. After Constantinople, Goldsmid agreed to support Herzl. In London's East End, a community of primarily Yiddish speaking recent Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Herzl addressed a mass rally of thousands, July 12, 1896. He was received with acclaim. They granted Herzl the mandate of leadership for Zionism. Within six months this mandate had been expanded throughout Zionist Jewry. The Zionist movement continued growing very rapidly.

In 1897, at considerable personal expense, he founded *Die Welt* of [Vienna](#), [Austria-Hungary](#) and planned the [First Zionist Congress](#) in [Basel](#), Switzerland. He was elected president (a position he held until his death in 1904), and in 1898 he began a series of diplomatic initiatives intended to build support for a Jewish country. He was received by the [German emperor](#), [Wilhelm II](#), on several occasions, one of them in [Jerusalem](#), and attended The [Hague Peace Conference](#), enjoying a warm reception by many other statesmen.

Herzl visited Jerusalem for the first time in October 1898.^[15] Herzl deliberately coordinated his visit with that of Kaiser Wilhelm II to secure, what he thought had been prearranged with the aid of Rev. [William Hechler](#), a public world power recognition of himself and Zionism.^[16] Herzl and Kaiser Wilhelm first met publicly, October 29, at Mikveh Israel, near present day Holon, Israel. It was a brief but historic meeting.^[9] He had a second formal, public audience with the emperor at the latter's tent camp on [Street of the Prophets](#) in Jerusalem, November 2, 1898.^{[11][17][18]}

In 1902–03 Herzl was invited to give evidence before the British Royal Commission on Alien Immigration. The appearance brought him into close contact with members of the British government, particularly with [Joseph Chamberlain](#), then secretary of state for the colonies, through whom he negotiated with the [Egyptian](#) government for a charter for the settlement of the Jews in [Al 'Arish](#), in the [Sinai Peninsula](#), adjoining southern Palestine.

In 1903, Herzl attempted to obtain support for the Jewish homeland from Pope [Pius X](#). Cardinal [Rafael Merry del Val](#) explained to him the Church's policy of [non possumus](#) on such matters, saying that as long as the Jews deny the divinity of Christ, the Church certainly could not make a declaration in their favor.^[19]

On the failure of that scheme, which took him to [Cairo](#), he received, through [L. J. Greenberg](#), an offer (August 1903) on the part of the British government to facilitate a large Jewish settlement, with autonomous government and under British [suzerainty](#), in [British East Africa](#). At the same time, the Zionist movement being threatened by the Russian government, he visited [St. Petersburg](#) and was received by [Sergei Witte](#), then finance minister, and [Viacheslav Plehve](#), minister of the interior, the latter of whom placed on record the attitude of his government toward the Zionist movement. On that occasion Herzl submitted proposals for the amelioration of the Jewish position in Russia. He published the Russian statement, and brought the British offer, commonly known as the "[Uganda Project](#)", before the Sixth Zionist Congress (Basel, August 1903), carrying the majority (295:178, 98 abstentions) with him on the question of investigating this offer, after the Russian delegation stormed out.

In 1905, after investigation, the Congress decided to decline the British offer and firmly committed itself to a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Herzl did not live to see the rejection of the Uganda plan. At 5 p.m. July 3, 1904 in Edlach, [Lower Austria](#), Theodor Herzl died of cardiac [sclerosis](#). A day before his death, he told the [Reverend William H. Hechler](#): "Greet Palestine for me. I gave my heart's blood for my people."^[20]

His will stipulated that he should have the poorest-class funeral without speeches or flowers and he added, "I wish to be buried in the vault beside my father, and to lie there till the Jewish people shall take my remains to Palestine".^[21] Nevertheless, some six thousand followed Herzl's hearse, and the funeral was long and chaotic. Despite Herzl's request that no speeches be made, a brief eulogy was delivered by [David Wolffsohn](#). Hans Herzl, then thirteen, read the [kaddish](#).^[22]

In 1949 his remains were moved from [Vienna](#) to be reburied on [Mount Herzl](#) in [Jerusalem](#).

Der Judenstaat *and* Altneuland

Beginning in late 1895, Herzl wrote *Der Judenstaat*, [the Jewish State](#). The small book was initially published, February 14, 1896, in Leipzig, Germany and Vienna, Austria by M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung. It is subtitled "Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage", "Proposal of a modern solution for the Jewish question"

Herzl's solution is the creation of a Jewish State. In the book he outlines his reasoning for the need to reestablish the historic Jewish State.

"The idea I have developed in this pamphlet is an ancient one: It is the restoration of the Jewish State. . ."

"The decisive factor is our propelling force. And what is that force? The plight of the Jews. . . I am profoundly convinced that I am right, though I doubt whether I shall live to see myself proved so. Those who today inaugurate this movement are unlikely to live to see its glorious culmination. But the very inauguration is enough to inspire in them a high pride and the joy of an inner liberation of their existence. . ."

[MY NOTE: The impetus is not religious, but rather for survival.]

"The plan would seem mad enough if a single individual were to undertake it; but if many Jews simultaneously agree on it, it is entirely reasonable, and its achievement presents no difficulties worth mentioning. The idea depends only on the number of its adherents. Perhaps our ambitious young men, to whom every road of advancement is now closed, and for whom the Jewish state throws open a bright prospect of freedom, happiness, and honor, perhaps they will see to it that this idea is spread. . ."

"It depends on the Jews themselves whether this political document remains for the present a political romance. If this generation is too dull to understand it rightly, a future, finer, more advanced generation will arise to comprehend it. The Jews who will try it shall achieve their State; and they will deserve it. . ."

"I consider the Jewish question neither a social nor a religious one, even though it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, and to solve it we must first of all establish it as an international political problem to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council.

We are a people — one people.

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country..."

"Oppression and persecution cannot exterminate us. No nation on earth has endured such struggles and sufferings as we have. Jew-baiting has merely winnowed out our weaklings; the strong among us defiantly return to their own whenever persecution breaks out..."

"Wherever we remain politically secure for any length of time, we assimilate. I think this is not praiseworthy..."

"Palestine is our unforgettable historic homeland..."

"Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews who will it shall achieve their State. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die. The world

will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind."^[23]

His last literary work, *Altneuland* (in English: [The Old New Land](#), 1902), is a [novel](#) devoted to Zionism. Herzl occupied his free time for three years in writing what he believed might be accomplished by 1923. It is less a novel, though the form is that of romance, than a serious forecasting of what could be done within one generation. The keynotes of the story are the love for [Zion](#), the insistence upon the fact that the changes in life suggested are not utopian, but are to be brought about simply by grouping all the best efforts and ideals of every race and nation; and each such effort is quoted and referred to in such a manner as to show that *Altneuland*, though blossoming through the skill of the Jew, will in reality be the product of the benevolent efforts of all the members of the human family.

Herzl envisioned a Jewish state which combined both a modern Jewish culture with the best of the European heritage. Thus a *Palace of Peace* would be built in Jerusalem, arbitrating international disputes, and at the same time the [Temple](#) would be rebuilt on [modern](#) principles. Herzl did not envision the Jewish inhabitants of the state being [religious](#), but there would be much respect for religion in the public sphere. He also assumed that many languages would be spoken, but [Hebrew](#) would not be the main tongue. Proponents of a Jewish cultural rebirth, such as [Ahad Ha'am](#) were critical of *Altneuland*.

In *Altneuland*, Herzl did not foresee any conflict between [Jews](#) and [Arabs](#). One of the main characters in *Altneuland* is a Haifa engineer, Reshid Bey, who is one of the leaders of the "New Society", is very grateful to his Jewish neighbors for improving the economic condition of Palestine and sees no cause for conflict. All non-Jews have equal rights, and an attempt by a fanatical rabbi to disenfranchise the non-Jewish citizens of their rights fails in the election which is the center of the main political plot of the novel.^[24] Herzl also envisioned the future Jewish state to be a "third way" between capitalism and socialism, with a developed welfare program and public ownership of the main natural resources and industry, agriculture and even trade organized on a cooperative basis. He called this mixed economic model "Mutualism", a term derived from French [utopian socialist](#) thinking. Women would have [equal voting rights](#)—as they did have in the Zionist movement from the Second Zionist Congress onwards.

In *Altneuland*, Herzl outlined his vision for a new Jewish state in the [Land of Israel](#). Herzl summed up his vision for an open society:

"It is founded on the ideas which are a common product of all civilized nations... It would be immoral if we would exclude anyone, whatever his origin, his descent, or his religion, from participating in our achievements. For we stand on the shoulders of other civilized peoples. ... What we own we owe to the preparatory work of other peoples. Therefore, we have to repay our debt. There is only one way to do it, the highest tolerance. Our motto must therefore be, now and ever: 'Man, you are my brother.'" (Quoted in "Zion & the Jewish National Idea", in *Zionism Reconsidered*, Macmillan, 1970 PB, p.185)

In his novel, Herzl wrote about an electoral campaign in the new state. He directed his wrath against the nationalist party which wished to make the Jews a privileged class in Palestine. Herzl regarded that as a betrayal of Zion, for Zion was identical to him with humanitarianism and tolerance—that this was true in politics as well as in religion. Herzl wrote:

"Matters of faith were once and for all excluded from public influence. ... Whether anyone sought religious devotion in the synagogue, in the church, in the mosque, in the art museum, or in a philharmonic concert, did not concern society. That was his [own] private affair." (Quoted in "Zion & the Jewish National Idea", in *Zionism Reconsidered*, Macmillan, 1970 PB, p.185)

Altneuland was written both for Jews and non-Jews: Herzl wanted to win over non-Jewish opinion for Zionism.^[25] When he was still thinking of [Argentina](#) as a possible venue for massive Jewish immigration, he mentioned in his diary he

"When we occupy the land, we shall bring immediate benefits to the state that receives us. We must expropriate gently the private property on the estates assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country. The property owners will come over to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly ... It goes without saying that we shall respectfully tolerate persons of other faiths and protect their property, their honor, and their freedom with the harshest means of coercion. This is another area in which we shall set the entire world a wonderful example ... Should there be many such immovable owners in individual areas [who would not sell their property to us], we shall simply leave them there and develop our commerce in the direction of other areas which belong to us", "The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl", vol. 1 (New York: Herzl Press and Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), pp. 88, 90 (hereafter Herzl diaries).

Herzl's draft of a charter for a Jewish-Ottoman Land Company (JOLC) gave the JOLC the right to obtain land in [Palestine](#) by giving its owners comparable land elsewhere in the [Ottoman empire](#).

The name of *Tel Aviv* is the title given to the Hebrew translation of *Altneuland* by the translator, [Nahum Sokolow](#). This name, which comes from [Ezekiel](#) 3:15, means [tell](#)— an ancient mound formed when a town is built on its own debris for thousands of years— of spring. The name was later applied to the new town built outside of [Jaffa](#), which went on to become [Tel Aviv-Yafo](#) the second-largest city in [Israel](#). The nearby city to the north, [Herzliya](#), was named in honor of Herzl.

Azure no. 21, Summer 5765 / 2005

The Political Legacy of Theodor Herzl

By Natan Sharansky

Before the melting pot, a different vision of the Jewish state.

Menachem Begin once said, "The captain proves himself in a storm, the maestro in his music, and the statesman in his prescience."¹ By this measure, Theodor Herzl was surely one of the world's great statesmen. Half a century before the Holocaust, he alone

understood the nature of the threat that anti-Semitism posed, and he alone dedicated his life's work to saving the Jewish people from its clutches. Herzl believed that the establishment of a Jewish state was the only answer. True, he did not succeed in averting disaster, and anti-Semitism did not die out. But the state that he envisaged came into being, and there is no doubt that its birth gave new meaning to Jewish identity, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

Herzl was determined to understand anti-Semitism, he said, "without fear or hatred."² He concluded that modern anti-Semitism was fundamentally different from the classical religious hatred of Jews, and was not a product of the psychological fear of the unknown. Nor could modern anti-Semitism be attributed to the absence of equal rights for Jews, for indeed it was rather a product of the Emancipation itself: It had been widely believed that in exchange for receiving full equality as individuals, Jews would forfeit their collective identity and dissolve among the nations; yet for the most part, the Jews were unable or unwilling to assimilate—a trend Herzl felt certain would only continue. As he wrote in *The Jewish State*: The distinctive nationality of Jews neither can, will, nor must be destroyed. It cannot be destroyed, because external enemies consolidate it. It will not be destroyed; this is shown during two thousand years of appalling suffering. It must not be destroyed, and that, as a descendant of numberless Jews who refused to despair, I am trying once more to prove in this pamphlet.³

Because the Jews showed no inclination to disappear as a collective, the nations of the world would continue to treat them as a separate people in their midst. For this reason, the problem of anti-Semitism could not be understood purely as a function of economics or class, nor as one that could be resolved by treating the Jews solely as individuals in need of equal rights. "The Jewish Question," he wrote, "is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, which can only be solved by making it a political-world question to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council."⁴ Only when a *national* solution was found would the problem be solved, not because all Jews would choose to live in Israel—Herzl never believed this would happen—but because the root cause of anti-Semitism would finally have disappeared.

It was thus that Herzl believed that after the establishment of a Jewish state, even those Jews who remained in the Diaspora would stand to benefit. "[They] would be able to assimilate in peace," he wrote, "because the present anti-Semitism would have been stopped forever. They would certainly be credited with being assimilated to the very depths of their souls, if they stayed where they were after the new Jewish state, with its superior institutions, had become a reality."⁵ In Herzl's view, any Jew who chose not to be part of the Jewish national liberation was in effect declaring a more profound allegiance to his host nation than to the Jewish one; by remaining in France, for example, a Jew would testify to believing himself more French than Jewish. For Jews like these the establishment of a Jewish state would mean that their acceptance by French society would finally be complete, untainted by the suspicion of dual national loyalty.

In tune with the positivistic spirit of the age, Herzl assumed that for every problem there was a rational solution. Applied to the problem of anti-Semitism, Herzl's analysis may today seem naïve and overly ambitious, ignoring as it does the profoundly religious roots of anti-Semitism, and attempting to pinpoint a single cause for what is really a complex phenomenon spanning thousands of years. Yet even if his analysis of anti-Semitism was oversimplified, he foresaw its consequences with stunning accuracy. He was, in fact, the only Jewish leader of his time who understood the calamity that was about to befall European Jewry. As he wrote in his diary:

I cannot imagine what appearance and form this will take. Will it be expropriation by some revolutionary force from below? Will it be proscription by some reactionary force from above? Will they banish us? Will they kill us? I expect all these forms and others.⁶

Elsewhere he put it this way: "It will overtake even Hungarian Jews with brutality, and the longer it takes to come, the worse it will be. The stronger they [the Jews] become, the more bestial will it be. There is no escaping it."⁷ And indeed, catastrophe struck as Herzl predicted. Far too late, both the Jews and the world at large were persuaded that without a national home, the Jewish people could not survive.

Even after a national home was established, however, Herzl's prophecy of an end to anti-Semitism went unfulfilled. He believed that once the Jewish collective won recognition as a nation, the individual Jew would finally be able to live in peace. Yet what actually happened was quite different. Over the half century since the Jewish state was founded, it has consistently been a lightning rod of hatred and enmity. There is the obvious animosity of the Arab world, which was never prepared to accept Israel's existence. But with time, the Jewish state has become the focus of a much broader hatred. In fact, the fashionable portrayal of Israel by many Europeans as the principal threat to world peace, a "Nazi state," the archenemy of human rights—this is precisely the kind of demonization previously directed at individual Jews. And because the individual Jew living in Europe is an easier target for violence than Israel, the terror war against Israel of the last four years has awakened the specter of classical anti-Semitism throughout Europe, giving rise to a renewed wave of violence against Diaspora Jewry.

It would seem, then, that we have come full circle: The old anti-Semitism now takes the form of anti-Zionism. In fact, the present wave of anti-Semitism in Europe has proven once and for all that there is no difference between the two, that the perceived distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism is an illusion. As far as the world is concerned, the Jews are Israel and Israel the Jews. But this means that every Jew, in turn, must define himself with respect to the Jewish state, either for or against. No Jew may remain indifferent to Israel.

Natan Sharansky is a Distinguished Fellow at the Shalem Center. He is former minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs. His latest book was The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror, with Ron Dermer (Public Affairs, 2004).

From Jews Against Zionism.com

Theodor Herzl

The term "Zionism" was first introduced in 1893 by Nathan Birnbaum, but Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew born to a prosperous, emancipated Budapest family, is recognized as the founder of the Zionist ideology when he published his book in 1896, "The Jewish State", where he declared that the cure for anti-semitism was the establishment of a Jewish state. As he saw it, the best place to establish this state was in Palestine.

While Herzl claimed that the establishment of a "Jewish" state would cure anti-Semitism, he also promoted anti-Semitism to further his cause.

Herzl stated in his diary:

"It is essential that the sufferings of Jews... become worse... this will assist in realization of our plans... I have an excellent idea... I shall induce anti-Semites to liquidate Jewish wealth... The anti-Semites will assist us thereby in that they will strengthen the persecution and oppression of Jews. The anti-Semites shall be our best friends". (From his Diary, Part I, pp. 16)

Benny Morris (the Israeli Historian), described how Herzl foresaw how anti-Semitism could be "HARNESSED" for the realization of Zionism. He stated:

"Herzl regarded Zionism's triumph as inevitable, not only because life in Europe was ever more untenable for Jews, but also because it was in Europe's interests to rid the Jews and relieved of anti-Semitism: The European political establishment would eventually be persuaded to promote

Zionism. Herzl recognized that anti-Semitism would be HARNESSED to his own--Zionist-purposes." (Righteous Victims, p. 21)

True Torah Jews Against Zionism - Our Mission

The relatively new concept of Zionism began only about one hundred years ago and since that time Torah-true Jewry has steadfastly opposed the Zionist ideology. This struggle is rooted in two convictions:

1. Zionism, by advocating a political and military end to the Jewish exile, denies the very essence of our Diaspora existence. We are in exile by Divine Decree and may emerge from exile solely via Divine Redemption. All human efforts to alter a metaphysical reality are doomed to end in failure and bloodshed. History has clearly borne out this teaching.
2. Zionism has not only denied our fundamental belief in Heavenly Redemption it has also created a pseudo-Judaism which views the essence of our identity to be a secular nationalism. Accordingly, Zionism and the Israeli state have consistently endeavored, via persuasion and coercion, to replace a Divine and Torah centered understanding of our peoplehood with an armed materialism.

True Torah Jews is dedicated to informing the world and in particular the American public and politicians that all Jews do not support the ideology of the Zionist state called "Israel" which is diametrically opposite to the teachings of traditional Judaism.

We are concerned that the widespread misconception that all Jews support the Zionist state and its actions endangers Jews worldwide.

We are NOT politically motivated. We are motivated by our concern for the peace and safety of all people throughout the world including those living in the Zionist state. We support and pray for peace for the people of the Zionist state but have no interest in and do not support the Zionist government.

We seek to disassociate Jews and traditional Judaism from the Zionist Ideology by:

- Providing historical and supporting documentation that Zionism is totally contrary to the teachings of traditional Judaism through the [words of our Rabbis, Sages](#), and [Holy Scriptures](#) which oppose the creation of a state called Israel.
- Providing historical documentation on the ideology and creation of Zionism, the supporters of Zionism and the negative impact of their actions on the Jewish people in the past hundred years, including their involvement in the Holocaust up to the present day.
- Publicizing the efforts of traditional Jews to demonstrate that all Jews do not support Zionism, which is being ignored by the mainstream media.
- Convince the news media, politicians and the public to cease referring to the state of Israel as the "Jewish State" but to call it what it is: the "Zionist State".

It is our firm belief that when the state of "Israel" is recognized for what it is, a Zionist state which is not guided by the teachings of the traditional Jewish faith, Jews worldwide will be able to live in peace.

From palestineremembered.com

Theodor Herzl in effect invented Zionism as a true political movement and an international force. Born to a prosperous, emancipated Budapest family, he was fluent in German and French but LACKED Hebrew,

Yiddish, and Russian; he was secular, cosmopolitan intellectual, a doctor of law, and a minor play writer. What catalyzed Herzl's conversion to Zionism was the Dreyfus affair in France.

In 1894--95 Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jewish officer, was WRONGFULLY convicted of treason and confined to Devil's Island. The trial triggered a wave of anti-Semitism in the cradle and bastion of Western European liberal democracy. This wave of French anti-Semitism was the PRIME motive behind Herzl authoring "The Jewish State" or *Der Judenstaat*, which appeared in 1896 under the subtitle of "An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question." ([Righteous Victims](#), p. 20)

Just before Herzl died in 1904, he had succeeded in securing a majority in favor of settling Russian Jews in Uganda as offered by the British. Herzl REFUSED to accept that Palestine ALONE must be the ZIONIST GOAL, and a state of "armed peace" was declared. As soon as he died in July, the Uganda scheme was finished, and his death effectively killed it. ([Israel: A History](#), p. 21)

Famous Quotes

In 1895, Herzl, the founder of Zionism, wrote in his diary:

"We must expropriate gently the private property on the state assigned to us. We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it employment in our country. The property owners will come over to our side. Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly. Let the owners of the immoveable property believe that they are cheating us, selling us things for more than they are worth. But we are not going to sell them anything back." ([America And The Founding Of Israel](#), p. 49, [Righteous Victims](#), p. 21-22)

In 1897 Herzl outlined one of the most important goals for Zionism during the first Zionist Congress convention held in Basel, Switzerland:

"We have an important task before us. We have met here to lay the foundation-stone of the house that will some day shelter the Jewish people. . . We have to aim at securing legal, international guarantees for our work." ([Israel: A History](#), p. 14) And on September 3rd, 1897 he also wrote:

"Were I to sum up the Basle Congress in a word-- which I shall GUARD AGAINST PRONOUNCING PUBLICLY-- it would be this: At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be answered by universal laughter. Perhaps in five years, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it." ([Israel: A History](#), p. 15)

[Benny Morris](#) (the Israeli Historian), described how Herzl foresaw how anti-Semitism could be "HARNESSED" for the realization of Zionism. He stated:

"Herzl regarded Zionism's triumph as inevitable, not only because life in Europe was ever more untenable for Jews, but also because it was in Europe's interests to rid the Jews and relieve of anti-Semitism: The European political establishment would eventually be persuaded to promote Zionism. Herzl recognized that anti-Semitism would be HARNESSED to his own--Zionist-purposes." ([Righteous Victims](#), p. 21)

On 7 July 1902, while meeting the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration in London, Herzl was asked why Russian Jews could not be settled in uninhabited lands other than Palestine, such as Argentina, he replied:

"[Such resettlement would fail] because when you want a great settlement, you must have a flag and an idea. You CANNOT make those things ONLY WITH MONEY. . . With money you CANNOT make a general movement of a great mass of people. You must give them an ideal. You must put into them the belief in their future, and then you will be able to take out the devotion of the hardest labour imaginable. [For example,] Argentina has a very GOOD SOIL and the conditions for agricultural labour are MUCH BETTER better than in Palestine, but in Palestine they work with enthusiasm and they succeed. I am not speaking of artificially made colonies, but self-helping colonies, which have that great national idea." ([Israel: A History](#), p. 21) The Jewish state in Palestine, Theodor Herzl wrote, would be Europe's bulwark against Asia:

"We can be the vanguard of culture against barbarianism." ([One Palestine Complete](#), p. 150)

Regarding antisemites, Theodor Herzl explained how it could benefit the Zionist enterprise, he wrote in his diary:

"The antisemites WILL BECOME our most loyal friends, the antisemites nations will become our allies." ([One Palestine Complete](#), p. 47)

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Henrietta Szold



How did Szold change Judaism?

At what point did she recognize her calling?

How did the historical context impact her life?

Henrietta Szold

Henrietta Szold (December 21, 1860 – February 13, 1945) was a [U.S. Jewish Zionist](#) leader and founder of the [Hadassah](#) Women's Organization. In 1942, she co-founded [Ihud](#), a political party in Mandate Palestine dedicated to a [binational solution](#).

Biography

Henrietta Szold was born in [Baltimore, Maryland](#), the daughter of Rabbi [Benjamin Szold](#), who was the spiritual leader of Baltimore's [Temple Oheb Shalom](#).^[1] She was the eldest of eight daughters. In 1877, she graduated from Western Female High School. For fifteen years, she taught at Miss Adam's School and Oheb Shalom religious school, and gave Bible and history courses for adults. To further her own education, she attended public lectures at [Johns Hopkins University](#) and the [Peabody Institute](#).^[2]

Szold established the first American night school to provide English language instruction and vocational skills to Russian Jewish immigrants in Baltimore.^[3] Beginning in 1893, she worked for the [Jewish Publication Society](#), a position she maintained for over two decades. Her commitment to Zionism was heightened by a trip to [Palestine](#) in 1909. She founded Hadassah in 1912 and served as its president until 1926.^[3] In 1933 she immigrated to Palestine and helped run [Youth Aliyah](#), an organization that rescued 30,000 Jewish children from Nazi Europe.^[4]

Henrietta Szold was 84 when she died at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, on February 13, 1945. She is buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.^[4] She had no children.^[2]

Zionism and origins of Hadassah

In 1896, one month before [Theodor Herzl](#) published his magnum opus, [Der Judenstaat](#), Szold described her vision of a Jewish state in [Palestine](#) as a place to ingather Diaspora Jewry and revive Jewish culture. In 1898, the [Federation of American Zionists](#) elected Szold as the only female member of its executive committee. During [World War I](#), she was the only woman on the Provisional Executive Committee for General Zionist Affairs.

In 1909, at age 49, Szold traveled to Palestine for the first time and discovered her life's mission: the health, education and welfare of the [Yishuv](#) (pre-state Jewish community of Palestine). Szold joined six other women to found Hadassah, which recruited American Jewish women to upgrade health care in Palestine. Hadassah's first project was the inauguration of an American-style visiting nurse program in Jerusalem. Hadassah funded hospitals, a medical school, dental facilities, x-ray clinics, infant welfare stations, soup kitchens and other services for Palestine's Jewish and Arab inhabitants. Szold persuaded her colleagues that practical programs open to all were critical to Jewish survival in the [Holy Land](#).

In the 1920s and 1930s she was a supporter of [Brit Shalom](#), a small organization dedicated to Arab-Jewish unity and a [binational solution](#). In 1942, she was one of the co-founders of the [Ihud](#) party which advocated the same program.

Mourners' Kaddish

Henrietta Szold was the oldest of eight daughters, and had no brothers. In [Orthodox Judaism](#), it was not the norm for women to recite the [Mourners' Kaddish](#). In 1916, Szold's mother died, and a friend, Hayim Peretz, offered to say kaddish for her. In a letter, she thanked Peretz for his concern, but said she would do it herself.

I know well, and appreciate what you say about the Jewish custom; and Jewish custom is very dear and sacred to me. And yet I cannot ask you to say Kaddish after my mother. The Kaddish means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community, which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.

Szold's answer to Peretz is cited by "Women and the Mourners' Kaddish," a [responsum](#) written by Rabbi [David Golinkin](#). This responsum, adopted unanimously by the [Committee on Jewish Law and Standards](#) of [Conservative Judaism](#), permits women to recite the Mourners' Kaddish in public when a [minyan](#) is present.^[5]

Commemoration

[Kibbutz Kfar Szold](#), in [Upper Galilee](#) is named after her. The [Palmach](#), in recognition of her commitment to "Aliyat Hanoar" [Youth Aliyah](#), named the illegal immigration (Ha'apalah) ship "Henrietta Szold" after her. The ship, carrying immigrants from the Kiffisia orphanage in [Athens](#), sailed from Piraeus on July 30, 1946, with 536 immigrants on board, and arrived on August 12, 1946. The passengers resisted capture, but were transferred to transport for Cyprus.^[6]

The Henrietta Szold Institute, National Institute for Research in the Behavioral Sciences, located in [Jerusalem](#), is named after her. The institute is Israel's foremost planner of behavioral science intervention and training programs.^[7]

Public School 134 on Manhattan's [Lower East Side](#) in New York City is named after her.^[8]

In 2007, Szold was inducted into the American [National Women's Hall of Fame](#).^[3]

In Israel, Mother's Day is celebrated on the day that Szold died, on the 30th of Shevat.

Szold Place, formerly Dry Dock Street^[9] runs from East 10th Street to East 12th Street in the [East Village](#) neighborhood of NYC.

Joseph Telushkin. [Jewish Literacy](#). NY: William Morrow and Co., 1991. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Henrietta Szold

Had Henrietta Szold been born in 1960 instead of 1860, she probably would have become a rabbi. One of eight daughters of a Baltimore rabbi, Szold was a passionate and accomplished student of Judaism. She even won permission to study Jewish texts at the then male-only Jewish Theological Seminary, on condition that she never agitate to be granted rabbinic ordination. Later, she translated Heinrich Graetz's monumental multivolume *History of the Jews* from German into English

Szold was, in certain respects, a forerunner of Jewish women's liberation. When her mother died in 1916, a close male friend, Haym Peretz, volunteered to say the Mourner's Kaddish for the dead woman. Szold graciously refused the offer. "I believe," she wrote him, "that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom-women were freed from positive duties when they could not perform them [because of family responsibilities] but not

when they could. It was never intended that, if they could perform them, their performance of them should not be considered as valuable and valid as when one of the male sex performed them."

Szold's outstanding contribution to Jewish life was the creation of the largest Jewish organization in American history, Hadassah Women. Although Zionist, Hadassah particularly involved itself in meeting the health needs of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine. Today, the foremost hospital in Israel and the entire Middle East is the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. Szold insisted that the most up-to-date medical treatment be extended to the Arabs of Palestine as well as to the Jews, and Hadassah played a major role in lowering Arab infant mortality. The Hadassah spirit of volunteerism and nondiscrimination was unfortunately rejected by the Arab leadership, which may have feared that its example would lessen hatred between Jews and Arabs. In early 1948, just before the State of Israel was declared, Arab troops ambushed and murdered seventy-seven Jewish doctors and nurses from Hadassah Hospital.

During the 1930s, Szold involved Hadassah in a program to rescue Jewish youth from Germany, and later from all of Europe. It is estimated that the program she created, "Youth Aliyah," saved some 22,000 Jewish children from Hitler's concentration camps.

The personal tragedy of Szold's life was that she never married; this woman, whose life was devoted to saving the lives of children, never had children of her own. While in her forties, she did fall passionately in love with the great Talmud scholar Louis Ginzberg. He was fifteen years her junior, and returned her feelings only platonically. Shortly after their relationship ended, she wrote: "Today it is four weeks since my only real happiness was killed." Many years later, she confided to a friend: "I would exchange everything for one child of my own."

To this day Henrietta Szold is regarded as one of the genuine heroic figures of American-Jewish history, a scholarly woman, a passionately committed Jew and a person who saved many thousands of lives.

The organization she founded, Hadassah, has as of 1990 about 350,000 members, and is the largest Jewish organization in the United States.



Va'ad Halakhah - English Summaries

Women as Halakhic Authorities (Poskot)

(HM 7 in *Birkey Yosef* subparag. 12)

Question:

May women serve on the Va'ad Halakhah of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel or, in other words, may a woman render halakhic decisions and write responsa?

Responsum:

The Mishnah states (Niddah 6:4) that “whoever is eligible to judge is eligible to give testimony”. Tosafot ask (ibid.): but Devorah judged even though as a woman she was ineligible to testify! They reply: perhaps she did not judge herself but rather taught the laws to the judges.

Sefer Hahinukh (no. 158) says that the inebriated may not render halakhic decisions. “And this mitzvah applies in every place and at every time, to males as well as to a wise woman worthy of rendering halakhic decisions.”

Rabbi H.Y.D. Azulai rules on the basis of these two sources ‘that even though a woman is ineligible to judge, she may render halakhic decisions’ (Birkei Yosef to Hoshen Mishpat 7, par. 12). Three modern rabbis came to the same conclusion (Rabbis Jacob Levinson, Isaac Halevi Herzog and Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron).

The most well known opponent of women rendering halakhic decisions was Rabbi Abraham Gumbiner. After quoting the halakhic opinion of a woman, he dismisses it by quoting Rabbi Eliezer (Yoma 66b): “There is no wisdom for women except for the spindle” (Magen Avraham to Orach Chaim 263, subparagraph 12). This approach, however, is quite surprising. Since Rabbi Eliezer strongly opposed women learning Torah (Mishnah Sotah 3:4), it is not surprising that he refused to answer the question of a learned woman. Furthermore, at least three halakhic authorities agree with the woman quoted by the Magen Avraham (R. Yosef Yuzpa Falk her son, R. Ezekiel Landau and R. Shem Tov Gaguine). Most importantly, his opinion is clearly contradicted by the historical facts. In practice, women participated in every facet of rendering halakhic decisions from the Tannaitic period until today.

1. Women such as Beruriah (second century) and Fioretta Modena (sixteenth century) studied practical halakhah and were experts in it.
2. women such as Bellette (eleventh century) and Chana (twelfth century) taught practical halakhah to other women.
3. Women such as Miriam Shapira (ca. 1350) and the wife of Rabbi Jacob Mizrahi (fifteenth-sixteenth century) taught practical halakhah to men and boys.
4. Halakhic authorities relied on the word of women such as the sister of Rabbi Shimon ben Yonai (third century) and the wife of Rabbi Haim Or Zarua (thirteenth century) who transmitted halakhic decisions in the name of their relatives.
5. Women such as the wife of Rabbi Joseph Treves (fourteenth century) and Chava Bachrach (d. 1652) engaged in learned halakhic discussions with men.
6. Women such as Beruriah (second century) and Beila Falk (sixteenth century - she was the woman referred to by the Magen Avraham) rendered halakhic decisions subsequently adopted by leading halakhic authorities.

7. Women such as Shundlein Isserlein (fifteenth century) wrote responsa in the name of their husbands.

8. Women such as Pomona Modena (fifteenth century) and Flora Sasson (d. 1936) wrote learned questions to leading halakhic authorities.

9. Women such as Tzertel Schwartz (nineteenth century) wrote formal halakhic responsa.

In conclusion, women are allowed to participate in every aspect of learning halakhah, teaching halakhah and rendering halakhic decisions as they have been doing for the past 1,800 years.

Rabbi David Golinkin

In favor: Rabbi Michael Graetz

Rabbi Reuven Hammer

Opposed: Rabbi Pesach Schindler

The Ordination of Women as Rabbis

(not in *Shulhan Arukh*)

Question:

Is it permissible for the Bet Midrash to ordain women as rabbis?

Responsum:

Not only is the Bet Midrash permitted to ordain women as rabbis; it is obligated to ordain women who are suitable just as it ordains men who are suitable.

One of the reasons that the majority of the Va'ad Halakhah gave for opposing the ordination of women five years ago was that such a step would cause irreparable harm to the future of the Masorti Movement. But times have changed. The Bet Midrash is already an established fact and is recognized by various sectors of the population. Furthermore, an Israeli woman who was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York is already serving as a Masorti rabbi in Israel. Thus it is hard to claim that accepting women will harm the Bet Midrash or the Masorti Movement. Furthermore, it is unfair, anti-Zionist and hypocritical to send Israeli women to study for the rabbinate in New York.

A rabbi is a person who has learned the tradition and is therefore worthy to continue the tradition and to teach it to others. The title does not grant any ceremonial or ritual status. The institution of the rabbinate was a revolution, which allowed any Jewish male to reach the level of teacher and spiritual leader. But that revolution was not complete

because sociological conditions were such that no one could imagine that a woman could become a rabbi. But today, when a woman can be a member of Knesset, a Prime Minister or a member of the Supreme Court, it is difficult to justify a position that women cannot be rabbis.

Some say that women cannot be rabbis because they cannot serve as cantors or witnesses. To me that is like saying that a Cohen cannot be a rabbi because he cannot perform a funeral at a cemetery. In any case, we must find a way to enable women to be witnesses either by reinterpreting the halakhah or through a takkanah.

Finally, there is the moral issue. Women make up over half of the Jewish people. Their opinions and abilities can come to the aid of our people in all sorts of ways. To forgo this resource is to forgo a treasure. Furthermore, who are we - the men - to decide if women can be rabbis or not? According to the Torah (Genesis 1:27), women too were made in God's image. To prevent them from reaching this high position is unethical and unjustifiable.

In conclusion, it is permissible for the Bet Midrash to ordain women as rabbis. We must not send them to the Diaspora to study when there is no halakhic obstacle to their being accepted here. The auxiliary problems are no reason not to accept women. Not accepting them will mean the loss of an important resource for the Jewish people and contradicts the principle that women were created in the image of God.

Rabbi Reuven Hammer

In favor: Rabbi Gilah Dror, Rabbi Michael Graetz

Responsum:

It is permissible - and even obligatory - for the Bet Midrash to ordain women as rabbis.

This question should not be treated as a routine halakhic question, for the answer given to this question will determine the nature of our Judaism. Some claim that there are specific halakhic issues, which need to be addressed such as: is it permissible for a woman to study and teach Torah, to decide halakhah, or to serve in public office. These specific issues, however, are not the central issue. The central issue is whether to change received tradition so that women's Jewishness can be equal to men's Jewishness.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz writes that the mitzvah of studying Torah "makes the Jew a partner in the cultural legacy and spiritual content of Judaism". To remove women from Talmud Torah is therefore "a negation of a basic Jewish right: her 'Jewishness' becomes inferior to that of a man's" (Amudim, No. 449, pp. 267-268). We must follow the dictum of Hillel the Elder: "what is hateful to you do not do to your fellow" (Shabbat 31a). Men would not accept the halakhic status of women for themselves, which would mean being treated as a subgroup of the Jewish species, so they should not expect women to accept this status.

Despite some opinions to the contrary, the general approach in Jewish tradition has been to see men and women as human beings created in God's image. The inferior status of women in halakhah has been based mainly on psycho-social arguments rather than on arguments of inherent inferiority. Thus, women are not allowed full participation in public ritual due to social or psychological considerations such as "kevod ha-tzibbur" (the honor of the public - see Megillah 23a), "kol kevudah bat melekch penimah" ("the honor of a princess is to remain at home" - see Psalms 45:14), or "mishum peritzut" (fear of promiscuity).

Depriving women of Talmud Torah is a kind of "inquisition" which uproots many talented, intelligent and sensitive Jews from the nation. The loss to Jewish life and culture of generations of women's intellectual contributions is tragic. The Jewish people has not benefited from the spiritual qualities of every Jew capable of being a rabbi and infusing Jewish life with spirituality.

Some raise the question: even if we are convinced by all of these arguments, is there a halakhic way to bring about such a radical change in the received tradition? The solution is to promulgate a takkanah. My opinion is that we must renew the mechanism and procedure of takkanah as a norm. As Prof. Menahem Elon writes: "...The reality of the State of Israel, which once again is the center of the Jewish people, enables us now to return and solve these problems by the use of takkanah both from the point of view of the world and the methodology of the halakhah itself, and as a necessary solution to the wholeness and integrity of the halakhah and the entire people" (Ha-Mishpat Ha-Ivri, 1973, p. 115). We should promulgate a takkanah, which will declare women obligated in all mitzvot in general, and equal as Jews in all of the areas mentioned above. Our belief in a dynamic and developing halakhah, our belief in the centrality of Israel, and our belief in justice combine to obligate us to act.

Even though I favor the general approach stated above, I want to relate specifically to the matter of testimony, which epitomizes the problems surrounding the status of women. The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 3:3) does not state specifically that women are disqualified as witnesses. The parallel in Rosh Hashanah 1:8 does add a statement about women, but this seems to be an addendum to the original statement. Even this statement assumes that women are not accepted as witnesses in every case, but it is clear that they are accepted as witnesses in some cases. Thus, it is clear that women are not inherently or on principle disqualified as witnesses, but, as we have seen above, they are disqualified in some cases for specific reasons, which are all connected to the social or psychological status of women. Particularly relevant is the reason the Bavli (Shevuot 30a) gives for a woman's disqualification as a witness, so that she will not have to appear among men in court (cf. Tosafot ibid. s.v. kol kevudah).

The generally accepted idea that a woman is inherently disqualified and that the sages just permitted her to testify in certain cases, is based on Sifrei Devarim (par. 190), which is from the school of Rabbi Akiba. A close examination of the sources by Rabbi Na'amah Kelman has revealed another tannaitic midrash on Deuteronomy, published by Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman, who attributed this source to the school of R. Ishmael. In that

source, the same wording on the verse is found, with no mention of women at all. Apparently this school did not feel that women were disqualified on the basis of Deuteronomy 19:15-18. Indeed, there is much evidence that R. Ishmael objected in general to the interpretation that since the Torah speaks in masculine gender, women were excluded from the obligation of the mitzvot (cf. Mekhilta d'Rashbi, ed. Epstein-Melamed, p. 158 and the note there; Yerushalmi Bava Kamma 1:3; Midrash Tannaim, ed. Hoffman, p. 145, lines 8-11). Thus, it is clear that the approach of the Sifrei was not the only one in the Midrash Halakhah. Subsequent tradition showed a preference for the approach of the Sifrei together with its general tendency to limit women's role in Jewish society. We, however, may rely on the other tradition, since it fits our preference much more closely.

In 1974, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly in North America adopted as a legitimate precedent a minority opinion permitting women's testimony.

We could take the approach of relying on early opinions, such as those of R. Ishmael, and just expand the areas where women's testimony would be accepted. But that approach is not sufficient. For even if there were no support from earlier sources, our own basic belief about the halakhah and our own basic religious beliefs about God lead us to the conclusion that women have to be equal as Jews. In Judaism, the highest expression of such equality would be to grant ordination to women. Since this is a question of principle, the Bet Midrash is obligated to ordain women.

We should ask Conservative rabbis throughout the world to sign a takkanah regarding the testimony of women. After 200 rabbis have signed it, the takkanah would be considered a valid halakhic option.

There follows a proposed text for such a takkanah:

For the glory of God, for the glory of his holy Torah, for the glory and honor of the people Israel in every place. Being assembled here in Jerusalem, we the undersigned have reflected and intend to amend the holy Torah of Israel.

We have seen changes in our times which demand of the sages to go out before the people and amend and fix that women are qualified as witnesses, just as men are. Since we have seen that we must do this thing, and that the justice of the Torah demands this amendment from us, therefore we sign this takkanah, and may God prosper our hands.

Rabbi Michael Graetz

In favor: Rabbi Gilah Dror, Rabbi Reuven Hammer

Responsum:

We live in an age of great change regarding the status of women in society. Seventy years ago there was a debate in the Yishuv regarding the right of women to vote. Now

this is self-understood. The legal equality of women in Israel is reflected in the Women's Equal Rights Law of 1951 and the like. One cannot compare the "woman" discussed by the sages with the woman of today. Similarly, one cannot base the status of women today on the status of their predecessors. The sages viewed women as being "enslaved" to their husbands while Maimonides viewed them as being intellectually inferior (Hilkhos Avodah Zarah 11:16 and Talmud Torah 1:13).

A corollary of this is that the halakhah is not a barrier to egalitarianism because, in fact, it never dealt with the woman of today. The only question on the agenda is what should the halakhic attitude be in our time regarding the functioning of women in society and particularly in the rabbinate. As Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein has said: "the question is to what extent we want to perpetuate the preliminary situation in the halakhah or to change it through legitimate halakhic methods taking into consideration historical developments".

The function of the rabbinate has gone through many permutations throughout Jewish history, but the common denominator was and is that the rabbi must be a spiritual leader and a halakhic decisor (posek) for his community. Today, rabbis generally fulfill other functions such as performing marriages and divorces, signing as a witness, serving on a bet din, being part of a minyan and serving as cantor, Torah reader, megillah reader, shofar blower and the like. But the initial situation allows women to be rabbis because women are allowed to study Torah and to hold public office.

Halakhic problems will no doubt arise as a result of the decision to ordain women as rabbis, but we have to rely on the women rabbis themselves to deal with those problems. Similarly, the suggestion that women be ordained with the proviso that they agree not to serve as witnesses is not only insulting, but may sooner or later also stand in contradiction to their conscience and their understanding of the halakhah.

Even so, since some claim that testimony by women is a serious obstacle to the ordination of women, I feel a need to deal with this issue now. It is commonly assumed that women are disqualified from serving as witnesses in monetary and capital cases, but that their testimony is considered "reliable" in certain cases such as helping agunot (Hoshen Mishpat 35:14). There is, however, no explicit source for this in the Bible or the Mishnah (see Sanhedrin 3:3 and Rosh Hashanah 1:8). On the other hand, many Mishnayot rule that the testimony of one woman is accepted in certain cases. Some say that the prohibition against women testifying stems from Sifrei Devarim (par.190) to Deuteronomy 19:15-17, but other tannaitic midrashim do not derive that halakhah from those same verses, which may reflect their agreement with the school of R. Yishmael that women may serve as witnesses.

This lack of clarity regarding the prohibition led to a disagreement as to whether it is biblical or rabbinic, and some scholars think it really derives from foreign cultures. Even in the past, women's testimony was accepted when they were likely to be present and likely to know the facts in question - e.g., a midwife's testimony was accepted regarding whether a child was the firstborn and women's testimony was accepted with regard to

the possession of seats in the women's section of the synagogue. Today there is an equal chance that men and women will witness a given event, so there is no reason to prohibit women's testimony especially since women testify routinely in the civil courts in Israel. Furthermore, many women are lawyers and judges and are even allowed to represent clients in rabbinic courts.

In the United States, some of the rabbis on the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly ruled in 1974 that women may testify, and since then many male and female rabbis have accepted their testimony.

The right and the duty to testify are a basic civil right, especially in Judaism where the most basic declaration of faith - the Shema - is testimony regarding a person's belonging to the Jewish people and faith.

Nevertheless, in order to remove all doubt in this matter, we should promulgate a takkanah regarding the equality of men and women, especially with regard to the testimony of women. In essence, Israeli civil law allows women to testify and, as rabbis, we merely need to adopt it as a takkanah allowing women to testify in all cases.

There is no question that many famous poskim who in the past limited the public roles of women would support today an egalitarian halakhic approach had they been privileged to see the Jewish women of today. But even if society's attitude towards women had not changed, the principles of justice themselves demand that we determine that Jewish women are spiritually equal to Jewish men. Therefore, we must determine and emphasize that not only is it permitted to ordain women, but it is our duty to do so just as we ordain men.

Some say that if we ordain women as rabbis and accept their testimony, there is danger that Orthodoxy will not accept us as Jews. But we will never gain the public acceptance of the Orthodox establishment. True, we may lose the silent cooperation of certain liberal Orthodox rabbis. But if we don't ordain women, we will cause alienation from the Conservative movement in the Diaspora, which does ordain women, and if we don't accept women's testimony, we will disqualify with our own hands many Conservative marriages in which women signed the ketubah!

Finally, some say that if we support egalitarianism we will increase dissension within the Masorti Movement. But in a pluralistic movement such as ours, we should not be afraid of such a course of events.

In light of the above, there is no doubt that it is permissible, and even required, for the Bet Midrash to ordain women as rabbis and it is required to determine that women are qualified to serve as witnesses and judges.

Rabbi Gilah Dror

In favor: Rabbi Michael Graetz, Rabbi Reuven Hammer

Responsum:

Many philosophical, sociological and practical arguments have been adduced on both sides of this issue. On the one hand, there are convincing arguments in favor of ordaining women. Today's woman is not the same woman described in talmudic literature. Practically speaking, there is not much point in preventing women from studying for the rabbinate in Israel if they can do so in the United States. Doing so simply causes them personal anguish and monetary loss. The claims about our target group work both ways. We must rather serve the needs of the community, which already belongs to the Masorti Movement and this community, for the most part, supports this step.

On the other hand, I do not think that egalitarianism is an absolute value, neither in society nor in Judaism. This phenomenon is too new to be judged. For the time being, it can only be said that egalitarianism is an established fact in the western world, and Judaism must deal with that fact. Similarly, I don't think that there is an ethical imperative to ordain women as rabbis because ethics fluctuate widely according to the time and place. For the time being, we can only say that in the eyes of most Jews in the western world, this is a fair, logical and desirable step. If so, it remains for us to investigate whether this step also is in keeping with the demands of the halakhah.

In order to determine if a woman can be ordained a rabbi, we must define the functions of the rabbi today. Proponents of women's ordination claim that rabbis are primarily teachers, while one opponent says that a rabbi is primarily a judge. Both sides are skirting the real issues. The rabbinate has changed constantly throughout Jewish history. But the question is not what rabbis did in the past or in the Orthodox world but what they do today in our congregations. The simple fact is that a Masorti rabbi is not just an educator and role model but also serves as a cantor, Torah reader, ba'al maftir, mezamen, megillah reader and shofar blower and performs weddings, serves as a witness for marriages (and divorces) and serves on a Bet Din for conversion. Therefore, we must deal with all of these issues before deciding the halakhah.

Some say we should ordain women as rabbis and they will decide according to their halakhic knowledge if a woman may serve as cantor, witness and judge. But if these activities are forbidden, the Bet Midrash will transgress the prohibition of "you shall not put a stumbling block before the blind" (Leviticus 19:14). This means you should not put a person in a position where he is likely to transgress a commandment (see e.g. Moed Katan 17a). Therefore, we must determine if ordaining women will lead to them transgressing various prohibitions. Therefore, the Va'ad Halakhah decided by majority vote on the 21st of Iyar, 5752 that we must deal with all of the following issues:

- 1) May a woman hold public office?
- 2) May a woman study and teach Torah?
- 3) May a woman decide halakhic issues?
- 4) May women be counted in the minyan, serve as cantors, read the Torah, read the megillah, blow the shofar, and perform positive time-bound commandments?
- 5) May a woman perform a marriage?
- 6) May a woman serve in a bet din and especially in a bet din for conversion?

7) May a woman serve as a witness and sign ketubot and gittin?

1) Those who oppose women holding public office rely primarily on Sifrei Devarim (par. 157): "and one does not appoint a woman as leader of the community" and Maimonides (Hilkhos Melakhim 1:5): "and so too for all appointments in the Jewish community - one only appoints a man".

However, there are eight reasons to reject this approach: a) it is not mentioned in the Talmud or by other poskim, b) Maimonides apparently inferred the prohibition regarding women from a similar prohibition regarding converts, but we needn't do so, c) Maimonides may have been influenced by his generally negative attitude towards women (see Hilkhos Talmud Torah 1:13 and Ishut 13:11), d) Maimonides is opposed by the other early authorities who ruled on this issue, e) the textual reading in the Sifrei is quite uncertain, f) in a similar case, Maimonides rejected the Sifrei as a "da'at yahid" of Rabbi Shimon, g) the Sifrei may very well have been dealing with appointments made by a Sanhedrin while we are dealing with appointments made by democratic vote, and, lastly, h) we know that women in fact served in public office in the biblical and Second Temple periods and we know of fifteen women who served as chassidic "rebbe's". Therefore, women may serve in public offices such as president of a synagogue, gabbai and rabbi.

2) Those who forbid or limit women's Torah study rely primarily on Rabbi Eliezer in Mishnah Sotah 3:4 "that whoever teaches his daughter Torah is considered as if he had taught her licentiousness". Maimonides followed Rabbi Eliezer regarding the Oral Law, but only forbade teaching the written law "lekhatila" (Hilkhos Talmud Torah 1:13). Most poskim accepted Rabbi Eliezer and Maimonides in principle, but managed to limit their stringent approach. Some allow teaching women practical mitzvot, while others allow teaching outstanding women such as Beruriah. Some modern poskim continue to forbid teaching women Talmud, but claim that we are required to teach them Torah, Pirkei Avot, ethics and laws which relate to them. And some even allow teaching them Talmud because of "the needs of the hour". But we needn't find loopholes in the approach of Rabbi Eliezer and Maimonides. We should rather follow Ben Azzai (Mishnah Sotah ibid.) and rule that "a person is required to teach his daughter Torah" because: a) that is the opinion of the sages ("rabbanan") according to the Talmud (ibid. 21b), b) Ben Azzai's opinion is supported by other Talmudic sources and by many historical precedents, c) according to the Lehem Mishneh, when there is a disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Ben Azzai, we rule according to Ben Azzai, d) this was the conclusion of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly in North America in 1975, e) times have changed and now ("ha'idana") it would be absurd for young women to receive a limited Jewish education while they receive a first-rate secular education identical to that of young men. Therefore, Jewish women today are required to study Torah like men and a woman may learn and teach all areas of Torah study without any problem.

3) The Va'ad Halakhah ruled a number of months ago by majority vote that women may decide halakhic issues because that is the opinion of the majority of poskim and that

has been the approach actually followed from the Talmudic period until today. (See Responsa of the Va'ad Halakhah, Vol. 4, pp. 107-117.)

4) There are two ways to approach the subject of women and prayer and women and positive time-bound commandments. If we check the matter piecemeal, we could prove that women are required to pray thrice daily, may be counted in a minyan, read the Torah and the megillah in public, and are required to recite kiddush and birkat hamazon d'oraita. But this would still not enable a woman rabbi to function in all necessary capacities because women are exempt from all positive time-bound commandments. Therefore a woman rabbi could not blow the shofar or count the omer or recite the blessing for the sukkah in public and thereby fulfill the congregation's obligation. She would also have trouble serving as a role model for tallit, tefillin, sukkah and lulav when she herself is exempt from them and may, in fact, not practice these mitzvot at all. Therefore, we should adopt the approach of Rabbi Joel Roth that women rabbinical students should accept upon themselves the obligation to observe all of the positive time-bound mitzvot. Then they can perform all of the liturgical functions that rabbis today perform.

5) The Va'ad Halakhah ruled in 5751 that a woman may actively participate in every aspect of the marriage ceremony. (See Responsa of the Va'ad Halakhah, Vol. 4, pp. 91-103.)

Until now, we have dealt with issues, which affect the individual or a specific congregation. The last two issues - dayyanut and testimony - however, effect "kelal yisrael" (the entire Jewish people), and one movement in Judaism should not act unilaterally in such matters.

6) There are talmudic sources, rishonim and modern poskim who allow women to judge under certain circumstances, but what would be the point of allowing such a practice? If a woman serves on a bet din for conversion, all of the Orthodox rabbis and the majority of Conservative rabbis will not recognize that conversion as valid. Is such a step for the good of the convert or for the good of kelal yisrael? It will just fuel the fires of controversy and harm the convert. Therefore, women rabbinical students must undertake in writing not to serve on a bet din for conversion.

7) There is no question that our sages considered women disqualified as witnesses d'oraita. In 1979, Rabbi Joel Roth suggested three ways of changing or circumventing this halakhah, but until today nothing has been done. In May of 1992, the matter arose again at the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in North America. 50% were in favor of women serving as witnesses and 50% were opposed. In other words, there may be halakhic ways to change this halakhah, but these two facts indicate that the time is not yet ripe. Therefore, women rabbinical students must undertake in writing not to serve as witnesses for divorces or marriages.

In conclusion, it is permissible for the Bet Midrash to ordain women as rabbis on condition that the women undertake in writing to accept upon themselves all positive

time-bound commandments and to refrain from serving in a Bet Din for conversion or to witness divorces and marriages.

Rabbi David Golinkin

In favor: Rabbi Yosef Green

Responsum:

There is an absurd aspect to this question, since the mother institution of the Bet Midrash - the Jewish Theological Seminary of America - has been ordaining women for a number of years. As a result, a woman who is ordained by the Seminary automatically becomes a member of the Rabbinical Assembly, which enables her to join the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel if she makes Aliyah, and she can then be chosen as an officer or as a member of any committee, including the Va'ad Halakhah. Furthermore, there is already such a woman rabbi who is the Vice President of the Rabbinical Assembly of Israel and a member of the Va'ad Halakhah.

Even so, there are those who say that despite our close ties to the Conservative Movement in North America, we are nonetheless independent. We are living here in Israel, and we wish to be part of a movement, which wants to be rooted here. Therefore, we must take into account the specific conditions in the State of Israel.

There are three sociological circumstances in Israel which turn every discussion of the role of women in Jewish ritual into a revolutionary question:

1. There is a "status-quo" in Israel regarding religion and state, according to which the Chief Rabbinate has the authority in all matters of personal status. Most Jews in Israel accept that authority. The Masorti Movement along with other like-minded groups is fighting to do away with the religious establishment, but by so doing they also endanger the good that has resulted from the "status-quo", such as kashrut in the army, public Shabbat observance and the like. Is the Masorti Movement in favor of complete separation of religion and state?
2. In general, the secular majority in Israel is not interested in religion, even if it's the "liberal" version. They are still willing to accept the rules of the game as defined by the Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox, either in order to reject them or for the life cycle events when they need their services such as weddings and funerals.
3. The Masorti Movement is still small in numbers, in political clout, in financial resources and in trained manpower.

Thus, in light of these three conditions in the State of Israel, our question takes on a more serious nature.

As Rabbi Robert Gordis and others have pointed out, every halakhic question is also a sociological question. That is precisely why Gordis supports the ordination of women as rabbis. Since women can now serve in every capacity such as doctors, politicians,

judges and lawyers, any delay in their ordination stems from lack of sensitivity to the change which has transpired in their status or from futile stubbornness. Gordis further claims that the exemption of women from positive time-bound commandments stemmed, according to the Abudraham, from the need for women to serve their families at home. But in modern times, with the invention of timesaving appliances, this exemption is unnecessary. The disqualification of women as witnesses and judges is also rejected by Gordis on sociological and moral grounds.

Rabbi Simon Greenberg explains that the halakhic attitude towards women is based on four talmudic value judgments which are outdated and not in keeping with our sense of morality: a) "women are light-headed", b) "a woman is subjugated to her husband", c) "a woman's body is lewd", d) "the honor of a princess is to remain at home" (Psalms 45:14).

It is obvious that anyone with an ounce of ethical sensitivity will listen carefully to the sociological-historical claims made by Rabbis Gordis and Greenberg. But it is also obvious that every legal system is caught up in the constant tension between pursuing justice and trying to maintain some sort of legal continuity.

In the case under discussion, there are two reactions to those who demand change in the name of justice as a result of their historical-sociological analysis:

1. There is no question that the four statements quoted by Rabbi Greenberg are embarrassing by abstract ethical criteria and therefore they should be ignored. But as for Rabbi Gordis's argument, if Judaism in the home throughout the generations was dependent on the division of responsibilities between men and women and if, in modern times, one of the most serious problems is the disintegration of the family, isn't there room for a much more careful and hesitant examination of blurring the public ritual roles? It is very possible that such an examination interested in strengthening the family will reject the four statements quoted above, yet still arrive at the conclusion that there is a point to the division of ritual responsibilities.

2. Let us assume that Rabbi Gordis's sociological analysis is correct for North America. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the sociological situation here in Israel regarding radical changes in religion, which require wisdom. Justice is the tendency of the prophets; wisdom is the tendency of the sages. And as mentioned above, there are three sociological factors in the State of Israel, which were not taken into account by Rabbi Gordis and others writing in the Diaspora.

Let us assume that we have the right and the duty to initiate a real religious revolution in Israel. On which pillars of belief and on which mitzvot will we build our new spiritual, ethical edifice? Do we have enough observant people in our congregations who are loyal to the authority of the halakhah that we can be so certain in our success to effect an authentic religious revolution? There are two types of revolutions: a) an ethical revolution which carries out the long-awaited desire of society to change its values and the institutions which reflect them; and b) an irresponsible revolution which reflects the

will of a small group of visionaries who are not willing to wait for their vision to be accepted by the majority of the community. Rabbi Louis Jacobs once translated Schechter's famous term "Catholic Israel" as "the consensus of the involved". The question is: who are the Masorti Jews involved in halakhic questions who will serve as the pioneers of our halakhic revolution?

It is clear that the decision to ordain women as rabbis will drive away those Masorti Jews who are involved - who pray every day, who keep strictly kosher, who observe Shabbat - as has already happened in North America. Furthermore, the same principles of justice and egalitarianism will lead to the demand for other changes such as accepting patrilineal descent as a sufficient criterion for Jewishness.

Among those who already ruled on the matter in question, Rabbi Joel Roth has written a detailed responsum, which assists us in relating to this question. As opposed to Gordis, Greenberg and others, Roth permits the ordination of women while remaining within the four ells of halakhah, so if, in the end, we disagree with him, it will strengthen the position opposing women's ordination for halakhic reasons.

The questions of women and Torah study and women and public office do not require our attention because "the consensus of the involved" has allowed these activities for quite some time. For us, the two main questions are: 1) May a woman serve as a witness and as a dayan? And 2) May a woman be counted in a minyan, serve as a cantor and accept upon herself positive time-bound commandments? Rabbi Roth suggests three solutions for solving the problem of women as witnesses which is prohibited "mid'oraita" but prefers the radical solution of "actively uprooting something from the Torah" and doing away with the prohibition. But Roth himself points out the dangers of such an approach including 1) opening up the dams to uproot all sorts of biblical prohibitions and 2) lack of agreement as to whether rabbis today have the right to actively uproot something from the Torah. This last point is critical. While we may have such power in North America where the non-Orthodox movements are the overwhelming majority of the community, here we are a tiny minority and the Chief Rabbinate possesses all of the actual power. Thus the ordination of women as rabbis vis a vis women's testimony is a question, which from the point of view of reality is being asked in an almost total vacuum.

There remains the question of women in the minyan, as cantors and with regard to positive time-bound commandments. Rabbi Roth has shown that women can obligate themselves to observe positive time-bound commandments. One can strengthen his approach by stating that, according to Shabbat 88a, God originally forced the entire Jewish people - both men and women - to accept the Torah while in the days of Ahashverosh the entire Jewish people - both men and women - accepted the Torah of their own free will. So we see that the exemption of women from certain mitzvot originally occurred in the framework of obligation, so what is the problem if in a certain generation the women choose to give up that exemption?

In modern times, however, we have the Kantian approach, which says that moral

autonomy must be entirely divorced from outside influence, versus the Jewish approach, which says that personal autonomy must be within the framework of the covenant made by God - a transcendental and heteronomous force - and the Jewish people, who accepted the covenant. Will the self-obligation by women in positive time-bound commandments be according to the Kantian model or according to the covenant model begun at Sinai and concluded in the days of Ahashverosh? The question is whether the Masorti Movement is willing to relate to such a serious question.

Rabbi Roth does not suggest that we should rule that all women are now obligated to perform all of the mitzvot, because this would transform most Jewish women into sinners. But his solution is not practical because he has created two categories of women - those who are obligated and count in the minyan etc. and those who do not. But the larger problem refuses to go away. Instead of expending so much effort in solving the problem of a few women who want to become rabbis, why not use the opportunity to obligate all women? And if we are already preparing the women for obligation, why not prepare the entire Jewish people including all the men for renewing the religious covenant in our day, since most men today do not feel obligated in the covenant of mitzvot? Without such a general halakhic renewal and obligation to perform mitzvot, there is no meaning to ordaining women as rabbis in Israel other than to draw a bit of attention from society at large.

Therefore, we need a period of an entire generation to prepare ourselves to obligate ourselves and our congregations - men and women - to the covenant. In order to execute this religious-educational process, we will need male and female spiritual leaders of the first caliber. The Bet Midrash will prepare these leaders for at least six years granting the degree of "Doctor of Jewish Theology". As a gesture of historical continuity, men will also receive ordination along with their doctorate. We will wait another generation to see whether the Masorti community is really ready to bring about the religious revolution required. And if the situation then requires women rabbis, we can add the honorary title of "Rabbi" to the female leadership, which will already exist. To the women who do not have the patience to wait another generation to receive a certain title, it is worth mentioning the saying from Pirkei Avot: "it does not devolve upon you to finish the task..."

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Queen Esther



Was Queen Esther real?

How did she change Judaism?

Should her book be in the Bible?

The **Book of Esther** is a book in the [Ketuvim](#) ("writings"), the third section of the Jewish [Tanakh](#) (the [Hebrew Bible](#)) and is part of the Christian [Old Testament](#). It tells the story of a [Jewish](#) girl named [Esther](#), who became queen of [Persia](#) and thwarted a plan to commit genocide against her people. The Book of Esther or the **Megillah** is the basis for the Jewish celebration of [Purim](#). Its full text is read aloud twice during the celebration, in the evening and again the following morning.

Setting

The biblical Book of Esther is set in the third year of [Ahasuerus](#), a king of Persia. The name Ahasuerus is equivalent to Xerxes, both deriving from the Persian Khshayārsha, thus Ahasuerus is usually identified as [Xerxes I](#) (486-465 BCE), though Ahasuerus is identified as [Artaxerxes](#) in the later Greek version of Esther (as well as by [Josephus](#), the Jewish commentary [Esther Rabbah](#), the Ethiopic translation and the Christian theologian [Bar-Hebraeus](#) who identified him more precisely as [Artaxerxes II](#) ^[1]).

Plot summary

Ahasuerus, ruler of a massive Persian empire, holds a lavish party, initially for his court and dignitaries and afterwards for all inhabitants of the capital city [Shushan](#). Ahasuerus orders the queen [Vashti](#) to display her beauty before the guests. She refuses. Worried all women will learn from this, Ahasuerus removes her as queen and has a royal decree sent across the empire that men should be the ruler of their households and should speak their own native tongue. Ahasuerus then orders all beautiful young girls to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of these is the orphan [Esther](#), whose Jewish name is Hadassah. After the death of her parents, she is being fostered by her cousin [Mordechai](#). She finds favor in the king's eyes, and is made his new queen. Esther does not reveal that she is Jewish. Shortly afterwards, Mordechai discovers a plot by courtiers [Bigthan](#) and Teresh to assassinate Ahasuerus. The conspirators are apprehended and hanged, and Mordechai's service to the king is recorded.

Ahasuerus appoints [Haman](#) as his prime minister. Mordechai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavor as he refuses to bow down to him. Having found out that Mordechai is Jewish, Haman plans to kill not just Mordechai but all the Jews in the empire. He obtains Ahasuerus' permission to execute this plan, against payment of ten thousand [talents](#) of silver (which the King declines to accept and rather allows him to execute his plan on principle), and he casts lots to choose the date on which to do this—the thirteenth of the month of [Adar](#). On that day, everyone in the empire is free to massacre the Jews and despoil their property. When Mordechai finds out about the plans he and all Jews mourn and fast. Mordechai informs Esther what has happened and tells her to intercede with the King. She is afraid to break the law and go to the King unsummoned. This action would incur the death penalty. Mordechai tells her that she must. She orders Mordechai to have all Jews fast for three days together with her, and on the third day she goes to Ahasuerus, who stretches out his sceptre to her which shows that she is not to be punished. She invites him to a feast in the company of Haman. During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening. Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordechai and consults with his friends. At his wife's suggestion, he builds a [gallows](#) for Mordechai.

That night, Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia, and when the court records are read to him to help him sleep, he learns of the services rendered by Mordechai in the previous plot against his life. Ahasuerus is told that Mordechai has not received any recognition for saving the king's life. Just then, Haman appears, to ask the King to hang Mordechai, but before he can make this request, King Ahasuerus asks Haman what should be done for the man that the king wishes to honor. Thinking that the man that the king is referring to is himself, Haman says that the man should be dressed in the king's royal robes and led around on the king's royal horse, while a [herald](#) calls: "See how the king honours a man he wishes to reward!" To his horror and surprise, the king instructs Haman to do so to Mordechai. After leading Mordechai's parade, he returns in mourning to his wife and friends, who suggest his downfall has begun.

Immediately after, Ahasuerus and Haman attend Esther's second banquet, at which she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, including her. Overcome by rage, Ahasuerus leaves the room; meanwhile Haman stays behind and begs Esther for his life, falling upon her in desperation. The king comes back in at this moment and thinks Haman is assaulting the queen; this makes him angrier than before and he orders Haman hanged on the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordechai. The previous decree against the Jews cannot be annulled, but the king allows the Jews to defend themselves during attacks. As a result, on 13 Adar, five hundred attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed in Shushan, followed by a Jewish slaughter of seventy-five thousand Persians, although they took no plunder. Esther sends a letter instituting an annual commemoration of the Jewish people's redemption, in a holiday called Purim (lots). Ahasuerus remains very powerful and continues reigning, with Mordechai assuming a prominent position in his court. ^[2]

Authorship and date

Esther is usually dated to the third or fourth century BCE. Jewish tradition regards it as a [redaction](#) by the [Great Assembly](#) of an original text written by [Mordecai](#).^[3]

The Greek additions to Esther (which do not appear in the Jewish/Hebrew; see "Additions to Esther" below) are dated to around the late 2nd century or early 1st BCE.^[4]

- The primary source relating to the origin of Purim is the *Megillat Esther* (Book of Esther), which became the last of the 24 books of the [Tanakh](#) to be canonized by the Sages of the [Great Assembly](#). It is dated to the 4th century BCE^[5] and according to the Talmud was a redaction by the Great Assembly of an original text by Mordecai.^[6]
- The Greek Book of Esther, included in the Septuagint, is a retelling of the events of the Hebrew Book of Esther rather than a translation and records additional traditions, in particular the identification of Ahasuerus with [Artaxerxes](#) and details of various letters. It is dated to the second to first century BCE.^[7] The Coptic and Ethiopic versions of Esther are translations of it instead of the Hebrew Esther.
- A Latin version of Esther was produced by [Jerome](#) for the [Vulgate](#). It translates the Hebrew Esther but interpolates translations of the Greek Esther where the latter provides additional material.
- Several Aramaic [targums](#) of Esther were produced in the Middle Ages of which two survive - the *Targum Rishon* ("First Targum") and *Targum Sheni* ("Second Targum")^{[8][9]} dated c. 500 - 1000 CE.^[10] These were not targums ("translations") in the true sense but like the Greek Esther are retellings of events and include additional legends relating to Purim.^[8] There is also a 16th century rescension of the *Targum Rishon* sometimes counted as *Targum Shelishi* ("Third Targum").^[9]

Historicity

The book of Esther falls under the category of Writings, one of three parts of the Jewish canon.^[11] Some modern scholars suggest the book of Esther to be a historical novella.^{[11][12]} That is, while the events may not be historically accurate the book itself was written to tell a story of a time in history, in this case the origin of the Jewish holiday of Purim.^[11]

There are a number of reasons some scholars question the historicity of the book of Esther. As noted by biblical scholar Michael D. Coogan, the book of Esther contains specific details regarding certain subject matter (for example, Persian rule) which are historically inaccurate. For example, Coogan discusses an apparent inaccuracy regarding the age of Esther's cousin (or, according to others, uncle) [Mordecai](#).^{[11][12]} In Esther 2:5–6, either Mordecai or his great-grandfather Kish is identified as having been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE: "Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jeconiah king of Judah." If this refers to Mordecai, he would have had to live over a century to have witnessed the events described in the Book of Esther.^[11] However, the verse may be read as referring not to Mordecai's exile to Babylon, but to his great-grandfather Kish's exile.^{[13][14][15]}

In her article "The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling," biblical scholar Adele Berlin discusses the reasoning behind scholarly concern of the historicity of Esther. Much of this debate relates to the importance of distinguishing history and fiction within biblical texts, as Berlin argues, in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the history of the Israelite people.^[16] Berlin quotes a series of scholars who suggest that the author of Esther did not mean for the book to be considered as a historical writing, but intentionally wrote it to be a historical novella.^[17] The genre of novellas under which Esther falls was common during both the Persian and Hellenistic periods to which scholars have dated the book of Esther.^{[11][16]}

There are certain elements of the book of Esther that are historically accurate. The story told in the book of Esther takes place during the rule of Ahasuerus, who has been identified as the fifth-century Persian king Xerxes (486-465). The author also displays an accurate knowledge of Persian customs and palaces.^[14] However, according to Coogan, considerable historical inaccuracies remain throughout the text, supporting the view that the book of Esther is to be read as a historical novella which tells a story describing historical events but is not necessarily historical fact.^[11]

Historical reading

Those arguing in favour of an historical reading of Esther, most commonly identify Ahasuerus with [Artaxerxes II](#) (ruled 405–359 BCE) although in the past it was often assumed that he was [Xerxes I](#) (ruled 486–465 BCE). The [Hebrew](#) *Ahasuerus* is most likely derived from [Persian](#) *Khshayarsha*, the origin of the [Greek](#) *Xerxes*. The Greek historian [Herodotus](#) wrote that Xerxes sought his [harem](#) after being defeated in the [Greco-Persian Wars](#). He makes no reference to individual members of the harem except for a domineering [Queen consort](#) named [Amestris](#), whose father, Otanes, was one of Xerxes's generals. (In contrast, the Greek historian [Ctesias](#) refers to a similar father-in-law/general figure named Onaphas.) Amestris has often been identified with [Vashti](#), but this identification is problematic, as Amestris remained a powerful figure well into the reign of her son, [Artaxerxes I](#), whereas Vashti is portrayed as dismissed in the early part of Xerxes's reign. Alternative attempts have been made to identify her with [Esther](#), although Esther is an orphan whose father was a Jew named Abihail.

As for the identity of Mordecai, the similar names *Marduka* and *Marduku* have been found as the name of officials in the Persian court in over thirty texts from the period of Xerxes I and his father Darius, and may refer to up to four individuals, one of which might after all be Mordecai.

The Septuagint version of Esther translates the name Ahasuerus as *Artaxerxes*, a Greek name derived from the [Persian](#) *Artakshatra*. [Josephus](#) too relates that this was the name by which he was known to the Greeks, and the [Midrashic](#) text, *Esther Rabba* also makes the identification. [Bar-Hebraeus](#) identified Ahasuerus explicitly as [Artaxerxes II](#); however, the names are not necessarily equivalent: Hebrew has a form of the name *Artaxerxes* distinct from *Ahasuerus*, and a direct Greek rendering of *Ahasuerus* is used by both Josephus and the Septuagint for occurrences of the name outside the Book of Esther. Instead, the Hebrew name Ahasuerus accords with an inscription of the time that notes that Artaxerxes II was named also *Arshu*, understood as a shortening of *Achshiyarshu* the Babylonian rendering of the Persian *Khshayarsha* (Xerxes), through which the Hebrew *Achashverosh* (Ahasuerus) is derived.^[18] [Ctesias](#) related that Artaxerxes II was also called *Arsicas* which is understood as a similar shortening with the Persian suffix *-ke* that is applied to shortened names. [Deinon](#) related that Artaxerxes II was also called *Oarses* which is also understood to be derived from *Khshayarsha*.^[18]

Another view attempts to identify him instead with [Artaxerxes I](#) (ruled 465–424 BCE), whose Babylonian concubine, [Kosmartydene](#), was the mother of his son [Darius II](#) (ruled 424–405 BCE). Jewish tradition relates that Esther was the mother of a King Darius and so some try to identify Ahasuerus with Artaxerxes I and Esther with Kosmartydene.

Based on the view that the Ahasuerus of the [Book of Tobit](#) is identical with that of the *Book of Esther*, some have also identified him as Nebuchadnezzar's ally [Cyaxares](#) (ruled 625–585 BCE). In certain manuscripts of Tobit, the former is called *Achiachar*, which, like the [Greek](#) *Cyaxares*, is thought to be derived from [Persian](#) *Akhuwakhshatra*. Depending on the interpretation of *Esther* 2:5–6, Mordecai or his great-grandfather Kish was carried away from [Jerusalem](#) with [Jeconiah](#) by [Nebuchadnezzar](#), in 597 BCE. The view that it was Mordecai would be consistent with the identification of Ahasuerus with Cyaxares. Identifications with other Persian monarchs have also been suggested.

Jacob Hoschander has argued that evidence of the historicity of Haman and his father Hamedatha is seen in *Omanus* and *Anadatus* mentioned by [Strabo](#) as being honoured with Anahita in the city of [Zela](#). Hoschander argues that these were not deities as Strabo supposed but garbled forms of "Haman" and "Hamedatha" who were being worshipped as martyrs. The names are indeed unattested in Persian texts as gods, however the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 61b) and [Rashi](#) both record a practice of deifying Haman and Josephus speaks of him being worshipped.^[18] Attempts have been made to connect both "Omanus" and "Haman" with the Zoroastrian term [Vohu Mana](#); however this denotes the principle of "Good Thoughts" and is not the name of a deity.)

Whenever the book was written and whatever the historicity of the events recounted in it, clearly by the time it was written the term "Yehudim" (יְהוּדִים - Jews) already gained a meaning quite close to what it means up to the present—i.e. an ethnic-religious group, scattered in many countries, organised in autonomous communities and a target of hatred.

Relation to the rest of the Bible

Esther is the only book of the [Tanakh](#) that is not represented among the [Dead Sea scrolls](#). It has often been compared to the first half of the [Book of Daniel](#) and to the [deuterocanonical](#) Books of [Tobit](#) and [Judith](#) for its subject matter.^{[[citation needed](#)]}

The story is also the first time that the word Jew (יְהוּדִי) was used, thus denoting a distinction between the Hebrews, the Israelites, and their Jewish descendants in the diaspora.^{[[citation needed](#)]} Moreover, whatever the historical validity of the specific events depicted, the book clearly reflects a situation in which Jews were an ethnic-religious minority - scattered in many countries, organised in self-contained, self-governing communities and subjected to intensive and sometimes violent hatred by some members of the surrounding society. Clearly, whenever the book was actually composed, a phenomenon which can already be identified as a kind of [antisemitism](#) was in existence - whether or not Haman is an actual historical character.

From aishdas.com

The Historicity of Megillat Esther

Recently, the historicity of the biblical book of Esther - whether the book is historically true - has been called into question in a most bold and audacious manner. Because the challenger writes with such overstated confidence in this matter, I have been easily convinced to take up my pen once again and demonstrate how thinly substantiated his claim is. What I intend to show here is that there is ample basis to support the claim that the book of Esther is historical and accurate. No, not all historians accept this. But many prominent historians do, so the challenge that the book of Esther is ahistorical lacks force. The believing Jew (and Christian) can easily respond that there is insufficient evidence to disprove the historicity of Esther. Because there is so much scholarly literature on the subject, this essay will consist mostly of quotations from mainstream historians who have written on the subject.

But first I need to point out that the issue under question is the historical accuracy of the book of Esther, not the related midrashim. We certainly know that many, perhaps most, midrashim were intended to relay allegorical religious messages and not to describe historical facts, as commentators such as Maharal and Maharsha demonstrate at length. Distinguishing between literal and allegorical midrashim is frequently a difficult task. However, if science or history conclusively demonstrates that a midrash cannot be literally true then we have been assisted in our understanding of this midrash. It has been proven to be allegorical, not untrue (if the proof is truly as strong as its proponent claims). Therefore, we are here only concerned with the actual biblical text and not assorted midrashim.

When and where was Megillat Esther written?

In view of Esther's setting in Susa [Shushan], its Persian background, its Aramaisms, and its lack of reference to Palestine, there is widespread agreement that Esther was composed in the eastern Diaspora, quite probably at Susa [Shushan] itself.

(E. Yamauchi, [Persia and the Bible](#), p. 226)

Carey Moore prefers to date Esther in the late Persian Period, that is, in the early fourth century [BCE]. Robert Gordis favors a similar date... Shemaryahu Talmon argues for a still earlier date... he concludes: "The traditional setting of the book in the days of Xerxes [Achashverosh] (485-465 BC[E]) cannot be wide of the mark." I would agree with his position.

(Yamauchi, pp. 227-228)

Is the portrayal of Achashverosh believable?

A study of Persian records indicates that Xerxes [Achashverosh] was a far more successful ruler than Herodotus would suggest... Xerxes [Achashverosh] used the fabulous wealth of his empire to build the most magnificent structure of Achaemenian times, the palace of Persepolis... He did, of course, also build at Susa [Shushan], but that site is not well preserved today... Xerxes' [Achashverosh's] empire did extend from India to Ethiopia, and Xerxes [Achashverosh] did have a winter palace at Susa [Shushan], which had features not incompatible with the

architectural detail given in [the book of Esther]. Famous for his lavish drinking parties and his extravagant promises and gifts, Xerxes [Achashverosh] also had, on occasion, a nast, irrational temper.
(C. Moore, [Anchor Bible: Esther](#), pp. XXVIII-XLI)

Does the book of Esther portray the Persian government properly?

[T]he author of Esther shows awareness of certain features of Persian government, such as the seven princely advisers and the very efficient postal system; he is also familiar with certain practices of Persian court life, including obeisance to the king's high officials and the reading and rewarding of the king's "benefactors." The author is also aware of various details and Persian customs, among them hanging as a form of capital punishment... And, finally, the author uses a number of Persian nouns...
(Moore, p. XLI)

Is Vashti an historical figure?

One of the most serious discrepancies cited by scholars to discredit the historicity of Esther is the fact that Herodotus indicates that Xerxes' [Achashverosh's] queen was Amestris, rather than the biblical Esther... J. Stafford Wright has suggested that by assuming certain phonetic modifications, an identification of Vashti with Amestris can be made - a conclusion accepted also by William Shea.
(Yamauchi, pp. 230-231)

Were there really 127 provinces in Achashverosh's kingdom?

[O. Leuze] points out that the [twenty-three] satrapies cover lesser divisions of up to seventy-one peoples and districts, which is an incomplete figure, lacking (e.g.) such constituent districts or (sub) provinces for the fifth, twelfth, and thirteenth satrapies (if not others also). The final total would not be far off the "127 provinces" ascribed to Xerxes [Achashverosh] in Esther 1:1, using the same term (*medina*) that was applied to Judaea (in Persian Aramaic, *Yehud*) as a local district, as in Ezra 5:8 and Neh. 1:3.
(K. Kitchen, [On the Reliability of the Old Testament](#), p. 516 n. 20)

Is Mordechai an historical figure?

The case for the historical identification of Mordecai with Marduka, attested as a Royal Persian official, has been complicated by the publication of the Elamite tablets from Persepolis. We now have more than thirty texts dated between 505 and 499 [BCE], with the name *Marduka* or *Marduku*, which may refer to up to four individuals. Although we cannot be certain, it is possible that one of these may have been the biblical Mordecai.
(Yamauchi, p. 235)

In conclusion:

Gordis summarizes the various lines in favor of the historicity of Esther by concluding, "all in all, the case for the historical basis for the book is impressive." Moore admits, "on the face of it, the story seems to be true... Nothing in the book seems improbable, let alone unbelievable." If this is the case, and if the alleged historical problems are not insoluble, then it would seem preferable to take the book at face value as a historical narrative rather than to resort to subjective and highly speculative reconstructions. Scholars such as Wright, Shea, and Claus Schedl have indeed argues for such a view.
(Yamauchi, p. 239)

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From Assembly of true Israel.com

The Book of Esther, fiction or 'Set-Apart' Scripture?

The Book of Esther is one of a small literary group of Books (along with Tobit and Judith) with very distinctive characteristics, and text which is difficult to determine. The book of Esther has two forms: one long, the Hebrew; one short, in the Greek. Of the Greek text there are two principal types: that of the current Greek Bible and that of

the widely variant recension of Lucian of Antioch. The Greek version contains the following passages not found in the Hebrew: the dream of Mordecai, 1:1, and its explanation, 10:3; two edicts of Ahasuerus, 3:13 and 8:12; the prayer of Mordecai, 4:17; the prayer of Esther, 4:17; a second account of Esther's appeal to Ahasuerus, 5:1, and 5:2; an appendix explaining the origin of the Greek version, 10:3. Jerome placed his translation of these passages after the translated Hebrew text (Vulg. 10:4-16:24).

The Book was admitted to the Canon at a late date, although it has been read and quoted from earlier days and appears in the official canonical list in the West from the time of the 'Roman' Synod of 382 and, in the East, from 682 (the 'in Trullo' Council of Constantinople). The Greek passages of Esther are considered deuterocanonical, that is to say, only recognized after certain hesitancy in the patristic period. The Jewish rabbis were still discussing the status of the Hebrew Esther in the 1st century A.D., but the book has now become very popular with the Jews.

The book belongs to a type of literature which treats history and geography with a good deal of 'Freedom.' In the book, the city of Susa is correctly described, along with some Persian customs. Ahasuerus (Hebrew transcription of Xerxes) is well known as an historical figure and the delineation of his character appears to agree with what Herodotus says of him. On the other hand, it is strange that one of the tolerant Achmenid dynasty should agree to sign the order for a Jewish pogrom. And still stranger that he should authorize a massacre of his own subjects, or that the Jews would be so blood thirsty to want to kill 75,000 fellow Persians, or that these Persians should offer no resistance to their own massacre. Moreover, at the time indicated by the narrative, the queen of Persia and consort of Xerxes was Amestris, as recorded in historical records. History leaves no room for either Vashi or Esther. And, if Mordecai was indeed deported under King Nebuchadnezzar, according to Esther 2:6, *he would have been one hundred and fifty years old by the reign of Xerxes* (which is not very likely).

The Book of Esther tells of the deliverance of the Jews by the actions of a woman. The Jews settled in Persia are threatened with extermination by Aman, a hostile and all-powerful vizir, and are saved by Esther, a young Jewess who has become queen, and who acts on the advice of her uncle, Mordecai. There is a complete reversal of the situation: Aman is hanged and his 10 sons impaled on the stake at the request of Esther (Esther 9:13-14). No wonder "many people of the land were becoming Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen on them" (Esther 8:17). *It is clear from the Book of Esther, that the Jews living in Persia at the time were a Religious Sect, but they were not a race, or a distinct people group, because of the incorporation of many people of the land that also became Jews.*

What the story does illustrate is the hatred toward the Jews, even in ancient times. Their way of life brought them into conflict with their autocratic rulers. The bloodthirstiness of the Book of Esther is very shocking, but we must remember, as in any literary conventions, the harem intrigues and the massacres serve to dramatize. But as to its value for inclusion into the set-apart Scripture, hardly. There is not much of a redeeming factor in the Book, except maybe for the Jew as a fabricated story.

The Greek version of the Book of Esther was in existence in 114 B.C. when it was sent to Egypt to authenticate the Jewish feast of Purim (Esther 4:13-17). The Hebrew text is earlier; in 160 B.C., according to 2 Maccabees 15:36, the Palestinian Jews were celebrating a 'Day of Mordecai'; which presupposes that the story, and probably the book of Esther were well known among the Jews. The book may therefore be assigned to the end of the Persian, or the beginning of the Hellenistic period. It is very doubtful that the Book is in any way connected with the feast of Purim, because Esther 9:20-32 is written in a very different linguistic style and reads very much like it was an addition. The origin of the feast of Purim is itself obscure, and it is quite possible that the book came to be connected with it later (2 Maccabees 15:36 does not use the term 'Purim', but 'Day of Mordecai') apparently to give it some historical basis.

We at the Assembly of Yahweh, consider the Book of Esther interesting Jewish literature, a story. We do not give it any 'Scriptural validity, or place any value on it. We do not believe it has any historical basis, and consider the book in the ranks of the Books of Tobit, and Judith. They are interesting stories, but not much more.

From Jewish Encyclopaedia.com

ESTHER (Hebrew, אֶסְתֵּר; Greek, Εσθήρ):

Name of the chief character in the Book of Esther, derived, according to some authorities, from the Persian "stara" (star); but regarded by others as a modification of "Ishtar," the name of the Babylonian goddess (see below).

—In Rabbinical Literature:

The story of Esther—typical in many regards of the perennial fate of the Jews, and recalled even more vividly by their daily experience than by the annual reading of the Megillah at Purim—invited, both by the brevity of some parts of the narrative and by the associations of its events with the bitter lot of Israel, amplifications readily supplied by popular fancy and the artificial interpretation of Biblical verse. The additions to Esther in the (Greek) Apocrypha have their counterparts in the post-Biblical literature of the Jews, and while it is certain that the old assumption of a Hebrew original for the additions in the Greek Book of Esther is not tenable (see Kautzsch, "Die Apocryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments," i. 194), it is not clear that the later Jewish amplifications are adaptations of Greek originals.

—Critical View:

As to the historical value of the foregoing data, opinions differ. Comparatively few modern scholars of note consider the narrative of Esther to rest on an historical foundation. The most important names among the more recent defenders of the historicity of the book are perhaps Hävernicks, Keil, Oppert, and Orelli. The vast majority of modern expositors have reached the conclusion that the book is a piece of pure fiction, although some writers qualify their criticism by an attempt to treat it as a historical romance. The following are the chief arguments showing the impossibility of the story of Esther:

Improbabilities of the Story.

- 1. It is now generally recognized that the Ahasuerus (אחשורוש), mentioned in Esther, in Ezra iv. 6, and in Dan. ix. 1, is identical with the Persian king known as Xerxes (Ξέρξης, "Khshayarha"), who reigned from 485 to 464 B.C.; but it is impossible to find any historical parallel for a Jewish consort to this king. Some critics formerly identified Esther with Amastris (Ionic, "Amestris"), who is mentioned by Herodotus (viii. 114, ix. 110; compare Ctesias, 20) as the queen of Xerxes at the time when Esther, according to Esth. ii. 6, became the wife of Ahasuerus. Amastris, however, was the daughter of a Persian general and, therefore, not a Jewess. Furthermore, the facts of Amastris' reign do not agree with the Biblical story of Esther. Besides all this, it is impossible to connect the two names etymologically. M'Clymont (Hastings, "Dict. Bible," i. 772) thinks it possible that Esther and Vashti may have been merely the chief favorites of the harem, and are consequently not mentioned in parallel historical accounts. It is very doubtful whether the haughty Persian aristocracy, always highly influential with the monarch, would have tolerated the choice of a Jewish queen and a Jewish prime minister (Mordecai), to the exclusion of their own class—not to speak of the improbability of the prime ministry of Haman the Agagite, who preceded Mordecai. "Agagite" can only be interpreted here as synonymous with "Amalekite" (compare "Agag," king of the Amalekites, the foe of Saul, I Sam. xv. 8, 20, 32; Num. xxiv. 7; see Agag). Oppert's attempt to connect the term "Agagite" with "Agaz," a Median tribe mentioned by Sargon, can not be taken seriously. The term, as applied to Haman, is a gross anachronism; and the author of Esther no doubt used it intentionally as a fitting name for an enemy of Israel. In the Greek version of Esther, Haman is called a Macedonian.
- 2. Perhaps the most striking point against the historical value of the Book of Esther is the remarkable decree permitting the Jews to massacre their enemies and fellow subjects during a period of two days. If such an extraordinary event had actually taken place, should not some confirmation of the Biblical account have been found in other records? Again, could the king have withstood the attitude of the native nobles, who would hardly have looked upon such an occurrence without offering armed resistance to their feeble and capricious sovereign? A similar objection may be made against the probability of the first edict permitting Haman the Amalekite to massacre all the Jews. Would there not be some confirmation of it in parallel records? This whole section bears the stamp of free invention.
- 3. Extraordinary also is the statement that Esther did not reveal her Jewish origin when she was chosen queen (ii. 10), although it was known that she came from the house of Mordecai, who was a professing Jew (iii. 4), and that she maintained a constant communication with him from the harem (iv. 4-17).

- 4. Hardly less striking is the description of the Jews by Haman as being "dispersed among the people in all provinces of thy kingdom" and as disobedient "to the king's laws" (iii. 8). This certainly applies more to the Greek than to the Persian period, in which the Diaspora had not yet begun and during which there is no record of rebellious tendencies on the part of the Jews against the royal authority.
- 5. Finally, in this connection, the author's knowledge of Persian customs is not in keeping with contemporary records. The chief conflicting points are as follows: (a) Mordecai was permitted free access to his cousin in the harem, a state of affairs wholly at variance with Oriental usage, both ancient and modern. (b) The queen could not send a message to her own husband (!). (c) The division of the empire into 127 provinces contrasts strangely with the twenty historical Persian satrapies. (d) The fact that Haman tolerated for a long time Mordecai's refusal to do obeisance is hardly in accordance with the customs of the East. Any native venturing to stand in the presence of a Turkish grand vizier would certainly be severely dealt with without delay. (e) This very refusal of Mordecai to prostrate himself belongs rather to the Greek than to the earlier Oriental period, when such an act would have involved no personal degradation (compare Gen. xxiii. 7, xxxiii. 3; Herodotus, vii. 136). (f) Most of the proper names in Esther which are given as Persian appear to be rather of Semitic than of Iranian origin, in spite of Oppert's attempt to explain many of them from the Persian (compare, however, Scheftelowitz, "Arisches im Alten Testament," 1901, i.).

Probable Date.

In view of all the evidence the authority of the Book of Esther as a historical record must be definitely rejected. Its position in the canon among the Hagiographa or "Ketubim" is the only thing which has induced Orthodox scholars to defend its historical character at all. Even the Jews of the first and second centuries of the common era questioned its right to be included among the canonical books of the Bible (compare Meg. 7a). The author makes no mention whatever of God, to whom, in all the other books of the Old Testament, the deliverance of Israel is ascribed. The only allusion in Esther to religion is the mention of fasting (iv. 16, ix. 31). All this agrees with the theory of a late origin for the book, as it is known, for example, from Ecclesiastes, that the religious spirit had degenerated even in Judea in the Greek period, to which Esther, like Daniel, in all probability belongs.

Esther could hardly have been written by a contemporary of the Persian empire, because (1) of the exaggerated way in which not only the splendor of the court, but all the events described, are treated (compare the twelve months spent by the maidens in adorning themselves for the king; the feasts of 187 days, etc., all of which point rather to the past than to a contemporary state of affairs); (2) the uncomplimentary details given about a great Persian king, who is mentioned by name, would not have appeared during his dynasty.

It is difficult to go so far as Grätz, who assigns Esther to an adherent of the Maccabean party in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. The vast difference in religious and moral tone between Esther and Daniel—the latter a true product of Antiochus' reign—seems to make such a theory impossible. Nor is the view of Jensen, followed by Nöldeke, more convincing to the unprejudiced mind. He endeavors to prove that the origin of the whole story lies in a Babylonian-Elamitic myth. He identifies Esther with the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (Aphrodite); Mordecai with Marduk, the tutelary deity of Babylon; and Haman with Hamman or Humman, the chief god of the Elamites, in whose capital, Susa, the scene is laid; while Vashti is also supposed to be an Elamite deity. Jensen considers that the Feast of Purim, which is the climax of the book, may have been adapted from a similar Babylonian festival by the Jews, who Hebraized the original Babylonian legend regarding the origin of the ceremonies. The great objection to such a theory is that no Babylonian festival corresponding with the full moon of the twelfth month is known.

The object of Esther is undoubtedly to give an explanation of and to exalt the Feast of Purim, of whose real origin little or nothing is known. [See Megillah](#); [Purim](#).

From Jewishmag.com

Megilat Esther, A Tribute to Jewish Women's Valor
By Eliahu Laurence

Although from the outside, Judaism seems to be a religion that gives preference to men, we find that the basis of much in Judaism stems from women. Tradition tells that the self-sacrifice of the Jewish women in Egypt who encouraged their husbands to continue in spite of no seemingly chance to get out of bondage hastened the redemption. We are told of the meritorious women who refused to participate in the idolatrous episode of the Golden Calf. The story of Chanukah is replete with the story of martyred Chanah and her seven sons who refuse to bow down to idols and the story of Yehudit who killed the wicked governor and brought about a victory over the Greeks.

The story of Megilat Esther is a true story of the heroism and self-sacrifice of one of Judaism's special personages, Queen Esther. It took place some 2300 years ago in the Oriental capital of the world, Sushan, Persia.

Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, was orphaned of her mother and father at a very early age. She was raised by her uncle, Mordechai. Mordechai was a judge of the distinguished high court of the Jewish people. He and Esther were descendants of King Saul.

Mordechai imbued into Esther all of the positive character traits that only the finest people possess. Esther was a very modest person and well liked by all. She concerned herself only with the other person, yet to herself, she showed little concern. Even her non-Jewish neighbors cherished her because of her genuine concern that she exhibited for them.

Esther eventually married her uncle, Mordechai. Although this is not mentioned in the Megillah, our Jewish tradition relates this to us. It could not be written in the Megillah since the Megillah was written during the life of Ahasverous. (He obviously would be unhappy to know and have it known that he had married a married woman.)

Ahasverous, the king of Persia, was not the most loveable person. He was ruthless and cruel. A despot who dealt strongly with all who stood in his way. He was not from any royal lineage, yet his wife Vashti, was. He used Vashti's lineage to give himself credence as a king.

Ahasverous was aware that the Jews in his kingdom had a prophecy that they would return to their homeland and rebuild the holy Temple in Jerusalem. He feared that this would break up his kingdom of 127 various states. When the time of his reckoning came and the Temple was not rebuilt, he made a gigantic party. During that party, he became drunk and began bragging about the beauty of his wife Vashti. To impress his many distinguished guests, he ordered Vashti to appear in front of all totally naked.

Vashti refused, and in his drunkenness, he ordered her to be executed for refusing to obey a royal decree. Vashti was put to death and the king had to suffer without a wife.

The advisors to the king suggested that a new queen be chosen from throughout the 127 states. The most beautiful girls were brought to the royal palace to seek their chances to become the new queen. To encourage girls to be brought to the palace, large financial gains were promised to the girls and their families. Many sought that their daughters should be contenders for becoming the queen.

Esther on the other hand, tried to hide from the eyes of all. Unfortunately, her charm was well known and she was taken to the palace of the king. Mordechai commanded her not to reveal who she really was. Esther obeyed her husband and like Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and Rivka, the wife of Isaac, did not reveal that she was a married woman to spare her husband's life.

Although all the girls in the palace, used their position to seek out the most that they could get from being in the palace, Esther, in her self-sacrificial manner, exhibited no concern for herself, but helped all those whom she met. She soon became the most liked person in the women's palace.

All the women would spend months learning how to use various makeups and perfumes and how to become attractive to the king. Each girl had her turn spending a night with the king, yet none were ever called back.

Esther was different. She wanted no perfume and no make-ups. Although, Jewish tradition relates that not only was she married, but also she was advanced in age, she had a beauty that shined from the essence of her personality. People were literally taken by her exquisite charm, grace and true concern for others.

When she was brought to Ahasuerus, she was the only one to plead to the king that she was not worthy of being the Queen. She pleaded with the king to take some one younger and more beautiful, some one that would be fitting to be queen to the king of the greatest and most powerful empire in the world.

In spite of the king's proddings, she refused to divulge her lineage. She told him that she was an orphan and not worthy of being the wife of a king. Her true humility won a place in the heart of Ahasuerus.

Yet the more she pleaded with Ahasuerus, the more enamoured he became with this wonderful woman. He had never met a woman that truly had his concerns at heart. He fell in love with Esther with such a strong bond that he declared her to be the queen.

In the meanwhile, Haman, the archenemy of the Jewish people had concocted a plan to exterminate all the Jewish people. He convinced the king of the worthiness of his plans with an extremely large bribe. When the king gave his permission to annihilate the Jewish people, Esther was shocked.

Mordechai urged her to speak with the king to intercede and change the decree. Esther was fearful of her life. Although she was the queen, no one was permitted to come into the king's chambers unsummoned. It was certain death unless the king extended his scepter to her, and there was no guarantee that he would. He had murdered Vashti because she did not hearken to his rules. Esther, too, could be replaced.

Mordechai explained to Esther that even though she may enjoy a high position, she must realize that perhaps it was divinely given to her in order to save her people. Esther told Mordechai that although she had had relations with the king, she was considered as a woman forced to have relations with another man and was still permitted to cohabit with Mordechai, her real husband. If she went to the king willingly, she would never ever be permitted to her real husband again.

Mordechai insisted. The danger facing the Jewish people was too great for personal concern. Esther was hesitant. Mordechai reminded her that if she did not go, the Jewish People will find redemption from another source but she may be cut off forever from G-d.

Esther requested a three day fast. At the end of the three days she invited Ahasuerus and Haman to a party. Haman was impressed that he was the only person present other than the king. The king was suspicious. Why was Haman, his minister invited? What connection did he have with the queen? Was some plot in the brewing?

The king requested Esther to explain the reason for the party. She said she would but only at the next party.

The king left perturbed. Haman left elated. Haman decided that his luck was rising even higher. The king suspected that Haman was involved in some evil plot.

At the next party, the king and Haman began to drink the superb wine that Esther poured for them. Soon they became relaxed and inebriated. Esther began to unfold a terrible story of the imminent destruction of her people. Although the king did not know her nationality, he became agitated to hear Esther report that some one was planning to kill her, together with all of her relatives and her nation.

The king demanded to know who would do such a terrible thing. Even Haman had no idea to whom she was referring. As the king's anger began to mount, he became agitated at the thought of someone trying to kill the queen together with her people. He demanded to know who this wicked person was. Haman also wondered who would have the audacity to even think to kill the queen.

Esther took her finger and slowly turned and pointed to Haman. This is the wicked evil man! The king's anger was uncontrollable. He jumped up and left the room to try to digest the accusations that he had heard. Was Haman, his closest and most reliable advisor, plotting to kill the queen?

Haman, realizing his jeopardy, knelt down to beg forgiveness from the queen. In his drunkenness, he stumbled and fell on to the chaise lounge that the queen was reclining on. At that moment, the king returned to the room to view Haman lying on top of the queen.

This sight was too much for the king to bear. Orders were given for the immediate execution of Haman and his influential sons. Esther asked that a royal decree be made giving the Jews the ability to defend themselves against those who tried to kill them. Ahasuerus agreed and the Jews were able to defend themselves and kill all of their enemies.

Through the efforts of Esther, a truly righteous woman, we have the holiday of Purim.

We see that due to the heroism of a Jewish woman, our people were saved from destruction. Esther remained the wife of the king. She had one son, Darius II, from Ahasuerus, through whom the holy Temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt. So we see that through the self sacrificing actions of heroic Jewish women, the Jewish nation continues

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Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer – the Baal Shem Tov



What impact did the BeShT have on Judaism?

Why was this so important for Eastern European Jews?

How does this differ from the Sephardim?

Rabbi **Yisroel (Israel) ben Eliezer** (רזעילא זב לארשי יבר ; May 22, 1760), often called **Baal Shem Tov** ([/ˈbaːl ʃɛm ˈtov/](#) or [/ˈtɒf/](#)) or **Besht**, was a [Jewish mystical rabbi](#). He is considered to be the founder of [Hasidic Judaism](#) (see also [Mezhibizh Hasidic dynasty](#)).

The Besht was born to Eliezer and Sara in [Okopy](#) ([Ukrainian](#): Окопи) a small village that over the centuries has been part of [Poland](#), [Russia](#), and is now part of [Ukraine](#), (located in the [Borschiv Raion](#) (district) of the [Ternopil Oblast](#)). He died in [Medzhybizh](#), ([Ukrainian](#): Меджибіж, [Polish](#): Międzybórz, Międzyborz or Międzybóž, [Yiddish](#): מעזשביזש), which had once been part [Poland](#) and [Russia](#), and is also now in [Ukraine](#), in the [Khmelnytskyi Oblast](#) (not to be confused with other cities of the same name).^[2]

The Besht is better known to many religious [Jews](#) as “the holy Baal Shem” (*der heylicher baal shem* in [Yiddish](#)), or most commonly, the **Baal Shem Tov** (בוט מש לעב). The title *Baal Shem Tov* is usually translated into English as “Master of the Good Name,” but at least two other translations are possible.^[3]

- "Good Master of the Name," taking "[Baal Shem](#)" as a unit, meaning one who uses [Divine names](#) to cure illnesses and perform miracles. I.e., an effective *baal shem*.
- "One who has a good reputation in the community," since in Hebrew idiom, "Baal" can mean "one characterized by" and "Shem" can mean "reputation," thus "one characterized by a good reputation."

The name *Besht* (ט"שעב) — the acronym from the words comprising that name, *bet ayin shin tet*—is typically used in print rather than speech. The appellation “[Baal Shem](#)” was not unique to Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer; however, it is Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer who is most closely identified as a “Baal Shem”, as he was the founder of the spiritual movement of [Hasidic Judaism](#).

The little biographical information that is known about Besht is so interwoven with legends of miracles that in many cases it is hard to arrive at the historical facts. The attitude of the Chassidim themselves towards these legends is an unusual blend of suspicion on one hand, and childlike, almost naïve belief on the other. The Rebbe Shlomo of Rodomsk pithily declared, "Whoever believes all the miracle stories about the Baal Shem Tov in *Shivhei HaBaal Shem Tov* is a fool, but whoever denies them is an [apikoros](#) [a nonbeliever]." Similarly, the Rebbe Mordechai of Neshkiz explains, "Even if a story about him never actually occurred, and there was no such miracle, it was in the power of the Baal Shem Tov, may his memory be a blessing for the life of the World-to-Come, to perform everything."^[4]

Nevertheless, from the numerous legends connected with his birth it appears that his parents were poor, upright, and pious. When he was orphaned, his community cared for him. At school, he distinguished himself only by his frequent disappearances, being always found in the lonely woods surrounding the place, rapturously enjoying the beauties of nature. Many of his disciples believed that he came from the [Davidic line](#) tracing its lineage to the [royal house](#) of [King David](#), and by extension with the institution of the [Jewish Messiah](#).

THE FOUNDERS OF GENERAL CHASSIDISM AND THE HEADS OF CHABAD

THE FOUNDER OF CHASSIDISM

RABBI ISRAEL BAAL SHEM TOV

Elul 18, 5458 — Sivan 6, 5520

(1698 — 1760)

SUCCESSOR

RABBI DOVBER OF MESERITZ

(Date of birth unknown) — Kislev 19, 5533

(? — 1772)

FOUNDER OF CHABAD

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI

Elul 18, 5505 — Teveth 24, 5573

(1745 — 1812)

SECOND GENERATION

RABBI DOVBER

(the son of Rabbi Shneur Zalman)

Kislev 9, 5534 — Kislev 9, 5588

(1773 — 1827)

THIRD GENERATION

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL

(grandson of Rabbi Shneur Zalman; son-in-law of Rabbi Dovber)

Elul 29, 5549 — Nissan 13, 5626

(1789 — 1866)

FOURTH GENERATION

RABBI SHMUEL

(son of Rabbi Menachem Mendel)

Iyar 2, 5594 — Tishrei 13, 5643

(1834 — 1882)

FIFTH GENERATION

RABBI SHOLOM DOVBER

(son of Rabbi Shmuel)

Cheshvan 20, 5621 — Nissan 2, 5680

(1860 — 1920)

SIXTH GENERATION

RABBI JOSEPH ISAAC SCHNEERSOHN

(son of Rabbi Sholom Dovber)

Tammuz 12, 5640 — Shevat 10, 5710

(1880 — 1950)

SEVENTH GENERATION

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON

(sixth in direct paternal line from Rabbi Menachem Mendel;

son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph Isaac)

Born Nissan 11, 5662 (1902)

א"י ש"א

From Judaism.about.com

Hasidic Judaism is one movement within [Haredi Judaism](#).

Hasidic Jews are called *Hasidim* in Hebrew. This word derived from the Hebrew word for loving kindness (*chesed*). The Hasidic movement is unique in its focus on the joyful observance of God's commandments (*mitzvot*), heartfelt prayer and boundless love for God and the world He created. Many ideas for Hasidism derived from Jewish mysticism (*Kabbalah*).

The movement originated in Eastern Europe in the 18th century, at a time when Jews were experiencing great persecution. While the Jewish elite focused on and found comfort in Talmud study, the impoverished and uneducated Jewish masses hungered for a new approach.

Fortunately for the Jewish masses, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1700-1760) found a way to democratize Judaism. He was a poor orphan from the Ukraine. As a young man, he traveled around Jewish villages, healing the sick and helping the poor. After he married, he went into seclusion in the mountains and focused on mysticism. As his following grew, he became known as the Baal Shem Tov (abbreviated as Besht) which means "Master of the Good Name".

In a nutshell, the Baal Shem Tov led European Jewry away from Rabbinism and toward mysticism. The early Hasidic movement encouraged the poor and oppressed Jews of 18th century Europe to be less academic and more emotional, less focused on executing rituals and more focused on experiencing them, less focused on gaining knowledge and more focused on feeling exalted. The way one prayed became more important than one's knowledge of the prayer's meaning. The Baal Shem Tov did not modify Judaism, but he did suggest that Jews approach Judaism from a different psychological state.

Despite united and vocal opposition (*mitnagdim*) led by the Vilna Gaon of Lithuania, Hasidic Judaism flourished. Some say that half of European Jews were Hasidic at one time.

Hasidic leaders, called *tzadikim* which is Hebrew for "righteous men", became the means by which the uneducated masses could lead more Jewish lives. The tzadik was a spiritual leader who helped his followers attain a closer relationship with God. The tzadik would pray on behalf of his followers and advise them on all matters.

Over time, Hasidism broke up into different groups headed by the different tzadikim. Some of the larger and more well-known Hasidic sects include Breslov, Lubavitch (Chabad), Satmar, Ger, Belz, Bobov, Skver, Vizhnitz, Sanz (Klausenberg), Pappa, Munkacz, Boston, and Spinka Hasidim.

Like other Haredim, Hasidim don distinctive attire, which is similar to that worn by their ancestors in 18th and 19th century Europe. And the different sects of Hasidim often wear different clothing – such as different hats, robes or socks – that identify their particular sect.

The largest Hasidic groups are located today in Israel and the United States. Hasidic Jewish communities also exist in Canada, England, Belgium and Australia.

From jewishvirtuallibrary

Hasidim And Mitnagdim

Although contemporary Jews often use the word "Hasid" as a synonym for ultra-Orthodox, Hasidism, a religious movement that arose in eighteenth century Eastern Europe, was originally regarded as revolutionary and religiously liberal. Its opponents, known as Mitnagdim, were

themselves [Orthodox](#) Jews. More than any thing else, the stories that each group told about its rabbinic leaders exemplify the differences among them. The Mitnagdim were proud of the fact that their leader, the [Vilna Gaon](#), had delivered an advanced discourse on the [Talmud](#) when he was only seven years old, and that he studied Jewish texts eighteen hours a day.

The founder of [Hasidism](#), [Israel Ba'al Shem Tov](#), was the hero of very different sorts of tales. The Hasidim told of how he spent his teenage years working in a job with low status, as assistant in a Jewish elementary school, a *cheder*. He would round up the students from their homes each morning and lead them to school singing songs. Later, after he married, he and his wife went to live in the faroff Carpathian Mountains. There, the Ba'al Shem Tov worked as a laborer, digging clay and lime, which his wife then sold in town. The couple later kept an inn.

During these years, the Ba'al Shem Tov spent much time in the nearby forest in meditation and solitude. His Hasidic followers subsequently likened this period to the years of isolation and meditation that Moses spent in Midian, tending the flocks of his father-in-law.

Around 1736, the Ba'al Shem Tov revealed himself as a healer and a leader. His last name, which literally means "Master of the Good Name," was one that was frequently applied in Jewish life to miracle workers and healers. In 1740, he moved to Meziboz, a town near the borders of both Poland and the Ukraine, and not far from [Lithuania](#). Disciples started coming to him from the surrounding countries, but the talks delivered by the Ba'al Shem Tov differed dramatically from lectures offered at a yeshiva; they focused far more on an individual's personal relationship with God and with his fellowman than on the intricacies of Jewish law. The stories Hasidim later told about the Ba'al Shem Tov — usually referred to by his acronym, the *Besht* — invariably depict him with a pipe in hand, telling seemingly secular tales with deep religious meanings. He died in 1760, leaving behind Dov Baer of Mezrich as his successor. Shortly before his death, the *Besht* told the people standing near his bed: "I grieve not at my death, for I can see a door opening while the other is closing."

Many of the dominant themes in the *Besht's* teachings became the central emphases in the Hasidic movement that his followers developed. There were statements of the *Besht*, not entirely innovative, which placed great stress on aspects of Judaism that the Mitnagdim generally ignored: the heart, for example. The *Besht* was particularly fond of a talmudic statement, "God desires the heart" (*Sanhedrin* 106b), which he interpreted as meaning that for God, a pure religious spirit mattered more than knowledge of the Talmud. It is told of the *Besht* that one [Yom Kippur](#) a poor Jewish boy, an illiterate shepherd, entered the synagogue where he was praying. The boy was deeply moved by the service, but frustrated that he could not read the prayers. He started to whistle, the one thing he knew he could do beautifully; he wanted to offer his whistling as a gift to God. The congregation was horrified at the desecration of their service. Some people yelled at the boy, and others wanted to throw him out. The Ba'al Shem Tov immediately stopped them. "Until now," he said, "I could feel our prayers being blocked as they tried to reach the heavenly court. This young shepherd's whistling was so pure, however, that it broke through the blockage and brought all of our prayers straight up to God."

Another ancient Jewish doctrine that was given particular emphasis by the Ba'al Shem Tov was based on a verse in *Isaiah*: "The whole world is full of His glory" (6:13). If the whole world is

full of God's glory, the *Besht* reasoned, then the Mitnagdim and the ascetics were wrong in thinking that one had to turn one's back on the pleasures of the world. "Don't deny that a girl is beautiful," the *Besht* would say. "Just be sure that your recognition of her beauty brings you back to its source-God." If one could do that, then even physical pleasures could bring about spiritual growth.

Because the world was full of God, the *Besht* believed that a person always should be joyful. Indeed, the greatest act of creativity comes about in an atmosphere of joy: "No child is born except through pleasure and joy," the *Besht* declared. "By the same token, if one wishes his prayers to bear fruit, he must offer them with pleasure and joy." This doctrine was a strong challenge to many ideas current among Jews in the *Besht*'s time. Many religious Jews, particularly among the kabbalists, preached asceticism, and advocated that Jews fast every Monday and Thursday. The Ba'al Shem Tov warned people against such practices, fearing that they would lead to melancholy, not joy.

To outsiders, unaccustomed to the *Besht*'s teachings, Hasidic prayer services sometimes seemed undignified, even chaotic. In fulfillment of the Psalmist's ecstatic declaration, "All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like You?" ([Psalms 35:10](#)), worshipers were capable of performing handstands. Characteristically, the *Besht* defended such practices at Hasidic services with a story. A deaf man passed by a hall where a wedding reception was being celebrated. When he looked through the window, he saw people engaged in exultant and tumultuous dancing. But because he could not hear the music, he assumed they were mad.

The *Besht* also taught that the *Tzaddik* (the religious leader of the Hasidim) should serve as a model of how to lead a religious life. However, he did not emphasize the doctrine of the *Tzaddik* nearly as much as some of his successors, particularly Dov Baer of Mezrich, who made it central to Hasidism. Dov Baer, the leader of the Hasidim after the Baal Shem Tov's death, taught that God revealed Himself through the *Tzaddik*'s most trivial actions; one of Dov Baer's followers said, "I didn't go to him to learn Torah, but to see him unbuckle his shoes." Dov Baer taught that the ideal *Tzaddik* had a closer relationship to God than the average Jew, and could bestow blessings on people. In return, it was understood that the Hasidim must bring their *Tzaddik* gifts.

The belief in the power and greatness of the *Tzaddik* became one of Hasidism's strongest-and most controversial-ideas. Hasidism's opponents charged that the *Tzaddikim* (plural) often enriched themselves at the expense of their followers. In the generation after Dov Baer, numerous new Hasidic groups were formed, each with its own *Tzaddik*, referred to as a *rebbe*. These *rebbe*s became a kind of Jewish royalty. When one died, he was succeeded by either his son or son-in-law. Those Hasidic groups that established eminent family dynasties became successful. Many Hasidic groups, however, went into decline when their *rebbe* died and left behind less capable successors.

The best known group of Hasidim in the United States are the [Lubavitcher](#), who are headquartered in Brooklyn. Their current rebbe is [Menachem Mendel Schneersohn](#), the seventh leader since the movement was founded in the late 1700s. But though Lubavitch is the one Hasidic group nonOrthodox Jews are most apt to meet-because of the movement's various

outreach programs-there are dozens of other Hasidic dynasties in the United States (many of them located in Brooklyn) and in Israel.

In their early years, the Hasidim were actively persecuted by the Mitnagdim, who feared they would become another heretical sect, similar to that of [Shabbetai Zevi](#). But in its formative stages, Hasidism wisely put its primary emphasis on personal religious growth rather than on national salvation, and it downplayed the messianic element. This was not enough, however, to appease the Mitnagdim. Other Hasidic traits, such as their laissezfaire attitude toward the appropriate hours for prayer, bitterly provoked their opponents. The Hasidim answered that they couldn't legislate precise hours for reciting each of the three daily [prayer services](#); they prayed with such intensity (*kavannah*) that they couldn't do so while looking at a watch.

The Israeli historian Jacob Katz has documented how other practices provocatively separated the Hasidim from their neighbors. For example, Hasidim advocated using a sharper knife when slaughtering animals than the one used by the Mitnagdim's slaughterers. Such stringency had a socially divisive effect: The Hasidim no longer could eat at the Mitnagdim's houses. The Hasidim also adopted a different prayerbook, so that their synagogue service differed somewhat from that of other Jews and had to be conducted separately. Their most brilliant act of "public relations" was labeling themselves Hasidim, the Hebrew word for both "pious" and "saintly," while calling their adversaries Mitnagdim, Hebrew for "opponents." These terms made the Hasidim seem like the more dynamic and positive of the two groups.

With the passage of time, the Hasidim and Mitnagdim recognized that their differences were increasingly inconsequential, particularly after both groups found themselves facing a common enemy: the nineteenth century [Haskala](#), or Jewish Enlightenment. Jewish parents who once feared that their Hasidic or Mitnagdish child might go over to the other camp, were now far more afraid that their child might become altogether irreligious.

An additional factor that lessened the HasidicMitnagdish split was nineteenth and twentieth century Hasidism's increasing emphasis on Talmud study. As the movement expanded, it put less emphasis on meditation and communing with God, and more on traditional Jewish learning. As a result, Hasidim today are no longer regarded as revolutionaries; in fact, they are the conservative stalwarts of Orthodox Judaism, easily recognized by the eighteenth and nineteenth century black coats and hats worn by most of their male adherents.

Nonetheless, the Hasidic approach to Judaism significantly differs from that of the Mitnagdim. Hasidism generally places a much greater stress on *simcha shel mitzvah* — the joy of performing a commandment.

Early life and marriage

Inducted into the secret society of mystics called [Tzaddikim Nistarim](#), the Besht became its leader at the age of 18. ^{[[citation needed](#)]} Caring for the Jewish poor, they encouraged Jews to move to

agrarian lifestyles as alternatives to the chronic poverty which was the lot of city Jews. In continuation of this policy they decided that they needed to look after the educational needs of the children living in small farm communities. If a suitable teacher could not be sourced they themselves would do so until an alternative arrangement emerged. As such — and in keeping with Jewish doctrine "the letter bearer should fulfill its contents" — the Baal Shem Tov became a teacher's assistant — and with unconditional love he tried to install honor for their parents, a love of God, and fellow beings in these children. He later commented "this one of the most joyous times in my life".^[citation needed] Later he became [shammash](#) ([sexton](#)) in the same community, and at about eighteen he married. When his young wife died he left the place^[which?], and after serving for a long time as helper in various small communities of [Podolia](#), he settled as a teacher at [Tluste](#) near [Zalischyky](#).

The Besht at the age of 5, his father gave the Besht his last words before passing on. They were "fear absolutely no one or no thing but G-d, and love every single jew no matter who he/she is and no matter what he/she is doing."

Due to his recognized honesty and his knowledge of [human nature](#), he was chosen^[by whom?] to act as [arbitrator](#) and [mediator](#) for people conducting suits against each other; and his services were brought into frequent requisition because the Jews had their own [civil courts](#) in Poland. In this [avocation](#) he succeeded in making so deep an impression upon the rich and learned [Ephraim of Brody](#) that the latter promised The Besht his daughter Chana in marriage. The man died, however, without telling his daughter of her betrothal; but when she heard of her father's wishes, she did not hesitate to comply with them.

The courtship was characteristic. In the shabby clothes of a peasant he presented himself at Brody before [Avraham Gershon of Kitov](#) ([Kuty](#)), brother of the girl, head of a [rabbinical court](#) in Brody, and a recognized authority in the [Kabbalah](#) and the [Talmud](#). Avraham Gershon was about to give him [alms](#), when The Besht produced a letter from his pocket, showing that he was the designated bridegroom. Avraham Gershon tried in vain to dissuade his sister Chana from shaming their family by marrying him, but she regarded her father's will alone as authoritative.

After his marriage Israel ben Eliezer did not remain long with his [brother-in-law](#), who was ashamed of him (for he kept up the pretense of being an ignorant fellow); and he went to a village in the [Carpathians](#) between Brody and Kassowa. His earthly possessions consisted of a horse given him by his brother-in-law. Israel ben Eliezer worked as a laborer, digging [clay](#) and [lime](#), which his wife delivered every week by the wagonload to the surrounding villages, and from this they derived their entire support. The magnificent scenery in this, the finest region of the Carpathians, and the possibility of enjoying it without the interruptions of city life, compensated him for his great privations.

Israel ben Eliezer and Chana had two children: Udl (born in 1720) and Zvi Hersh.

Development as leader and challenges

The Besht bettered his condition when he took a position as a ritual butcher in Kshilowice, near Iaslowice. He soon gave up this position in order to conduct a village tavern that his brother-in-law bought for him. During the many years that he lived in the woods and came into contact with the peasants, Israel ben Eliezer had learned how to use plants for healing purposes and to effect wonderful cures. In fact, his first appearance in public was that of an “ordinary” [Baal Shem](#). He wrote [amulets](#) and prescribed cures.

After many trips in [Podolia](#) and [Volhynia](#) as a Baal Shem, Besht, considering his following large enough and his authority established, decided (about 1740) to expound his teachings in the [shtetl](#) of [Medzhybizh](#) and people, mostly from the spiritual elite, came to listen to him. Medzhybizh became the seat of the movement and of the [Medzybizh](#) Hasidic dynasty. His following gradually increased, and with it the dislike, not to say hostility, of the Talmudists. Nevertheless, Besht was supported at the beginning of his career by two prominent Talmudists, the brothers Meir and Isaac Dov Margalios. Later he won over great and universally recognized rabbinic authorities who became his disciples and attested to both his scholarship and saintliness. These include [Rabbi Meir](#) Margolius, [chief rabbi](#) of Lemberg and later Ostroha, and author of *Meir Netivim* (a work of halachic responsa) and other works; Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Hakohen, rabbi of Polnoy; Rabbi Dovid Halperin, rabbi of Ostroha; Rabbi Israel of Satinov, author of Tiferet Yisrael; Rabbi Yoseph Heilperin of Slosowitz; and Rabbi [Dov Ber of Mezrich](#) to whose great authority as a Talmudist it was chiefly due that Besht's doctrines (though in an essentially altered form) were introduced into learned circles. Noteworthy is that the renowned Sefardic Rabbi Chaim Dovid Azulai (Chida) cites the Baal Shem Tov in his works in great laudatory terms.

Some direct historical evidence remains of the Besht during the days he lived in Medzhybizh. Rosman discovered numerous legal documents that shed light on this period from the Polish [Czartoryski noble family](#) archives. The Besht's house is mentioned on several tax registers and his house is given tax-free status, thus indicating that he was well-known to the Polish Magnate as an important town resource. Several of the Besht's colleagues in his stories from Shivhei HaBesht also appear in Polish court records, notably, Ze'ev Wolf Kitses and Dovid Surkes. Rosman contends that the Polish documents show the Besht and his followers were not outcasts or pariahs, but rather a respected part of the mainstream Jewish communal life. Medzhybizh at the time was not some backwater village, but a thriving, prosperous, and important community in the Czartorysky estate.

Other [direct evidence](#) includes the Besht's daily prayer-book ([siddur](#), owned by the Agudas Chabad Library in New York) with his handwritten personal notes in the margins. His grave can be seen today in the old Jewish cemetery in Medzhybizh.

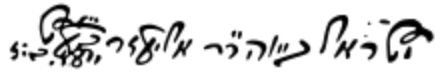
Over the past few years, the "Agudas Ohalei Tzadikim"^[5] organization (based in Israel) has restored many graves of [Tzadikim \(Ohelim\)](#) in Ukraine, including Baal Shem Tov's. A new guesthouse and synagogue is also being built ^[when?] next to the [Ohel](#) of Baal Shem Tov.

Disputes with the Frankists and death

While the Besht was alive, there was very little antagonism between different styles of Judaism (Talmudism and [Hasidism](#)). In fact, the Besht considered himself and his disciples as

mainstream. Besht took sides with the Talmudists in their disputes against the Frankists ([Jacob Frank](#)'s cultist movement that considered Frank to be the [Messiah](#)). It was only in keeping with Besht's character that he welcomed [baptism](#) by the Frankists as an end to its threat to mainstream Judaism of the day, for it is related that he said: "As long as a diseased limb is connected with the body, there is hope that it may be saved; but, once amputated, it is gone, and there is no hope." The upheaval caused by the threats of the Frankist movement to destroy mainstream Judaism seemed to undermine Besht's health, however, and he died shortly after the [conversion](#) of many Frankists to [Christianity](#).

His legacy



Signature of the Baal Shem Tov.

Israel ben Eliezer left no books; for the [Kabbalistic](#) commentary on Ps. cvii., ascribed to him ([Zhitomir](#), 1804), *Sefer mi-Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem-tov*, may not be genuine. In order to get at his teachings, it is therefore necessary to turn to his utterances as given in the works of his disciples [Hasidim](#). Most are found in the works of Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polnoy. But since Hasidism, immediately after the death of its founder, was divided into various parties, each claiming for itself the authority of Besht, the utmost of caution is necessary in judging as to the authenticity of utterances ascribed to Besht.

Chapin and Weinstock contend that the Besht was essentially the right person, in the right place, at the right time. Eighteenth century [Podolia](#) was an ideal place to foster a sea-change in Jewish thinking. It had been depopulated one generation earlier due to the [Khmelnitsky](#) Massacres. A Turkish occupation of [Podolia](#) occurred within the Besht's lifetime and along with it the influence within this frontier territory of [Shabbetai Zvi](#) and his latter day spiritual descendants such as Malach and [Frank](#). Once the Polish Magnates regained control from the Turks, [Podolia](#) essentially went through an economic boom. The Magnates were benevolent to the economic benefits the Jews provided and encouraged Jewish resettlement to help protect the frontier from future invasions. Thus, the Jewish community itself was essentially starting over. Within this context, the Jews of [Podolia](#) were open to new ideas. The Besht's refreshing new approaches to Judaism were welcome, expanding with little resistance in a community hungry for change.

Elements of Besht's doctrines

The foundation-stone of Hasidism as laid by Besht is a strongly marked [panentheistic](#) conception of God. He declared the whole universe, mind and matter, to be a manifestation of the Divine Being; that this manifestation is not an emanation from God, as is the conception of the Kabbalah by [Mitnagdim](#), for nothing can be separated from God: all things are rather forms in which God reveals Himself. When man speaks, said Besht, he should remember that his speech is an element of life, and that life itself is a [manifestation of God](#). Even evil exists in God. This seeming contradiction is explained on the ground that evil is not bad in itself, but only in its relation to man. It is wrong to look with desire upon a woman; but it is divine to admire her beauty: it is wrong only insofar as man does not regard beauty as a manifestation of God, but

misconceives it, and thinks of it in reference to himself. Nevertheless, [sin](#) is nothing positive, but is identical with the imperfections of human deeds and thought. Whoever does not believe that God resides in all things, but separates God and them in his thoughts, has not the right conception of God. It is equally fallacious to think of a creation in time: creation, that is, God's activity, has no end. God is ever active in the changes of nature: in fact, it is in these changes that God's continuous creativeness consists.

This [panentheism](#) would have been ignored, had Besht not been a man of the people. He gave his metaphysical conception of God an eminently practical significance.

The first result of his principles was a remarkable [optimism](#). Since God is immanent in all things, all things must possess something good in which God manifests Himself as the source of good. For this reason, the Besht taught, every man must be considered good, and his sins must be explained, not condemned. One of his favorite sayings was that no man has sunk too low to be able to raise himself to God. Naturally, then, it was his chief endeavor to convince sinners that God stood as near to them as to the righteous, and that their misdeeds were chiefly the consequences of their folly.

Another important result of his doctrines, which was of great practical importance, was his denial that [asceticism](#) is pleasing to God. "Whoever maintains that this life is worthless is in error: it is worth a great deal; only one must know how to use it properly." From the very beginning Besht fought against that contempt for the world which, through the influence of [Isaac Luria's](#) Kabbalah, had almost become a dogma among the Jews. He considered care of the body as necessary as care of the soul; since matter is also a manifestation of God, and must not be considered as hostile or opposed to Him.

As Besht fought ascetics, so he fought the rigidity and sanctimony that had accreted to strict Talmudic viewpoints while not abrogating a single religious ceremony or observance. His target was the great importance which the Talmudic view attaches to the fulfillment of a law, while almost entirely disregarding sentiment or the growth of man's inner life. While the rabbis of his day considered the study of the Talmud as the most important religious activity, Besht laid all the stress on [prayer](#). "All that I have achieved," he once remarked, "I have achieved not through study, but through prayer". Prayer, however, is not merely petitioning God to grant a request, nor even necessarily speaking to God, but rather ("cleaving", *dvekut*)— the glorious feeling of 'Oneness with God Almighty', the state of the soul wherein a man or woman gives up their consciousness of separate existence, and join their own selves to the Eternal Being of God Supreme. Such a state produces indescribable bliss, which is the foremost fruit of the true worship of God.

Influence on Hasidism

The later developments of Hasidism are unintelligible without consideration of Besht's opinion concerning man's proper relation with the universe. True worship of God, as above explained, consists in the cleaving to, and the unification with, God. To use his own words, ^{[[citation needed](#)]} "the ideal of man is to be a revelation himself, clearly to recognize himself as a manifestation of God." Mysticism, he said, is not the Kabbalah, which everyone may learn; but that sense of true

oneness, which is usually as strange, unintelligible, and incomprehensible to mankind as dancing is to a dove. However, the man who is capable of this feeling is endowed with a genuine intuition, and it is the perception of such a man which is called prophecy, according to the degree of his insight. From this it results, in the first place, that the ideal man may lay claim to authority equal, in a certain sense, to the authority of the Prophets. This focus on oneness and personal revelation helps earn his mystical interpretation of Judaism the title of panentheism.

A second and more important result of the doctrine is that through his oneness with God, man forms a connecting link between the Creator and creation. Thus, slightly modifying the Bible verse, Hab. ii. 4, Besht said, "The righteous can vivify by his faith." Besht's followers enlarged upon this idea and consistently deduced from it the source of divine mercy, of blessings, of life; and that therefore, if one love him, one may partake of God's mercy.

On the opposite side of the coin, the Baal Shem Tov warned the Hasidim:

[Amalek](#) is still alive today.... Every time you experience a worry or doubt about how God is running the world—that's Amalek launching an attack against your soul. We must wipe Amalek out of our hearts whenever—and wherever—he attacks so that we cannot serve God with complete joy.

Though Besht may not be held responsible for the later conceptions, there is no doubt that his self-reliance was an important factor in winning adherents. It may be said of Hasidism that there is no other Jewish sect in which the founder is as important as his doctrines. Besht himself is still the real center for the chasidim; his teachings have almost sunk into oblivion. As Schechter ("Studies in Judaism," p. 4) finely observes: "To the Hasidim, Baal-Shem [Besht]... was the incarnation of a theory, and his whole life the revelation of a system."

Characteristics

Besht did not combat the practice of [rabbinical Judaism](#); it was the spirit of the practice which he opposed. His teachings being the result not of speculation, but of a deep, religious temperament, he laid stress upon a religious spirit, and not upon the forms of religion. Though he considered the Law to be holy and inviolable, and emphasized the importance of Torah-study, he held that one's entire life should be a service of God, and that this would constitute true worship of Him.

Since every act in life is a manifestation of God, and must perforce be divine, it is man's duty so to live that the things called "earthly" may also become noble and pure, that is, divine. Besht tried to realize his ideal in his own career. His life provided the best example for his disciples; and his relationships with the innkeepers (a number of whom he raised to a higher level) furnished a silent but effective protest against the practice of the rabbis, who, in their inexorable sense of strict righteousness, would have no dealings with people fallen morally. The Hasidim tell of a woman whom her relatives sought to kill on account of her shameful life, but who was saved in body and soul by Besht. The story may be a myth, but it is characteristic of Besht's activity in healing those in greatest need of relief. More important to him than prayer was a friendly relationship with sinners; though the former constituted an essential factor in the religious life. The story of Besht's career affords many examples of unselfishness and high-

mindful benevolence. And while these qualities equally characterize a number of the rabbis of his day, his distinguishing traits were a merciful judgment of others, fearlessness combined with dislike of strife, and a boundless joy in life.

Moreover, Besht's methods of teaching differed essentially from those of his opponents and contributed not a little to his success. He directed many satirical remarks at his opponents, an especially characteristic one being his designation of the typical Talmudist of his day as "a man who through sheer study of the Law has no time to think about God". Besht illustrated his views of asceticism by the following parable:

A thief once tried to break into a house, the owner of which, crying out, frightened the thief away. The same thief soon afterward broke into the house of a very strong man, who, on seeing him enter, kept quite still. When the thief had come near enough, the man caught him and put him in prison, thus depriving him of all opportunity to do further harm.

Not by fleeing from earthly enjoyments through fear is the soul's power assured, but by holding the passions under control.

Much of Besht's success was also due to his firm conviction that God had entrusted him with a special mission to spread his doctrines. In his enthusiasm and ecstasy he believed that he often had heavenly visions revealing his mission to him. In fact, for him every intuition was a [divine revelation](#); and divine messages were daily occurrences.

Besht is quite naturally one of the most interesting figures in modern [Jewish history](#). As a man of the people and for the people, it is not strange that he should have been honored and glorified in story and in tradition. Of the many narratives that cluster about him, the following are given as the most characteristic:

From sichosinenglish

Happy Birthday, Baal Shem Tov!

by Tzvi Freeman, author of

"Bringing Heaven Down to Earth -- 365 Meditations of the Rebbe"

The Truth About the Baal Shem Tov

There are many myths and legends about the Baal Shem Tov. Even the most fantastic ones they say, are true -- because even if they didn't actually happen, the Baal Shem Tov was capable of making them happen.

But there's at least one myth that's not true. And it's probably also the most popular. It's the Modern Jewish Legend of the Baal Shem Tov.

To appreciate the Modern Jewish Legend of the Baal Shem Tov, you must first appreciate the Modern Jewish Legend of Judaism. Judaism, you see, is very nice. It's all about humanitarianism, ethics and the family.

So then, the Baal Shem Tov fits in very nicely. He told nice stories, and made people feel good about themselves by telling them that it wasn't really important as long as you're sincere and happy and nice to other people. (What exactly is not important is not clear. Something we forgot about a long time ago -- but the main thing is that it's not important.)

Years ago, as a music composition major at the University of British Columbia, I stood in a concert hall lobby at intermission, reverberating with awe in the wake of a powerful rendition of Beethoven's Violin Concerto starring soloist Yehudi Menuhin. I overheard two sweet old ladies discussing the performance. They said it was "very nice". I felt sick.

The whole legend, as I said before, is very nice. After all, who could have anything against humanitarianism, ethics, family and being nice? Certainly not any good modern American. You might want to call this Politically Correct Judaism -- fully equipped with a Politically Correct Baal Shem Tov.

Let's get this straight: There has been nothing more disastrous to Judaism than political correctness. The two approaches stand at mutually exclusive extremes. Political Correctness means not shaking the boar and keeping the peace. Judaism that makes peace with the world the way it stands now is not Judaism. And it has no chance of survival any longer than the waves of accepted social correctness will survive before crashing against the shore.

A case in point -- and perhaps the most painful one: There was a time when mysticism was considered irrational, bizarre, archaic and certainly not for the respectable, modern gentleman to be caught dead in. "Emancipated" and "Enlightened" Jews, therefore, denounced the Kaballa. They called the Zohar the "Book of Lies". They created a myth that the Kaballa was the creation of a lunatic fringe and was entirely grown from alien roots. They even went so far as to claim that Jews had never believed in Mystical union with the Ein Sof, reincarnation, life after death, meditation, etc., etc..

The Baal Shem Tov and the chassidic movement was a big thorn in the side of these politically correct Jews. Too mystical. Too far off the edge. And much too popular.

At first they tried to deny the Baal Shem Tov had ever existed. When that turned out about as believable as denying the existence of George Washington (one of the fathers of the "Enlightenment" had met the Besht face to face), they resorted to creating a new mythology that entirely distorted everything chassidic masters had ever taught.

That's how the Baal Shem Tov ended up being nice. A folksy, theological kind of Robin Hood.

Just how benign was this niceness? You need look no farther than our own generation. When we went to our parents and to our rabbis seeking out the spirituality for which our souls so much thirsted, we got the equivalent of a blank stare. Jews don't believe in that stuff, we were told.

And if they did, sorry, there's nothing we can tell you about it. Just about ethics and humanitarianism. Nothing about souls.

So the most spiritual young Jews ended up on the other side of the planet searching for what their grandparents had rejected years before, and what their great-grandparents had basked in: nourishment for the soul -- a.k.a Mysticism.

Enough ranting and raving. Here are the raw facts:

Kaballa is as central to Judaism as the sun is to the solar system, as a heart is to a body, as Human Liberty is to America.

Judaism begins with the most mystical of experiences at Mount Sinai, where we "saw the sounds and heard the sights", and ends with mystical union of all of Creation with its Creator. Everything in between is driven by the drive to absorb the first mystical revelation in order to achieve the final one.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were mystics (go ahead, tell me that someone who speaks with angels is not a mystic), who practiced meditation in isolation in the pastures and received divine revelations thereby. Moses was a mystic. Prophets=Mystics. The sages of the Talmud were mystics, as is clear from many of the tales told therein. Since the time of the Ramban (Nachmanides) almost every classic Jewish scholar has openly espoused the teachings of the Kaballa.

Every classic attempt to explain Judaism in depth has resorted to mystical terms. Every such attempt over the last 600 or so years has resorted to the language of Kaballa.

Amongst Sephardic and Oriental Jewry the Zohar is at least as popular as the Psalms. Chassidism is entirely an outgrowth of the Kaballa of the Arizal - (Rabbi Issac Luria 16th Century). The great Lithuanian Mitnagdim" were great in Kaballa and justified their opposition to the chassidim and their dedication to scholarship in terms of Kaballa. Even the romantic/rational orthodoxy of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, et al, relies heavily upon the mysticism of Rabbi Chaim Atar, the Ohr Hachayim, and others.

The great masters of halacha, particularly Rav Yosef Karo who wrote the Shulchan Aruch and Rav Moshe Isserles who adapted it for Ashkenazim, also wrote books of Kaballa. It was the Vilna Gaon who wrote, "A rav who attempts to make a halachic decision without an understanding of the Kaballa will come to err."

As Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz recently put it, Kaballa is the official theology of Judaism. Furthermore, any attempts to explain Judaism in any other terms are bound to fall flat on their face. Halacha is the body, Kaballa is the soul. Just as you cannot explain the body without taking into account the inner psyche that fills it, so you cannot begin to explain the meaning and purpose of halacha without a knowledge of Kaballa.

Now, back to the Baal Shem Tov: To say the Baal Shem Tov was a simple peasant boy who began a popular folk movement is somewhat akin to saying that American Democracy was the product of some Daniel Boone types who were fed up with high-falooten British sophisticates.

The Baal Shem Tov was a student of the Kaballa of Rabbi Yitzchaak Luria, the "Arizal" -- as were so many of his contemporary scholars. It amazes me how so many authors could have imagined even for a moment that the teacher of so many great scholars -- such as Rabbis Yoseph Polnoye, Dov Ber of Mezritch, Levi Yitzchaak of Berdichev and others -- could have been any less a scholar himself.

He was involved from his early youth with a society of "hidden tzaddikim" who were scholars of Talmud and Kaballa and travelled about incognito in an effort to resurrect the Jewish life of Eastern Europe that was still licking its wounds from the tragic pogroms of 1648-49.

Most all of what the Baal Shem Tov taught can be traced back to ideas of the Arizal, especially as presented in the classic "Shnei Luchos Ha-Bris". These works were extremely popular in those days. What the Besht added was the sort of leap of intellect that typifies supreme genius -- the genius that disregards accepted conventions and normative world concepts. What Albert Einstein was to physics and Beethoven was to music -- and much, much more -- was the Baal Shem Tov to the human soul.

There were other mystics before the Besht who dealt with the simple folk. But to them life was a dichotomy: Their study of the mystic works was of one world, their dealings with simple folk in another -- a world affected by their mysticism, but very, very distant from it.

The Baal Shem Tov came and said, "These are not two worlds. They are intimately connected. The Kaballa of the Arizal has as much to do with the saintly ascetic as it has with the simple innkeeper or potato farmer who serves G-d with all his heart. As a matter of fact, in the simple, the ultimate simplicity of the Infinite Light shines best."

Here is the inside story as passed down from tzaddik to tzaddik until it was told to us by Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch. This is what you call "getting it from a reliable source."

After all, who are you going to believe, a pompous German-jewish historian who conjures up history to fit to his Promethean bed of 19th century world-concept -- or a brilliant tzaddik who would never let a word of untruth pass his lips and tells you he is reciting verbatim as a previous tzaddik told him? Aside from which, the tzaddik's version is so much more believable.

Here is the tzaddik's version, as he told it in the Baal Shem Tov's words:

On my sixteenth birthday, the eighteenth of Elul 5474, I was in a small village. The innkeeper was a Jew of quintessential simplicity. He knew his prayers only with difficulty -- he had no idea what the words meant. But he had a great awe of heaven and for everything that would occur to him he would comment, "Blessed be He, and may He be blessed for ever and ever" [believe me, it flows much better in the original --trans.]. The innkeeper's wife and partner had a different saying: "Blessed be His Holy Name".

On that day, I went to meditate in solitude in the pasture, as had been taught by the sages before us, that on your birthday you should meditate alone for a period of time. In my meditations I recited Psalms and concentrated on the yichudim of the divine names. ["Yichudim" are a form of kabalistic meditation based on different permutations and combinations of the divine names and attributes of G-d --trans.].

As I was immersed in this, I had lost awareness of my surroundings. Suddenly, I beheld Elijah the Prophet -- and a smile was drawn over his lips. I was very amazed that I should merit a revelation of Elijah the Prophet while alone. When I was with the tzaddik Rabbi Meir, and also with others of the hidden tzaddikim I had the fortune to see Elijah the Prophet. But to be privileged to this while alone -- this was the very first time and I was very amazed. Understandably, I was unable to interpret the smile on Elijah's face.

And this is what he said to me:

"Behold, you are struggling with great effort to focus your mind upon the divine names that extend from the verses of psalms that David, King of Israel, composed. But Aaron Shlomo the innkeeper and Zlota his wife are ignorant of the yichudim of divine names that extend from "Blessed be He, and may He be blessed for ever and ever" that the innkeeper recites and "Blessed be His Holy Name" that she recites -- yet these yichudim make a storm throughout all the worlds far beyond the yichudim of Divine Names that the great tzaddikim can create."

Then, Elijah the Prophet told me about the pleasure G-d takes, so to speak, from the praise and thanksgiving of the men, women and children that praise the Holy One Blessed be He -- especially when the praise and thanks comes from simple people, and most specifically when it is ongoing, continual praise -- for then they are continuously bonded with G-d, blessed be He, with pure faith and sincerity of heart.

From that time on I took upon myself a path in the service of G-d to bring men, women and children to say words of praise to G-d. I would always ask them about their health, the health of their children, about their material welfare -- and they would answer me with different words of praise for the Holy One, blessed be He -- each one in his or her own way.

For several years I did this myself, and at one of the gatherings of the hidden tzaddikim they all accepted this path....

From finding the most mystical in the most simple of people, the Baal Shem Tov went on to find the most divine sparks in the most mundane, the essence of the One G-d everywhere and in every event.

May we merit the time when the truth of his wellsprings shall spread forth, without distortion, then the Age of Moshiach has arrived, may it be sooner than we all think.

Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Rabbeinu Moshe ben Amram haLevi



How did Moses change Judaism?

At what point did Moses recognize his calling?

Why did we have a leader like Moses?

1. Led the Israelites out of Egypt
2. Received/wrote the Law
3. Governed a new generation
4. Brought them through desert to Israel

Rembrandt's Depiction of Moses with the tablets, 1659

Moses ([Hebrew](#): מֹשֶׁה, [Modern Moshe Tiberian](#) *Mōšéh* [ISO 259-3](#) *Moše*; [Greek](#): Μωϋσῆς *Mōūsēs*; [Arabic](#): موسى *Mūsa*) was, according to the [Hebrew Bible](#) and [Qur'an](#), a religious leader, lawgiver and [prophet](#), to whom the [authorship](#) of the [Torah](#) is traditionally attributed. Also called *Moshe Rabbenu* in Hebrew (מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ), [Lit.](#) "Moses our Teacher/Rabbi"), he is the most important prophet in [Judaism](#),^{[1][2]} and is also considered an important prophet in [Christianity](#) and [Islam](#), as well as a number of [other faiths](#).

The existence of Moses as well as the veracity of the [Exodus](#) story is disputed amongst [archaeologists](#) and [Egyptologists](#), with experts in the field of [biblical criticism](#) citing logical inconsistencies, new archaeological evidence, historical evidence, and related [origin myths](#) in [Canaanite](#) culture.^{[3][4][5]} Other historians maintain that the biographical details, and Egyptian background, attributed to Moses imply the existence of a historical political and religious leader who was involved in the consolidation of the [Hebrew](#) tribes in [Canaan](#) towards the end of the [Bronze Age](#).

According to the [Book of Exodus](#), Moses was born in a time when his people, the [Children of Israel](#), were increasing in number and the [Egyptian Pharaoh](#) was worried that they might help Egypt's enemies. Moses' Hebrew mother, [Jochebed](#), hides him when the Pharaoh ordered all newborn Hebrew boys to be killed, and the child is adopted as a [foundling](#) by the Egyptian royal family. After killing an Egyptian slave-master, Moses flees across the [Red Sea](#) to [Midian](#) where he has his encounter with the [God of Israel](#) in the form of the "[burning bush](#)". God sends Moses to request the release of the Israelites. After the [Ten Plagues](#), Moses leads [the Exodus](#) of the Israelites out of Egypt and [across the Red Sea](#), after which they base themselves at [Mount Sinai](#), where Moses receives the [Ten Commandments](#). After 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moses dies aged 120, within sight of the [Promised Land](#).

[Rabbinical Judaism](#) calculated a lifespan of Moses corresponding to 1391–1271 BCE;^[6] Christian tradition has tended to assume an earlier date.^[7] [MY NOTE: Remember David lived at 1000 BCE]

The biblical text explains the name Mošeh מֹשֶׁה as a derivation of the [root](#) *mšh* ni, "ward ot" מִשָּׁה [Exodus 2:10](#): "[...] she called his name Moses (מֹשֶׁה): and she said, Because I drew him (וַהֲרִישָׁה) out of the water." ([KJV](#)).^[8]

The name is thus suggested to relate to *drawing out* in a passive sense, "the one who was drawn out". Those who depart from this tradition derive the name from the same root but in an active sense, "he who draws out", in the sense of "[saviour](#), deliverer".^[9] The form of the name as recorded in the [Masoretic text](#) is indeed the expected form of the Biblical Hebrew active participle.^[10] [Josephus](#) argued for an [Egyptian](#) etymology, and some scholarly suggestions have followed this in deriving the name from [Coptic](#) terms *mo* "water" and *uses* "save, deliver", suggesting a meaning "saved from the water".^[11] Another suggestion has connected the name with the Egyptian *ms*, as found in [Tuth-mose](#) and [Ra-messes](#), meaning "born" or "child".^{[8][12]}

Biblical narrative

In the [Hebrew Bible](#), the narratives of Moses are in Exodus, [Leviticus](#), [Numbers](#) and [Deuteronomy](#). According to the Book of Exodus, Moses was a son of [Amram](#), a member of the [Levite](#) tribe of [Israel](#) descended from [Jacob](#), and his wife, [Jochebed](#).^[13] Jochebed (also Yocheved) was kin to Amram's father [Kehath](#) (Exodus 6:20). Moses had one older (by seven years) sister, [Miriam](#), and one older (by three years) brother, [Aaron](#).^[13] According to Genesis 46:11, Amram's father Kehath immigrated to Egypt with 70 of Jacob's household, making Moses part of the second generation of Israelites born during their time in Egypt.^[14]

In the Exodus account, the birth of Moses occurred at a time when an unnamed Egyptian [Pharaoh](#) had commanded that all male Hebrew children born be killed by drowning in the river [Nile](#). Jochebed, the wife of the Levite Amram, bore a son and kept him concealed for three months.^{[13][15][16]} When she could keep him hidden no longer, rather than deliver him to be killed, she set him adrift on the Nile River in a small craft of bulrushes coated in pitch.^[15] Moses' sister [Miriam](#) observed the progress of the tiny boat until it reached a place where Pharaoh's daughter ([Bithiah](#),^[13] Thermuthis^[17]) was bathing with her handmaidens. It is said that she spotted the baby in the basket and had her handmaiden fetch it for her. Miriam came forward and asked Pharaoh's daughter if she would like a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby.^[13] Thereafter, Jochebed

was employed as the child's nurse. He grew up and was brought to Pharaoh's daughter and became her son and a younger brother to the future Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses would not be able to become Pharaoh because he was not the 'blood' son of Bithiah, and he was the youngest.^[18][\[better source needed\]](#)

Shepherd in Midian

After Moses had reached adulthood, he went to see how his brethren were faring.^[15] Seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and buried the body in the sand, supposing that no one who knew about the incident would be disposed to talk about it.^[15] The next day, seeing two [Hebrews](#) quarreling, he endeavored to separate them, whereupon the Hebrew who was wronging the other taunted Moses for slaying the Egyptian.^[19] Moses soon discovered from a higher source that the affair was known, and that Pharaoh was likely to put him to death for it; he therefore made his escape over the [Sinai Peninsula](#).^[15] In [Midian](#) he stopped at a well, where he protected seven shepherdesses from a band of rude shepherds. The shepherdesses' father [Hobab](#) adopted him as his son, gave his daughter [Zipporah](#) to him in marriage, and made him the superintendent of his herds.^{[15][20][21]} There he sojourned forty years, following the occupation of a shepherd, during which time his son [Gershom](#) was born.^{[15][22]} One day, Moses led his flock to [Mount Horeb](#) ([Exodus 3](#)), usually identified with [Mount Sinai](#) — a mountain that was thought in the [Middle Ages](#) to be located on the [Sinai Peninsula](#). While tending the flocks of Jethro at Mount Horeb, he saw a [burning bush](#). The bush was not consumed and when Moses turned aside to look more closely at the marvel, [God](#) spoke to him from the bush, revealing [his name](#) to Moses.^[15]

Egypt: the Plagues and the Exodus

God commanded Moses to go to Egypt and deliver his fellow Hebrews from bondage.^[23] On the way Moses was nearly killed by God because his son was not [circumcised](#). He was met on the way by his elder brother, Aaron, and gained a hearing with his oppressed kindred after they returned to Egypt, who believed Moses and Aaron after they saw the signs that were performed in the midst of the Israelite assembly.^[24] Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him that the Lord God of Israel wanted Pharaoh to permit the Israelites to celebrate a feast in the wilderness. Pharaoh replied that he did not know their God and would not permit them to go. They gained a second hearing with Pharaoh and changed Moses' rod into a serpent, but Pharaoh's magicians did the same with their rods. Moses and Aaron met Pharaoh at the Nile riverbank, and Moses had Aaron turn the river to blood, but Pharaoh's magicians could do the same. Moses obtained a fourth meeting, and had Aaron bring frogs from the Nile to overrun Egypt, but Pharaoh's magicians were able to do the same thing. Pharaoh asked Moses to remove the frogs and promised to let the Israelites go observe their feast in the wilderness in return. Pharaoh decided against letting the Israelites leave to observe the feast.^[25] Eventually Pharaoh let the Hebrews depart after Moses' God sent [ten plagues](#) upon the Egyptians. The third and fourth were the plague of [gnats](#) and [flies](#). The fifth was diseases on the Egyptians' cattle, oxen, goats, sheep, camels, and horses. The sixth was boils on the skins of Egyptians. Seventh, fiery [hail](#) and [thunder](#). The eighth plague was [locusts](#). The ninth plague was total darkness. The tenth plague was the slaying of the Egyptian male first-born children, whereupon such terror seized the Egyptians that they ordered the Hebrews to leave. The events are commemorated as [Passover](#),

referring to how the plague "passed over" the houses of the Israelites while smiting the Egyptians.^[26]

The crossing of the Red Sea

Moses then led his people eastward, beginning the long journey to [Canaan](#). The procession moved slowly, and found it necessary to encamp three times before passing the Egyptian frontier — some believe at the [Great Bitter Lake](#), while others propose sites as far south as the northern tip of the [Red Sea](#). Meanwhile, Pharaoh had a change of heart, and was in pursuit of them with a large army. Shut in between this army and the sea, the Israelites despaired, but Exodus records that God [divided the waters](#) so that they passed safely across on dry ground. There is some contention about this passage, since an earlier incorrect translation of [Yam Suph](#) to Red Sea was later found to have meant [Reed Sea](#).^[27] When the Egyptian army attempted to follow, God permitted the waters to return upon them and drown them.

The people then continued to Marsa marching for three days along the wilderness of the Shur^[28] without finding water. Then they came to Elim where twelve water springs and 70 Palm trees greeted them.^[29] From [Elim](#) they set out again and after 45 days they reached the wilderness of Sin between Elim and Sinai. From there they reached the plain of [Rephidim](#), completing the crossing of the Red Sea.

Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments

According to the [Bible](#), after crossing the Red Sea and leading the [Israelites](#) towards the desert, Moses was summoned by God to [Mount Sinai](#), also referred to as [Mount Horeb](#), the same place where Moses had first talked to the [Burning Bush](#), tended the flocks of [Jethro](#) his father-in-law, and later produced water by striking the rock with his [staff](#) and directed the battle with the [Amalekites](#).

Moses stayed on the mountain for 40 days and nights, a period in which he received the Ten Commandments directly from God. Moses then descended from the mountain with intent to deliver the commandments to the people, but upon his arrival he saw that the people were involved in the sin of the [Golden Calf](#). In terrible anger, Moses broke the commandment [tablets](#)^[30] and ordered his own tribe (the [Levites](#)) to go through the camp and kill everyone, including family and friends,^[31] upon which the Levites killed about 3,000 people.^[32] God later commanded Moses to inscribe two other tablets, to replace the ones Moses smashed,^[33] so Moses went to the mountain again, for another period of 40 days and nights, and when he returned, the commandments were finally given.

In Jewish tradition, Moses is referred to as "The Lawgiver" for this singular achievement of delivering the Ten Commandments. [MY NOTE: Moses also delivered the rest of the Torah]

The years in the wilderness

When the people arrived at [Marah](#), the water was bitter, causing the people to murmur against Moses. Moses cast a tree into the water, and the water became sweet.^{[34][35]} Later in the journey

the people began running low on supplies and again murmured against Moses and Aaron and said they would have preferred to die in Egypt, but God's provision of [manna](#) from the sky in the morning and quail in the evening took care of the situation.^{[36][37]} When the people camped in Rephidim, there was no water, so the people complained again and said, "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" Moses struck a rock with his staff, and water came forth.^{[38][39]}

Amalekites arrived and attacked the Israelites. In response, Moses bade [Joshua](#) lead the men to fight while he stood on a hill with the rod of God in his hand. As long as Moses held the rod up, Israel dominated the fighting, but if Moses let down his hands, the tide of the battle turned in favor of the [Amalekites](#). Because Moses was getting tired, Aaron and Hur had Moses sit on a rock. Aaron held up one arm, Hur held up the other arm, and the Israelites routed the Amalekites.^{[40][41]}

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to see Moses and brought Moses' wife and two sons with him. After Moses had told Jethro how the Israelites had escaped Egypt, Jethro went to offer sacrifices to the Lord, and then ate bread with the elders. The next day Jethro observed how Moses sat from morning to night giving judgement for the people. Jethro suggested that Moses appoint judges for lesser matters, a suggestion Moses heeded.^[42]

When the [Israelites](#) came to Sinai, they pitched camp near the mountain. Moses commanded the people not to touch the mountain. Moses received the [Ten Commandments](#) orally (but not yet in tablet form) and other moral laws. He then went up with Aaron, [Nadab](#), [Abihu](#), and seventy of the elders to see the God of Israel. Before Moses went up the mountain to receive the tablets, he told the elders to direct any questions that arose to Aaron or [Hur](#). While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instruction on the laws for the Israelite community, the Israelites went to Aaron and asked him to make gods for them. After Aaron had received golden earrings from the people, he made a [golden calf](#) and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." A "solemnity of the Lord" was proclaimed for the following day, which began in the morning with sacrifices and was followed by revelry.

After Moses had persuaded the Lord not to destroy the people of Israel, he went down from the mountain and was met by Joshua. Moses destroyed the calf and rebuked Aaron for the sin he had brought upon the people. Seeing that the people were uncontrollable, Moses went to the entry of the camp and said, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me." All the sons of [Levi](#) rallied around Moses, who ordered them to go from gate to gate slaying the idolators.^{[43][44]}

Following this, according to the last chapters of *Exodus*, the [Tabernacle](#) was constructed, the priestly law ordained, the plan of encampment arranged both for the Levites and the non-priestly tribes, and the Tabernacle consecrated. Moses was given eight prayer laws that were to be carried out in regards to the Tabernacle. These laws included light, incense and sacrifice.^[45]

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses on account of his marriage to an [Ethiopian](#), Josephus explains the marriage of Moses to this Ethiopian in the *Antiquities of the Jews*^{[46][better source needed]} and about him being the only one through whom the Lord spoke. Miriam was punished with leprosy for seven days.^[47]

The people left [Hazereth](#) and pitched camp in the wilderness of [Paran](#).^[48] (Paran is a vaguely defined region in the northern part of the Sinai peninsula, just south of Canaan) Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan as scouts, including most famously Caleb and Joshua. After forty days, they returned to the Israelite camp, bringing back grapes and other produce as samples of the regions fertility. Although all the spies agreed that the land's resources were spectacular, only two of the twelve spies (Joshua and [Caleb](#)) were willing to try to conquer it, and are nearly stoned for their unpopular opinion. The people began weeping and wanted to return to Egypt. Moses turned down the opportunity to have the Israelites completely destroyed and a great nation made from his own offspring, and instead he told the people that they would wander the wilderness for forty years until all those twenty years or older who had refused to enter Canaan had died, and that their children would then enter and possess Canaan. Early the next morning, the Israelites said they had sinned and now wanted to take possession of Canaan. Moses told them not to attempt it, but the Israelites chose to disobey Moses and invade Canaan, but were repulsed by the Amalekites and Canaanites.^[49]

The [Tribe of Reuben](#), led by [Korah](#), [Dathan](#), [Abiram](#), and 250 Israelite princes accused Moses and Aaron of raising themselves over the rest of the people. Moses told them to come the next morning with a censer for every man. Dathan and Abiram refused to come when summoned by Moses. Moses went to the place of Dathan and Abiram's tents. After Moses spoke the ground opened up and engulfed Dathan and Abiram's tents, after which it closed again. Fire consumed the 250 men with the censers. Moses had the censers taken and made into plates to cover the altar. The following day, the Israelites came and accused Moses and Aaron of having killed his fellow Israelites. The people were struck with a plague that killed 14,700 persons, and was only ended when Aaron went with his censer into the midst of the people.^[50] To prevent further murmurings and settle the matter permanently, Moses had each of the chief princes of the non-Levitic tribes write his name on his staff and had them lay them in the sanctuary. He also had Aaron write his name on his staff and had it placed in the tabernacle. The next day, when Moses went into the tabernacle, Aaron's staff had budded, blossomed, and yielded almonds.^[51]

After leaving Sinai, the Israelites camped in Kadesh. After more complaints from the Israelites, Moses struck the stone twice, and water gushed forth. However, because Moses and Aaron had not shown the Lord's holiness, they were not permitted to enter the land to be given to the Israelites.^[52] This was the second occasion Moses struck a rock to bring forth water; however, it appears that both sites were named [Meribah](#) after these two incidents.

Now ready to enter Canaan, the Israelites abandoned the idea of attacking the Canaanites head-on in [Hebron](#), a city in the southern part of Canaan. Having been informed by spies that they were too strong, it was decided that they would flank Hebron by going further East, around the [Dead Sea](#). This required that they pass through [Edom](#), [Moab](#), and [Ammon](#). These three tribes were considered Hebrews by the Israelites as descendants of [Lot](#), and therefore could not be attacked. However they were also rivals, and did not therefore give permission to allow the Israelites to pass openly through their territory. So Moses lead his people carefully along the eastern border of Edom, the southernmost of these territories. While the Israelites were making their journey around Edom, they complained about the *manna*. After many of the people had been bitten by serpents and died, Moses made the [brass serpent](#) and mounted it on a pole, and if those who were bitten looked at it, they did not die.^[53] According to the Biblical [Book of Kings](#)

this brass serpent remained in existence until the days of King [Hezekiah](#), who destroyed it after persons began treating it as an idol.^[54] When they reached Moab, it was revealed that Moab had been attacked and defeated by the [Amorites](#) led by a king named [Sihon](#). The Amorites were a non-Hebrew Canaanic people who once held power in the [Fertile Crescent](#). When Moses asked the Amorites for passage and it was refused, Moses attacked the Amorites (as non-Hebrews, the Israelites had no reservations in attacking them), presumably weakened by conflict with the Moabites, and defeated them.^[55] The Israelites, now holding the territory of the Amorites just north of Moab, desired to expand their holdings by acquiring [Bashan](#), a fertile territory north of Ammon famous for its oak trees and cattle. It was led by a king named [Og](#). Later [rabbinical](#) legends made Og a survivor of the flood, suggesting he had sat on the Ark and was fed by [Noah](#). The Israelites fought with Og's forces at [Edrei](#), on the southern border of Bashan, where the Israelites were victorious and slew every man, woman, and child of his cities and took spoil for their bounty.^[55]

[Balak](#), king of Moab, having heard of the Israelites' conquests, feared that his territory might be next. Therefore he sent elders of Moab, and of [Midian](#), to [Balaam](#) (apparently a powerful and respected prophet), son of [Beor \(Bible\)](#), to induce him to come and curse the Israelites. Balaam's location is unclear. Balaam sent back word that he could only do what God commands, and God has, via a dream, told him not to go. Moab consequently sent higher ranking priests and offers Balaam honours, and so God tells Balaam to go with them. Balaam thus set out with two servants to go to Balak, but an [Angel](#) tried to prevent him. At first the Angel is seen only by the ass Balaam is riding. After Balaam started to punish the ass for refusing to move, it is miraculously given the power to speak to Balaam, and it complains about Balaam's treatment. At this point, Balaam was allowed to see the angel, who informed him that the ass is the only reason the Angel did not kill Balaam. Balaam immediately repented, but is told to go on.^[56]

Balak met with Balaam at [Kirjath-huzoth](#), and they went to the high places of [Baal](#), and offered sacrifices at seven altars, leading to Balaam being given a prophecy by God, which Balaam relates to Balak. However, the prophecy blesses Israel; Balak remonstrated, but Balaam reminded him that he can only speak the words put in his mouth, so Balak took him to another high place at [Pisgah](#), to try again. Building another seven altars here, and making sacrifices on each, Balaam provided another prophecy blessing Israel. Balaam was finally taken by a now very frustrated Balak to [Peor](#), and, after the seven sacrifices there, decided not to seek enchantments but instead looked on the Israelites from the peak. The spirit of God came upon Balaam and he delivered a third positive prophecy concerning Israel. Balak's anger rose to the point where he threatened Balaam, but Balaam merely offered a prediction of fate. Balaam then looked on the [Kenites](#), and Amalekites and offered two more predictions of fate. Balak and Balaam then go to their respective homes. Later, Balaam informed Balak and the Midianites that, if they wished to overcome the Israelites for a short interval, they needed to seduce the Israelites to engage in idolatry.^[57]^[better source needed] The Midianites sent beautiful women to the Israelite camp to seduce the young men to partake in idolatry, and the attempt proved successful.^[58]

God then commanded Moses to kill and hang the heads of everyone who had engaged in idolatry, and Moses ordered the judges to carry out the mass execution. At the same time, one of the Israelites brought home a Midianitish woman in the sight of the congregation. Upon seeing this, [Phinehas](#), the grandson of Aaron, took a javelin in his hand and thrust through both the

Israelite and the Midianitish woman, which turned away the wrath of God. By that time, however, the plague inflicted on the Israelites had already killed about twenty-four thousand persons. Moses was then told that because [Phinehas](#) had averted the wrath of God from the Israelites, [Phinehas](#) and his descendents were given the pledge of an everlasting priesthood.^[59] After Moses had taken a census of the people, he sent an army to avenge the perceived evil brought on the Israelites by the Midianites. Numbers 31 says Moses instructed the Israelite soldiers to kill every Midianite woman, boy, and non-virgin girl, although virgin girls were shared amongst the soldiers.^[60] The Israelites killed Balaam, and the five kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba.^[61]

Moses appointed Joshua, son of [Nun](#), to succeed him as the leader of the Israelites.^[62] Moses then died at the age of 120.^[63]

Death

Moses was warned that he would not be permitted to lead the Israelites across the [Jordan river](#), because of his trespass at the waters of Meribah (Deut. 32:51) but would die on its eastern shores (Num. 20:12).^[64] He therefore assembled the [tribes](#), and delivered to them a parting address, which is taken to form the [Book of Deuteronomy](#).^[64]

When Moses finished, he sang a [song](#) and pronounced a [blessing](#) on the people. He then went up Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah, looked over the promised land of Israel spread out before him, and died, at the age of one hundred and twenty, according to Talmudic legend on 7 Adar, his 120th birthday exactly.^[65] God Himself buried him in an unknown grave in a valley in the land of [Moab](#), over against Bethpeor (Deut. 34:6).^{[16][64]}

Moses was thus the human instrument in the creation of the nation of Israel by communicating to it the [Torah](#).^[64] More humble than any other man (Num. 12:3), he enjoyed unique privileges, for "there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom [YHWH](#) knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).^[64] See also [Jude 1:9](#) and [Zechariah 3](#).

Mosaic law

The [Book of Kings](#) relates how a "law of Moses" was discovered in the [Temple](#) during the reign of King [Josiah](#) (r. 641–609 BC). This book is mostly identified as an early version of the [Book of Deuteronomy](#), perhaps chapters 5-26 and chapter 28 of the extant text. This text contains a number of laws, dated to the 8th century BC [kingdom of Judah](#), a time when a minority [Yahwist](#) faction was actively attacking mainstream polytheism, succeeding in establishing official [monolatry](#) of the [God of Israel](#) under Josiah by the late 7th century BC.

The law attributed to Moses, specifically the laws set out in Deuteronomy, as a consequence came to be considered supreme over all other sources of authority (the king and his officials), and the Levite priests were the guardians and interpreters of the law.^[66]

The Book of Deuteronomy ([Deuteronomy 31:9](#) and [Deuteronomy 31:24–26](#)) describes how Moses writes "[torah](#)" (instruction) on a scroll and lays it beside the [Ark of the Covenant](#).^[67]

Similar passages include, for example, Exodus 17:14, "And YHWH said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of [Joshua](#), that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of [Amalek](#) from under heaven;" Exodus 24:4, "And Moses wrote all the words of YHWH, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel;" Exodus 34:27, "And Yahweh said unto Moses, Write thou these words, for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel;"^[68] and [Leviticus 26:46](#) "These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses."

Based on this tradition, "Mosaic law" came to refer to the entire legal content of the Pentateuch, not just the Ten Commandments explicitly connected to Moses in the biblical narrative. [MY NOTE: All of Parashat Mishpatim]

The content of this law was excerpted and codified in [Rabbinical Judaism](#) as the [613 Mitzvot](#). By Late Antiquity, the tradition of Moses being the source of the law in the Pentateuch also gave rise to the tradition of [Mosaic authorship](#), the interpretation of the entire [Torah](#) as the work of Moses.

Moses in Hellenistic literature

Non-biblical writings about Jews, with references to the role of Moses, first appear at the beginning of the [Hellenistic](#) period, the zenith of Greek influence in the ancient world, from 323 BCE to about 146 BCE. Shmuel notes that "a characteristic of this literature is the high honour in which it holds the peoples of the East in general and some specific groups among these peoples."^{[69]:1102} In addition to the Judeo-Roman or Judeo-Hellenic historians [Artapanus](#), [Eupolemus](#), [Josephus](#), and [Philo](#), a few non-Jewish historians including [Hecataeus of Abdera](#) (quoted by [Diodorus Siculus](#)), [Alexander Polyhistor](#), [Manetho](#), [Apion](#), [Chaeremon of Alexandria](#), [Tacitus](#) and [Porphyry](#) also make reference to him. The extent to which any of these accounts rely on earlier sources is unknown.^{[69]:1103} Moses also appears in other religious texts such as the [Mishnah](#) (c. 200 AD), [Midrash](#) (AD 200 - 1200),^[70] and the [Qur'an](#) (c. 610—653).

The figure of [Osarseph](#) in Hellenistic historiography is a renegade Egyptian priest who leads an army of lepers against the pharaoh and is finally expelled from Egypt, changing his name to Moses.

In Tacitus

The Roman historian [Tacitus](#) (ca. 56—120 AD) refers to Moses by noting that the Jewish religion was monotheistic and without a clear image. His primary work, wherein he describes Jewish philosophy, is his *Histories* (ca. 100), where, according to Murphy, as a result of the Jewish worship of one God, "pagan" mythology fell into contempt."^[71] Tacitus states that, despite various opinions current in his day regarding the Jews' ethnicity, most of his sources are in agreement that there was an Exodus from Egypt. By his account, the Pharaoh [Bocchoris](#), suffering from a plague, banished the Jews in response to an oracle of the god [Hammon](#).

*A motley crowd was thus collected and abandoned in the desert. While all the other outcasts lay idly lamenting, one of them, named **Moses**, advised them not to look for help to gods or men, since both had deserted them, but to trust rather in themselves, and accept as divine the guidance of the first being, by whose aid they should get out of their present plight.*^[78]

In this version, Moses and the Jews wander through the desert for only six days, capturing the Holy Land on the seventh.^[78]

According to Feldman, Josephus also attaches particular significance to Moses' possession of the "cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice." He also includes piety as an added fifth virtue. In addition, he "stresses Moses' willingness to undergo toil and his careful avoidance of bribery. Like [Plato](#)'s philosopher-king, Moses excels as an educator."^{[74]:130}

Historicity

The tradition of Moses as a lawgiver and culture hero of the [Israelites](#) can be traced to 8th or 7th century BCE in the [Kingdom of Judah](#). Moses is a central figure in the [Deuteronomist](#) account of the origins of the Israelites, cast in a literary style of elegant flashbacks told by Moses. The Deuteronomist relies on earlier material that may date to the [United Monarchy](#), so that the biblical narrative would be based on traditions that can be traced to about four centuries after the supposed lifetime of Moses.

The question of the historicity of [the Exodus](#) (specifically, the [Pharaoh of the Exodus](#), identification of which would connect the biblical narrative to Egyptological chronology) has long been debated, without conclusive result. Many biblical scholars are prepared to admit that there may be a historical core beneath the Exodus and Sinai traditions, even if the biblical narrative dramatizes by portraying as a single event what was more likely a gradual process of migration and conquest. Thus, the motif of "slavery in Egypt" reflects the historical situation of imperialist control of the [Egyptian Empire](#) over [Canaan](#) after the conquests of [Ramesses II](#), which declined gradually during the 12th century under the pressure from the [Sea Peoples](#) and the general [Bronze Age collapse](#)^[citation needed]. [Israel Finkelstein](#) points to the appearance of settlements in the central hill country around 1200 as the earliest of the known settlements of the Israelites.^[82] A cyclical pattern to these highland settlements, corresponding to the state of the surrounding cultures, suggests that the local Canaanites combined an agricultural and nomadic lifestyles. When Egyptian rule collapsed after the invasion of the [Sea Peoples](#), the central hill country could no longer sustain a large nomadic population, so they went from nomadism to [sedentism](#).^{[83][clarification needed]}

While the general narrative of the Exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land may be remotely rooted in historical events, the figure of Moses as a leader of the Israelites in these events cannot be substantiated.^{[84][85][86][87]} [William Dever](#) agrees with the Canaanite origin of the Israelites but allows for the possibility of some immigrants from Egypt among the early hilltop settlers, leaving open the possibility of a Moses-like figure in Transjordan ca 1250-1200.^[88]

[Martin Noth](#) holds that two different groups experienced the Exodus and Sinai events, and each group transmitted its own stories independently of the other one, writing that "The biblical story

tracing the Hebrews from Egypt to Canaan resulted from an editor's weaving separate themes and traditions around a main character Moses, actually an obscure person from Moab."^[89]

[William Albright](#) held a more favorable view towards the traditional views regarding Moses, and accepted the essence of the biblical story, as narrated between Exodus 1:8 and Deuteronomy 34:12, but recognized the impact that centuries of oral and written transmission have had on the account, causing it to acquire layers of accretions.^[89]

[Biblical minimalists](#) such as Philip Davies and [Niels Peter Lemche](#) regard the Exodus as a fiction composed in the [Persian](#) period or even later, without even the memory of a historical Moses.^[citation needed]

Moses in religious traditions

Judaism

There is a wealth of stories and additional information about Moses in the [Jewish apocrypha](#) and in the genre of [rabbinical](#) exegesis known as [Midrash](#), as well as in the primary works of the Jewish [oral law](#), the [Mishnah](#) and the [Talmud](#). Moses is also given a number of bynames in Jewish tradition. The [Midrash](#) identifies Moses as one of seven biblical personalities who were called by various names.^[90] Moses' other names were: Jekuthiel (by his mother), Heber (by [his father](#)), Jered (by [Miriam](#)), Avi Zanoah (by Aaron), [Avi Gedor](#) (by [Kohath](#)), Avi Soco (by his wet-nurse), Shemaiah ben Nethanel (by people of Israel).^[91] Moses is also attributed the names Toviah (as a first name), and Levi (as a family name) (Vayikra Rabbah 1:3), Heman,^[92] Mechoqeq (lawgiver)^[93] and Ehl Gav Ish (Numbers 12:3)^[94]

Jewish historians who lived at [Alexandria](#), such as [Eupolemus](#), attributed to Moses the feat of having taught the [Phoenicians](#) their alphabet,^[95] similar to legends of [Thoth](#). [Artapanus of Alexandria](#) explicitly identified Moses not only with Thoth / Hermes, but also with the Greek figure [Musaeus](#) (whom he calls "the teacher of [Orpheus](#)"), and ascribed to him the division of Egypt into 36 districts, each with its own liturgy. He names the princess who adopted Moses as Merriis, wife of Pharaoh Chenephres.^[96]

Ancient sources mention an Assumption of Moses and a Testimony of Moses. A Latin text was found in [Milan](#) in the 19th century by [Antonio Ceriani](#) who called it the [Assumption of Moses](#), even though it does not refer to an assumption of Moses or contain portions of the Assumption which are cited by ancient authors, and it is apparently actually the Testimony. The incident which the ancient authors cite is also mentioned in the [Epistle of Jude](#).

To Orthodox Jews, Moses is called *Moshe Rabbenu*, *`Eved HaShem*, *Avi haNeviim zya"á*. He is defined "Our Leader Moshe", "Servant of God", and "Father of all the Prophets". In their view, Moses not only received the Torah, but also the revealed (written and oral) and the hidden (the *`hokhmat nistar* teachings, which gave Judaism the Zohar of the [Rashbi](#), the Torah of the [Ari haQadosh](#) and all that is discussed in the Heavenly Yeshiva between the [Ramhal](#) and his masters). He is also considered the greatest prophet.^[97]

Arising in part from his age, but also because 120 is elsewhere stated as the maximum age for Noah's descendants (one interpretation of [Genesis 6:3](#)), "may you live to 120" has become a common blessing among Jews.

For [Christians](#), Moses — mentioned more often in the [New Testament](#) than any other [Old Testament](#) figure — is often a symbol of God's law, as reinforced and [expounded on](#) in the teachings of [Jesus](#). New Testament writers often compared Jesus' words and deeds with Moses' to explain Jesus' mission. In [Acts](#) 7:39–43, 51–53, for example, the rejection of Moses by the Jews who worshiped the golden calf is likened to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews that continued in traditional Judaism.

Moses also figures in several of Jesus' messages. When he met the [Pharisees Nicodemus](#) at night in the third chapter of the [Gospel of John](#), he compared Moses' lifting up of the [bronze serpent](#) in the wilderness, which any Israelite could look at and be healed, to his own lifting up (by his death and [resurrection](#)) for the people to look at and be healed. In the sixth chapter, Jesus responded to the people's claim that Moses provided them [manna](#) in the wilderness by saying that it was not Moses, but God, who provided. Calling himself the "bread of life", Jesus stated that He was provided to feed God's people.

Moses, along with [Elijah](#), is presented as meeting with Jesus in all three Gospel accounts of the [Transfiguration of Jesus](#) in [Matthew](#) 17, [Mark](#) 9, and [Luke](#) 9, respectively. Later Christians found numerous other parallels between the life of Moses and Jesus to the extent that Jesus was likened to a "second Moses." For instance, Jesus' escape from the [slaughter by Herod in Bethlehem](#) is compared to Moses' escape from Pharaoh's designs to kill Hebrew infants. Such parallels, unlike those mentioned above, are not pointed out in Scripture. See the article on [typology](#).

His relevance to modern Christianity has not diminished. Moses is considered to be a saint by several churches; and is commemorated as a prophet in the respective Calendars of Saints of the [Eastern Orthodox Church](#), [Roman Catholic Church](#), and [Lutheran](#) churches on September 4. He is commemorated as one of the Holy Forefathers in the [Calendar of Saints](#) of the [Armenian Apostolic Church](#) on July 30.

Islam

Moses is mentioned more in the [Quran](#) than any other individual and his life is narrated and recounted more than that of any other [prophet](#).^[104] In general, Moses is described in ways which parallel the [prophet Muhammad](#),^[105] and "his character exhibits some of the main themes of Islamic theology," including the "moral injunction that we are to submit ourselves to God."

Moses is defined in the Qur'an as both prophet (*nabi*) and messenger (*rasul*), the latter term indicating that he was one of those prophets who brought a scripture and law to his people.

Modern reception

In Freudian psychoanalysis

Freud, in his last book, [*Moses and Monotheism*](#) in 1939, postulated that Moses was an Egyptian nobleman who adhered to the monotheism of [Akhenaten](#). Following a theory proposed by a contemporary biblical critic, Freud believed that Moses was murdered in the wilderness, producing a collective sense of patricidal guilt that has been at the heart of Judaism ever since. "Judaism had been a religion of the father, Christianity became a religion of the son", he wrote. The possible Egyptian origin of Moses and of his message has received significant scholarly attention.^[76]

Opponents of this view observe that the religion of the Torah seems different to [Atenism](#) in everything except the central feature of devotion to a single god,^[111] although this has been countered by a variety of arguments, e.g. pointing out the similarities between the [Hymn to Aten](#) and [Psalm 104](#).^{[112][113]} Freud's interpretation of the historical Moses is not well accepted among [historians](#), and is considered [pseudohistory](#) by most.^[114]

Criticism

Main article: [Criticism of Moses](#)

In the late 18th century the [deist Thomas Paine](#) commented at length on Moses' Laws in [The Age of Reason](#), and gave his view that "the character of Moses, as stated in the Bible, is the most horrid that can be imagined",^[115] giving the story at [Numbers 31:13-18](#) as an example. In the 19th century the [agnostic Robert G. Ingersoll](#) wrote "...that all the ignorant, infamous, heartless, hideous things recorded in the 'inspired' Pentateuch are not the words of God, but simply 'Some Mistakes of Moses'".^[116] In the 2000s, the [atheist Richard Dawkins](#) referring, like Paine, to the incident at [Numbers 31:13-18](#), concluded, "No, Moses was not a great role model for modern moralists."^[117]



Statue by [Michelangelo](#) — in Basilica San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome

Film and television

Moses was portrayed by [Theodore Roberts](#) in DeMille's 1923 [silent film The Ten Commandments](#). Moses appears as the central character in the 1956 [Cecil B. DeMille](#) movie, also called [The Ten Commandments](#). He is portrayed by [Charlton Heston](#). A [television remake](#) was produced in 2006. [Burt Lancaster](#) played Moses in the 1975 television [miniseries Moses the Lawgiver](#). In the 1981 [film History of the World, Part I](#), Moses is portrayed by [Mel Brooks](#).^[127] [Sir Ben Kingsley](#) is the narrator of the 2007 animated film, [The Ten Commandments](#).

Moses appears as the central character in the 1998 [DreamWorks](#) Pictures animated movie, [The Prince of Egypt](#). He is voiced by [Val Kilmer](#).^[128]

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What impact did Muhammed and Islam have on Judaism?

Why was this so important for Jews today?



Muhammad (c. 26 April 570 – 8 June 632;^[2] also [transliterated](#) as **Mohammad**, **Mohammed**, or **Muhammed**; [Arabic](#): محمد) (full name: **Muhammad Ibn `Abd Allāh Ibn `Abd al-Muttalib** [Arabic](#): محمد بن عبد الله بن عبد المطلب) was the founder of the [religion](#) of [Islam](#).^{[3][n 1]} He is considered by [Muslims](#) and [Bahá'ís](#) to be a [messenger](#) and [prophet](#) of [God](#), and by Muslims the last law-bearer in a series of [Islamic prophets](#). Most Muslims consider him to be the last prophet of God as taught by the [Quran](#).^{[4][n 2]} Muslims thus consider him the restorer of an uncorrupted original [monotheistic faith](#) (*islām*) of [Adam](#), [Noah](#), [Abraham](#), [Moses](#), [Jesus](#) and [other prophets](#).^{[5][6][7]}

Born in [570 CE](#) in the [Arabian](#) city of [Mecca](#),^{[8][9]} he was orphaned at an early age and brought up under the care of his uncle [Abu Talib](#). He later worked mostly as a merchant, as well as a shepherd, and was first married by age 25.^[10] Discontented with life in Mecca, he retreated to a cave in the surrounding mountains for [meditation](#) and reflection. According to Islamic beliefs it was here, at age 40,^{[8][11]} in the month of [Ramadan](#), where he received [his first revelation](#) from God. Three years after this event Muhammad started [preaching](#) these revelations publicly,

proclaiming that "[God is One](#)", that complete "surrender" to Him (lit. *islām*) is the only way (*dīn*)^[n 3] acceptable to God, and that he himself was a prophet and messenger of God, in the same vein as [other Islamic prophets](#).^{[7][12][13]}

Muhammad gained few [followers](#) early on,^[14] and was met with [hostility from some Meccan tribes](#); he and his followers were treated harshly. To escape persecution, Muhammad sent some of his followers to Abyssinia^[15] before he and his remaining followers in Mecca migrated to [Medina](#) (then known as Yathrib) in the year 622.^[16] This event, the [Hijra](#), marks the beginning of the [Islamic calendar](#), which is also known as the Hijri Calendar. In Medina, Muhammad united the tribes under the [Constitution of Medina](#).^[16] After eight years of fighting with the Meccan tribes, his followers, who by then had grown to 10,000, [conquered Mecca](#). Muhammad destroyed the symbols of paganism in Mecca^[17] and then sent his followers out to destroy all of the remaining pagan temples throughout Eastern Arabia^{[18][19]}.

In 632, a few months after returning to Medina from his [Farewell pilgrimage](#), Muhammad fell ill and died. By the time of his death, most of the [Arabian Peninsula](#) had [converted to Islam](#), and he had united the [tribes of Arabia](#) into a single [Muslim religious polity](#).^{[20][21]}

The revelations (or [Ayah](#), lit. "Signs [of God]")—which Muhammad reported receiving until his death—form the verses of the Quran, regarded by Muslims as the "Word of God" and around which the religion is based. Besides the Quran, Muhammad's life (*sira*) and traditions (*sunnah*) are also upheld by Muslims. They discuss Muhammad and other prophets of Islam with reverence, adding the phrase [peace be upon him](#) whenever their names are mentioned.^[22] While conceptions of Muhammad in [medieval Christendom](#) and [premodern](#) times were largely negative, appraisals in [modern history](#) have been far less so.^{[13][23]} His life and deeds have been [debated and criticized](#) by followers and opponents over the centuries.^[24]

Sources for Muhammad's life

Muhammad being a highly influential historical figure, his life, deeds, and thoughts have been debated by followers and opponents over the centuries, which makes a biography of him difficult to write.^[13]

The [Quran](#) is the central [religious text](#) of [Islam](#) and Muslims believe that it represents the words of [God](#) revealed to Muhammad through the archangel [Gabriel](#).^{[24][28][29]} Although it mentions Muhammad directly only four times,^[30] there are verses which can be interpreted as allusions to Muhammad's life.^{[13][n 4]} The Quran however provides little assistance for a chronological biography of Muhammad, and many of the utterances recorded in it lack historical context.^{[31][32]}

Non-Arabic sources

The earliest documented Christian knowledge of Muhammad stems from [Byzantine](#) sources. They indicate that both [Jews](#) and [Christians](#) saw Muhammad as a "[false prophet](#)". In the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* of 634, Muhammad is portrayed as being "deceiving[,] for do prophets come with sword and [chariot](#)?, [...] you will discover nothing true from the said prophet

except human bloodshed."^[41] Another Greek source for Muhammad is the 9th-century writer [Theophanes](#). The earliest Syriac source is the 7th-century writer [John bar Penkaye](#).^[42]

The [Arabian Peninsula](#) was largely arid and volcanic, making agriculture difficult except near oases or springs. The landscape was thus dotted with towns and cities, two prominent ones being [Mecca](#) and [Medina](#). Medina was a large flourishing agricultural settlement, while Mecca was an important financial center for many surrounding tribes.^[43] Communal life was essential for survival in the [desert](#) conditions, as people needed support against the harsh environment and lifestyle. Tribal grouping was encouraged by the need to act as a unit, this unity being based on the bond of kinship by blood.^[44] Indigenous Arabs were either [nomadic](#) or sedentary, the former constantly travelling from one place to another seeking water and pasture for their flocks, while the latter settled and focused on trade and agriculture. Nomadic survival was also dependent on raiding caravans or oases, the nomads not viewing this as a crime.^{[45][46]}

In pre-Islamic Arabia, gods or goddesses were viewed as protectors of individual tribes, their spirits being associated with sacred trees, [stones](#), springs and wells. As well as being the site of an annual pilgrimage, the [Kaaba](#) shrine in Mecca housed 360 idol statues of tribal patron deities. Aside from these gods, the Arabs shared a common belief in a supreme deity called [Allah](#)^[citation needed] (literally "the god"), who was remote from their everyday concerns and thus not the object of cult or ritual.^[citation needed] Three goddesses were associated with Allah as his daughters: [Allāt](#), [Manāt](#) and [al-‘Uzzá](#). Monotheistic communities existed in Arabia, including [Christians](#) and [Jews](#).^[47] [Hanifs](#) – native pre-Islamic Arab monotheists – are also sometimes listed alongside Jews and Christians in pre-Islamic Arabia, although their [historicity](#) is disputed amongst scholars.^{[48][49]} According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad himself was a Hanif and one of the descendants of [Ishmael](#), son of [Abraham](#).^[50]

Life

Life in Mecca

Muhammad was born and lived in Mecca for the first 52 years of his life (570–622). This period is generally divided into two phases, before and after declaring the [prophecy](#).

Childhood and early life

Muhammad was born in the month of [Rabi' al-awwal](#) in 570. He belonged to the [Banu Hashim](#) clan, one of the prominent families of [Mecca](#), although it seems not to have been prosperous during Muhammad's early lifetime.^{[13][51]} The Banu Hashim clan was part of the [Quraysh tribe](#). Tradition places the year of Muhammad's birth as corresponding with the [Year of the Elephant](#), which is named after the failed destruction of Mecca that year by the [Aksumite king Abraha](#) who had in his army a number of elephants. 20th-century scholarship has suggested alternative dates for this event, such as 568 or 569.^[52]

Muhammad's father, [Abdullah](#), died almost six months before he was born.^[54] According to Islamic tradition, soon after Muhammad's birth he was sent to live with a Bedouin family in the desert, as the desert life was considered healthier for infants. Muhammad stayed with his foster-

mother, [Halimah bint Abi Dhuayb](#), and her husband until he was two years old.^[10] Some western scholars of Islam have rejected the historicity of this tradition.^{[55][not in citation given]} At the age of six, Muhammad lost his biological mother [Amina](#) to illness and he became fully orphaned.^{[10][56]} For the next two years, he was under the guardianship of his paternal grandfather [Abd al-Muttalib](#), of the Banu Hashim clan, but when Muhammad was eight, his grandfather also died. He then came under the care of his uncle [Abu Talib](#), the new leader of Banu Hashim.^{[10][52]} According to [William Montgomery Watt](#), because of the general disregard of the guardians in taking care of weak members of the tribes in Mecca in the 6th century, "Muhammad's guardians saw that he did not starve to death, but it was hard for them to do more for him, especially as the fortunes of the clan of Hashim seem to have been declining at that time."^[57]

While still in his teens, Muhammad accompanied his uncle on trading journeys to [Syria](#) gaining experience in commercial trade, the only career open to Muhammad as an orphan.^{[10][57]} Islamic tradition states that when Muhammad was either nine or twelve while accompanying the Meccans' caravan to Syria, he met a Christian monk or hermit named [Bahira](#) who is said to have foreseen Muhammed's career as a prophet of God.^[58]

Beginnings of the Quran

Muhammad adopted the practice of meditating alone for several weeks every year in a cave on [Mount Hira](#) near Mecca.^{[63][64]} Islamic tradition holds that during one of his visits to Mount Hira, the angel [Gabriel](#) appeared to him in the year 610 and commanded Muhammad to recite the following verses:^[65]

Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created-
Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood:
Proclaim! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,-
He Who taught (the use of) the pen,-
Taught man that which he knew not.
—Quran, sura 96 ([Al-Alaq](#)), ayat 1-5^[66]

After returning home, Muhammad was consoled and reassured by Khadijah and her Christian cousin, [Waraqah ibn Nawfal](#). Upon receiving his first revelations, he was deeply distressed and resolved to commit [suicide](#).^[46] He also feared that others would dismiss his claims as being possessed.^[46] Shi'a tradition maintains that Muhammad was neither surprised nor frightened at the appearance of Gabriel but rather welcomed him as if he had been expecting him.^[67] The initial revelation was followed by a pause of three years during which Muhammad further gave himself to prayers and [spiritual practices](#). When the revelations resumed he was reassured and commanded to begin preaching: "Thy Guardian-Lord hath not forsaken thee, nor is He displeased."^{[68][69][70]}

[Sahih Bukhari](#) narrates Muhammad describing the revelations as, "Sometimes it is (revealed) like the ringing of a bell" and [Aisha](#) reported, "I saw the Prophet being inspired Divinely on a very cold day and noticed the sweat dropping from his forehead (as the Inspiration was over)".^[71] According to [Welch](#) these revelations were accompanied by mysterious seizures, and the reports are unlikely to have been forged by later Muslims.^[13] Muhammad was confident that he could

distinguish his own thoughts from these messages.^[72] According to the Quran, one of the main roles of Muhammad is to warn the unbelievers of their eschatological punishment (Quran 38:70, Quran 6:19). Sometimes the Quran does not explicitly refer to the Judgment day but provides examples from the history of some extinct communities and warns Muhammad's contemporaries of similar calamities (Quran 41:13–16).^[26] Muhammad is not only a warner to those who reject God's revelation, but also a bearer of good news for those who abandon evil, listen to the divine word and serve God.^[73] Muhammad's mission also involves preaching monotheism: The Quran commands Muhammad to proclaim and praise the name of his Lord and instructs him not to worship idols or associate other deities with God.^{[15][26]}

The key themes of the early Quranic verses included the responsibility of man towards his creator; the resurrection of dead, God's final judgment followed by vivid descriptions of the tortures in hell and pleasures in Paradise; and the signs of God in all aspects of life. Religious duties required of the believers at this time were few: belief in God, asking for forgiveness of sins, offering frequent prayers, assisting others particularly those in need, rejecting cheating and the love of wealth (considered to be significant in the commercial life of Mecca), being chaste and not to kill newborn girls.^[13]

Opposition

According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad's wife Khadija was the first to believe he was a prophet.^[74] She was soon followed by Muhammad's ten-year-old cousin [Ali ibn Abi Talib](#), close friend [Abu Bakr](#), and adopted son [Zaid](#).^{[11][74]} Around 613, Muhammad began his public preaching (Quran 26:214).^[75] Most Meccans ignored him and mocked him,^[15] while a few others became his followers. There were three main groups of early converts to Islam: younger brothers and sons of great merchants; people who had fallen out of the first rank in their tribe or failed to attain it; and the weak, mostly unprotected foreigners.^[76]

According to Ibn Sad, the opposition in Mecca started when Muhammad delivered verses that condemned idol worship and the Meccan forefathers who engaged in polytheism.^{[15][77]} However, the Quranic exegesis maintains that it began as soon as Muhammad started public preaching.^[78] As the number of followers increased, he became a threat to the local tribes and the rulers of the city, whose wealth rested upon the Kaaba, the focal point of Meccan religious life, which Muhammad threatened to overthrow. Muhammad's denunciation of the Meccan traditional religion was especially offensive to his own tribe, the [Quraysh](#), as they were the guardians of the Ka'aba.^[76] The powerful merchants tried to convince Muhammad to abandon his preaching by offering him admission into the inner circle of merchants, and establishing his position therein by an advantageous marriage. However, he refused.^[76]

Tradition records at great length the persecution and ill-treatment of Muhammad and his followers.^{[13][15]} [Sumayyah bint Khabbab](#), a slave of a prominent Meccan leader [Abu Jahl](#), is famous as the first martyr of Islam, having been killed with a spear by her master when she refused to give up her faith. [Bilal](#), another Muslim slave, was tortured by [Umayyah ibn Khalaf](#) who placed a heavy rock on his chest to force his conversion.^{[79][80]} Apart from insults,^{[15][81][82]} Muhammad was protected from physical harm as he belonged to the Banu Hashim clan.

In 615, some of Muhammad's followers [emigrated](#) to the [Ethiopian Aksumite Empire](#) and founded a small colony there under the protection of the Christian Ethiopian emperor [Ashama ibn Abjar](#).^{[13][15]}

Isra and Mi'raj

Islamic tradition relates that in 620, Muhammad experienced the [Isra and Mi'raj](#), a miraculous journey said to have occurred with the angel [Gabriel](#) in one night. In the first part of the journey, the *Isra*, he is said to have travelled from [Mecca](#) on a [winged steed](#) (*Buraq*) to "the farthest mosque" (in Arabic: *masjid al-aqsa*), which Muslims usually identify with the [Al-Aqsa Mosque](#) in [Jerusalem](#). In the second part, the *Mi'raj*, Muhammad is said to have toured [heaven](#) and [hell](#), and spoken with earlier prophets, such as [Abraham](#), [Moses](#), and [Jesus](#).^{[88][90]} [Ibn Ishaq](#), author of the first [biography of Muhammad](#), presents this event as a spiritual experience whereas later historians like [Al-Tabari](#) and [Ibn Kathir](#) present it as a physical journey.^[90]

Some western scholars of Islam hold that the oldest Muslim tradition identified the journey as one traveled through the heavens from the sacred enclosure at Mecca to the celestial *al-Baytu l-Ma'mur* (heavenly prototype of the Kaaba); but later tradition identified Muhammad's journey as having been from Mecca to Jerusalem.^[92]

Last years in Mecca before Hijra

Muhammad's wife Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib both died in 619, the year thus being known as the "[year of sorrow](#)". With the death of Abu Talib, the leadership of the Banu Hashim clan was passed to Abu Lahab, an inveterate enemy of Muhammad. Soon afterwards, [Abu Lahab](#) withdrew the clan's protection from Muhammad. This placed Muhammad in danger of death since the withdrawal of clan protection implied that the blood revenge for his killing would not be exacted. Muhammad then [visited Ta'if](#), another important city in Arabia, and tried to find a protector for himself there, but his effort failed and further brought him into physical danger.^{[13][87][88]} Muhammad was forced to return to Mecca. A Meccan man named Mut'im b. Adi (and the protection of the tribe of [Banu Nawfal](#)) made it possible for him safely to re-enter his native city.^{[13][87][88]}

Many people were visiting Mecca on business or as pilgrims to the [Kaaba](#). Muhammad took this opportunity to look for a new home for himself and his followers. After several unsuccessful negotiations, he found hope with some men from Yathrib (later called [Medina](#)).^[13] The Arab population of Yathrib were familiar with monotheism and prepared for the appearance of a prophet because a Jewish community existed there.^{[13][16]} They also hoped by the means of Muhammad and the new faith to gain supremacy over Mecca, as they were jealous of its importance as the place of pilgrimage.^[16] Converts to Islam came from nearly all [Arab](#) tribes in Medina, such that by June of the subsequent year there were seventy-five Muslims coming to Mecca for pilgrimage and to meet Muhammad. Meeting him secretly by night, the group made what was known as the "[Second Pledge of al-'Aqaba](#)", or the "[Pledge of War](#)".^{[16][93]} Following the pledges at Aqabah, Muhammad encouraged his followers to [emigrate](#) to [Yathrib](#). As with the [migration to Abyssinia](#), the Quraysh attempted to stop the emigration. However, almost all Muslims managed to leave.^[94]

Hijra

The Hijra is the migration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. In September 622, warned of a plot to assassinate him, Muhammad secretly slipped out of Mecca, moving with his followers to Medina,^[16] 320 kilometres (200 mi) north of Mecca. The Hijra is celebrated annually on the first day of the Muslim year.

Migration to Medina

A delegation consisting of the representatives of the twelve important clans of Medina, invited Muhammad as a neutral outsider to Medina to serve as chief arbitrator for the entire community.^{[95][96]} There was fighting in Yathrib mainly involving its Arab and Jewish inhabitants for around a hundred years before 620.^[95] The recurring slaughters and disagreements over the resulting claims, especially after the [Battle of Bu'ath](#) in which all clans were involved, made it obvious to them that the tribal conceptions of blood-feud and [an eye for an eye](#) were no longer workable unless there was one man with authority to adjudicate in disputed cases.^[95] The delegation from Medina pledged themselves and their fellow-citizens to accept Muhammad into their community and physically protect him as one of themselves.^[13]

Muhammad instructed his followers to emigrate to Medina until virtually all his followers left Mecca. Being alarmed at the departure of Muslims, according to the tradition, the Meccans plotted to assassinate Muhammad. With the help of [Ali](#), Muhammad fooled the Meccans who were watching him, and secretly slipped away from the town with Abu Bakr.^{[16][97]} By 622, Muhammad emigrated to [Medina](#), a large agricultural [oasis](#). Those who migrated from Mecca along with Muhammad became known as [muhajirun](#) (emigrants).^[13]

Establishment of a new polity

Among the first things Muhammad did to settle down the longstanding grievances among the tribes of Medina was drafting a document known as the [Constitution of Medina](#), "establishing a kind of alliance or federation" among the eight Medinan tribes and Muslim emigrants from Mecca, which specified the rights and duties of all citizens and the relationship of the different communities in Medina (including that of the Muslim community to other communities, specifically the [Jews](#) and other "[Peoples of the Book](#)").^{[95][96]} The community defined in the Constitution of Medina, [Ummah](#), had a religious outlook but was also shaped by practical considerations and substantially preserved the legal forms of the old Arab tribes.^[13] It effectively established the first Islamic state.

Several ordinances were proclaimed to win over the numerous and wealthy Jewish population. But these were soon rescinded as the Jews insisted on preserving the entire Mosaic law, and did not recognize him as a prophet because he was not of the race of David.^[16]

The first group of pagan converts to Islam in Medina were the clans who had not produced great leaders for themselves but had suffered from warlike leaders from other clans. This was followed by the general acceptance of Islam by the pagan population of Medina, apart from some

exceptions. According to Ibn Ishaq, this was influenced by the conversion of [Sa'd ibn Mu'adh](#) (a prominent Medinan leader) to Islam.^[99] Those Medinans who converted to Islam and helped the Muslim emigrants find shelter became known as the [ansar](#) (supporters).^[13] Then Muhammad instituted [brotherhood between the emigrants and the supporters](#) and he chose [Ali](#) as his own brother.^[100]

Beginning of armed conflict

Following the emigration, the Meccans seized the properties of the Muslim emigrants in Mecca.^[101] Economically uprooted and with no available profession, the Muslim migrants turned to raiding Meccan caravans, initiating armed conflict with Mecca.^{[102][103][104]} Muhammad delivered [Quranic](#) verses permitting the Muslims to fight the Meccans (see sura [Al-Hajj](#), Quran [22:39–40](#)).^[105] These attacks allowed the migrants to acquire wealth, power and prestige while working towards their ultimate goal of conquering Mecca.^{[106][107]}

On 11 February 624 according to the traditional account, while praying in the [Masjid al-Qiblatain](#) in Medina, Muhammad received a revelation from God that he should be facing Mecca rather than Jerusalem during prayer. As he adjusted himself, so did his companions praying with him, beginning the tradition of facing Mecca during prayer.^[108] According to Watt, the change may have been less sudden and definite than the story suggests – the related Quranic verses ([2:136–2:147](#)) appear to have been revealed at different times – and correlates with changes in Muhammad's political support base, symbolizing his turning away from Jews and adopting a more Arabian outlook.^[108]

In March 624, Muhammad led some three hundred warriors in a raid on a Meccan merchant caravan. The Muslims set an ambush for them at Badr.^[109] Aware of the plan, the Meccan caravan eluded the Muslims.^[104] Meanwhile, a force from Mecca was sent to protect the caravan, continuing forward to confront the Muslims upon hearing that the caravan was safe. The Battle of Badr began in March 624.^[110] Though outnumbered more than three to one, the Muslims won the battle, killing at least forty-five Meccans with only fourteen Muslims dead. They also succeeded in killing many Meccan leaders, including [Abu Jahl](#).^[111] Seventy prisoners had been acquired, many of whom were soon ransomed in return for wealth or freed.^{[102][104][112][113]} Muhammad and his followers saw in the victory a confirmation of their faith^[13] as Muhammad ascribed the victory to the assistance of an invisible host of angels.^[114] The Quranic verses of this period, unlike the Meccan ones, dealt with practical problems of government and issues like the distribution of spoils.^{[115][116]}

The victory strengthened Muhammad's position in Medina and dispelled earlier doubts among his followers.^[117] As a result the opposition to him became less vocal. Pagans who had not yet converted were very bitter about the advance of Islam. Two pagans, [Asma bint Marwan](#) and [Abu 'Afak](#), had composed verses taunting and insulting the Muslims. They were killed by people belonging to their own or related clans, and no blood-feud followed.^[118]

Muhammad expelled from Medina the [Banu Qaynuqa](#), one of three main Jewish tribes.^[13] Although Muhammad wanted them executed, [Abd-Allah ibn Ubaib](#) chief of the [Khazraj](#) tribe did not agree and they were expelled to Syria but without their property.^[116] Following the Battle of

Badr, Muhammad also made mutual-aid alliances with a number of Bedouin tribes to protect his community from attacks from the northern part of [Hijaz](#).^[13]

.....

After signing the truce, Muhammad made an expedition against the Jewish oasis of [Khaybar](#),^[151] known as the [Battle of Khaybar](#). This was possibly due to it housing the Banu Nadir, who were inciting hostilities against Muhammad, or to regain some prestige to deflect from what appeared to some Muslims as the inconclusive result of the truce of Hudaibiyya.^{[122][153]} According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad also [sent letters](#) to many rulers of the world, asking them to convert to Islam (the exact date is given variously in the sources).^{[13][154][155][156]} Hence he sent messengers (with letters) to [Heraclius](#) of the [Byzantine Empire](#) (the eastern Roman Empire), [Khosrau](#) of [Persia](#), the chief of [Yemen](#) and to some others.^{[154][155][156]} In the years following the truce of Hudaibiyya, Muhammad sent his forces against the Arabs on [Transjordanian](#) Byzantine soil in the [Battle of Mu'tah](#), in which the Muslims were defeated.^{[156][157]}

Final years

Conquest of Mecca

The [truce of Hudaibiyyah](#) had been enforced for two years.^{[158][159]} The tribe of [Banu Khuza'a](#) had good relations with Muhammad, whereas their enemies, the [Banu Bakr](#), had an alliance with the Meccans.^{[158][159]} A clan of the Bakr made a night raid against the Khuza'a, killing a few of them.^{[158][159]} The Meccans helped the Banu Bakr with weapons and, according to some sources, a few Meccans also took part in the fighting.^{[156][158]} After this event, Muhammad sent a message to Mecca with three conditions, asking them to accept one of them. These were that either the Meccans paid [blood money](#) for those slain among the Khuza'ah tribe; or, that they should disavow themselves of the Banu Bakr; or, that they should declare the truce of Hudaibiyyah null.^[160]

The Meccans replied that they would accept only the last condition.^[160] However, soon they realized their mistake and sent [Abu Sufyan](#) to renew the Hudaibiyyah treaty, but now his request was declined by Muhammad.^[156]

Muhammad began to prepare for a campaign.^[161] In 630, Muhammad marched on Mecca with an enormous force, said to number more than ten thousand men. With minimal casualties, Muhammad took control of Mecca.^{[162][163]} He declared an amnesty for past offences, except for ten men and women who had mocked and ridiculed him in songs and verses. Some of these were later pardoned.^{[163][164]} Most Meccans converted to Islam and Muhammad subsequently had destroyed all the statues of Arabian gods in and around the Kaaba.^{[163][165][166]} According to reports collected by [Ibn Ishaq](#) and [al-Azraqi](#), Muhammad personally spared paintings or frescos of [Mary](#) and [Jesus](#), but other traditions suggest that all pictures were erased.^[167] The Quran discusses the conquest of Mecca.^{[78][168]}

Conquest of Arabia

Soon after the conquest of Mecca, Muhammad was alarmed by a military threat from the confederate tribes of Hawazin who were collecting an army twice the size of Muhammad's. The [Banu Hawazin](#) were old enemies of the Meccans. They were joined by the [Banu Thaqif](#) (inhabiting the city of Ta'if) who adopted an anti-Meccan policy due to the decline of the prestige of Meccans.^[169] Muhammad defeated the Hawazin and Thaqif tribes in the Battle of Hunayn.^{[13][170]}

In the same year, Muhammad made the expedition of Tabuk against northern Arabia because of their previous defeat at the [Battle of Mu'tah](#) as well as reports of the hostile attitude adopted against Muslims. With the greatest difficulty he collected thirty thousand men, half of whom, however, on the second day after their departure from Mecca, returned with [Abd-Allah ibn Ubayy](#), untroubled by the damning verses which Muhammad hurled at them.^[171] Although Muhammad did not make contact with hostile forces at Tabuk, he received the submission of some local chiefs of the region.^{[13][172]}

He also ordered the destruction of remaining pagan idols in Eastern Arabia. The last city to hold out against the Muslims in Eastern Arabia was [Taif](#). Muhammad refused to accept the surrender of the city until they agreed to convert to Islam and let his men destroy their statue of their goddess [Allat](#).^{[173][174][175]}

A year after the Battle of Tabuk, the Banu Thaqif sent emissaries to [Medina](#) to surrender to Muhammad and adopt Islam. Many bedouins submitted to Muhammad to be safe against his attacks and to benefit from the booties of the wars.^{[13][171]} However, the bedouins were alien to the system of Islam and wanted to maintain their independence, their established code of virtue and their ancestral traditions. Muhammad thus required of them a military and political agreement according to which they "acknowledge the suzerainty of Medina, to refrain from attack on the Muslims and their allies, and to pay the [Zakat](#), the Muslim religious levy."^{[171][176]}

Farewell pilgrimage

In 632, at the end of the tenth year after the migration to Medina, Muhammad carried through his first truly Islamic pilgrimage, thereby teaching his followers the rites of the annual Great Pilgrimage (Hajj).^[13] After completing the pilgrimage, Muhammad delivered a famous speech known as [The Farewell Sermon](#), at [Mount Arafat](#) east of Mecca. In this sermon, Muhammad advised his followers not to follow certain pre-Islamic customs. He declared that an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action.^[177] He abolished all old [blood feuds](#) and disputes based on the former [tribal](#) system and asked for all old pledges to be returned as implications of the creation of the new Islamic community. Commenting on the vulnerability of women in his society, Muhammad asked his male followers to "Be good to women; for they are powerless captives (*awan*) in your households. You took them in God's trust, and [legitimated your sexual relations](#) with the Word of God, so come to your senses people, and hear my words ..." He told them that they were entitled to discipline their wives but should do so with kindness. He addressed the issue of inheritance by forbidding false claims of paternity or of a client relationship to the deceased, and forbade his followers to leave their wealth to a testamentary heir. He also upheld the sacredness

of four lunar months in each year.^{[178][179][180]} According to [Sunni tafsir](#), the following Quranic verse was delivered during this event: “Today I have perfected your religion, and completed my favours for you and chosen Islam as a religion for you.”(Quran 5:3)^{[13][181]} According to [Shia tafsir](#), it refers to the appointment of [Ali ibn Abi Talib](#) at the [pond of Khumm](#) as [Muhammad's successor](#), this occurring a few days later when Muslims were returning from Mecca to Medina.^[182]

Aftermath

Muhammad united the [tribes of Arabia](#) into a single Arab Muslim religious polity in the last years of his life. With Muhammad's death, disagreement broke out over who would succeed him as leader of the Muslim community.^[21] [Umar ibn al-Khattab](#), a prominent companion of Muhammad, nominated [Abu Bakr](#), Muhammad's friend and collaborator. Others added their support and Abu Bakr was made the first [caliph](#).^[186] This choice was disputed by some of Muhammad's companions, who held that Ali ibn Abi Talib, his cousin and son-in-law, had been designated the successor by Muhammad at [Ghadir Khumm](#). Abu Bakr's immediate task was to make an expedition against the [Byzantine](#) (or [Eastern Roman Empire](#)) forces because of the previous defeat, although he first had to put down a rebellion by Arab tribes in an episode referred to by later Muslim historians as the [Ridda wars](#), or "Wars of Apostasy".^[198]

The pre-Islamic [Middle East](#) was dominated by the [Byzantine](#) and [Sassanian](#) empires. The [Roman-Persian Wars](#) between the two had devastated the region, making the empires unpopular amongst local tribes. Furthermore, in the lands that would be conquered by Muslims many Christians ([Nestorians](#), [Monophysites](#), [Jacobites](#) and [Copts](#)) were disaffected from the [Christian Orthodoxy](#) which deemed them heretics. Within only a decade, Muslims conquered [Mesopotamia](#) and [Persia](#), [Byzantine Syria](#) and [Byzantine Egypt](#).^[199] and established the [Rashidun empire](#).

Early reforms under Islam

According to [William Montgomery Watt](#), for Muhammad, religion was not a private and individual matter but rather “the total response of his personality to the total situation in which he found himself. He was responding [not only]... to the religious and intellectual aspects of the situation but also to the economic, social, and political pressures to which contemporary Mecca was subject.”^[200] [Bernard Lewis](#) says that there are two important political traditions in Islam – one that views Muhammad as a statesman in Medina, and another that views him as a rebel in Mecca. He sees Islam itself as a type of revolution that greatly changed the societies into which the new religion was brought.^[201]

Historians generally agree that Islamic social reforms in areas such as [social security](#), family structure, slavery and the rights of women and children improved on the [status quo](#) of Arab society.^{[201][202]} For example, according to Lewis, Islam "from the first denounced [aristocratic](#) privilege, rejected hierarchy, and adopted a formula of the career open to the talents".^[201] Muhammad's message transformed the society and [moral order](#) of life in the Arabian Peninsula through reorientation of society as regards to identity, [world view](#), and

the hierarchy of values.^[203] Economic reforms addressed the plight of the poor, which was becoming an issue in [pre-Islamic](#) Mecca.^[204] The Quran requires payment of an alms tax ([zakat](#)) for the benefit of the poor, and as Muhammad's position grew in power he demanded that those tribes who wanted to ally with him implement the zakat in particular.^{[205][206]}

Legacy

Muslim views

Following the attestation to the oneness of God, the belief in Muhammad's prophethood is the main aspect of the [Islamic faith](#). Every Muslim proclaims in the [Shahadah](#) that "I testify that there is none worthy of worship except God, and I testify that Muhammad is a Messenger of God". The Shahadah is the basic creed or tenet of [Islam](#). Ideally, it is the first words a newborn will hear, and children are taught as soon as they are able to understand it and it will be recited when they die. Muslims must repeat the shahadah in the call to prayer ([adhan](#)) and the [prayer](#) itself. Non-Muslims wishing to [convert to Islam](#) are required to recite the creed.^[235]

According to the [Quran](#), Muhammad is only the last of a series of [Prophets](#) sent by God for the benefit of mankind, and commands Muslims to make no distinction between them. [Quran 10:37](#) states that "...it (the Quran) is a confirmation of (revelations) that [went before it](#), and a fuller explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from [The Lord of the Worlds](#)". Similarly [Quran 46:12](#) states "...And before this was the book of Moses, as a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it)...", while [2:136](#) commands the believers of Islam to "Say: we believe in God and that which is revealed unto us, and that which was revealed unto [Abraham](#) and [Ishmael](#) and [Isaac](#) and [Jacob](#) and the tribes, and that which [Moses](#) and [Jesus](#) received, and which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered."

Historian Denis Gril believes that the Quran does not overtly describe Muhammad performing [miracles](#), and the supreme miracle of Muhammad is finally [identified with the Quran itself](#).^[236] However, Muslim tradition credits [Muhammad with several miracles or supernatural events](#).^[237] For example, many Muslim commentators and some Western scholars have interpreted the Surah [54:1–2](#) as referring to Muhammad [splitting the Moon](#) in view of the Quraysh when they began persecuting his followers.^{[236][238]}

The [Sunnah](#) represents the actions and sayings of Muhammad (preserved in reports known as [Hadith](#)), and covers a broad array of activities and beliefs ranging from religious rituals, personal hygiene, burial of the dead to the mystical questions involving the love between humans and God. The Sunnah is considered a model of emulation for pious Muslims and has to a great degree influenced the Muslim culture. The greeting that Muhammad taught Muslims to offer each other, "may peace be upon you" (Arabic: [as-salamu `alaykum](#)) is used by Muslims throughout the world. Many details of major Islamic rituals such as daily prayers, the fasting and the annual pilgrimage are only found in the Sunnah and not the Quran.^[239]

The Sunnah also played a major role in the development of the Islamic sciences. It contributed much to the development of Islamic law, particularly from the end of the first Islamic century.^[240] Muslim mystics, known as [sufis](#), who were seeking for the inner meaning of the Quran and the inner nature of Muhammad, viewed the prophet of Islam not only as a prophet but also as a perfect saint. Sufi orders trace their chain of spiritual descent back to Muhammad.^[241]

Other views

Non-Muslim views regarding Muhammad have ranged across a large spectrum of responses and beliefs, many of which have changed over time.^{[258][259]}

Non-Western views

[Mahatma Gandhi](#) stated:^[260]

I wanted to know the best of the life of one who holds today an undisputed sway over the hearts of millions of mankind.... I became more than ever convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle. When I closed the second volume (of the Prophet's biography), I was sorry there was not more for me to read of that great life.

European and Western views

See also: [Medieval Christian views on Muhammad](#)

According to [Hossein Nasr](#), earliest European literature often refers to Muhammad unfavorably. He has been maligned in various European sources for over a millennium.^[261] A few learned circles of [Middle Ages](#) Europe—primarily Latin-literate scholars—had access to fairly extensive biographical material about Muhammad. They interpreted that information through a Christian religious filter that viewed Muhammad as a charlatan driven by ambition and eagerness for power, and who seduced the Saracens into his submission under a religious guise.^[13] Popular European literature of the time portrayed Muhammad as though he were worshipped by Muslims in the manner of an idol or a heathen god.^[13] Some medieval Christians believed he died in 666, alluding to [the number of the beast](#), instead of his actual death date in 632;^[262] others changed his name from Muhammad to [Mahound](#), the "devil incarnate".^[263] [Bernard Lewis](#) writes "The development of the concept of Mahound started with considering Muhammad as a kind of demon or false god worshipped with [Apollyon](#) and [Termagant](#) in an unholy trinity."^[264] A later medieval work, *Livre dou Tresor* represents Muhammad as a former monk and cardinal.^[13] [Dante's Divine Comedy](#) (Canto [XXVIII](#)), puts Muhammad, together with Ali, in [Hell](#) "among the sowers of discord and the schismatics, being lacerated by devils again and again."^[13] [Cultural critic](#) and author [Edward Said](#) wrote in [Orientalism](#) regarding Dante's depiction of Muhammad:

Empirical data about the Orient...count for very little; ... What ... Dante tried to do in the [*Inferno*](#), is ... to characterize the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are ... only for Europe. Hence the vacillation between the familiar and the alien; Mohammed is always the imposter (familiar, because he pretends to be like the Jesus we know) and always the Oriental (alien, because although he is in some ways "like" Jesus, he is after all not like him).^[265]

After the [reformation](#), Muhammad was often portrayed as a cunning and ambitious imposter.^{[13][264]} [Guillaume Postel](#) was among the first to present a more positive view of Muhammad.^[13] Boulainvilliers described Muhammad as a gifted political leader and a just lawmaker.^[13] [Gottfried Leibniz](#) praised Muhammad because "he did not deviate from the natural religion".^[13] [Thomas Carlyle](#) in his book [*Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*](#) (1840) defines Muhammed as "A silent great soul, one of that who cannot but be earnest".^[266] [Edward Gibbon](#) in his book [*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*](#) observes that "the good sense of Mohammad despised the pomp of royalty." [Friedrich Martin von Bodenstedt](#) (1851) described Muhammad as "an ominous destroyer and a prophet of murder."^[13] Many of the later Western works, from the 18th century onward, distanced themselves from the polemical histories of earlier Christian authors. These more historically oriented treatments, which generally reject the prophethood of Muhammad, are coloured by the [Western philosophical](#) and theological framework of their authors. Many of these studies reflect much historical research, and most pay more attention to human, social, economic, and political factors than to religious, theological, and spiritual matters.^[24]

[Simon Ockley](#) wrote in his book [*The History of the Saracen Empires*](#) (1718);

The greatest success of Mohammad's life was effected by sheer moral force...It is not the propagation but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder, the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Mecca and Medina is preserved, after the revolutions of twelve centuries by the Indian, the African and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran. . . The Mahometans have uniformly withstood the temptation of reducing the object of their faith and devotion to a level with the senses and imagination of man. 'I believe in One God and Mahomet the Apostle of God' is the simple and invariable profession of Islam. The intellectual image of the Deity has never been degraded by any visible idol; the honours of the prophet have never transgressed the measure of human virtue, and his living precepts have restrained the gratitude of his disciples within the bounds of reason and religion.^[267]

According to [William Montgomery Watt](#) and Richard Bell, recent writers have generally dismissed the idea that Muhammad deliberately deceived his followers, arguing that Muhammad "was absolutely sincere and acted in complete good faith"^[272] and that Muhammad's readiness to endure hardship for his cause when there seemed to be no rational basis for hope shows his sincerity.^[273] Watt says that sincerity does not directly imply correctness: In contemporary terms, Muhammad might have mistaken his own subconscious for divine revelation.^[274] Watt and [Bernard Lewis](#) argue that viewing Muhammad as a self-seeking imposter makes it impossible to understand the development of Islam.^{[275][276]} [Alford T. Welch](#) holds that Muhammad was able to be so influential and successful because of his firm belief in his vocation.^[13] [Michael H. Hart](#) in his first book [*The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*](#) (1978), a ranking of

the 100 people who most influenced [human history](#),^[277] chose Muhammad as the first person on his list,^[278] attributing this to the fact that Muhammad was "supremely successful" in both the religious and secular realms. He also credits the authorship of the [Quran](#) to Muhammad, making his role in the development of Islam an unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.

Other religious traditions

- [Bahá'ís](#) venerate Muhammad as one of a number of prophets or "[Manifestations of God](#)", but consider his teachings to have been superseded by those of [Bahá'u'lláh](#), the founder of the Bahai faith.^[279]
- Muhammad is regarded as one of the [Saints of Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica](#).
- [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints](#) neither regards Muhammad as a prophet nor accepts the Quran as a book of scripture. However, it does respect Muhammad as one who taught moral truths which can enlighten nations and bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.^[280]

Maimonides

[Maimonides](#) referred to Muhammad as a [false prophet](#) and an insane man. In his [Epistle to Yemen](#) he wrote "After [Jesus] arose the Madman who emulated his precursor [Jesus], since he paved the way for him. But he added the further objective of procuring rule and submission [*talb al-mulk*; pursuit of sovereignty] and he invented what is well known [Islam]."^[1]

In his authoritative work of law the [Mishneh Torah](#) (Hilkhot Melakhim 11:10–12), Maimonides indicated that nevertheless Muhammad was part of God's plan of preparing the world for the coming of the [Jewish Messiah](#): "All those words of Jesus of Nazareth and of this Ishmaelite [i.e., Muhammad] who arose after him are only to make straight the path for the messianic king and to prepare the whole world to serve the Lord together. As it is said: 'For then I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech so that all of them shall call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord' (Zephaniah 3:9)."^[2]

Natan'el al-Fayyumi

[Nethanel ibn al-Fayyumi](#), a prominent 12th-century [Yemenite](#) rabbi and theologian, and the founder of so-called [Jewish Ismailism](#), wrote in his philosophical treatise *Bustan al-Uqul* ("Garden of Wisdom") that God sends prophets to establish religions for other nations, which do not have to conform to the precepts of the Jewish Torah. Nethanel explicitly considered Muhammad a true prophet, who was sent from Heaven with a particular message that applies to the Arabs, but not to the Jews.^{[3][4]} However, Al-Fayyumi's explicit acceptance of Muhammad's prophecy may be unique and was virtually unknown until recent times beyond his native [Yemen](#).^[5]

Fabrications and obscure references

One Yemenite Jewish document, found in the [Cairo Genizah](#), suggests that many Jews had not only accepted Muhammad as a prophet, but even desecrated the [Sabbath](#) in order to join Muhammad in his struggle against the infidels; However, this document, called *Dhimmat an-nabi Muhammad* (Muhammad's Writ of Protection), was apparently fabricated by Yemenite Jews for the purpose of self-defence.^[6]

An obscure [Kabbalistic apocalyptic](#) tract called *Secrets (Nistarot) of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yohai* implies that Muhammad, who is alluded to in the tract as "a prophet sent to [Ishmael](#)", plays a positive role in the messianic process.^[7]

A number of stories from the Islamic tradition about Muhammad entered mainstream Jewish thought incidentally, due to the great cultural convergence in Islamic Spain of the 9th-12th centuries, known as the [Golden Age of Spanish Jewry](#). For example, Rabbi [Jacob Joseph of Polonne](#), one of the early [Hasidic](#) mystics, wrote that one pious man (*hasid*) taught that the internal struggle against the evil inclination is greater than external battle, quoting [Bahya ibn Paquda's](#) popular treatise [Chovot HaLevavot](#). In the [Judeo-Arabic](#) original version of that book, Bahya Ibn Paquda refers to both external and internal battle as [jihad](#) and the "pious man" about whom the story is originally told is Muhammad, though the author does not mention his source by name.^[8]

From Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

Influence of Arabic and Islamic Philosophy on Judaic Thought

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The influence of Arabic and Islamic philosophy on Judaic thought has never been studied as a whole: as a matter of fact, in recent times it has not yet been the object of a comprehensive and detailed analysis, apart from that made in a general article (Zonta 1997a). That article concentrated on some particular subjects of this influence, i.e. on the quotations, translations and interpretations of the texts written by some Arabo-Islamic philosophers (the Brethren of Purity, Avicenna, and Averroes), but did not include other authors, as al-Kindi, al-Ghazali or Ibn Bajja, nor some minor figures which left some traces in Medieval Jewish philosophy. Of course, the question of the general influence of Arabo-Islamic philosophers on a prominent author as Maimonides has been examined in specific articles (see in particular Pessin 2007); however, this has not happened in the case of other Jewish authors, although a number of more or less explicit or implicit references to Medieval Arabic and Islamic philosophy have been found by modern scholars in many Jewish authors, active in the period 900–1500: among the most well-known of them, are Jacob al-Qirqisani, Isaac Israeli, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Bahya Ibn Paquda, Abraham bar Hiyya, Joseph Ibn Zaddik, Moses Ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, Abraham Ibn Daud, Moses Maimonides, Samuel Ibn Tibbon, Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera, Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides), Moses Narboni, and Hasdai Crescas. Usually, the discovery of these references has not driven modern scholars to arrive at even tentative conclusions about the real extent of this influence and the ways of its spreading among Jewish authors, apart from some particular cases – for example, that of Arabic sources of 14th-century Jewish logic in Provence (see Zonta 1997b).

Islam and Judiasm Influences Contrasts and Parallels

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1. Israelite-Jewish Relations with the Arabs

From the earliest times, Israelite relations with the Arabs have been extensive but mainly limited to commerce and not generally acrimonious. Typical is the first recorded interaction when Ishmaelites traders purchased Joseph from his brothers (Gen. 37:25-28). These Ishmaelites were playing an unwitting part in God's grand design to send the Israelites to Egypt. Of course, from their point of view they were just making a quick buck slave trading.

Nehemiah, the 5th century BCE rebuilders of Jerusalem was opposed by Geshem the Arab^{i[1]} who probably controlled the southern Negev. By the fourth century BCE, the [Nabatean](#) Arabs had established a strong state south and east of Judea in former Edomite territory.

Most of the boundaries of the Maccabean state were with the [Iturean](#) and Nabatean Arab kingdoms. Points of Physical contiguity:

- a) The Nabatean Arab kingdom formed the southern and eastern borders of Perea (i.e. Jewish areas east of the Jordan formerly called Gilead)^{ii[2]}. After the Judean conquest and conversion of Idumea the Nabatean kingdom also formed the southern boundary of Judea. Both wars, and peaceful contact, between the Maccabees, and their successors, were frequent; and,
- b) The Iturean Arab kingdom, based on the Beqa' Valley (south-east Lebanon) and Mt. Hermon, had taken over Upper Galilee. Aristobulus conquered Upper Galilee (104-103 BCE)^{iii[3]} and force converted the Itureans there.

It is possible that Jewish trading colonies existed in Sheba (Yemen) and the Hejaz (western Saudi Arabia) as early as the time of king Solomon. In the period before Muhammad a famous Jewish king ruled in Yemen before being conquered by the Christians.

2. Judaism and Islam – Influences and parallels

In the Hejaz, Muhammad's homeland, there were Jewish tribes with which he was intimately involved as he was, to a lesser extent, with Christian Arabs. Muhammad learned much from the Jews and using Judaism as a base, developed his new faith Islam. There was no Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible at the time, but Arabian Jews were deeply immersed in the mainstream of the Jewish midrashic tradition. Thus, in the Koran, many of the stories of the Hebrew Bible are retold in the form known from midrashim which diverges widely from the simple meaning of the biblical text (see [Geiger](#)). Many Jewish teachings, sayings, normative and ethical precepts are also found in the sacred oral tradition of Islam.

As Islam developed it became, by far, the major religion closest to Judaism^{iv[5]}. The most obvious common feature is the statement of the absolute unity of God which Muslims repeat five times each day, and Jews at least twice. Judaism and Islam are unique in having systems of religious law based on oral tradition which can over-ride the written laws and which does not distinguish between holy and secular spheres. In each, similar logical systems are used for deriving religious law^{v[6]}, and in both cases a similar responsa literature developed in Iraq during the same period. Both Judaism and Islam consider the study the study of religious law to be a form of worship and an end in itself, and both picture God as studying in heaven. **According to the Encyclopedia Judaica**

The fundamental similarity of Judaism and Islam, both based on religious laws in principles, methods, and legislation, caused parallel developments in later centuries.

Probably the only major Islamic belief that Judaism would find unpalatable would be the recognition of Muhammad as the last and greatest of the prophets.

Jews Under Islam
The Theological Dimension

“If we compare the Muslim attitude to Jews and treatment of Jews in medieval times with the position of Jews among their Christian neighbors in medieval Europe, we see some striking contrasts. Even the hostilities of the two majority communities differ considerably. In Islamic society hostility to the Jew is non-theological. It is not related to any specific Islamic doctrine, nor to any specific circumstance in Islamic sacred history. For Muslims, it is not part of the birth pangs of their religion, as it is for Christians. It is rather the usual attitude of the dominant to the subordinate, of the majority to the minority, without that additional theological and therefore psychological dimension that gives Christian anti-Semitism its unique and special character.”

[Lewis 1984](#)

Jewish influence on Islam in its formative period was great. It is of interest to note that there are cases of Jewish ideas or practices entering Islam, being changed and then returned to Judaism. Thus the Talmudic idea of *kavannah* (praying or doing a ritual act with conscious intent) entered Islam which invented ritual *kavannah* formulations and these in turn, in Hebrew garb, were reintroduced into Judaism by Jewish mystics^{vi[17]}.

When the Arabs conquered the Middle East, they found a Christian higher culture which was a lineal continuation of Ancient Greek civilization ([For background see](#)). In it, Greek science, mathematics, medicine and other knowledge had been preserved. Christian theology was built on the writings of the Jewish the philosopher [Philo](#), and later the pagan Plotinus. Thus the Christian church had harmonized Greek philosophy with monotheism. The Arabs took over this Greek-Christian culture and developed many of its branches to a higher level of perfection. What developed was an Arab-Muslim culture which, however, could be and was shared by both Christians and Jews who wrote, and thought, not only in Arabic, but within the conceptual framework of the Arab-Muslim culture. This led to a massive influence of Arab-Muslim culture on the Jewish culture of the Middle Ages. Some examples:

a. [Philosophy](#)

- ❖ **Mainstream Jewish philosophy developed as a subdivision of Islamic philosophy^{vii[18]}**. This is true whether one is talking of Saadia Gaon, who was influenced by the Muslim-Kalam theological school or of the Jewish Neoplatonists or Aristotelians that followed him.
- ❖ **Greek philosophy, science, medicine and mathematics was absorbed by Jewish thinkers in the Arab world via Arabic translations^{viii[19]} and, to some extent, via Arab Muslim commentators^{ix[20]}**. In science and philosophy, Jewish scholars absorbed the data and, more importantly, method, world view and pre-suppositions of the Greek masters. Also absorbed were more dubious works e.g. Hermetica, astrology.
- ❖ **“In their philosophy of nature... Hellenistic and medieval Jewish thinkers... for the most part... adopted the view that the universe is governed by immutable laws.... However, the philosophical view of nature posed problems for the traditional Jewish (and Muslim and Christian) view** as expressed in the Bible and Talmud. For traditional Judaism the universe did not run according to set immutable laws. Rather God directly regulated the workings of the universe that he had created, insuring that events would lead to the specific goal He had in mind. The medieval Jewish philosopher, unable to give up this view of nature completely, sought in his philosophies of nature to reconcile the biblical and Talmudic concepts of creation and miracles with the theories of secular philosophy.”^{x[21]}
- ❖ Of special note are:
 - **Moses Maimonides** was a follower of Greek-Islamic Aristotelianism and a practitioner of Greek-Islamic medicine. *Mishneh Torah* was the main conduit for entry of Greek science and philosophy into rabbinic legal tradition^{xii[22]}. [Goitein](#) said that the *Guide of the Perplexed* is a great monument of Jewish-Arab symbiosis, not merely because it was written in Arabic by an original Jewish thinker and was studied by Arabs, but because it developed and conveyed to large sections of the Jewish intellectual elite ideas which had so long occupied the Arab mind;
 - **Neo-Platonism^{xiii[23]} fusing with older Jewish Mystic tradition to form Kabbalah^{xiii[24]}**
 - **Bahya ibn Paquda’s Neo-Platonic and Islamic Sufi influenced *Hovot ha-Levavot*** (Duties of the Heart) was the founding work of Jewish ethical or pietistic literature^{xiv[25]} and has strongly influenced subsequent works and the lives of pietistic groups such as the Musar Movement. *Hovot ha-Levavot* is clearly in the Sufi (Islamic mystical) tradition and, in fact, is very similar to Christian and Muslim books of the same school.^{xv[26]}
 - Judah Halevi’s Neo-Platonic influenced Kuzari and Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed* have an ongoing influence on traditional Jews.

b. Secular Poetry

Muslims consider the Koran to be the perfect divine book and the Arabic of the Koran to be the ideal language. Thus, when Muslim poets in Spain started writing secular poetry,

they wrote it in the archaic Arabic of the Koran. Jewish poets started medieval secular Hebrew poetry arose in Spain as a result of the stimulus provided by secular Arabic poetry ([see Pagis](#)). Imitating the Arabs, the poets revived [Biblical Hebrew](#) for their poetry. The outstanding Arabic-speaking masters of Hebrew poetry were Solomon ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra and Yehudah Halevi.

c. Grammar Linguistic Tradition and Lexicography

The Arabs developed vowel pointing to ensure that preservation of the ancient reading tradition of the Koran was perpetuated. Also in support of maintaining and increasing the understanding of the Koran they developed the sciences of Arabic and lexicography. The Masorites developed the [system of vowels used in Hebrew](#) during the period of the Arabic Caliphate probably stimulated by concurrent developments for Arabic and Syriac. Medieval Hebrew study of grammar and lexicography were inspired and informed by the development of those branches of knowledge for Arabic.

3. Theological Idiom – Toward the Future

Judaism and Islam being very similar religious systems (see [Goitein](#)), face very similar intellectual and practical problems in confronting western culture. Many of these problems are quite different from those faced by Christianity. There may be much to gain by opening a dialogue between Jewish and Muslim religious thinkers. Of course, any such dialogue requires that each group study the other's religion and literature, as they did at the height of the Arab-Jewish symbiosis.

I'd like to end with a hope for the future –

“Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!”

Psalm 133:1

From sacred-texts.com

CHAPTER VIII.

ISLAM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE TALMUD.

In 622, the Hebrew religion gave birth to a second daughter, Mohammedanism--founded by Mahomet of Mecca among the tribes of Arabia, who had lived unprogressive for ages in the large peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, keeping by the usages received from their ancestors traditionally. Hundreds of years had passed without making any impression on the development of this people, until Mahommed arose, and in the space of twenty years subdued with the

sword and by the tongue the whole great land of Arabia. And like a stream of mighty waters the Arabs burst from their bonds, animated by a spirit of war, and fired by religious zeal, tore away from the Byzantine empire the whole of Syria and Egypt, and conquered also Persia, extended their empire to India and Caucasus, on the one band, and to Western Africa, on the other, spreading, at last, over Spain and Southern Italy to the heart of Christendom, preaching Islam, and bearing the banner of their prophet wherever they stepped.

For the second time, after an interval of six hundred years, Judaism witnessed a new faith born, all whose choice portions, all whose good and beauty, were taken from the storehouse of the Talmudic Hagada. When Mahomet arose to say that through Gabriel, the angel, the Lord had destined him to confirm the truth of the Divine revelation previously to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and the rest of the saints who had been on earth, he borrowed only the foundation of his idea from the Hagada of the Talmud. Likewise he borrowed many sayings, traditions, and historic legends from the same source, and these materials served him as the foundation of the principles he prescribed for the guidance of his people. All the Hebrew plants succeeded speedily on the Arabian soil, as if they had been native.

Islam grew in power and soon made progress, political and ecclesiastical, for new forces joined it. It reared a new civilization on the ruins of the heathen culture of Syria. During the first century of its existence it likewise exercised an influence on the scholars of the Talmud. As the Greek spirit had formerly been wedded to the Jewish spirit, so now the Arabian was wedded to it. It might have supplanted Jewish thought altogether had not the many sages, adherents of the Talmud, written excellent books in Arabic, extolling the Talmud, its system and its spirit.

When the Jewish tribes of Arabia, some of these powerful and independent, had refused to believe in the inspiration of the new prophet, Islam arose on its parent Judaism, as Christianity had done before; persecutions, massacres, blood and fire and exile were visited on the adherents of the Talmud. As long as Mahomet had entertained the hope of gaining Jews for converts, his treatment of them was favorable and he enjoined in the Koran not to be inimical to adorers of one God. He even wanted to make the date of the fast of Rhamadan on the tenth of Tishri (the Day of Atonement), as well as to make Jerusalem the centre of the pilgrims instead of Mecca. Perceiving, however, that notwithstanding all this, Islam gained few Jewish converts, he turned the enemy of the Jews and became wroth against them ("The Vision of the Cow"; a chapter in the Koran) and persecuted them with fury and bloodthirstiness as infidels. But at his death his hatred and intolerance died with him, the Jews found peace and protection under the Caliphs, and the Gaonim could establish their colleges. When Spain was added in 711 by the General Torick Aben Zara, bright days ensued for the Jews; they were able to devote themselves to spiritual activity undisturbed, also to take a large part in the culture of science which flourished in Spain. Great offices and high posts were given to Talmudic Jews; councillors, authors of law articles, court physicians and ministers were taken from among them. Together with their civic prosperity their spiritual activity made progress, and they made great contributions to Judaism, and benefited their co-religionists. Rarely were they visited by storms, as in Granada, in 1603, and at Cordova, in 1157, and then they suffered only as citizens.

In Egypt, Syria, Fez and Morocco, wherever Islam dominated, Jewish communities flourished. In contrast to this, the study of the Torah decayed in the East, and from Babylonia it changed its place to Spain.

The prosperity and the power of the Jews called forth envy and opposition, resulting in the desertion of some Jews to Islam; and this spirit of opposition was kindled yet more by false Messiahs arising frequently, as Shiraini in 720 and Abu Eiei in 1464, in the reign of the Caliph Merian, who opposed themselves to the Talmud with all their might (the last abolished also divorce). In spite of all that, the Talmud was honored as before. For the Gaonim and the two colleges at Sura and Pumbeditha were as beacons to all the exiled Jews till the second half of the tenth century. Only a singular accident, which happened about 960, put an end to this unlimited and undivided dominion of Babylonia over the Jewish minds. Four scholars had left Sura with the purpose of collecting money

among their European brethren, for the benefit of encouraging a more assiduous study of the Talmud at the college of Sura; the vessel being captured by an Arab pirate, the four sages were sold as slaves. One, R. Shemariah b. El'hanan was then brought to Alexandria; there the Jewish community ransomed him, and appointed him as supervisor of religion and teacher of the Talmud in Cairo. The second, R. Hushiel, was sold into slavery at the African coast, and brought to Kairuban. The third, R. Moses b. Enoch was ransomed from his owners after many hardships, at Cordova, where the community chose him as Rabbi. The name of the fourth has not transpired. It is possible that he reached France. The four men, not having attained their object of collecting money for Sura, and its college having been closed seven hundred years after its foundation, brought to an end the spiritual dominion of Babylonia over the Jewish mind and scattered the seeds of Talmudic study throughout all lands.

The college of Pumbeditha, though it continued to exist for some period after that of Sura, spreading the light of the Torah among all the exiled, sank from its preëminent rank, gradually, till its existence came to an end (about 1040). With it was extinguished the light of the Gaonim. From that time the centre of religious activity for the Jews was in Europe. The Talmud had its home in Spain, whence it spread to other countries, as will be seen in the coming chapters.

Eat and Educate – formerly Lunch and Learn

2011-2012

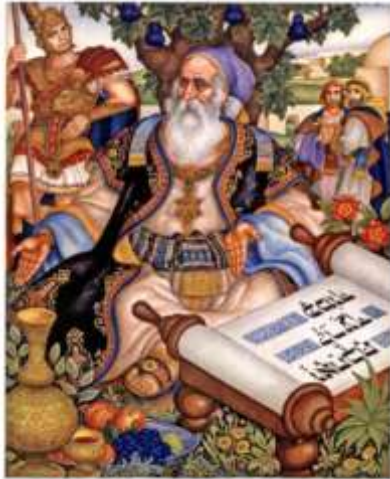
Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Hillel the Elder



How did Hillel change Judaism?

At what point did Hillel recognize his calling?

Why do we remember Hillel and not other sages?

Hillel (ללֵה) (born [Babylon](#) traditionally c.110 BCE, died 10 CE^[1] in [Jerusalem](#)) was a famous [Jewish](#) religious leader, one of the most important figures in [Jewish history](#). He is associated with the development of the [Mishnah](#) and the [Talmud](#). Renowned within Judaism as a sage and scholar, he was the founder of the [House of Hillel](#) school for [Tannaïm](#) (Sages of the *Mishnah*) and the founder of a dynasty of Sages who stood at the head of the Jews living in the [land of Israel](#) until roughly the fifth century of the [Christian Era](#).

He is popularly known as the author of two sayings: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am for myself, what am I?" And "If not now, when?"^[2] and the expression of the [ethic of reciprocity](#), or "Golden Rule": "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole [Torah](#); the rest is the explanation; go and learn."^[3]

"As Hillel the Elder had stated, whosoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whosoever that saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world." ^[4]
'Olam' can alternatively be translated 'infinity' or 'world'. ^[5]

Hillel lived in [Jerusalem](#) during the time of [King Herod](#) and the [Roman Emperor Augustus](#). In the [Midrash](#) compilation *Sifre* (Deut. 357), the periods of Hillel's life are made parallel to those in the life of [Moses](#). Both lived 120 years (Deut. 34:7), and at the age of forty Hillel went to the [Land of Israel](#); forty years he spent in study; and the last third of his life he was the spiritual head of the [Jewish people](#). A biographical sketch can be constructed; that Hillel went to [Jerusalem](#) in the prime of his life and attained a great age. His activity of forty years likely covered the period of 30 BCE to 10 CE.

Life

Hillel was born in [Babylon](#) and, according to the Iggeret of Rav [Sherira Gaon](#) (a comprehensive history of the composition of the [Talmud](#) from the 10th century CE), Hillel descended from the [Tribe of Benjamin](#) on his father's side, and from the family of [David](#) on his mother's side. Nothing definite, however, is known concerning his origin, nor is he anywhere called by his father's name, which may have been Gamliel. ^[citation needed]

When [Josephus](#) ("Vita," § 38) speaks of Hillel's great-grandson, *Rabban* [Shimon ben Gamliel I](#), as belonging to a very celebrated family (γένους σφόδρα λαμπροῦ), he probably refers to the glory the family owed to the activity of Hillel and *Rabban* [Gamliel Hazaken](#). Only Hillel's brother Shebna is mentioned; he was a merchant, whereas Hillel devoted himself to studying the [Torah](#) whilst also working as a woodcutter (Hertz 1936).

His position

According to the [Mishnah](#) Hillel went to Jerusalem with the intention of studying Biblical exposition and tradition at the age of 40 in 70 BCE. The difficulties Hillel had to overcome to gain admittance to the school of [Sh'maya](#) and [Abtalion](#), and the hardships he suffered while pursuing his aim, are told in a touching passage (Talmud, tractate Yoma 35b), the ultimate purpose of which is to show that poverty cannot be considered as an obstacle to the study of [Torah](#). Some time later, Hillel succeeded in settling a question concerning the sacrificial ritual in a manner that showed his superiority over the *Benei Betheira* (literally, sons of *Betheira*), who were at that time the heads of the [Sanhedrin](#). On that occasion, it is narrated, they voluntarily resigned their position as [Nasi](#) (President) in favor of Hillel. After the resignation of the *Benei Betheira*, Hillel was recognized as the highest authority among the [Pharisees](#) (predecessors to [Rabbinic Judaism](#)). Hillel was the head of the great school, at first associated with Menachem, a scholar mentioned in no other connection, afterward with [Shammai](#), Hillel's peer in the teaching of [Jewish Law](#).

Whatever Hillel's position, his authority was sufficient to introduce those decrees handed down in his name. The most famous of his enactments was the [Pruzbul](#), (προσβολή), an institution that, in spite of the law concerning cancellation of debts in the Sabbatical year (Deut. xv) ensured the repayment of loans. The motive for this institution was the "[repair of the world](#)", i.e., of the

social order, because this legal innovation protected both the creditor against the loss of his property, and the needy against being refused the loan of money for fear of loss. A likewise tendency is found in another of Hillel's institutions, having reference to the sale of houses. These two are the only institutions handed down in Hillel's name, although the words that introduce the *pruzbul* show that there were others. Hillel's judicial activity may be inferred from the decision by which he confirmed the legitimacy of some Alexandrians whose origin was disputed, by interpreting the marriage document ([ketubah](#)) of their mother in her favor (Tosef., Ket. iv 9; B. M. 104a). Of other official acts no mention is found in the sources.

Hillel and Shammai

In the memory of posterity Hillel lived, on the one hand, as the scholar who made the whole contents of the traditional law his own (Soferim xvi. 9), who, in opposition to his [Judaean](#) colleague, [Shammai](#), generally advocated milder interpretations of [Halakha](#) (Jewish law and tradition) and whose disciples stood in like opposition to Shammai's disciples. It was in this time that the rabbinical tradition was recorded, with Hillel as its 'founder'. Modern-day Rabbinic tradition descends from the law that Hillel recorded.

He was known as the saint and the sage who in his private life and in his dealings with people practised the high virtues of morality and resignation, just as he taught them in his maxims with unexcelled brevity and earnestness. The traditions concerning Hillel's life harmonize completely with the sayings handed down in his name, and bear in themselves the proof of their genuineness. The [Babylonian Talmud](#) is richer in traditions concerning Hillel than the [Jerusalem Talmud](#) because the Babylonians were especially careful to preserve the recollection of their great countryman, and in the Babylonian schools of the third century was proudly quoted the saying of the Judean sage [Simeon ben Lakish](#), in which he placed the activity of Hillel on a level with that of [Ezra](#), who also went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Golden Rule

The saying of Hillel that introduces the collection of his maxims in the Mishnaic treatise [Pirkei Avoth](#) mentions [Aaron HaKohen](#) (the [high priest](#)) as the great model to be imitated in his love of peace, in his love of man, and in his leading mankind to a knowledge of the Law (Pirkei Avoth 1:12). In mentioning these characteristics, which the Haggadah attributes to Moses' brother, Hillel stated his own prominent virtues. He considered "love of man" the kernel of Jewish teaching.

The comparative response to the challenge of a Gentile who asked that the Torah be explained to him while he stood on one foot, illustrates the character differences between Shammai and Hillel. Shammai dismissed the man. Hillel chided the man for his behavior, but in a constructive way: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn" (Shab. 31a). Hillel recognized brotherly love as the fundamental principle of Jewish moral law. (Lev. xix. 18).

From the doctrine of man's likeness to God, Hillel deduced man's duty to care for his own body. According to Midrash Leviticus rabbah he said "As in a theater and circus the statues of the king

must be kept clean by him to whom they have been entrusted, so the bathing of the body is a duty of man, who was created in the image of the almighty King of the world." In this work, Hillel calls his soul a guest upon earth, toward which he must fulfill the duties of charity.

In Avot, Hillel stated "If I am not for myself, who will be? And when I am for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" The third part contains the admonition to postpone no duty, the same admonition he gave with reference to study (Avot 2:4): "Say not, 'When I have free time I shall study'; for you may perhaps never have any free time."

The precept that one should not separate oneself from the community, Hillel paraphrases, with reference to Eccl. iii. 4, in the following saying (Tosef., Ber. ii.): "Appear neither naked nor clothed, neither sitting nor standing, neither laughing nor weeping." Man should not appear different from others in his outward deportment; he should always regard himself as a part of the whole, thereby showing that love of man Hillel taught. The feeling of love for one's neighbor shows itself also in his exhortation (Avot ii. 4).

Hillel's awareness of his own insufficiency is expressed in the following maxim: "Don't trust yourself until the day you die." How far his love of man went may be seen from an example that shows that benevolence must be given with regard to the needs of the poor. Thus, Hillel provided to a man of good family who became poor, a riding horse, in order that he not be deprived of his customary physical exercise, and a slave, that he might be served (Tosef., Peah, iv. 10; Ket. 67b).

Love of peace

The exhortation to love peace emanated from Hillel's most characteristic traits—from that proverbial meekness and mildness—as in the saying: "Let a man be always humble and patient like Hillel, and not passionate like Shammai" (Shab. 30b; Ab. R. N. xv.). Hillel's gentleness and patience are illustrated in an anecdote that describes how two men made a wager on the question of whether Hillel could be made angry. Though they questioned him and made insulting allusions to his Babylonian origin, they were unsuccessful (ib.).

The study of Torah

The many anecdotes according to which Hillel made proselytes, correspond to the third part of his maxim: "Bring men to the Law." A later source (Ab. R. N.) gives the following explanation of the sentence: Hillel stood in the gate of Jerusalem one day and saw the people on their way to work. "How much," he asked, "will you earn to-day?" One said: "A [denarius](#)"; the second: "Two denarii." "What will you do with the money?" he inquired. "We will provide for the necessities of life." Then said he to them: "Would you not rather come and make the [Torah](#) your possession, that you may possess both this and the future world?"

This narrative has the same points as the epigrammatic group of Hillel's sayings (Avot. 2:7) commencing: "The more flesh, the more worms," and closing with the words: "Whoever has acquired the words of the Law has acquired the life of the world to come." In an [Aramaic](#) saying Hillel sounds a warning against neglect of study or its abuse for selfish purposes: "Whoever would make a name (i.e. glory) loses the name; he who increases not [his knowledge] decreases;

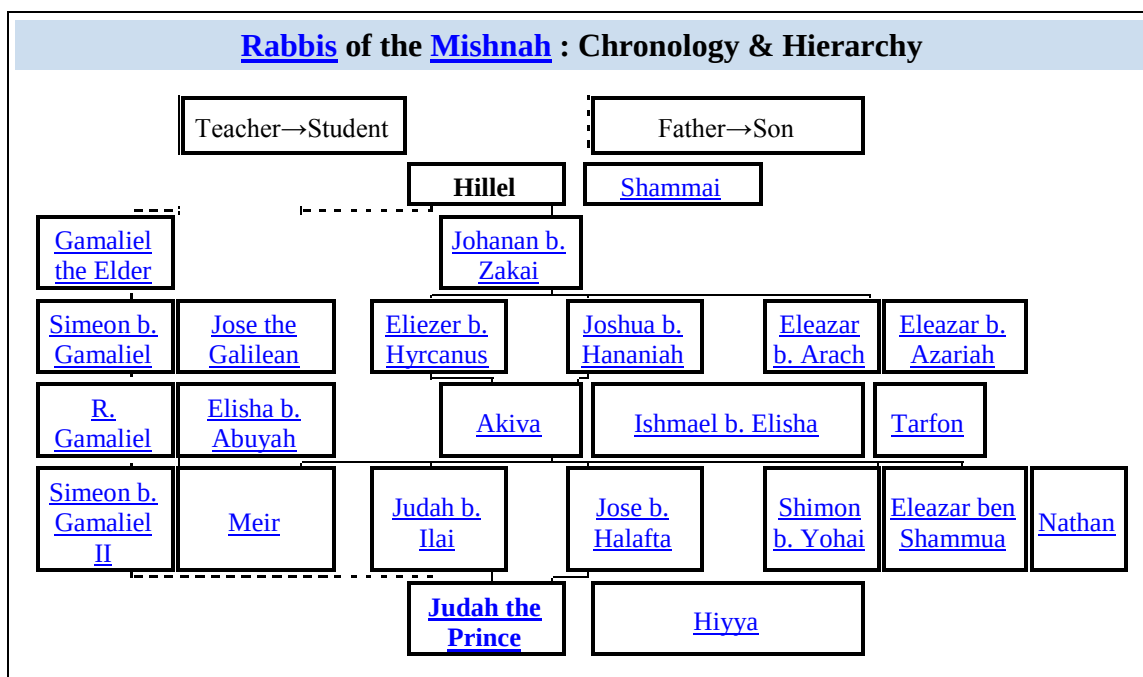
whoever learns not [in Ab. R. N. xii.: "who does not serve the wise and learn"] is worthy of death; whoever makes use of the crown perishes" (Avot. 1:13).

Hillel's influence: "House of Hillel" vs. "House of Shammai"

Hillel's disciples are generally called the "[House of Hillel](#)", in contrast to [Shammai](#)'s disciples, the "[House of Shammai](#)". Their controversies concern all branches of the Jewish law. Only a few decisions have been handed down under Hillel's name; but there can be no doubt that much of the oldest anonymous traditional literature was due directly to him or to the teachings of his masters. The fixation of the norms of the Midrash and of halakhic Scripture exposition was first made by Hillel, in the "seven rules of Hillel," which, as is told in one source, he applied on the day on which he overcame the Benei Betheira (Tosef., Sanh. vii., toward the end; Sifra, Introduction, end; Ab. R. N. xxxvii.). On these seven rules rest [the thirteen of R. Ishmael](#); they were epoch-making for the systematic development of the ancient Scripture exposition.

Hillel Sandwich

During the [Passover Seder](#) (the annual commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt), one re-enacts ancient customs in the [Haggadah](#). In the section of *Korech*, or 'sandwich', participants are instructed to place bitter herbs between two pieces of [matzo](#) and eat them after saying in Hebrew: *This is a remembrance of Hillel in Temple times — This is what Hillel did when the Temple existed: He enwrapped the Paschal lamb, the matzo and the bitter herbs to eat them as one, in fulfillment of the verse, "with matzot and [maror](#) they shall eat it."*(Numbers 9:11)^[7] In modern times, when there is no [paschal lamb](#), [Ashkenazi](#) practice is to emulate this by making a matzo, maror, (horseradish or lettuce) sandwich. Philo has called this sandwich a "moral migration from wickedness to virtue. Repentant sinners at first brood bitterly ([maror](#)) over their past misdeeds. Then [matzah](#), the healing food, brings them to humility and contentment."^[8]



HILLEL:

Doctor of the Law at Jerusalem in the time of King Herod; founder of the school called after him, and ancestor of the patriarchs who stood at the head of Palestinian Judaism till about the fifth century of the common era. Hillel was a Babylonian by birth and, according to a later tradition, belonged to the family of David (Lévi, in "R. E. J." xxxi. 202-211, xxxiii. 143). Nothing definite, however, is known concerning his origin, nor is he anywhere called by his father's name, which may perhaps have been Gamaliel. When Josephus ("Vita," § 38) speaks of Hillel's great-grandson, Simeon ben Gamaliel I., as belonging to a very celebrated family (γένους δφόδρα λαμποῦ), he probably refers to the glory which the family owed to the activity of Hillel and Gamaliel I. Only Hillel's brother Shebna (Soṭah 21a) is mentioned; he was a merchant, whereas Hillel devoted himself to study. In Sifre, Deut. 357 the periods of Hillel's life are made parallel to those in the life of Moses. Both were 120 years old; at the age of forty Hillel went to Palestine; forty years he spent in study; and the last third of his life he passed as the spiritual head of Israel. Of this artificially constructed biographical sketch this much may be true, that Hillel went to Jerusalem in the prime of his manhood and attained a great age. His activity of forty years is perhaps historical; and since it began, according to a trustworthy tradition (Shab. 15a), one hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem, it must have covered the period 30 B.C. -10 C.E.

His Position.

According to an old tannaitic tradition founded upon Hillel's own words, Hillel went to Jerusalem with the intention of perfecting himself in the science of Biblical exposition and of tradition (Yer. Pes. 33c; Tosef., Neg. i.; Sifra, Tazria', ix.). Shemaiah and Abṭalion, the "great Scripture expositors" ("darshanim"; Pes. 70b), became his teachers. The difficulties which Hillel had to overcome in order to be admitted to their school, and the hardships he suffered while pursuing his aim, are told in a touching passage (Yoma 35b), the ultimate purpose of which is to show that poverty can not be considered as an obstacle to the study of the Law. Some time after the death of Shemaiah and Abṭalion, Hillel succeeded in settling a question concerning the sacrificial ritual in a manner which showed at once his superiority over the Bene Bathyra, who were at that time the heads of the college. On that occasion, it is narrated, they voluntarily resigned their position in favor of Hillel (Tosef., Pes. iv.; Pes. 66a; Yer. Pes. 33a). According to tradition, Hillel thereupon became head of the Sanhedrin with the title of "Nasi" (prince); but this is hardly historical. All that can be said is that after the resignation of the Bene Bathyra Hillel was recognized as the highest authority among the Pharisees and the scribes of Jerusalem. He was the head of the great school, at first associated with Menahem, a scholar mentioned in no other connection, afterward with Shammai, Hillel's peer in the study of the Law (Ḥag. ii. 2; Gem. 16b; Yer. Ḥag. 77d). Hillel's only title was "Ha-Zaken" (the elder), a title given not to distinguish him from another of the same name, as some have held, but either to express his position among the leading scribes or to indicate his membership in the Sanhedrin.

Whatever Hillel's position, his authority was sufficient to introduce those decrees which were handed down in his name. The most famous of his enactments was the [Prosbul](#), (προσβολή), an institution which, in spite of the law concerning the year of jubilee (Deut. xv. 1 *et seq.*), insured the repayment of loans (Sheb. x. 3). The motive for this institution was the "amelioration of the world" ("tikḵun ha-'olam"), *i.e.*, of the social order (Giṭ. iv. 3), because it protected both the creditor against the loss of his property, and the needy against being refused the loan of money for fear of loss. A like tendency is found in another of Hillel's institutions, having reference to the sale of houses (Lev. xxv. 30, 'Ar. ix.). These two are the only institutions handed down in Hillel's name, although the words which introduce the prosbul (Sheb. *ib.*) show that there were others. Hillel's judicial activity may be inferred from the decision by which he confirmed the legitimacy of some Alexandrians whose origin was disputed, by interpreting the marriage document ("ketubbah") of their mother in her favor (Tosef., Ket. iv 9; B. M. 104a). Of other official acts no mention is found in the sources.

Hillel and Shammai

In the memory of posterity Hillel lived, on the one hand, as the scholar who made the whole contents of the traditional law his own (Soferim xvi. 9), who, in opposition to his colleague, Shammai, generally advocated milder interpretations of the Halakah, and whose disciples as a "house," that is, as "Hillel's school," stood in like opposition to Shammai's disciples. On the other hand, he was known as the saint and the sage who in his private life and in his dealings with men practised the high virtues of morality and resignation, just as he taught them in his maxims with unexcelled brevity and earnestness. The traditions concerning Hillel's life harmonize completely with the sayings which are handed down in his name, and bear in themselves the proof of their genuineness. No wonder that the Babylonian Talmud is richer in traditions concerning Hillel than the Palestinian, since the Babylonians were especially careful to preserve the recollection of their great countryman; and in the Babylonian schools of the third century was proudly quoted the saying of the Palestinian Simeon ben Lakish—on the whole no friend of the Babylonians—in which he placed the activity of Hillel on a level with that of Ezra, who also went up from Babylon to Jerusalem. Hillel's sayings are preserved partly in Hebrew, the language of the school, partly in Aramaic, the language of the people, or, as it is said in Ab. R. N. xii., in the language of Hillel's home ("the Babylonian language").

The Golden Rule.

The saying of Hillel which introduces the collection of his maxims in the Mishnaic treatise Abot mentions Aaron as the great model to be imitated in his love of peace, in his love of man, and in his leading mankind to a knowledge of the Law (Ab. i. 12). In mentioning these characteristics, which the Haggadah then already ascribed to Moses' brother, Hillel mentions his own most prominent virtues. Love of man was considered by Hillel as the kernel of the entire Jewish teaching. When a heathen who wished to become a Jew asked him for a summary of the Jewish religion in the most concise terms, Hillel said: "What is hateful to thee, do not unto thy fellow man: this is the whole Law; the rest is mere commentary" (Shab. 31a). With these words Hillel recognized as the fundamental principle of the Jewish moral law the Biblical precept of brotherly love (Lev. xix. 18). Almost the same thing was taught by Paul, a pupil of Gamaliel, the grandson of Hillel (Gal. v. 14; comp. Rom. xiii. 8); and more broadly by Jesus when he declared the love

of one's neighbor to be the second great commandment beside the love of God, the first (Matt. xxii. 39; Mark xii. 31; Luke x. 27). It may be assumed without argument that Hillel's answer to the proselyte, which is extant in a narrative in the Babylonian Talmud (comp. also Ab. R. N., recension B., cxxvi. [ed. Schechter, p. 53]), was generally known in Palestine, and that it was not without its effect on the founder of Christianity.

It has been remarked that Hillel did not, like Jesus, state the love of God to be the principal commandment of the Jewish teaching (see Delitzsch, "Jesus und Hillel," p. 17); but it must not be forgotten that Jesus gave his answer to a scribe, whereas Hillel answered the question of a prospective proselyte, to whom it was necessary first of all to show how the teachings of Judaism are to be practised by him who wishes to accept them. That the love of God had also a central position in Hillel's conception of religion needs not to be proved; this position had long been assigned to it in Judaism—since the Scripture passage in which this precept is joined immediately to the confession of the unity of God (Deut. vi. 4 *et seq.*) had been made the principal portion of the daily prayer. Moreover, the Pharisaic scribes who approved of Jesus' answer evidently belonged to Hillel's school. Hillel seems to have connected the precept of brotherly love with the Biblical teaching of man's likeness to God, on which account he calls the love of man "love of creatures" ("oheb et ha-beriyot"); and it is worthy of note that the term "creatures" for men was then already the common property of the language.

From the doctrine of man's likeness to God Hillel ingeniously deduced man's duty to care for his own body. In a conversation with his disciples (Lev. R. xxxiv.) he said: "As in a theater and circus the statues of the king must be kept clean by him to whom they have been entrusted, so the bathing of the body is a duty of man, who was created in the image of the almighty King of the world." In another conversation Hillel calls his soul a guest upon earth, toward which he must fulfil the duties of charity (*ib.*). Man's duty toward himself Hillel emphasized also in the first sentence of his saying (Ab. i. 14): "If I am not for myself, who is for me? and if I am only for myself, what am I? and if not now, when?" The second part of this sentence expresses the same idea as another of Hillel's teachings (Ab. ii. 4): "Separate not thyself from the congregation." The third part contains the admonition to postpone no duty—the same admonition which he gave with reference to study (Ab. ii. 4): "Say not, 'When I have time I shall study'; for you may perhaps never have any leisure."

The precept that one should not separate oneself from the community, Hillel paraphrases, with reference to Eccl. iii. 4, in the following saying (Tosef., Ber. ii., toward the end): "Appear neither naked nor clothed, neither sitting nor standing, neither laughing nor weeping." Man should not appear different from others in his outward deportment; he should always regard himself as a part of the whole, thereby showing that love of man which Hillel taught. The feeling of love for one's neighbor shows itself also in his exhortation (Ab. ii. 4): "Judge not thy neighbor till thou art in his place" (comp. Matt. vii. 1). In the following maxim is expressed also his consciousness of his own insufficiency: "Trust not thyself till the day of thy death." How far his love of man went may be seen from an example which shows that benevolence must act with regard to the needs of him who is to be helped. Thus a man of good family who had become poor Hillel provided with a riding horse, in order that he might not be deprived of his customary physical exercise, and with a slave, in order that he might be served (Tosef., Peah, iv. 10; Ket. 67b).

That the same spirit of kindness prevailed in Hillel's house is shown by a beautiful story (Derek Ereẓ v.). Hillel's wife one day gave the whole of a meal, prepared in honor of a guest, to a poor man, and at once prepared another. When she excused herself for the delay and explained its cause, Hillel praised her for her action. How firmly Hillel was persuaded that peace was ruling in his house, the following tradition teaches (Ber. 60a; Yer. Ber. 14b): When one day he came near his house and heard a noise, he expressed, in the words of Ps. cxii. 7 ("He shall not be afraid of evil tidings"), his confidence that the noise could not be in his house. His trust in God was such that whereas Shammai provided for the Sabbath already on the first day of the week, Hillel referred to Ps. lxxviii. 19: "Blessed be the Lord who daily loadeth us with benefits" (Beẓah 16a).

Love of Peace.

The exhortation to love peace emanated from Hillel's most characteristic traits—from that meekness and mildness which had become proverbial, as is seen from the saying: "Let a man be always humble and patient like Hillel, and not passionate like Shammai" (Shab. 31a; Ab. R. N. xv.). Hillel's gentleness and patience are beautifully illustrated in an anecdote which relates how two men made a wager on the question whether Hillel could be made angry. Though they questioned him and made insulting allusions to his Babylonian origin, they were unsuccessful in their attempt (*ib.*). In the anecdotes about proselytes in which Hillel and Shammai are opposed to each other, Hillel's mildness and meekness appear in a most favorable light. In a paradoxical manner Hillel praised humility in the following words (Lev. R. i. 1): "My humility is my exaltation; my exaltation is my humility" (with reference to Ps. cxiii. 5).

The Study of the Law.

The many anecdotes, resting doubtless on good tradition, according to which Hillel made proselytes, correspond to the third part of his maxim: "Bring men to the Law." A later source (Ab. R. N., recension B., xxvi., toward the end) gives the following explanation of the sentence: Hillel stood in the gate of Jerusalem one day and saw the people on their way to work. "How much," he asked, "will you earn to-day?" One said: "A denarius"; the second: "Two denarii." "What will you do with the money?" he inquired. "We will provide for the necessities of life." Then said he to them: "Would you not rather come and make the Torah your possession, that you may possess both this and the future world?" This narrative has the same points as the epigrammatic group of Hillel's sayings (Ab. ii. 7) commencing: "The more flesh, the more worms," and closing with the words: "Whoever has acquired the words of the Law has acquired the life of the world to come." In an Aramaic saying Hillel sounds a warning against neglect of study or its abuse for selfish purposes: "Whoever would make a name [glory] loses the name; he who increases not [his knowledge] decreases; whoever learns not [in Ab. R. N. xii.: "who does not serve the wise and learn"] is worthy of death; whoever makes use of the crown perishes" (Ab. i. 13). Another group reads (Ab. ii. 5): "The uneducated has no aversion to sin; the ignorant is not pious; the timid can not learn, nor the passionate teach; he who is busied with trade can not become wise. In a place where there are no men, study to show thyself a man" (*ib.*). In this last sentence Hillel may have recalled how he, overcoming his modesty, manfully came forward in Jerusalem after the death of Shemaiah and Abṭalion and gave a new impulse to learning, then threatened with decay. To his own activity no doubt refers the saying preserved in Aramaic (Yer. Ber. 143) and Hebrew (Tosef., Ber. vii.; Ber. 63a): "Where some gather, scatter; where they

scatter, gather!" that is, "Learn where there are teachers, teach where there are learners" (another form is given in Sifre Zuṭa on Num. xxvii. 1; Yalk., Num. 773).

Mystical Utterances.

The epigrammatic and antithetic form of Hillel's sayings, as well as the almost mystic depth of his consciousness of God, may be seen from the words spoken by him at the festival of water-drawing, when, filled with a feeling of God's presence, he said: "If I am here—so says God—every one is here; if I am not here, nobody is here" (Suk. 53a; Ab. R. N. xii., without stating the occasion of the utterance). In like manner, with reference to Ex. xx. 24, and applying a proverb, Hillel makes God speak to Israel: "To the place in which I delight my feet bring me. If thou comest to mine house, I come to thine; if thou comest not to mine, I come not to thine." (Suk. *l.c.*; Tosef., Suk. iv. 3).

In an epigrammatic form Hillel expresses the moral order of the world, according to which every sin is punished (Ab. ii. 6). Seeing a skull floating on the water, he said (in Aramaic): "Because thou didst drown, thou art drowned; and in the end they that have drowned, shall be drowned." Hillel was perhaps thinking here of the misdeeds of Herod and of the retribution which he could not escape.

No indications exist of Hillel's relation to the rulers of his time; but his love of peace and his devotion to study as the most important part of his life, no doubt showed the way which his disciple Johanan ben Zakkai, under the yoke of the Romans and amidst the strife of parties which brought about the catastrophe of Jerusalem, pursued for the salvation of Judaism. A panegyric tradition concerning Hillel's pupils (Suk. 28a; B. B. 134a), which glorifies the master in the disciples, recounts that of the eighty disciples whom Hillel had (probably during the last period of his activity), thirty were worthy that the glory of God (the spirit of prophecy) should rest upon them as upon Moses; thirty, that for their sake the sun should stand still as for Joshua. It is possible that this figure, which may have had a historical basis, was a reference to the fact that among Hillel's disciples were those who, like Joshua, were ready to fight against Israel's enemy and were worthy of victory; perhaps, also, that to them belonged those distinguished and beloved teachers whom Josephus mentions ("Ant." xvii. 6, § 2), Judah ben Sarifai and Mattithiah ben Margalit, who shortly before Herod's death led a revolt directed against fixing the Roman eagle on the Temple gate. This tradition concerning Hillel's disciples mentions, moreover, two by name: [Jonathan ben Uzziel](#) and [Johanan ben Zakkai](#) (comp. also Yer. Ned. v., toward the end).

His Influence.

In the history of tradition Hillel's disciples are generally called "the house of Hillel" ([see Bet Hillel](#)), in opposition to Shammai's disciples, "the house of Shammai." Their controversies, which no doubt included also those of their masters, concern all branches of tradition—Midrash, Halakah, and Haggadah. Only a few decisions, belonging to these three branches, have been handed down under Hillel's name; but there can be no doubt that much of the oldest anonymous traditional literature was due directly to him or to the teachings of his masters. The fixation of the norms of the Midrash and of halakic Scripture exposition was first made by Hillel, in the "seven rules of Hillel," which, as is told in one source, he applied on the day on which he overcame the

Bene Bathyra (Tosef., Sanh. vii., toward the end; Sifra, Introduction, end; Ab. R. N. xxxvii.). On these seven rules rest the thirteen of R. Ishmael; they were epoch-making for the systematic development of the ancient Scripture exposition.

Hillel's importance as the embodiment of the religious and moral teachings of Judaism and as the restorer of Jewish Scripture exegesis is expressed in a most significant manner in the words of lamentation uttered at his death: "Wo for the meek one! Wo for the pious! Wo for the disciple of Ezra!" (Tosef., Soṭah, xiii. 3; Soṭah 48b; Yer. Soṭah, toward the end). One day while he and the sages were assembled at Jericho, a heavenly voice is said to have exclaimed: "Among those here present is one man upon whom the Holy Spirit would rest, if his time were worthy of it." All eyes were thereupon fixed on Hillel. No miracles are connected with Hillel's memory. He lived, without the glory of legend, in the memory of posterity as the great teacher who taught and practised the virtues of philanthropy, fear of God, and humility.

From a VirtualPassover.com

Hillel Sandwich

The Hillel Sandwich is named after its creator, Hillel the Elder (1st century b.c.e. – 1st century c.e.) who took the scriptural injunction: "And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it"[1] to mean that it was incumbent upon him to partake of matzah, bitter herbs, and a portion of the Paschal sacrifice together in order to fulfill the commandment of keeping Passover. Thus, he would place a small portion of bitter herbs and Paschal sacrifice (according to some versions, just bitter herbs) on a piece of matzah, creating a small open-faced sandwich. Because he was the first known person to do this, and because of his influence and stature in Palestinian Judaism, this practice was added to the Seder and the sandwich was named after him.

Today it is customary in almost every seder to partake of the Hillel Sandwich using the bottom piece of the three matzot with the explanatory words: "In memory of the Temple according to Hillel." The Hillel Sandwich is a reminder of the temple today because there is no Paschal sacrifice to put on it. Therefore, its absence reminds celebrants of the Temple that existed in the days of Hillel near the close of the Second Temple Period (516 b.c.e. – 70 c.e.). Many celebrants include an additional reminder by replacing the portion of the sacrifice with a small amount of charoseth. This practice of using charoseth was also instigated by Hillel after the destruction of the Temple in 70 c.e. as recorded in the Mishnah: "When food is brought before [Hillel] he eats it seasoned with lettuce [bitter herbs], until he is come to the breaking of bread; they bring before him unleavened bread and lettuce and the charoseth, although charoseth is not a religious obligation. R. Eliezer b. R. Zadok says: It is a religious obligation. And in the Holy City [Jerusalem] they used to bring before him the body of the Passover-offering (i.e. – before the destruction of the Temple in 70 c.e.)."

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Hazzan Rob Menes

Thursdays, 12:30-1:30 (start eating at 12)

Village Shalom



Adolph Hitler and the Holocaust



How did the Holocaust change Judaism?

At what point did Hitler specifically target Jews?

What do Jews do differently now?

How does the Holocaust differ from the destruction of the second Temple?

Adolf Hitler (German: [\[ˈadɔlf ˈhɪtlɐ\]](#)  [listen](#)); 20 April 1889 – 30 April 1945) was an [Austrian](#)-born [German](#) politician and the leader of the [National Socialist German Workers Party](#) (German: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), commonly referred to as the Nazi Party). He was [chancellor of Germany](#) from 1933 to 1945 and [dictator](#) of [Nazi Germany](#) (as [Führer und Reichskanzler](#)) from 1934 to 1945. Hitler is commonly associated with the rise of [fascism](#) in Europe, [World War II](#), and [the Holocaust](#).

A decorated veteran of [World War I](#), Hitler joined the [German Workers' Party](#), precursor of the Nazi Party, in 1919, and became leader of the NSDAP in 1921. In 1923 he attempted a [coup d'état](#), known as the [Beer Hall Putsch](#), in Munich. The failed coup resulted in Hitler's imprisonment, during which time he wrote his memoir, [Mein Kampf](#) (*My Struggle*). After his release in 1924, Hitler gained popular support by attacking the [Treaty of Versailles](#) and promoting [Pan-Germanism](#), [antisemitism](#), and [anticommunism](#) with charismatic oratory and [Nazi propaganda](#). After his appointment as chancellor in 1933, he transformed the [Weimar Republic](#) into the [Third Reich](#), a [single-party](#) dictatorship based on the [totalitarian](#) and [autocratic](#) ideology of [Nazism](#). His aim was to establish a [New Order](#) of absolute Nazi German [hegemony](#) in continental Europe.

Hitler's foreign and domestic policies had the goal of seizing [Lebensraum](#) ("living space") for the [Germanic people](#). He directed the rearmament of Germany and the [invasion of Poland](#) by the [Wehrmacht](#) in September 1939, leading to the outbreak of [World War II in Europe](#). Under Hitler's rule, in 1941 German forces and their [European allies](#) occupied most of Europe and North Africa. These gains were gradually reversed, and in 1945 the [Allied armies](#) defeated the German army. Hitler's supremacist and [racially motivated](#) policies resulted in the systematic murder of eleven million people, including nearly six million [Jews](#).

In the final days of the war, during the [Battle of Berlin](#) in 1945, Hitler married his long-time mistress, [Eva Braun](#). On 30 April 1945—less than two days later—the two [committed suicide](#) to avoid capture by the [Red Army](#), and their corpses were burned.

The Holocaust

Main article: [The Holocaust](#)

If the international Jewish financiers outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevisation of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!^[169]

— Adolf Hitler addressing the German [Reichstag](#), 30 January 1939

A main Nazi concept was the notion of [racial hygiene](#). On 15 September 1935, Hitler presented two laws—known as the [Nuremberg Laws](#)—to the Reichstag. The laws banned marriage between non-Jewish and Jewish Germans, and forbade the employment of non-Jewish women under the age of 45 in Jewish households. The laws deprived so-called "non-Aryans" of the benefits of German citizenship.^[170] Hitler's early [eugenic](#) policies targeted children with physical and developmental disabilities in a programme dubbed [Action T4](#).^[171]

Hitler's idea of *Lebensraum*, espoused briefly in *Mein Kampf*, focused on acquiring new territory for German settlement in Eastern Europe.^[172] The [Generalplan Ost](#) ("General Plan for the East") called for the population of occupied Eastern Europe and the [Soviet Union](#) to be deported to West Siberia, used as slave labour, or murdered,^[173] the conquered territories were to be colonised by German or "Germanised" settlers.^[174] The original plan called for this process to begin after the conquest of the Soviet Union, but when that failed to happen, Hitler moved the plans forward.^{[173][175]} By January 1942 the decision had been taken to kill the Jews and other deportees considered undesirable.^[176]

The Holocaust (the "[Endlösung der jüdischen Frage](#)" or "Final Solution of the Jewish Question") was organised and executed by [Heinrich Himmler](#) and [Reinhard Heydrich](#). The records of the [Wannsee Conference](#)—held on 20 January 1942 and led by Heydrich, with fifteen senior Nazi officials participating—provide the clearest evidence of systematic planning for the Holocaust. On 22 February Hitler was recorded saying to his associates, "we shall regain our health only by eliminating the Jews".^[177] Approximately thirty [Nazi concentration camps](#) and [extermination camps](#) were used for this purpose.^[178] By summer 1942 [Auschwitz concentration camp](#) was rapidly expanded to accept large numbers of deportees for killing or [enslavement](#).^[179]

Although no specific order from Hitler authorising the mass killings has surfaced,^[180] he approved the [Einsatzgruppen](#)—killing squads that followed the German army through Poland, the Baltic, and the Soviet Union^[181]—and he was well informed about their activities.^[182] During interrogations by Soviet [intelligence officers](#), the records of which were declassified over fifty years later, Hitler's valet, [Heinz Linge](#), and his [adjutant](#), [Otto Günsche](#), stated that Hitler had a direct interest in the development of gas chambers.^[183]

Between 1939 and 1945, the SS, assisted by [collaborationist](#) governments and recruits from occupied countries, were responsible for the deaths of eleven to fourteen million people, including about six million Jews, representing two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe,^{[184][185]} and between 500,000 and 1,500,000 [Roma](#).^[186] Deaths took place in concentration and extermination camps, [ghettos](#), and through mass executions. Many victims of the Holocaust were [gassed](#) to death, whereas others died of starvation or disease while working as slave labourers.^[187]

Hitler's policies also resulted in the killings of [Poles](#)^[188] and [Soviet prisoners of war](#), communists and other political opponents, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled,^{[189][190]} [Jehovah's Witnesses](#), [Adventists](#), and trade unionists. Hitler never appeared to have visited the concentration camps and did not speak publicly about the killings.^[191]

[F]or me, being a Jew means feeling the tragedy of yesterday as an inner oppression. On my left forearm I bear the Auschwitz number; it reads more briefly than the Pentateuch or the Talmud and yet provides more thorough information. It is also more binding than basic formulas of Jewish existence. If to myself and the world, including the religious and nationally minded Jews, who do not regard me as one of their own, I say: I am a Jew, then I mean by that those realities and possibilities that are summed up in the Auschwitz number.”

— [Jean Améry](#), [At the Minds Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities](#)

“It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children, but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory.”

— [Elie Wiesel](#), [Night](#)

From answers.com

How has the Shoah (Holocaust) affected rabbinic Judaism? Has there been any change as a response?

[Click here for a\(n\) Orthodox answer by Rabbi Sanford Shudnow](#)

This question is one of the most perplexing that can be asked in our generation.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust—*Shoah*—little has been done rabbinically. Much has been written, including by rabbis, but in all honesty, Rabbinic Judaism has continued as if no catastrophe has occurred in the very recent past, affecting many still alive, their descendants and all the rest of us.

This is the sad fact. If one enters the synagogue, looks into the *Siddur*—traditional Jewish prayer book, and seeks a change, even a mention of the Holocaust and the devastating loss of 6 million Jews, one would in most instances come away bewildered.

In very recent years, some *Siddurim* and *Mahazorim* have included a prayer—*tefillah*—known as a *E-I Maleh Rahamim*—to be recited during the *Yizkor* prayers—*Hazkarat Neshamot*—on Yom Kippur and at the end of the *Shalosh Regalim*—Three Festivals of *Pesah*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot* (*Shemini Atzeret*) for Ashkenazic Jews. The recently published [The Koren Siddur](#) by Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, includes one such prayer on pages 802-3.

Some pioneering work was done by Rabbi Jules Harlow of the Rabbinical Assembly, with the issuing of what became known as the Harlow *Mahzor* for the High Holy Days. The entire Martyrology service was revamped to include many tragedies that befell Jews throughout the millennia, to include prayers for the victims of the *Shoah*, all woven into the *Eleh Ezkirah* recitations.

Sadly, Harlow's efforts were met with some resistance, due to unfamiliarity with the lengthy prayers and readings. Many quickly skipped through his powerful writings and quotations.

Another powerful work known as [The Shoah Scroll](#)—*Megillat Hashoah*—“The Scroll of the Holocaust” has in recent years appeared and can be incorporated in Holocaust observances.

Tisha B'Av—Fast of the Ninth of Av has been used by many congregations as a time to incorporate in the recitation of *Kinot*—Prayers of Lamentation, lamentations designed in similar fashion to those of the Middle Ages which include the *Shoah*.

It is hard to say how effective these efforts are, due to relatively small attendance and the very large number of prayers already part of such services.

For the most part, congregations often leave Holocaust remembrances, especially on *Yom HaShoah*, to Holocaust organizations in their local communities. Naturally, this is uneven due to the unavailability in some communities of such organizations and groups, and due to a lack of support within some segments of the Jewish community, often not relating well to more secular leadership within the organized Jewish community.

Much more needs to be done and I am sure will be done in the years ahead.

[Click here for a\(n\) Conservative answer by Rabbi Wayne Allen](#)

The Sho'ah – more than any other event in Jewish history – remains a theological challenge for Judaism in general and rabbis in particular. That is because the Sho'ah exacerbates the already difficult question of theodicy. Monotheists have historically grappled with the problem of explaining how - if God is both all good and all powerful - there can be evil in the world. Either God is content to let evil exist (in that case we question his goodness) or God is unable to defeat evil (in that case we question his omnipotence). In either case, God, as we conceive God, would be deficient. And that would be contrary to the premise that God is perfect. As hard as it was in the past to imagine a way out of this dilemma, it has become infinitely harder because of the scope and magnitude of the evil of the Sho'ah. It is representative of what one contemporary philosopher calls “radical evil.”

Accordingly, the traditional answers to the provocative questions of why did God allow so many innocents to suffer and why didn't God intervene, have proven insufficient and unsatisfying. The Torah (e.g. Leviticus 26:3-39) ascribes physical suffering with sin. Yet it would be impossible to argue that the one million child victims of the Sho'ah died because of sin. Minors are not accountable for their actions according to Jewish law and what sins babies could have committed is inexplicable. And the Talmud's suggestion (Berakhot 5a) that sometimes suffering is a manifestation of God's love is not very convincing to the victims, the survivors, or to observers.

Consequently, rabbis and thinkers in the post-Sho'ah era have generated alternative answers other than the Jobian Solution that no explanation is possible because human beings can never understand how God operates. For example, Rabbi Eliezer Berkowitz valiantly explained that God was present but temporarily hid His face. In the end, however, God conquers evil. Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, made the outrageous claim that the Sho'ah was punishment for the sin of Zionism. Philosopher Will Herberg and others argued that the real question to ask was not “where was God?” but “where was humanity?” Elie Weisel admits that “after the Sho'ah it is difficult to live with God, but it is impossible to live without him.” And Emil Fackenheim wrote that despite the unanswerable questions if Jews fail to remain steadfast we would be granting Hitler a posthumous victory. Rabbi Richard Rubenstein suggested that after Auschwitz everything has changed – even the way Jews conceptualize God.

Perhaps too little time has passed for Judaism to have fashioned an adequate theological response to the cataclysm called the Sho'ah. But it is clear that the Sho'ah remains a central concern in Jewish theology.

Reform Response: Rabbi John Sherwood

Thank you for your inquiry. You inquired about rabbinic Judaism. Please allow me to me somewhat pedantic at this point. Rabbinic Judaism is defined as the Judaism of the Talmudic period. I think what you mean is "How has the Shoah (Holocaust) affected the thinking of the contemporary rabbinate?"

My response is that by and large, the Shoah has definitely moved the rabbinate into a greater awareness of Judaism as a peoplehood, not merely a religion as many Jews had previously considered it to be. Many of us are strongly concerned that as this generation passes, there are many who will forget the Holocaust, and therefore, we have added emphasis on it in our religious school and adult education curricula. Yom HaShoa is observed in just about every Jewish community in the United States.

How did judaism change after the holocaust?

I'm doing a research paper on a country, but my thesis statement is the holocaust changed the jewish religion for many countries. It pretty much sucks for writing a paper. I can find plenty of effects of the holocaust, but not how it might have changed Judaism itself.

Best Answer - Chosen by Voters

The holocaust did not change Judaism at all. The prayers, rituals etc are still exactly the same as before the Holocaust- there has been no change to the religion.

The only debate is over the date of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust remembrance day); many on the religious establishment object to the current date since it is in a period when we are not meant to eulogise people and thus Yom HaShoah has become a contentious issue date wise. However, since it is actually a secular remembrance rather than a religious occasion- the no-Orthodox Jewish world (in other words the majority of Jews world wide) is likely to continue to celebrate it on the current date- with various Orthodox communities holding their own celebrations on more appropriate days. To many in the Orthodox world it seems bizarre that we should remember the righteous dead on a date when we should not be doing so under Jewish law! To us, it is inappropriate.

Maybe a better theme for your thesis is going to have to be the resilience of Judaism despite secular disasters.

Source(s):

Orthodox Jew

Jewish Views of the Holocaust: Theology *nach Auschwitz*

"Strange--people come to me sad and leave happy; whereas I . . . I stay with my sadness, which is like black fire . . . Woe to the generation whose leader I am. . . I prefer a simple Jew who prays with joy to a sage who studies with sadness."

--The Holy Sage of Lublin

"*Nach Auschwitz noch ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch.*" ("Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.")

--Theodore Adorno

"Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as the tortured have to scream . . . hence it may have been wrong to say that no poem could be written after Auschwitz."

--Theodore Adorno

Jewish responses to the *Shoah*, to the Holocaust, have been understandably multi-faceted:

1. **"God is dead."** If there were a God, he would surely have prevented the Holocaust. Since God did not prevent it, then God as traditionally understood either does not exist or has changed in some way. For some this means that God has abandoned them, while for others it means God never did exist. Jews must be in the world for themselves. This may mean a turn to atheism or perhaps a turn to some more like pantheism. Sherman Wine holds that no God can possibly exist, while Richard Rubenstein has come to suggest a kind of neo-paganism as the best alternative.
2. **"The Eclipse of God."** There are times when God is inexplicably absent from history. Martin Buber made this phrase famous, suggesting that the 20th century was passing through a period where God, for reasons unknowable to us, refused to reveal himself.
3. **A Distant God.** The experience of the Holocaust calls for Jews to reinterpret their belief in God. God is obviously not a being who actually interferes with human existence in any tangible, measurable way. Arthur A. Cohen holds that God is so transcendent that he cannot be held responsible for the Holocaust.
4. **A Limited God.** God is not omnipotent. He does not have the power to bring to a halt such things as the Holocaust. Harold Kushner made this view popular in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.
5. **Free Will & God.** Terrible events such as the Holocaust are the price we have to pay for having free will. God will not and cannot interfere with history, otherwise our free will would effectively cease to exist. Eliezer Berkovits, for example, stresses that God is all-powerful but that he curtails his own freedom to respect human freedom, even with such horrific consequences.
6. **A Suffering God.** Borrowing from Christian reflection on Christ and the passibility of God, Hans Jonas has suggested that God is limited in power but able to suffer with the pain of the Jewish people. Others stress the compassion and love of God, even if not understood in the Holocaust.
7. **Jewish Survival.** The event issues a call for Jewish affirmation for survival. The rise of the nation of Israel is one way of reading this revelation. Emil Fackenheim speaks of the 614th commandment--
""Jews are forbidden to give Hitler posthumous victories." He further states this as Jews are
"commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish;" "to remember the victims of
Auschwitz, lest their memory perish;" and they are "forbidden to despair of Man, lest they co-operate
in delivering the world to the forces of Auschwitz;" nor "to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism
perish."
8. **Incomprehensible Silence.** The Shoah exceeds human comprehension. It is so horrific as to strip away any attempts at explanation. André Neher believes that there can only be silence after the Holocaust--God's silence and our own.
9. **A Theodicy of Protest.** If the Holocaust is a mystery, it is nonetheless on the surface a clearly unjust and wicked horror that God should have prevented. What does this then reveal about the character of God? Perhaps God is capable of evil. David Blumenthal has argued that an analogy can be drawn between child abuse and the Holocaust. Children of abusing parents can learn to eventually make their peace with such a parent but should never be required to abstain from challenging the parent's misuse of authority.
10. **A Broken Covenant.** The Holocaust is proof that God has broken his covenant with the Jewish people. One need not conclude, Irving Greenberg holds, that Jews can still not choose to hold to Jewish law, but it is now only on a voluntary basis.
11. **Providential History.** Some have suggested the Shoah had the providential outcome of overturning old medieval Jewish structures and replacing them with modern Jewish life, and that this is what needed to happen.
12. **Vicarious Suffering.** In the Holocaust, the Jewish people become the "suffering servant" of Isaiah, collectively suffering for the sins of the world. Ignaz Maybaum explored this shocking claim, holding that perhaps in the Holocaust Jews even atoned for humanity's wickedness.
13. **Coming Messiah.** Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen has argued that the Shoah represents the birth pangs of the Messiah, that the Jewish people are in the final days before the Jewish savior finally comes.
14. **"Because of our sins we were punished."** (*mi-penei hataeinu*) Some in the Orthodox community have taught that European Jews were punished for their sins, either for the heresy of liberal Judaism or for an unfaithful rejection of the Holy Land. In these views, the Shoah is God's just retribution.

15. **One More Tragedy.** Some would suggest that the Holocaust is not a singular event, but only represents one more horror in human history. From this viewpoint, Jews make too much of the Holocaust as a crisis event that changes everything. David Weiss has taken something like this position.
16. **Jewish Reconstruction.** The Holocaust is better understood as a historical tragedy, singular or otherwise, that must now be answered with Jewish commitment to the restoration of cultural and ethnic life. Those who survive must rebuild what has been violated and lost.
17. **Christian Responsibility.** Christians need to face up to their history of anti-Semitism and the role it played in the Holocaust. Ben Zion Bokser has suggested that Christianity's exclusive view of itself rendered the German people numb to the moral repugnance of Nazi racial theories. Others argue that this culpability should put an end to any exclusive claims on Christianity's part or to any assigning of "second-class" status to Jewish faith. Supersessionism is no longer a credible theology.
18. **Jewish Responsibility.** Marc Ellis argues that national Israel now uses the rhetoric of the Holocaust to justify the oppression of the Palestinian people. The Holocaust should become a reminder to care for the disadvantaged state of all colonized groups. In a broader way, the Shoah is a reminder that to be a Jew is to be a chosen people, one that must carry out the covenant and bring salvation to others in daily life.
19. **Jewish Witness.** Jews must not allow despair to shut their testimonies forever. Memory and writing is at the heart of what it means to be Jewish, and the Holocaust is a temptation to hopelessness and to the secular Enlightenment, a project wholly discredited by the Shoah. It is better to keep one's Jewish identity and belief in the face of this. Even God cannot rob Jews of this loyalty.
20. **God's Female Face.** God was not absent in the Holocaust, rather present in the face of female Jewish sufferers, who by covering themselves and holding to their dignity were bringing the Jewish God into Auschwitz. Melissa Raphael has made this position part of the current Jewish discussion.
21. **No Theology *nach* Auschwitz.** Any attempt at theology totalizes the ultimate horror, and by doing so, it lessens the suffering of what happened, as well as opening up humanity to ultimately excusing it and letting it happen again. For some this is a radical negation of any attempt to explain, while for others it is a simple dismissal of religious attempts at an answer. Any talk of God's justice or love makes a mockery of what happened in the Shoah.

CHRISTIANITY IN JEWISH TERMS: A PROJECT TO REDEFINE THE RELATIONSHIP by Peter Ochs and David Sandmel

The time has come for Jews to learn about Christianity in Jewish terms.

In September of this year 2000, an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars and rabbis made public the fruits of several years of work and two millennia of memories. They published a public statement and an academic book, *"Christianity in Jewish Terms*, possibly the first effort ever by a formal gathering of Jews to initiate a Jewish theology of Christianity.⁽¹⁾ In this essay, two of the project's editors introduce *Cross Currents* readers to the purposes, hopes, and struggles that lie behind this initiative.

Christianity in Jewish Terms is a theology offered both about and in response to Christian theologies that themselves arose from within, about, and in response to Judaism. It also recognizes that, since the dawn of Christianity, Jewish theologies have often been a response to Christianity. In the past, these mutual influences have been obscured by a rhetoric of rejection. It is only recently that scholars and theologians have become aware of the almost symbiotic relationship between the two traditions. This Jewish theology is offered, moreover, in response to efforts by courageous Christians who, in the years since the Shoah, have exposed those aspects of their tradition that helped create Western anti-Semitism and who offered new Christian visions that affirm the rightful place of Jews and Judaism in the cosmic order. Our theological project has therefore been dialogical in form, part of an ongoing history

of responses to responses; in keeping with that theme, we introduce the project here by illustrating how our editorial group responded and to what we responded, with what effects.

* * *

.....excerpt:

There was, however, a third common challenge that gnawed at our traditions from within: the implosion of religious faith and confidence that has followed the Shoah. As Eugene Borowitz and Elie Wiesel have written, we Jews did not lose faith in God during the Shoah -- many had lost that faith already after the Enlightenment and emancipation. What we lost was faith in humanity -- faith in the humanism that for so many had replaced our traditional religion. For many Jews, this humanism had already appeared in Jewish dress *as if* it were our modern Judaism, so that the loss of Jewish humanistic faith after the Shoah *did*, after all, mean a crisis of religious faith. It is not as if, now mistrusting secularism, Jews rush back to some form of traditional Jewish practice. The crisis of Jewish confidence is that many Jews do not have any strong idea about what belief or knowledge or faith to adopt. This is the kind of crisis that leads to moral and ontological enervation. And this is a terrible problem for us.

While Jews and Christians face this same problem, it challenges us in different ways. For Jews, the Shoah remains a defining event of our collective existence. It means that humanity, Western civilization, Christianity, and God all have some explaining to do -- that our relationship with all of these begins with questions, challenges, and uncertainties. And this means that, under the surface at least, we do not assume that "existence," or *maaseh breshit* (the order of creation), is *fully* ordered, or rational, or even good. For many or perhaps most Jews, a part of the darkness of being is displayed in the questionable behavior of many Christians during the Shoah and in the troubling ways that many forms of Christianity have, for two millennia, defined themselves over against Judaism, as either critics of or substitutes for Judaism.

We know that there are Christians for whom the Shoah appears in no way to be a significant aspect of their religious identities. But we judge that, independently of individual opinions, the Shoah remains an irrepressible aspect of contemporary Christian self-identity. This fact reconnects us to the circle of Christians and Jews, mentioned earlier, within which we carry on our theological work. The Christians in this circle share our judgment that Christianity cannot define itself today without including a serious response to the Shoah and the Christian failings that are implicated in it. They have also introduced us to a broader movement of Christian scholars who appear to think about the Shoah as much as we do and who, with great courage, have worked to revise the words of Christian liturgy, teachings, and doctrine that underwrite Christian anti-Judaism and supersessionism.

Christian rescuers. We stand, perhaps, in the third generation of Jewish respondents to the Shoah. The first generation, in the numbing first decade after the Shoah, attended for the most part to collecting testimonies and recounting the horrible facts of atrocity. For the second generation, of which Elie Wiesel's work is prototypical, the time had come to compose fictional but historically realistic accounts of the victims' suffering. While extending the work of the first two generations to new media, primarily cinema, this third generation appears to turn its historical gaze to rescuers (Christian rescuers in particular), as well as to victims and oppressors. In other areas of inquiry, philosophers now ask what lessons of ethics are to be learned from these horrible years; psychologists examine the lives of the children of survivors; humanistic scholars examine the early history of Jewish memorializations of the Shoah. Theologians ask what has happened to our relationship to the one to whom we pray, what has happened to our covenant, and what do we have to say, now, about Christianity -- the religion of some of our rescuers as well as of our oppressors?

Popularly, "rescuers" refers to those Christians and others honored at Yad Vashem and elsewhere for helping save Jews during the Shoah. But it also seems appropriate for us today to apply the label "theological rescuers" to our Christian colleagues who seek and have sought to rescue Christianity itself from anti-Jewish or supersessionist tendencies and expressions. Scholars such as James Parkes, Edward Flannery, and Rosemary Radford Ruether have honestly confronted the history of Christian teachings about Jews and Judaism. More recently, A. Roy Eckardt, Norman Beck, Paul van Buren, Clark Williamson, John Pawlikowski and Mary Boys have offered theologies of Christianity, grounded in the traditional Christian sources, in which Jews and Judaism are sources of blessing. These

scholars have been part of the Christian Scholars Group that has been meeting for over twenty-five years and has now become a program of the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore, which also provided the educational forum in which our project developed. In addition to their scholarly accomplishments, the work of the Christian Scholars Group has been effectively communicated to clergy and lay leaders on the congregational level. Finally, official church bodies, Catholic and Protestant, have publicly repudiated anti-Semitism and the teaching of contempt as inimical to authentic Christianity. The recent visit of the pope to Israel -- praying at the Kotel and offering a confession at Yad va-Shem -- symbolizes the courage of the theological rescuers and the progress that has been made in the last fifty years.

Jews have been happy to assist Christian scholars in this work and to further the efforts, as one Christian colleague puts it, "to clean up our mess." And Jews have been quick both to praise Christian efforts and to point out their weaknesses or shortcomings. To this date, however, few Jews have grappled with the question of how Judaism might respond in its own authentic voice to the profound changes that have taken place in the Christian world.

This is not an indictment of the Jewish community. The wounds of the past are still healing; it is hard to overcome centuries of distrust. Disillusioned with universalism and frightened by the inroads of assimilation, Jews are turning away from the world and into their own communities. Furthermore, the recent changes in the Christian world are not universally accepted by all Christians; missionary activity and anti-Jewish rhetoric are still integral to sectors of the Christian community. Nevertheless, while we recognize all the factors that lead to these reactions, we believe that they no longer function as an effective means of responding to today's challenges.

A New Response. We believe that, living as a minority in a still largely Christian America and Christian West, Jews need to learn the languages and beliefs of their neighbors. They need to understand the meaning of what their Christian neighbors are saying; about what modern society should become and about the place of the Jewish people itself in that society. Jews need to learn ways of judging what forms of Christianity are friendly to them and what forms are not, and what forms of Christian belief merit their public support and what forms do not. They need, as well, to acknowledge the efforts of those Christians who have sacrificed aspects of their work and of their lives to combat Christian anti-Judaism and to promote forms of Christian practice that are friendly to Jewish life and belief. They need to know enough about Christian belief that they can explain their own Jewish goals and ideals for society in terms their Christian neighbors will understand.

For the past hundreds of years, when Jews have been taught about Christian belief, it has been primarily in non-Jewish terms. During the years of their residence in Christian Europe, Jews learned about Christianity only through the untranslated terms of a Christianity that separated itself from its Jewish roots. Then, during the years that followed Emancipation, Jews learned about Christianity through the equally non-Jewish terms of secular European thought. This was often the most difficult kind of learning, since secular European thought often treated Christianity as a universal religion, as opposed to the particularity or "tribalism" of Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to learn about Christianity in Jewish terms: to rediscover the basic categories of rabbinic Judaism and to hear what the basic categories of Christian belief sound like when they are taught in terms of this rabbinic Judaism. This is to hear Christianity in our terms and therefore understand it deeply, perhaps for the first time.

If Christianity is changing in these years after the Holocaust, Judaism is changing as well. During the past two hundred years, Judaism has suffered from an increasing inner division, separating the realms of science and reason on the one hand and faith and tradition on the other. It is as if the Jewish religion itself spoke of an unbridgeable gulf between the human and the divine. The editors of *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, however, are animated by a different vision. The Judaism we editors encounter in the Bible, Talmud, and our other classic sources has always emphasized the partnership of humanity and God. We have therefore gathered together essays that help us rediscover the power of the classical sources of Judaism to heal the divisions from which we suffer today: between human reason and Jewish faith, as well as between Judaism and Christianity.

There are two main concerns at the heart of our book: how to renew our understanding of Judaism today from out of the sacred texts and, then, how to understand Christianity in terms of this Judaism.

Our first goal is to educate American Jews about the religion of their Christian neighbors. American Jews, proud of their knowledge of so many things, know relatively little about the actual theologies of Christianity. Too many Jews understand Christianity only in oppositional terms that grossly oversimplify or actually distort both traditions. Thus, many Jews believe that original sin and incarnation are totally alien to Judaism, just because they are emphasized by Christianity. Such misunderstanding is also displayed in the commonplace Jewish assertion that theology is a uniquely Christian endeavor. In addition, many Jews -- including those who have no fear of everyday social interaction with Christians -- fear that *theological* engagement with Christianity will lead to weakened Jewish commitment and intermarriage. We suggest, however, that ignorance of Christianity leaves Jews ignorant of differences between the traditions as well as of differences between either tradition and the prevailing modern culture in which both Jews and Christians participate. We hold that a sound understanding of Christianity is as essential for Jewish survival as it is for mutual understanding among Jews and Christians.

Our second goal is to explore and expand Jewish theology for its own sake (*l'shma*, as we say). American Jews often know relatively little about the theologies of Judaism as well! We sense, in fact, that secular Jews' resistance to learning about Christianity may, in part, reflect their resistance to their own theological traditions. Our goal is to stimulate renewed interest in the theologies of classical rabbinic Judaism and, then, *to extend Jewish theology* to include theologies of Christianity.

Our third goal is to contribute to the revitalization of Judaism after the Shoah and in the face of modern secularism and postmodern doubt. We turn away from the modern Jewish tendency to cultural assimilation and reaffirm the enduring voice of the scriptural and rabbinic sources in our daily lives and our intellectual disciplines. But our turn is not antimodern. We appeal to standards of reason that are irreducible to the modern/anti-modern dialectic between "reason and faith," or "universality and particularity." Our reasoning is at once hermeneutical, scientific (in the classical sense), text-based, and responsive to the historically lived context of all textual interpretation. Our scriptural and rabbinic hermeneutic is therefore irreducible, as well, to the modern/anti-modern dialectic between a wholly universalized Judaism that is supposed to be identical to some universalized Christianity and a wholly particularized Judaism that is supposed to be incommensurable with any elements of Christianity. Our Judaism is neither assimilated to the Western world nor cut off from it. Reconnected to its scriptural and rabbinic roots -- but without losing its critical edge -- it is prepared to speak *to* the world once again: reintroducing ancient teachings that can offer renewed wisdom for a culture that has lost its bearings. And it is prepared to enlist sympathetic Christians -- and Muslims -- as co-workers in the task of repairing a troubled Western civilization.

Our fourth goal is to acknowledge and encourage the good work of Christian theological rescuers. For Jewish scholars to take Christian theology this seriously is to complement *and* compliment the courageous work of the Christian scholars who have sought to remove anti-Jewish and supersessionist language from church teachings and practices. This work is two-fold: to let the Christian world know that Jews are aware of and appreciate this work and to let Jews know that this work is being done and needs to be appreciated.

In closing, here are two brief illustrations of the theological voice of *Christianity in Jewish Terms*.

On God.⁽³⁾ The name of God refers to the ultimate reason why we would write our book like this. We write as members of a people pulled apart from the world only because of our relationship to the one we call creator of the world (*bore olam*), merciful father -- or "womb-like father!" (*av harachamim*) -- the name YHVH who cannot be spoken, our God (*elohenu*). While most modern Jews do not often speak openly about their God, this appears to be more a sign of unfamiliarity than of modesty or even of protest against a God who would be God in this awful century. The cross-cultural evidence is that most people in the world feel comfortable talking about and to the one(s) they call "God." It may therefore require morechutzpah for a human being to claim to have *no* need for such a God than to admit to participating in such an ordinary practice. As for protest against God, throughout Jewish tradition this has been a primary means of prayer.

Christians as well as Jews today may rely on the ordinariness of talking to an extra-ordinary God as a shared resource in the effort to reestablish moral and religious order after the Shoah and after modernity. What, however, about the names of God that we do not share? There is another surprising lesson to be learned from ordinariness. It is in everyday religious practice that Jews and Christians may sound most different, since everyday practice is guided by the linguistic traditions of particular communities; and since Babel we have found that social differences

are framed by linguistic difference. Trinitarian formulae of prayer are decidedly not the same as rabbinic formulae. Nonetheless, it is also in everyday practice that Jews and Christians behave in most clearly analogous ways: in the general form and consequences of their turning to a creator God who hears prayer and commands moral action. The analogy that divides us on one level also unites us on another; that is one reason that analogical thinking defies the either/or logic that burdens modern culture.

Some Jews, of a more intellectual as well as religious bent, may seek a bridge to understanding what is less ordinary in Christian religious practice, such as philosophic theologies of the mysteries of Trinity. Surprisingly, such Jews may find it most helpful to begin with questions typically asked by Jewish skeptics rather than by traditionalists. Imagine, for example, the Jewish skeptic who asks the traditionalist: "How can you claim that God speaks to us through words of scripture, when you admit that you are finite and God is infinite? If God's word is finite, then there would be nothing to distinguish it *per se* from other finite words. Do you want to claim that God's word is infinite?" Imagine that the traditionalist says, "Yes." That answer alone, however we judge it, offers sufficient entrée for Jewish study of Trinitarian speculations. It is not odd for a Jew to conceive of asking this question nor of answering it this way, and this answer leads to the speculation that the word that God speaks and that mediates between God and us may itself be infinite: a word that is at once "of God," in this sense, and also "of us." This is not Trinitarian speculation, but a Jew who speculates this way can enter into meaningful conversation with a Trinitarian philosophical theologian. And that is what we mean by a "bridge to understanding."

On Israel.⁽⁴⁾ Much of the tragedy of the relationship between Jews and Christians can be traced to competing claims to be Israel, God's covenant partner. Is it possible for both Jews and Christians to lay claim to this name in ways that are not exclusionist? The Jewish understanding of Israel consists of three aspects. First, Jews are Israel because they are the descendants of a common ancestor, Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel (Gen. 32). Second, Jews as Israel are covenanted to the God of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Finally, Israel is the name of the land which, according to Jewish tradition, God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel in perpetuity.

The church also claims to be Israel, although its understanding of what that means differs from the Jewish one. Christian tradition speaks of a "new Israel" or a "true Israel" consisting of those who recognize in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the continuation of God's covenant that began with Abraham. According to this exclusionist reading, the Jews rejected Jesus, the covenant, and God -- and so, in turn, God rejected the Jews and established a new covenant with the church. Christian self-understanding of Israel is not bound to any one nation or nor does it privilege any particular geographic location.

This exclusionist Christian understanding of Israel leaves no possibility for Jews to be a people in covenant with God. In post-Holocaust Christian theology, however, a new understanding of the relationship between God and Israel, God and the church, and the church and Israel is being articulated. Finding scriptural warrant in passages such as Romans 9-11, the new theology argues that God's promises are eternal -- and that, in particular, God's covenant with the Jews continues and, more importantly, informs and enriches the Christian covenant. Does Jewish tradition contain a warrant for acknowledging Christian claims to be in covenant with the God of Israel? While one starting point is the Jewish concept of the Noahide laws, this is not completely satisfactory, since it is largely a negative formulation and does not specifically address the Christian claim to be in covenant with the same God upon whom Israel calls. If we are serious about developing a Jewish theology of Christianity, then we must admit that this move by Christian theologians challenges the Jewish community to find within its scriptural resources a way of affirming Christianity's relationship with the God of Israel that does not compromise Judaism's integrity.

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Rav Moshe ben Maimon



How did Maimonides change Judaism?

At what point did he recognize his calling?

How did his era influence his work?

Mosheh ben Maimon משה בן מימון, called **Moses Maimonides** and also known as Mūsā ibn Maymūn ([Arabic](#): موسى بن ميمون), or **RaMBaM** (רמב"ם – Hebrew acronym for "Rabbi Mosheh Ben Maimon"), was a preeminent medieval [Jewish philosopher](#) and one of the most prolific and followed [Torah](#) scholars and physicians of the [Middle Ages](#). He was born in [Córdoba](#), [Almoravid Empire](#) (present-day Spain) on [Passover Eve](#), 1135, and died in [Egypt](#) (or [Tiberias](#)) on 20th [Tevet](#), December 12, 1204.^[6] He was a [rabbi](#), [physician](#) and [philosopher](#) in [Morocco](#) and [Egypt](#).

Although his writings on Jewish law and ethics were met with acclaim and gratitude from most Jews even as far off as Spain, Iraq and Yemen, and he rose to be the revered head of the Jewish community in Egypt, there were also vociferous critics of some of his rulings and other writings particularly in Spain. Nevertheless, he was posthumously acknowledged to be one of the foremost rabbinical [arbiters](#) and philosophers in [Jewish history](#), his copious work a cornerstone of Jewish scholarship. His fourteen-volume [Mishneh Torah](#) still carries canonical authority as a

codification of [Talmudic](#) law. In the [Yeshiva world](#) he is known as "haNesher haGadol" (the great eagle) in recognition of his outstanding status as a bona fide exponent of the Oral Torah.

Biography



The dominion of the [Almoravid dynasty](#) at its greatest extent, c. 1204 CE

Maimonides was born during what some scholars consider to be the end of the [golden age of Jewish culture in the Iberian Peninsula](#), after the first centuries of the [Moorish](#) rule. At an early age, he developed an interest in the exact sciences and philosophy. He read those [Greek philosophers](#) accessible in Arabic translations, and was deeply immersed in the sciences and learning of Islamic culture.^[7] Though the [Gaonic](#) tradition, especially in its North African version, formed the basis of his legal thought, some scholars have argued recently that [Muslim law](#), including [Almohad](#) legal thought, also had a substantial impact.^[8] Maimonides was not known as a supporter of [mysticism](#), although a strong intellectualistic type of mysticism has been discerned in his philosophy.^[9] He voiced opposition to poetry, the best of which he declared as false, since it was founded on pure invention. This [Sage](#), who was revered for his saintly personality as well as for his writings, led an unquiet life, and wrote many of his works while travelling or in temporary accommodation.^[10] Maimonides [studied Torah](#) under his father Maimon, who had in turn studied under Rabbi [Joseph ibn Migash](#) – a student of [Isaac Alfasi](#).

During the reign of [Almoravids](#), the position of the Jews was apparently free of significant abuses,^[11] but after another [Berber](#) dynasty [Almohads](#) conquered [Córdoba](#) in 1148, they threatened the [Jewish community](#) with the choice of [conversion to Islam](#), [death](#), or [exile](#).^[10] although the historical records of abuses against Jews in the immediate post-1148 period are subject to different interpretations.^[12] Many Jews were also forced to convert or to wear identifying clothing.^[13] Maimonides's family, along with most other [Jews](#), chose exile. Some say, though, that it is probable Maimonides feigned a conversion to Islam before escaping,^[11] his forced conversion was ruled legally invalid per Islamic law when brought up by a rival in Egypt.^[12] For the next ten years Maimonides moved about in southern Spain, eventually settled in [Fes](#) in [Morocco](#), where he studied at the [University of Al-Karaouine](#). During this time, he composed his acclaimed [commentary](#) on the [Mishnah](#) in the years 1166–1168.^[14]

Following this sojourn in Morocco, he and his family briefly lived in the [Holy Land](#), before settling in [Fostat](#), Egypt around 1168. While in Cairo he studied in [Yeshiva](#) attached to a small [synagogue that bears his name](#).^[15] In the Holy Land, he prayed at the [Temple Mount](#). He wrote that this day of visiting the Temple Mount was a day of holiness for himself and his descendants. Maimonides shortly thereafter became instrumental in helping rescue Jews taken captive during [King Amalric's](#) siege of the Egyptian town of [Bilbays](#). He sent five letters to the Jewish communities of Lower Egypt asking them to pool money together to pay the ransom. The money was collected and then given to two judges sent to Palestine to negotiate with the Crusaders. The

captives were eventually released.^[16] Following this triumph the Maimonides family, hoping to increase their wealth, gave their savings to the youngest son David, a merchant. Maimonides directed him to procure goods only at the Sudanese port of [‘Aydhab](#). After a long arduous trip through the desert, however, David was unimpressed by the goods on offer there, and, against his brother's wishes, boarded a ship for India since great wealth was to be found in the East.^[17] Before he could reach his destination though, David drowned at sea sometime between 1169–1170. The death of his brother caused Maimonides to become sick with grief. In a letter discovered in the [Cairo Geniza](#), he later explained:

The greatest misfortune that has befallen me during my entire life—worse than anything else—was the demise of the saint, may his memory be blessed, who drowned in the Indian sea, carrying much money belonging to me, him, and to others, and left with me a little daughter and a widow. On the day I received that terrible news I fell ill and remained in bed for about a year, suffering from a sore boil, fever, and depression, and was almost given up. About eight years have passed, but I am still mourning and unable to accept consolation. And how should I console myself? He grew up on my knees, he was my brother, [and] he was my student.^[18]

Subsequently, he was appointed the [Nagid](#) of the Egyptian Jewish community around 1171.^[15] Arabist [S.D. Goitein](#) believes the leadership he displayed during the ransoming of the Crusader captives led to this appointment.^[19] With the loss of the family funds tied up in David's business venture, Maimonides was constrained to assume the vocation of physician, for which he was to become famous, having been trained in medicine in both Córdoba and in Fes. Gaining widespread recognition, he was appointed court physician to the Grand [Vizier](#) Al Qadi al Fadil, then to Sultan [Saladin](#), after whose death he remained a physician to the royal family.^[20] In his writings, he described many conditions including asthma, diabetes, hepatitis, and pneumonia, and emphasized moderation and a healthy lifestyle.^[21] His treatises became influential for generations of physicians. He was knowledgeable about Greek and Arabic medicine, and followed the principles of [humorism](#) in the tradition of [Galen](#), however, he did not blindly accept authority but used his own observation and experience.^[21] Frank, however, indicates that in his medical writings he sought not to explore new ideas but to interpret works of authorities so that they could become acceptable.^[20] Maimonides displayed in his interactions with patients attributes that today would be called intercultural awareness and respect for the patient's autonomy.^[22] Although he frequently wrote of his longing for solitude in order to come closer to God and to extend his reflections – elements considered essential to the prophetic experience itself in his philosophy -he gave over almost all his time to caring for others.^[23] In a famous letter, he describes his daily routine: After visiting the Sultan's palace, he would arrive home exhausted and hungry, where "I would find the antechambers filled with gentiles and Jews ... I would go to heal them, and write prescriptions for their illnesses ... until the evening ... and I would be extremely weak."^[24] As he goes on to say in this letter, even on the Sabbath he would receive members of the community. It is remarkable that despite all this he managed to fit in the composition of massive treatises, including not only medical and other scientific studies but some of the most systematically thought-through and influential treatises on halachah (Rabbinic law) and Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages.^[25] It has even been suggested that his "incessant travail" undermined his own health and brought about his death at 69.^[26] His Rabbinic writings are still fundamental and unparalleled resources for religious Jews today.

Maimonides died on December 12, 1204 (20th of [Tevet 4965](#)) in [Fustat](#), and it is widely believed that he was briefly buried in the study room ([beit hamidrash](#)) of the synagogue courtyard, and that, soon after, in accordance with his wishes, his remains were exhumed and taken to [Tiberias](#) where he was re-interred.^[27] The [Tomb of Maimonides](#) on the western shore of the [Sea of Galilee](#) in [Israel](#) marks his grave. This location for his final resting-place is, however, not without controversy, for in the [Jewish Cairene community](#) a tradition holds that he remained buried in Egypt.^[28]

Maimonides and his wife, the daughter of one Misha'el ben Yeshayahu Halevi, had one child, [Avraham](#), who was recognized as a great scholar, and who succeeded him as Nagid and as court [physician](#) at the age of eighteen. He greatly honored the memory of his father, and throughout his career defended his father's writings against all critics. The office of Nagid was held by the Maimonides family for four successive generations until the end of the 14th century.

He is widely respected in Spain and a statue of him was erected in Córdoba in [the only synagogue](#) in that city which escaped destruction; although no longer functioning as a Jewish house of worship, it is open to the public.

He is sometimes said to be a descendant of [King David](#), although he never made such a claim.^{[29][30]}

Influence

Maimonides's Mishneh Torah is considered by traditionalist Jews even today as one of the chief authoritative codifications of Jewish law and ethics. It is exceptional for its logical construction, concise and clear expression and extraordinary learning, so that it became a standard against which other later codifications were often measured.^[31] It is still closely studied in Rabbinic yeshivot (academies). A popular medieval saying that also served as his [epitaph](#) states, *From [Mosheh](#) (of the Torah) to Mosheh (Maimonides) there was none like Mosheh*. It chiefly referred to his Rabbinic writings.

But Maimonides was also one of the most influential figures in medieval Jewish philosophy. His brilliant adaptation of Aristotelian thought to Biblical faith deeply impressed later Jewish thinkers, and had an unexpected immediate historical impact.^[32] Some more acculturated Jews in the century that followed his death, particularly in Spain, sought to apply Maimonides's Aristotelianism in ways that undercut traditionalist belief and observance, giving rise to an intellectual controversy in Spanish and southern French Jewish circles.^[33] The intensity of debate spurred Catholic Church interventions against "heresy" and even a general confiscation of Rabbinic texts and in reaction, the defeat of the more radical interpretations of Maimonides and at least amongst Ashkenazi Jews, a tendency not so much to repudiate as simply to ignore the specifically philosophical writings and to stress instead the Rabbinic and halachic writings; even these writings often included considerable philosophical chapters or discussions in support of halachic observance, as David Hartman observes Maimonides made clear "the traditional support for a philosophical understanding of God both in the Aggadah of Talmud and in the behavior of the hasid [the pious Jew]"^[34] and so Maimonidean thought continues to influence traditionally observant Jews.^{[35][36]}

The most rigorous medieval critique of Maimonides is [Hasdai Crescas' *Or Adonai*](#). Crescas bucked the eclectic trend, by demolishing the certainty of the Aristotelian world-view, not only in religious matters but even in the most basic areas of medieval science (such as physics and geometry). Crescas's critique provoked a number of 15th century scholars to write defenses of Maimonides. A partial translation of Crescas was produced by [Harry Austryn Wolfson](#) of [Harvard University](#), in 1929.

Because of his path-finding synthesis of Aristotle and Biblical faith, Maimonides also had a fundamental influence on the great Church theologian [Saint Thomas Aquinas](#).^[37] There are explicit references to Maimonides in several of Aquinas's works, including the [Commentary on the Sentences](#).

The 13 principles of faith

In his commentary on the Mishnah (tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 10), Maimonides formulates his **13 principles of faith**. They summarized what he viewed as the required beliefs of Judaism:

1. The [existence of God](#)
2. God's [unity](#)
3. God's [spirituality](#) and [incorporeality](#)
4. God's [eternity](#)
5. [God alone](#) should be the object of [worship](#)
6. [Revelation](#) through God's [prophets](#)
7. The preeminence of [Moses](#) among the prophets
8. God's law given on [Mount Sinai](#)
9. The immutability of the [Torah](#) as God's Law
10. God's [foreknowledge](#) of human actions
11. Reward of good and [retribution](#) of evil
12. The coming of the [Jewish Messiah](#)
13. The [resurrection](#) of the dead

Maimonides compiled the principles from various Talmudic sources. These principles were controversial when first proposed, evoking criticism by Rabbi [Hasdai Crescas](#) and Rabbi [Joseph Albo](#), and were effectively ignored by much of the Jewish community for the next few centuries. ("Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought," Menachem Kellner). However, these principles have become widely held; today, [Orthodox Judaism](#) holds these beliefs to be obligatory.^[citation needed] Two poetic restatements of these principles ([Ani Ma'amin](#) and [Yigdal](#)) eventually became canonized in the "[Siddur](#)" (Jewish prayer book).

Legal works

With *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides composed a code of [Jewish law](#) with the widest-possible scope and depth. The work gathers all the binding laws from the [Talmud](#), and incorporates the positions of the [Geonim](#) (post-Talmudic early Medieval scholars, mainly from [Mesopotamia](#)).

While *Mishneh Torah* is now considered the fore-runner of the [Arbaah Turim](#) and the [Shulchan Aruch](#) ^[citation needed] (two later codes), it met initially with much opposition. ^[citation needed] There were two main reasons for this opposition. Firstly, Maimonides had refrained from adding references to his work for the sake of brevity; secondly, in the introduction, he gave the impression of wanting to "cut out" study of the Talmud, ^[38] to arrive at a conclusion in Jewish law, although Maimonides himself later wrote that this was not his intent. His most forceful opponents were the rabbis of [Provence](#) (Southern France), and a running critique by Rabbi [Abraham ben David](#) (Raavad III) is printed in virtually all editions of *Mishneh Torah*. However, it was recognized as a monumental contribution to the systemized writing of [Halakha](#). Throughout the centuries, it has been widely studied and its halakhic decisions have weighed heavily in later rulings.

In response to those who would attempt to force followers of Maimonides and his *Mishneh Torah* to abide by the rulings of his own [Shulchan Aruch](#) or other later works, Rabbi [Yosef Karo](#) wrote: "Who would dare force communities who follow the Rambam to follow any other decisor, early or late? ... The Rambam is the greatest of the decisors, and all the communities of the Land of Israel and the [Arabistan](#) and the [Maghreb](#) practice according to his word, and accepted him as their rabbi." ^[39]

An oft-cited legal maxim from his pen is: "[It is better and more satisfactory to acquit a thousand guilty persons than to put a single innocent one to death.](#)" He argued that executing a defendant on anything less than absolute certainty would lead to a slippery slope of decreasing burdens of proof, until we would be convicting merely according to the judge's caprice. ^[40]

Scholars specializing in the study of the history and subculture of Judaism in premodern China (Sino-Judaica) have noted this work has surprising similarities with the liturgy of the [Kaifeng Jews](#), descendants of Persian Merchants who settled in the Middle Kingdom during the early [Song Dynasty](#). ^[41] Beyond scriptural similarities, Michael Pollak comments the Jews' Pentateuch was divided into 53 sections according to the Persian style. ^[42] He also points out:

There is no proof, to be sure, that Kaifeng Jewry ever had direct access to the works of "the Great Eagle," but it would have had ample time and opportunity to acquire or become acquainted with them well before its reservoir of Jewish learning began to run out. Nor do the Maimonidean leanings of the *kehillah* contradict the historical evidence that has the Jews arriving in [Kaifeng](#) no later than 1126, the year in which [the Sung fled the city](#)--and nine years before Maimonides was born. In 1163, when the *kehillah* built the first of its synagogues, Maimonides was only twenty-eight years old, so that it is highly unlikely that even his earliest authoritative teachings could by then have reached China. ^[43]

Charity (Tzedakah)

One of the most widely referred to sections of the *Mishneh Torah* is the section dealing with [Tzedakah](#). In *Hilkhot Matanot Ani'im* (Laws about Giving to Poor People), Chapter 10:7–14, Maimonides lists his famous Eight Levels of Giving (where the first level is most preferable, and the eighth the least): ^[44]

1. Giving an interest-free loan to a person in need; forming a partnership with a person in need; giving a grant to a person in need; finding a job for a person in need; so long as that loan, grant, partnership, or job results in the person no longer living by relying upon others.
2. Giving tzedakah anonymously to an unknown recipient via a person (or public fund) which is trustworthy, wise, and can perform acts of tzedakah with your money in a most impeccable fashion.
3. Giving tzedakah anonymously to a known recipient.
4. Giving tzedakah publicly to an unknown recipient.
5. Giving tzedakah before being asked.
6. Giving adequately after being asked.
7. Giving willingly, but inadequately.
8. Giving "in sadness" (giving out of pity): It is thought that Maimonides was referring to giving because of the sad feelings one might have in seeing people in need (as opposed to giving because it is a religious obligation). Other translations say "Giving unwillingly."

Philosophy

Through the [Guide for the Perplexed](#) (which was initially written in Arabic as *Delalatul Ha'yreen*) and the philosophical introductions to sections of his commentaries on the Mishna, Maimonides exerted an important influence on the [Scholastic](#) philosophers, especially on [Albert the Great](#), Thomas Aquinas and [Duns Scotus](#). He was himself a Jewish Scholastic. Educated more by reading the works of Arab Muslim philosophers than by personal contact with Arabian teachers, he acquired an intimate acquaintance not only with Arab Muslim philosophy, but with the doctrines of Aristotle. Maimonides strove to reconcile [Aristotelian philosophy](#) and science with the teachings of the [Torah](#). He was also influenced by [Asaph ha-Jehoudi](#), who was the first [Hebrew](#) medical writer.

Negative theology

The principle which inspired his philosophical activity was identical with the fundamental tenet of Scholasticism: there can be no contradiction between the truths which God has revealed and the findings of the human mind in science and philosophy. Maimonides primarily relied upon the science of Aristotle and the teachings of the Talmud, commonly finding basis in the former for the latter. In some important points, however, he departed from the teaching of Aristotle; for instance, he rejected the [Aristotelian](#) doctrine that God's provident care extends only to humanity, and not to the individual.

Maimonides was led by his admiration for the [neo-Platonic](#) commentators to maintain many doctrines which the Scholastics could not accept. For instance, Maimonides was an adherent of "[negative theology](#)" (also known as "Apophatic theology".) In this theology, one attempts to describe God through negative attributes. For instance, one should not say that God exists in the usual sense of the term; all we can safely say is that God is not non-existent. We should not say that "God is wise"; but we can say that "God is not ignorant," i.e. in some way, God has some properties of knowledge. We should not say that "God is One," but we can state that "there is no

multiplicity in God's being." In brief, the attempt is to gain and express knowledge of God by describing what God is not; rather than by describing what God "is".

The Scholastics agreed with him that no predicate is adequate to express the nature of God; but they did not go so far as to say that no term can be applied to God in the affirmative sense. They admitted that while "eternal," "omnipotent," etc., as we apply them to God, are inadequate, at the same time we may say "God is eternal" etc., and need not stop, as Maimonides did, with the negative "God is not not-eternal," etc. In essence what Maimonides wanted to express is that when people give God anthropomorphic qualities they do not explain anything more of what God is, because we cannot know anything of the essence of God.

Maimonides' use of apophatic theology is not unique to this time period or to Judaism. For example, [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite](#) and [Maximus the Confessor](#), [Eastern Christian](#) theologians, developed apophatic theology for Christianity nearly 900 years earlier. See [Negative theology](#) for uses in other religions.

Prophecy

He agrees with "the philosophers" in teaching that, man's intelligence being one in the series of intelligences emanating from God, the [prophet](#) must, by study and meditation, lift himself up to the degree of perfection required in the [prophetic](#) state. But here, he invokes the authority of "the Law," which teaches that, after that perfection is reached, there is required the "free acts of God," before the man actually becomes a [prophet](#).

The problem of evil

Maimonides wrote on [theodicy](#) (the philosophical attempt to reconcile the existence of a God with the existence of evil). He took the premise that an omnipotent and good God exists.^{[45][46][47][48]} In his [Guide for the Perplexed](#), Maimonides writes that all bad that exists within human beings are a matter of the individual's attributes, but all of the merits of humanity are due to their general characteristics (Guide 3;8). He also writes that there are people who are guided by higher purpose and there are those who are guided by physicality and must strive to find the higher purpose with which to guide their actions. Maimonides explains [evil](#) by saying that one who created something by causing its opposite not to exist is not the same as creating something that exists. He applies this principle to evil saying that evil is merely the absence of good, so God didn't create a thing called evil, rather God created good and evil is something that exists where good is absent (Guide 3;10). God therefore created only the good things and not the bad things – the bad things come secondarily. Maimonides also contests the common view that evil outweighs good in the world by saying that if you look at some individual cases this may be so, but if you look at the whole universe, good is significantly more common than evil (Guide 3;12). He reasons this because man is very lowly compared to the rest of the universe and that when people see mostly evil, they are focused only on themselves and not taking into account the entirety of the [universe](#) which is overwhelmingly good since it contains all of life and all of the heavens.

Maimonides also believes that there are three types of evil in the world; evil caused by nature, evil that people bring upon others and evil brought upon oneself (Guide 3;12). The first type of evil Maimonides reconciles as being very rare but at the same time, necessary for the survival of the species – if man does not change and old generations do not die to make space for new generations, then man cannot exist in its ultimate form. Maimonides writes that the second type of evil is relatively rare and that humanity brings it upon itself. The third type of evil humans bring upon themselves and are the source of most of the ills of the world, they are mostly the result of people falling victim to their physical desires. To prevent the majority of evil which stems from harm we do to ourselves, we must learn how to ignore our bodily urges.

Astrology

Maimonides answered an inquiry concerning astrology, addressed to him from [Marseille](#). He responded that man should believe only what can be supported either by rational proof, by the evidence of the senses, or by trustworthy authority. He affirms that he had studied astrology, and that it does not deserve to be described as a science. The supposition that the fate of a man could be dependent upon the constellations is ridiculed by him; he argues that such a theory would rob life of purpose, and would make man a slave of destiny. (See also [Jewish views of astrology](#))

True beliefs versus necessary beliefs

In "[Guide for the Perplexed](#)" Book III, Chapter 28,^[49] Maimonides explicitly draws a distinction between "true beliefs," which were beliefs about God that produced intellectual perfection, and "necessary beliefs," which were conducive to improving social order. Maimonides places anthropomorphic personification statements about God in the latter class. He uses as an example the notion that God becomes "angry" with people who do wrong. In the view of Maimonides (taken from [Avicenna](#)) God does not actually become angry with people, as God has no human passions; but it is important for them to believe God does, so that they desist from sinning.

Resurrection, acquired immortality, and the afterlife

Maimonides distinguishes two kinds of intelligence in man, the one material in the sense of being dependent on, and influenced by, the body, and the other immaterial, that is, independent of the bodily organism. The latter is a direct emanation from the universal [active intellect](#); this is his interpretation of the *noûs poietikós* of Aristotelian philosophy. It is acquired as the result of the efforts of the soul to attain a correct knowledge of the absolute, pure intelligence of God.

The knowledge of God is a form of knowledge, which develops in us the immaterial intelligence, and thus confers on man an immaterial, spiritual nature. This confers on the soul that perfection in which human happiness consists, and endows the soul with immortality. One who has attained a correct knowledge of God has reached a condition of existence, which renders him immune from all the accidents of fortune, from all the allurements of sin, and even from death itself. Man, therefore is in a position not only to work out his own salvation and immortality.

The resemblance between this doctrine and [Spinoza's](#) doctrine of immortality is so striking as to warrant the hypothesis that there is a causal dependence of the latter on the earlier doctrine. The

differences between the two [Jewish](#) thinkers are, however, as remarkable as the resemblance. While Spinoza teaches that the way to attain the knowledge which confers immortality is the progress from sense-knowledge through scientific knowledge to philosophical intuition of all things *sub specie æternitatis*, Maimonides holds that the road to perfection and immortality is the path of duty as described in the [Torah](#) and the rabbinic understanding of the [oral law](#).

Religious Jews not only believed in immortality in some spiritual sense, but most believed that there would at some point in the future be a messianic era, and a resurrection of the dead. This is the subject of [Jewish eschatology](#). Maimonides wrote much on this topic, but in most cases he wrote about the immortality of the soul for people of perfected intellect; his writings were usually *not* about the resurrection of dead bodies. This prompted hostile criticism from the rabbis of his day, and sparked a controversy over his true views.

Rabbinic works usually refer to this afterlife as "[Olam Haba](#)" (the World to Come). Some [rabbinic works](#) use this phrase to refer to a messianic era, an era of history right here on Earth; in other rabbinic works this phrase refers to a purely spiritual realm. It was during Maimonides's lifetime that this lack of agreement flared into a full-blown controversy, with Maimonides charged as a [heretic](#) by some [Jewish](#) leaders.

Some Jews at this time taught that [Judaism](#) did not require a belief in the physical resurrection of the dead, as the afterlife would be a purely spiritual realm. They used Maimonides's works on this subject to back up their position. In return, their opponents claimed that this was outright heresy; for them the afterlife was right here on Earth, where God would raise dead bodies from the grave so that the resurrected could live eternally. Maimonides was brought into this dispute by both sides, as the first group stated that his writings agreed with them, and the second group portrayed him as a heretic for writing that the afterlife is for the immaterial spirit alone. Eventually, Maimonides felt pressured to write a treatise on the subject, the "*Ma'amar Tehiyyat Hametim*" "The Treatise on Resurrection."

Chapter two of the treatise on resurrection refers to those who believe that the world to come involves physically resurrected bodies. Maimonides refers to one with such beliefs, as being an "utter fool" whose belief is "folly".

If one of the multitude refuses to believe [that angels are incorporeal] and prefers to believe that angels have bodies and even that they eat, since it is written (Genesis 18:8) 'they ate', or that those who exist in the World to Come will also have bodies—we won't hold it against him or consider him a heretic, and we will not distance ourselves from him. May there not be many who profess this folly, and let us hope that he will go no farther than this in his folly and believe that the Creator is corporeal.

However, Maimonides also writes, that those who claimed that he altogether believed the verses of the [Hebrew Bible](#) referring to the resurrection were only allegorical, were spreading falsehoods and "revolting" statements. Maimonides asserts that belief in resurrection is a fundamental truth of Judaism about which there is no disagreement, and that it is not permissible for a Jew to support anyone who believes differently. He cites [Daniel](#) 12:2 and 12:13 as definitive proofs of physical resurrection of the dead when they state "many of them that sleep in

the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence" and "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

While these two positions may be seen as in contradiction (non-corporeal eternal life, versus a bodily resurrection), Maimonides resolves them with a then unique solution: Maimonides believed that the resurrection was not permanent or general. In his view, God never violates the laws of nature. Rather, divine interaction is by way of [angels](#), whom Maimonides often regards to be metaphors for the laws of nature, the principles by which the physical universe operates, or Platonic eternal forms. [This is not always the case. In Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah Chaps. 2–4, Maimonides describes angels that are actually created beings.] Thus, if a unique event actually occurs, even if it is perceived as a miracle, it is not a violation of the world's order.^[50]

In this view, any dead who are resurrected must eventually die again. In his discussion of the [13 principles of faith](#), the first five deal with knowledge of God, the next four deal with prophecy and the Torah, while the last four deal with reward, punishment and the ultimate redemption. In this discussion Maimonides says nothing of a universal resurrection. All he says it is that whatever resurrection does take place, it will occur at an indeterminate time before the world to come, which he repeatedly states will be purely spiritual.

He writes "It appears to us on the basis of these verses (Daniel 12:2,13) that those people who will return to those bodies will eat, drink, copulate, beget, and die after a very long life, like the lives of those who will live in the Days of the Messiah." Maimonides thus disassociated the resurrection of the dead from both the World to Come and the Messianic era.

In his time, many Jews believed that the physical resurrection was identical to the world to come; thus denial of a permanent and universal resurrection was considered tantamount to denying the words of the Talmudic sages. However, instead of denying the resurrection, or maintaining the current dogma, Maimonides posited a third way: That resurrection had nothing to do with the messianic era (here in this world) or with [Olam Haba](#) (אבה מלוע) (the purely spiritual afterlife). Rather, he considered resurrection to be a miracle that the book of Daniel predicted; thus at some point in time we could expect some instances of resurrection to occur temporarily, which would have no place in the final eternal life of the righteous.

The Oath of Maimonides

The [Oath of Maimonides](#) is a document about the medical calling and recited as a substitute for the [Oath of Hippocrates](#). The *Oath* is not to be confused with a more lengthy *Prayer of Maimonides*. These documents may not have been written by Maimonides, but later.^[20] The *Prayer* appeared first in print in 1793 and has been attributed to [Marcus Herz](#), a German physician, pupil of [Immanuel Kant](#).^[51]

Maimonides and the Modernists

Maimonides remains one of the most widely debated Jewish thinkers among modern scholars. He has been adopted as a symbol and an intellectual hero by almost all major movements in

modern Judaism, and has proven immensely important to philosophers such as [Leo Strauss](#); and his views on the importance of [humility](#) have been taken up by modern [humanist](#) philosophers, such as [Peter Singer](#). In academia, particularly within the area of Jewish Studies, the teaching of Maimonides has been dominated by traditional, generally Orthodox scholars, who place a very strong emphasis on Maimonides as a rationalist. The result of this is many sides of Maimonides's thought, for example his opposition to anthropocentrism, have been obviated. There is some movement in postmodern circles, e.g. within the discourse of ecotheology, to claim Maimonides for other purposes. Maimonides's reconciliation of the philosophical and the traditional has given his legacy an extremely diverse and dynamic quality.

Works and bibliography

Judaic and philosophical works

Maimonides composed works of Jewish scholarship, [rabbinic law](#), philosophy, and medical texts. Most of Maimonides's works were written in [Judeo-Arabic](#). However, the *Mishneh Torah* was written in Hebrew. His Judaism texts were:

- [Commentary on the Mishna](#) (Hebrew *Pirush Hamishnayot*, Arabic *siraj*), written in Judeo-Arabic. This text was one of the first commentaries of its kind; its introductory sections are widely quoted.
- [Sefer Hamitzvot](#) (trans. *The Book of Commandments*).
- Sefer Ha'shamad (letter of Martydom)
- [Mishneh Torah](#), also known as *Sefer Yad ha-Chazaka*, a comprehensive [code](#) of Jewish law;
- [Guide for the Perplexed](#), a philosophical work harmonising and differentiating Aristotle's philosophy and Jewish theology. Written in Judeo-Arabic. The first translation of this work into Hebrew was done by [Samuel ibn Tibbon](#)
- *Teshuvot*, collected correspondence and [responsa](#), including a number of public letters (on resurrection and the [afterlife](#), on conversion to other faiths, and [Iggereth Teiman](#) – addressed to the oppressed Jewry of [Yemen](#)).
- *Treatise on Logic* (Arabic: *Maqala Fi-Sinat Al-Mantiq*) has been printed 17 times, including editions in [Latin](#) (1527), [German](#) (1805, 1822, 1833, 1828), [French](#) (1935), and English (1938), and in an abridged Hebrew form.
- *Hilkhhot ha-Yerushalmi*, a fragment of a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud, identified and published by [Saul Lieberman](#) in 1947.

Medical works

Maimonides wrote ten known medical works in Arabic that have been translated by the [Jewish medical ethicist Fred Rosner](#) into contemporary English.^[21]

- *Extracts from Galen*, or *The Art of Cure*, is essentially an extract of [Galen](#)'s extensive writings.
- *Commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates* is interspersed with his own views.

- *Medical Aphorisms of Moses* titled *Fusul Musa* in [Arabic](#) ("Chapters of Moses," *Pirkei Moshe* in Hebrew) contains 1500 aphorisms and many medical conditions are described.
 - *Treatise on Hemorrhoids* discusses also digestion and food.
 - *Treatise on Cohabitation* contains recipes as [aphrodisiacs](#) and anti-aphrodisiacs.
 - *Treatise on Asthma* discusses climates and diets and their effect on asthma and emphasizes the need for clean air.
 - *Treatise on Poisons and Their Antidotes* is an early [toxicology](#) textbook that remained popular for centuries.
 - *Regimen of Health* is a discourse on healthy living and the mind-body connection.
 - *Discourse on the Explanation of Fits* advocates healthy living and the avoidance of overabundance.
 - *Glossary of Drug Names* represents a [pharmacopeia](#) with 405 paragraphs with the names of drugs in Arabic, Greek, Syrian, Persian, Berber, and Spanish.
-

From Jewish Literacy, Telushkin.

If one did not know that Maimonides was the name of a man, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, one would assume it was the name of a university. The writings and achievements of this twelfth-century Jewish sage seem to cover an impossibly large number of activities. Maimonides was the first person to write a systematic code of all Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*; he produced one of the great philosophic statements of [Judaism](#), *The Guide to the Perplexed*; published a commentary on the entire Mishna; served as physician to the sultan of Egypt; wrote numerous books on medicine; and, in his "spare time," served as leader of [Cairo's Jewish community](#). It is hardly surprising that when Shmuel ibn Tibbon, the Hebrew translator of *The Guide to the Perplexed* (which had been written in Arabic), wrote Maimonides that he wished to visit him to discuss some difficult points in the translation, Maimonides discouraged him from coming:

I dwell at Fostat, and the sultan resides at Cairo [about a mile and a half away].... My duties to the sultan are very heavy. I am obliged to visit him every day, early in the morning, and when he or any of his children or any of the inmates of his harem are indisposed, I dare not quit Cairo, but must stay during the greater part of the day in the palace. It also frequently happens that one of the two royal officers fall sick, and I must attend to their healing. Hence, as a rule, I leave for Cairo very early in the day, and even if nothing unusual happens, I do not return to Fostat until the afternoon. Then I am almost dying with hunger. . . I find the antechamber filled with people, both Jews and gentiles, nobles and common people, judges and bailiffs, friends and foes—a mixed multitude who await the time of my return.

I dismount from my animal, wash my hands, go forth to my patients and entreat them to bear with me while I partake of some slight refreshment, the only meal I take in the twenty-four hours. Then I go forth to attend to my patients, and write prescriptions and directions for their various ailments. Patients go in and out until nightfall, and sometimes even, I solemnly assure you, until two hours or more in the night. I converse with and prescribe for them while lying down from sheer fatigue; and when night falls I am so exhausted that I can scarcely speak.

In consequence of this, no Israelite can have any private interview with me, except on the [Sabbath](#). On that day the whole congregation, or at least the majority of the members, come to me after the morning service, when I instruct them as to their proceedings during the whole week; we study together a little until noon, when they depart. Some of them return, and read with me after the afternoon service until evening prayers. In this manner I spend that day.

Maimonides's full name was Moses ben Maimon; in Hebrew he is known by the acronym of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, Rambam. He was born in [Spain](#) shortly before the fanatical [Muslim](#) Almohades came to power there. To avoid persecution by the Muslim sect — which was wont to offer Jews and Christians the choice of conversion to Islam or death — Maimonides fled with his family, first to [Morocco](#), later to [Israel](#), and finally to Egypt. He apparently hoped to continue his studies for several years more, but when his brother David, a jewelry merchant, perished in the Indian Ocean with much of the family's fortune, he had to begin earning money. He probably started practicing medicine at this time.

Maimonides's major contribution to Jewish life remains the *Mishneh Torah*, his code of Jewish law. His intention was to compose a book that would guide Jews on how to behave in all situations just by reading the [Torah](#) and his code, without having to expend large amounts of time searching through the [Talmud](#). Needless to say, this provocative rationale did not endear Maimonides to many traditional Jews, who feared that people would rely on his code and no longer study the Talmud. Despite sometimes intense opposition, the *Mishneh Torah* became a standard guide to Jewish practice: It later served as the model for the [Shulkhan Arukh](#), the sixteenth-century code of Jewish law that is still regarded as authoritative by [Orthodox Jews](#).

Philosophically, Maimonides was a religious rationalist. His damning attacks on people who held ideas he regarded as primitive — those, for example, who understood literally such biblical expressions as “the finger of God” so infuriated his opponents that they proscribed parts of his code and all of *The Guide to the Perplexed*. Other, more liberal, spirits forbade study of the *Guide* to anyone not of mature years. An old joke has it that these rabbis feared that a Jew would start reading a section in the *Guide* in which Maimonides summarizes a rationalist attack on religion, and fall asleep before reading Maimonides's counterattack—thereby spending the night as a heretic.

How Maimonides's opponents reacted to his works was no joke, however. Three leading [rabbis](#) in [France](#) denounced his books to the Dominicans, who headed the French [Inquisition](#). The Inquisitors were only too happy to intervene and burn the books. Eight years later, when the Dominicans started burning the Talmud, one of the rabbis involved, Jonah Gerondi, concluded that [God](#) was punishing him and French Jewry for their unjust condemnation of Maimonides. He resolved to travel to Maimonides's grave in Tiberias, in Israel, to request forgiveness.

Throughout most of the Jewish world, Maimonides remained a hero, of course. When he died, Egyptian Jews observed three full days of mourning, and applied to his death the biblical verse “The ark of the Lord has been taken” ([I Samuel 4:11](#)).

To this day, Maimonides and the French Jewish sage [Rashi](#) are the most widely studied Jewish scholars. Contemporary yeshiva students generally focus on the *Mishneh Torah*, and his *Book of*

Commandments (*Sefer haMitzvot*) a compilation of the Torah's [613 commandments](#). Maimonides also formulated a credo of Judaism expressed in [thirteen articles of faith](#), a popular reworking of which (the *Yigdal* [prayer](#)) appears in most Jewish [prayerbooks](#). Among other things, this credo affirms belief in the oneness of God, the divine origins of the Torah, and the afterlife. Its twelfth statement of faith — “I believe with a full heart in the coming of the [Messiah](#), and even though he may tarry I will still wait for him” — was often among the last words said by Jews being marched into [Nazi gas chambers](#).

Maimonides was one of the few Jewish thinkers whose teachings also influenced the nonJewish world; much of his philosophical writings in the *Guide* were about God and other theological issues of general, not exclusively Jewish, interest. Thomas Aquinas refers in his writings to “Rabbi Moses,” and shows considerable familiarity with the *Guide*. In 1985, on the 850th anniversary of Maimonides's birth, Pakistan and Cuba — which do not recognize Israel — were among the cosponsors of a UNESCO conference in Paris on Maimonides. Vitali Naumkin, a Soviet scholar, observed on this occasion: “Maimonides is perhaps the only philosopher in the Middle Ages, perhaps even now, who symbolizes a confluence of four cultures: GrecoRoman, Arab, Jewish, and Western.” More remarkably, Abderrahmane Badawi, a Muslim professor from Kuwait University, declared: “I regard him first and foremost as an Arab thinker.” This sentiment was echoed by Saudi Arabian professor Huseyin Atay, who claimed that “if you didn't know he was Jewish, you might easily make the mistake of saying that a Muslim was writing.” That is, if you didn't read any of his Jewish writings. Maimonides scholar Shlomo Pines delivered perhaps the most accurate assessment at the conference: “Maimonides is the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages, and quite possibly of all time” (*Time* magazine, December 23, 1985). As a popular Jewish expression of the Middle Ages declares: “From Moses [of the Torah] to Moses [Maimonides] there was none like Moses.”

Anticipate charity by preventing poverty.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides143974.html>

Consequently he who wishes to attain to human perfection, must therefore first study Logic, next the various branches of Mathematics in their proper order, then Physics, and lastly Metaphysics.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides326748.html>

Do not consider it proof just because it is written in books, for a liar who will deceive with his tongue will not hesitate to do the same with his pen.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides184452.html>

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides326751.html>

No disease that can be treated by diet should be treated with any other means.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides326756.html>

One should see the world, and see himself as a scale with an equal balance of good and evil. When he does one good deed the scale is tipped to the good - he and the world is saved. When he does one evil deed the scale is tipped to the bad - he and the world is destroyed.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides326758.html>

Teach thy tongue to say 'I do not know,' and thou shalt progress.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides184449.html>

The risk of a wrong decision is preferable to the terror of indecision.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides184451.html>

The whole object of the Prophets and the Sages was to declare that a limit is set to human reason where it must halt.

[Maimonides](#)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/maimonides326760.html>

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Rabbi Abraham Geiger



How did R. Geiger change Judaism?

At what point did he articulate his changes?

How did his era influence his work?

Abraham Geiger (24 May 1810 in [Frankfurt am Main](#) – 23 October 1874 in [Berlin](#)) was a [German rabbi](#) and scholar who led the founding of [Reform Judaism](#). He sought to remove all nationalistic elements (particularly the "Chosen People" doctrine) from [Judaism](#), stressing it as an evolving and changing religion.

Biography

As a child, Geiger started doubting the traditional understanding of Judaism when his studies in classical history seemed to contradict the biblical claims of divine authority. At the age of seventeen, he began writing his first work, a comparison between the legal style of the [Mishnah](#) and Biblical and Talmudic law. He also worked on a dictionary of Mishnaic (Rabbinic) Hebrew.

Geiger's friends provided him with financial assistance which enabled him to attend the University in Heidelberg, to the great disappointment of his family. His main focus was centered

on the areas of [philology](#), Syriac, Hebrew, and classics, but he also attended lectures in Old Testament, philosophy, and archaeology. After one semester, he transferred to the University of Bonn, where he studied at the same time as [Samson Raphael Hirsch](#). Hirsch initially formed a friendship with Geiger, and with him organized a society of Jewish students for the stated purpose of practicing [homiletics](#), but with the deeper intention of bringing them closer to Jewish values. It was to this society that Geiger preached his first sermon (January 2, 1830).^[1] In later years he and Hirsch became bitter opponents as the leaders of two opposing Jewish movements.

At Bonn, Geiger began an intense study of Arabic and the *Koran*, winning a prize for his essay "Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?" ("What has Mohammed taken from Judaism?").^[2] The essay earned Geiger a doctorate at the [University of Marburg](#). It demonstrated that large parts of the Koran were taken from, or based on, rabbinic literature. (On this see [Origin and development of the Qur'an](#)).

This book was Geiger's first step in a much larger intellectual project. Geiger sought to demonstrate Judaism's central influence on Christianity and Islam. He believed that neither movement possessed religious originality, but were simply a vehicle to transmit the Jewish monotheistic belief to the pagan world.

At this time, no university professorships were available in Germany to Jews, so Geiger was forced to seek a position as rabbi. He found a position in the Jewish community of Wiesbaden (1832–1837). There he continued his academic publications primarily through the scholarly journals he founded and edited, including *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift fuer juedische Theologie* (1835–39) and *Juedische Zeitschrift fuer Wissenschaft und Leben* (1862–75). His journals became important vehicles in their day for publishing Jewish scholarship, chiefly historical and theological studies, as well as a discussion of contemporary events.^[2]

By that time Geiger had begun his program of religious reforms, chiefly in the synagogue liturgy. For example, he abolished the prayers of mourning for the temple, believing that since Jews were German citizens, such prayers would appear to be disloyal to the ruling power and could possibly spark [anti-semitism](#). Geiger was the driving force in convening several synods of reform-minded Rabbis with the intention of formulating a program of progressive Judaism. However, unlike [Samuel Holdheim](#), he did not want to create a separate community. Rather, his goal was to change Judaism from within.^[3]

Reformer

In the Germany of the 19th century, Geiger and [Samuel Holdheim](#), along with [Israel Jacobson](#) and [Leopold Zunz](#), stood out as the founding fathers of Reform Judaism. Geiger was a more moderate and scholarly reformer, seeking to found this new branch of Judaism on the scientific study of history, without assuming that any Jewish text was divinely written.

Geiger was not only a scholar and researcher commenting on important subjects and characters in Jewish history, he was also a rabbi responsible for much of the reform doctrine of the mid 19th century. He contributed much of the character to the reform movement that remains today.

Reform historian Michael A. Meyer has stated that, if any one person can be called the founder of Reform Judaism, it must be Geiger.

Much of Geiger's writing has been translated into English from the original German. There have been many biographical and research texts about him, such as the work *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* by [Susannah Heschel](#) (1998), which chronicles Geiger's radical contention that the New Testament illustrates Jesus was a Pharisee teaching Judaism. Some of Geiger's studies are included in *The Origins of The Koran: Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book* edited by [Ibn Warraq](#). Other works are *Judaism and Islam* (1833) and *An Appeal to My Community* (1842).

Criticism

[Samson Raphael Hirsch](#) devoted a good many issues of his journal *Jeschurun* to criticizing Geiger's reform stance (published in English as *Hirsch, Collected Writings*).

Some critics also attacked Geiger's opposition to a Jewish national identity; most notably he was criticized when he refused to intervene on the behalf of the [Jews of Damascus accused of ritual murder](#) (a [blood libel](#)) in 1840. However, Jewish historian Steven Bayme has concluded that Geiger had actually *vigorously protested* on humanitarian grounds.^[4]

From Jewish Virtual Library

The Origins of Reform Judaism

[Reform Judaism](#) was born at the time of the French Revolution, a time when European [Jews](#) were recognized for the first time as citizens of the countries in which they lived. Ghettos were being abolished, special badges were no more, people could settle where they pleased, dress as they liked and follow the occupations that they wanted.

Many [Jews](#) settled outside of Jewish districts, and began to live like their neighbors and speak the language of the land. They went to public schools and universities, began to neglect Jewish studies and to disregard the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In 1815, after Napoleon's defeat, [Jews](#) lost the rights of citizenship in several countries. Many [Jews](#) became Christian to retain those rights. Thoughtful [Jews](#) were concerned about this. They realized that many of these changes took place not because of a dislike of [Judaism](#), but to obtain better treatment. Many rabbis believed the way to address this was to force [Jews](#) to keep away from Christians and give up public schools and universities. This didn't work.

Leopold Zunz proposed something else. He suggested that [Jews](#) study their history and learn of the great achievements of the past. While Zunz was implementing his ideas, a movement began to make religious services better understood, by incorporating music and the local language. Local Rabbis, however, persuaded the government to close the test synagogue.

Shortly after the closing, Rabbi Abraham Geiger suggested that observance might also be changed to appeal to modern people. Geiger, a skilled scholar in both Tanach and German

studies, investigated Jewish history. He discovered that Jewish life had continually changed. Every now and then, old practices were changed and new ones introduced, resulting in a Jewish life that was quite different from that lived 4,000 or even 2,000 years before. He noticed these changes often made it easier for [Jews](#) to live in accordance with Judaism. Geiger concluded that this process of change needed to continue to make Judaism attractive to all [Jews](#).

Between 1810 and 1820, congregations in Seesen, Hamburg and Berlin instituted fundamental changes in traditional Jewish practices and beliefs, such as mixed seating, singleday observance of festivals and the use of a cantor/choir. Many leaders of the Reform movement took a very "rejectionist" view of Jewish practice and discarded traditions and rituals. For example:

- Circumcision was not practiced, and was decried as barbaric.
- The Hebrew language was removed from the liturgy and replaced with German.
- The hope for a restoration of the [Jews](#) in Israel was officially renounced, and it was officially stated that Germany was to be the new Zion.
- The ceremony in which a child celebrated becoming Bar Mitzvah was replaced with a "confirmation" ceremony.
- The laws of Kashrut and family purity were officially declared "repugnant" to modern thinking people, and were not observed.
- Shabbat was observed on Sunday.
- Traditional restrictions on Shabbat behavior were not followed.

Reform Comes to America

American Reform Judaism began as these German "reformers" immigrated to American in the mid1800s. The first "Reform" group was formed by a number of individuals that split from Congregation Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina. Reform rapidly became the dominant belief system of American [Jews](#) of the time. It was a national phenomenon.

Reform Judaism in American benefitted from the lack of a central religious authority. It also was molded by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise. Rabbi Wise came to the United States in 1846 from Bohemia, spent eight years in Albany, NY, and then moved to Cincinnati on the edge of the frontier. He then proceeded to:

1. Write the first siddur edited for American worshipers, *Minhag American* (1857).
2. Found the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in 1873.
3. Found Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1875.
4. Found the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in 1889.

Reform [Jews](#) also pioneered a number of organizations, such as the Educational Alliance on the Lower East Side of New York, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith.

By 1880, more than 90 percent of American synagogues were Reform. This was the time of the major Eastern European immigration, which was heavily Orthodox and nonGerman, as contrasted with the strongly German Reform movement. Many Reform congregations of this

time were difficult to distinguish from neighboring Protestant churches, with preachers in robes, pews with mixed seating, choirs, organs and hymnals. Like their counterparts in Germany, American Reform rabbis, such as David Einhorn, Samuel Holdheim, Bernard Felsenthal and Kaufmann Kohler, adopted a radical approach to observance.

Although early American Reform rabbis dropped quite a bit of traditional prayers and rituals, there was still a "bottom line." In 1909, the CCAR formally declared its opposition to intermarriage. And, although decried as "archaic" and "barbarian," the practice of circumcision remained a central rite.

This early radicalism was mentioned in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which dismisses "such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress" as anachronisms that only obstruct spirituality in the modern age. The platform stressed that Reform [Jews](#) must only be accepting of laws that they feel "elevate and sanctify our lives" and must reject those customs and laws that are "not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."

Early Reform Judaism was also antiZionist, believing the Diaspora was necessary for [Jews](#) to be "light unto the nations." Nevertheless, a number of Reform rabbis were pioneers in establishing Zionism in America, including Gustav and Richard Gottheil, Rabbi Steven S. Wise (founder of the American Jewish Congress) and Justice Louis Brandeis. Following the Balfour Declaration, the Reform movement began to support Jewish settlements in Palestine, as well as institutions such as Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University.

As the years passed, a reevaluation took place in which many members of the Reform movement began to question the "reforms" that were made. By 1935, the movement had begun to return to a more traditional approach to Judaism-distinctly Jewish and distinctly American, but also distinctively nonChristian. Starting with the Columbus Platform in 1937, many of the discarded practices were reincorporated into the Reform canon, and constitute what is now called "Modern" Reform Judaism, or more succinctly, Reform Judaism. The platform also formally shifted the movement's position on Zionism by affirming "the obligation of all Jewry to aid in building a Jewish homeland...."

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Reform movement in Judaism

The Reform movement in [Judaism](#) is a historic and on-going religious and [social movement](#) that originated in the early nineteenth century in [Europe](#).^[1] The term is used by two widely read and frequently cited historians of the movement: [David Philipson](#) and Michael Meyer. Philipson wrote *The Reform movement in Judaism* (1903, 1931) covering the movement from its beginnings up until 1930. Meyer wrote *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (1978). Meyer's book, the first general history of the movement since Philipson, updates Philipson's coverage to reflect modern concerns with bias and to extend the history of the movement up to the 1970s.^[2]

Throughout its history, [Jewish beliefs and practices in the reform movement](#) have undergone dynamic changes and innovations. Due to its origins in [Enlightenment](#)-era Germany, the reform

movement has eyed traditional Jewish beliefs through the lens of [liberal](#) thought, such as [autonomy](#), [modernity](#), [universalism](#), and the historical-philosophical critique of religion. The reform movement in Judaism challenged many traditionalist Jewish doctrines, adapted or eliminated practices, and introduced its own theological and communal innovations.

Whether in support or reaction, some [Ashkenazi](#) Jewish denominations can trace their intellectual and organization origins to this critical time in Jewish history.^{[3][4]}

The nineteenth century

Germany

In response to the [Haskalah](#), [Enlightenment](#), and [Jewish Emancipation](#), reform-minded thinkers within German Jewry, such as [Israel Jacobson](#), [Abraham Geiger](#), [Samuel Holdheim](#) and [Leopold Zunz](#), sought to change Jewish belief and practice. Initially, the reformers did not call for a separate organizational structure. They convened synods but did not formally establish independent organizations or a rabbinical body. However, reform efforts shifted after the German state permitted the establishment of separate organizational structures in the Jewish community, including congregations. During the 1840s and 1850s, separate reform congregations were set up in two major centers of the German Jewry, [Frankfurt](#) and [Berlin](#). No other separatist reform congregations were established for decades in Germany and key reformers, including Geiger, did not serve in these separate synagogues. The movement did take the significant step, in 1870, to create a rabbinical seminary and research center known as the [Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums](#).

Beyond Germany

In Denmark, controversial Reform movement efforts were undertaken by Mendel Levin Nathanson and [Isaac Noah Mannheimer](#). The dispute was sparked by a reform [confirmation](#) service in 1817. Meyer states: "... the Copenhagen community remained divided between unbending traditionalists and Jewish minimalists. ... Among the reformers were highly assimilated families, including that of Nathanson, whose hold on Judaism was so weak that it could not prevent apostasy in the next generation."^[5]

In Austria, [Vienna](#) was introduced to the Reform movement through [Isaac Noah Mannheimer](#), who left Copenhagen in 1821 and found in Vienna that "the Jewish elite mingled freely with highly placed Gentiles," gained sometimes great wealth, yet whose 135 families were barely tolerated by the empire. This elite built a large, high status new Temple and recruited Mannheimer. Since Mannheimer was "known as a man who in Denmark had expressed patently reformist views," the Temple and its community sought to dampen reform and called it "restoration" instead.^[6]

Around the same time, reform efforts in North America started to emerge, but with none of the governmental opposition and regulation facing their European counterparts. Christian Americans may have been prejudiced, but the [separation of church and state](#) philosophy allowed for the Reform movement to blossom differently overseas. In addition, North America lacked rabbis of

any kind, Orthodox or reformist.^[7]^[citation needed] In 1825, lay members of [Beth Elohim](#) in [Charleston, South Carolina](#) founded the *Reformed Society of Israelites* as a breakaway ground seeking mild reforms.^[8] In America, while the Charleston effort "was only slightly influenced by the German model," this soon changed: "the classical Reform ideology in America was almost fully developed in Europe and transplanted to the United States."^[9]

In Hungary, a supporter of [Geiger](#) and of the Hamburg Temple emerged as an influential thinker and leader: [Aaron Chorin](#) (1766–1844). Chorin "served as a valuable authority for the German Reformers" and, albeit from Hungary, was "one of the movement's pioneers." A talmudic scholar, Chorin was traditional at first but then "began to deviate from the norm." He changed the kashrut requirements, condemned [kabbalah](#), instituted some of the earliest changes in the *alenu* prayer practice, and abolished [amulets](#) and the [kol nidre](#) prayer of [Yom Kippur](#). According to Meyer, "Chorin was a reformer on the basis of Haskalah, not historical development. With his rabbinic training, he wrote Jewish law [responsa](#) to permit train travel and organ playing on [Shabbat](#)."^[10] And Chorin was not the only Hungarian reformer.

In [Budapest](#), there were "less thoroughgoing religious reformers" who were inspired by the reform Temple in [Vienna](#). Budapest reformers, in turn, "moderate reforms" were undertaken in various cities and outreach efforts were made to various German rabbis, including [Zacharias Frankel](#), widely seen as the pioneer of [Conservative Judaism](#).^[11] Ignaz Einhorn, a Hungarian-born rabbi, "put forward a program based neither on halakhic reform nor on 'Mosaic' Judaism – in fact not on a reform of historical Judaism at all, but on an alternative *kind* of Judaism called 'Reform.' Though Einhorn said little which had not already been expressed by Holdheim, nowhere previously had the principles and program of a radical Reform Judaism been formulated as clearly."^[12] Einhorn sought to abolish the ceremonial element of Judaism and retain its faith and morality. Says Meyer, "Very much like Zacharias Frankel, Einhorn found his authority in what he called 'the religious consciousness of the people' except that here the people (Volk) consisted of the most acculturated among the Jews, those most rooted in the present." Einhorn permitted mixed marriages, ended [circumcision](#), shifted his congregation's [Shabbat](#) worship to Sundays and, "sounding a note that would be heard often thereafter in American Reform Judaism, was recognized simply by his idea of God and the moral dicta on which he acts."^[13]

Out of these multi-faceted Continental European reform developments, there arose a variety of thinkers who, like Ignaz Einhorn, anticipated or participated in reform elsewhere. For instance, after leaving Germany, a rabbi was appointed for a brief stint in Budapest who proved instrumental to reform both in Europe and America: [David Einhorn](#), unrelated to Ignaz, David Einhorn was a "talented radical who would later become a leading figure in American Reform."^[14] Indeed, Einhorn had participated in the controversial Frankfurt assembly and his "Reform philosophy had crystallized" in Europe.^[15]

In Great Britain, reform efforts were sparked by efforts to change the liturgy at [London's Bevis Marks](#), as had been done with the [Hamburg Temple](#). Despite some initial reforms in 1836, further alterations were rebuffed in 1839. in requested the introduction of *such alterations and modifications as were in the line of the changes introduced in the Reform synagogue in Hamburg and other places*. The British reformers established an independent congregation, the [West London Synagogue of British Jews](#), on 15 April 1840. The West London Synagogue reformers

paved the way for the modern British reform movement, the [Movement for Reform Judaism](#). In 1856, [Act of Parliament](#) was passed to allow the minister of the West London Synagogue of British Jews to register marriage ceremonies. This act established the full autonomy of the congregation and ensured its equality before the law with the Orthodox congregations.

Across the Atlantic, by 1873 sufficient Reform congregations had emerged to organize as the [Union of American Hebrew Congregations](#) (UAHC). Shortly after, in 1875, the [Hebrew Union College](#) was established to improve the quality of rabbis in the US.

As in Europe, there were significant disagreements among the reformers over the role of tradition. In 1883 a banquet was planned to celebrate the first graduating class of rabbis from [Hebrew Union College](#). The more radical element planned the banquet with a menu containing shrimp. Soon after this banquet, known as the Trefa Banquet, intensified the conflict between the radical and conservative reformers.^[16] The conflict further intensified in 1885 when a fierce debate broke out between [Kaufmann Kohler](#) and [Alexander Kohut](#) over the nature of reform.

In response to debate, Kohler called a conference of reform-minded rabbis in [Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania](#). [Isaac Mayer Wise](#), the rabbinical head of Hebrew Union College, presided over the conference. The conference produced the [Pittsburgh Platform](#). This platform was highly controversial and an organizational split between those more and less conservative.^[17] In 1887 a separate rabbinical school, the [Jewish Theological Seminary](#) was founded. In 1889, the more liberal rabbis organized under the banner of the [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#).

The Twentieth Century

At the start of the twentieth century, the European reform movement gained new steam organizationally. In Germany, rabbis and followers organized under the banner of [Liberal Judaism](#). Meanwhile, inspired largely by [Claude Montefiore](#), [Lily Montagu](#) spearheaded reform efforts in [Great Britain](#). Around 1902, following liturgical changes and debates, they formed the *Jewish Religious Union* in London. Liberal Judaism steadily gained adherents after the founding in 1911 of the Liberal Jewish synagogue, the first of more than thirty Liberal congregations in the UK.

At the same time, reform-minded French Jews established the *Union Liberale Israelite*, which was criticized as a revolutionary schism.^[18]

In 1926, representatives from the U.S. and Europe convened the first international conference for the Reform movement in Judaism and formed [World Union for Progressive Judaism](#).^[19] With British and then American leadership, the WUPJ spread the reform movement to many countries, most notably Israel, to which the WUPJ headquarters were relocated.

In the United States, the Reform movement grew significantly through the [Union of American Hebrew Congregations](#) and its affiliates. In 1922, Reform Rabbi [Stephen S. Wise](#) established the [Jewish Institute of Religion](#) in New York, which merged with [Hebrew Union College](#) in 1950. Other centers were opened in Los Angeles (1954) and Jerusalem (1963).

On policy matters, the American Reform movement has had a number of official platforms. The [Columbus platform](#) was written in 1937 by the Reform movement's [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#) (CCAR). The CCAR rewrote its principles in 1976 with its *Centenary Perspective* and rewrote them again in the 1999 as *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*. According to the CCAR, personal autonomy still has precedence over these platforms. In 1983, the Central Conference of American Rabbis took one of its most controversial stands and formally affirmed that a Jewish identity can be passed down through either the mother or the father, if the child is raised with a Jewish identity.

The emergence of Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism

Historians of [Conservative Judaism](#) trace its intellectual origins to thinkers like [Zacharias Frankel](#), who held a religious middle ground between German Reformers and Orthodoxy. Institutionally, the Conservative movement in the US developed in reaction to reforms. For instance, a group of rabbis split with the Reform movement due to the controversial [Pittsburgh Platform](#).^[17] In 1887, they founded a separate rabbinical school, the [Jewish Theological Seminary](#) and, in 1901, Conservative rabbis organized as the [Rabbinical Assembly](#) and by 1913 their congregations banded together under the banner of the [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism](#).

From the [Conservative movement](#), another liberal, non-orthodox Judaism approach was created by [Mordecai Kaplan](#). Initially, Mordecai Kaplan was deeply opposed to the formation of yet another American Jewish denomination. In 1955, the Reconstructionist Fellowship of Congregations was formed. This organization allowed reconstructionist congregations to share common concerns but required members to be dual affiliated with either the US Reform or Conservative movement. In 1961 the dual affiliation requirement was dropped and [Reconstructionist Judaism](#) became a full fledged third denomination on the American scene.^[20] After building its own [rabbinical seminary](#) and congregational presence, the Reconstructionists eventually affiliated^[21] in the 1990s with the World Union of Progressive Judaism.

Orthodoxy and the Reform movement in Judaism

Historians, such as [Jacob Katz](#), [David Ellenson](#) and Shmuel Feiner, see the co-emergence of the non-Orthodox and Orthodox movements as a gradual, dialectical process. This dialectical dynamic is dominated largely by controversy and conflict, of both an intellectual and organizational character, yet mixed as well with intermittent measures of cooperation, dialogue, and personnel exchange. In addition, both movements went through a gradual process of identity formation and ideological differentiation—primarily during the 19th century, yet continuing to this day.

Criticism and interchange

Since the very beginnings of the movement, reformers and traditionalists have often been strongly critical of one another.

Reformers often felt traditionalists were encouraging secularization and assimilation by creating an identity that Jews could not relate to or be nurtured by. They accused traditionalists of being irrational or intellectually naive in rejecting what modern textual criticism, historiography, psychology, anthropology, and sociology had to say about Jewish history and peoplehood.

Traditionalists often argued on behalf of tradition making much the same claims: that reformers were creating a meaningless Jewish identity that encouraged assimilation and failed to nurture the Jewish spirit. They accused reformers of dishonoring Torah, and even God in their pursuit of the modern. Yet despite this interchange between Traditional and Reform, there has from time to time been a positive flow of ideas between the communities. Many of the early reformers had a rich knowledge of Jewish text and tradition to draw on, a knowledge nurtured by years spent studying in traditional [yeshivas](#).

When Western modes of university study began to dominate the educational landscape of the reformers, they soon found themselves with a generation of educators who knew a great deal about modern scholarship and very little about the historic content of Judaism. In recent years non-orthodox Judaisms have turned to the traditional yeshiva or bet-midrash model, and even imported Orthodox teachers to help them maintain the connection to tradition. Thus the US conservative movement has its [Conservative Yeshiva](#) in Jerusalem and both the New York and Jerusalem school of HUC sponsor part-time [batei-midrash](#).

There has been a similar flow in the other direction as well. [Modern Orthodoxy](#) still maintains a traditional approach to [Halakhah](#), but has been increasingly comfortable with the study techniques pioneered by the [Wissenschaft des Judentums](#) school. Some of the products of that school are found today on almost every yeshiva desk, even those that reject the historical critical method: among them the Aramaic dictionary of [Marcus Jastrow](#) and the concordance of [Avraham Even-Shoshan](#).

Organizational identity

Elements of Orthodoxy developed their cohesive identity in reaction to the Reform movement in Judaism.^[4] In the United States, reformers took control of several synagogue boards, prompting Orthodox members to separate and form new congregations. For example, in [Charleston, South Carolina](#), the first reform synagogue in the United States, in 1839, the cantor of [Beth Elohim](#) asked the congregation for an organ. Traditionalists opposed the proposal and when the congregation supported the proposal, the traditionalists left and formed their own congregation, [Shearith Israel](#).^[22]

In the United Kingdom, Orthodox congregations maintained control of state sponsored religion and reformers were forced to separate and form their own communities.

Also in the United Kingdom, the [Masorti movement](#) ([Conservative](#)) started in the 1950s when the Chief Rabbi at the time refused to appoint [Louis Jacobs](#) as principal of [Jews' College](#) and refused to allow him to return to his former congregation. A crisis ensued and the majority of the congregation left and formed the [New London Synagogue](#) in 1964. Other synagogues later joined the [New London Synagogue](#) and formed the [Assembly of Masorti Synagogues](#).^[23]

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Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch



How did R. Hirsch change Judaism?

At what point did he articulate his changes?

How did his era influence his work?

Samson Raphael Hirsch (June 20, 1808 – December 31, 1888) was a [German rabbi](#) best known as the intellectual founder of the [Torah im Derech Eretz](#) school of contemporary [Orthodox Judaism](#). Occasionally termed *neo-Orthodoxy*, his philosophy, together with that of [Azriel Hildesheimer](#), has had a considerable influence on the development of [Orthodox Judaism](#).^[1]

Hirsch was rabbi in [Oldenburg](#), [Emden](#), was subsequently appointed chief rabbi of [Moravia](#), and from 1851 until his death led the secessionist Orthodox community in [Frankfurt am Main](#). He wrote a number of influential books, and for a number of years published the monthly journal *Jeschurun*, in which he outlined his philosophy of Judaism. He was a vocal opponent of [Reform Judaism](#) and similarly opposed early forms of [Conservative Judaism](#).^[1]

Early years and education

Hirsch was born in [Hamburg, Germany](#). His father, though a merchant, devoted much of his time to [Torah](#) studies; his grandfather, Mendel Frankfurter, was the founder of the [Talmud Torah](#) in Hamburg and unsalaried assistant rabbi of the neighboring congregation of [Altona](#); and his granduncle, Löb Frankfurter, was the author of several Hebrew works, including *Harechasim le-Bik'ah* (העקבל מיסכרה), a [Torah](#) commentary. Hirsch was a pupil of [Chacham Isaac Bernays](#), and the [Biblical](#) and [Talmudical](#) education which he received, combined with his teacher's influence, led him to determine not to become a merchant, as his parents had desired, but to choose the rabbinical vocation. In furtherance of this plan he studied [Talmud](#) from 1823 to 1829 in [Mannheim](#) under Rabbi [Jacob Ettlinger](#). He then entered the [University of Bonn](#), where he studied at the same time as his future antagonist, [Abraham Geiger](#).^[1]

Oldenburg

In 1830 Hirsch was elected [chief rabbi](#) (*Landesrabbiner*) of the [principality](#) of [Oldenburg](#). During this period he wrote his *Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum*, (*Nineteen Letters on Judaism*) which were published, under the pseudonym of "Ben Usiel" (or "Uziel"), at Altona in 1836. This work made a profound impression in German Jewish circles because it was something new — a brilliant, intellectual presentation of [Orthodox Judaism](#) in classic [German](#), and a fearless, uncompromising defense of all its institutions and ordinances.^[1]

In 1838 Hirsch published, as a necessary concomitant of the *Letters*, his *Horeb, oder Versuche über Jissroel's Pflichten in der Zerstreuung*, which is a text-book on Judaism for educated Jewish youth. In fact, he wrote *Horeb* first, but his publishers doubted that a work defending traditional Judaism would find a market in those times, when reform was in vogue.^[1]

In 1839 he published *Erste Mittheilungen aus Naphtali's Briefwechsel*, a polemical essay against the [reforms in Judaism](#) proposed by Holdheim and others; and in 1844 he published *Zweite Mittheilungen aus einem Briefwechsel über die Neueste Jüdische Literatur*, also polemical in tendency.^[1]

Emden

Hirsch remained in Oldenburg until 1841, when he was elected chief rabbi of the Hanoverian districts of [Aurich](#) and [Osnabrück](#), with his residence in [Emden](#). During this five-year post, he was taken up almost completely by communal work, and had little time for writing. He did, however, found a secondary school with a curriculum featuring both [Jewish studies](#) and a secular programme, for the first time employing his motto [Torah im Derech Eretz](#) ("The Torah is maximalised in partnership with worldly involvement").^[1]

In 1843, Hirsch applied for the post of [Chief Rabbi](#) of the [British Empire](#). Out of 13 candidates, mostly from [Germany](#), he reached the short list of four: [Nathan Marcus Adler](#), Hirsch Hirschfeld, [Benjamin Hirsch Auerbach](#) and Hirsch.^[1] Adler won the position on December 1, 1844. With 135 communities having one vote each, Adler received 121 votes, Hirschfeld 12, and Hirsch 2.^[2]

Nikolsburg

In 1846 Hirsch was called to the rabbinate of [Nikolsburg](#) in [Moravia](#), and in 1847 he became chief rabbi of [Moravia](#) and Austrian Silesia. In Austria he passed five years in the reorganization of the Jewish congregations and the instruction of numerous disciples; he was also, in his official capacity as chief rabbi, a member of the Moravian [Landtag](#), where he campaigned for more civil rights for Jews in Moravia.^[1]

In Moravia Hirsch had a difficult time, on the one side receiving criticism from the Reform-minded, and on the other side from a deeply traditional [Orthodox](#) element, which found some of his reforms too radical. Hirsch placed a much stronger emphasis on deep study of the entire [Hebrew Bible](#), rather than just the [Torah](#) and selected Bible readings, in addition to [Talmud](#), as had been the custom of religious Jews up until then.^[1]

Frankfurt am Main

In 1851 he accepted a call as rabbi of an Orthodox separatist group in [Frankfurt am Main](#), a part of the Jewish community of which had otherwise largely accepted classical Reform Judaism. This group, known as the "Israelite Religious Society" ("Israelitische Religions-Gesellschaft" or IRG), became under his administration a great congregation, numbering about 500 families. Hirsch remained rabbi of this congregation for the rest of his life.^[1]

Hirsch organized the *Realschule* and the *Bürgerschule*, in which thorough Jewish training was provided along with those aspects of secular training deemed true according to the [Torah](#) ([Torah im Derech Eretz](#)). He also founded and edited the monthly magazine *Jeschurun* (1855–70; new series, 1882 et seq); most of the pages of the *Jeschurun* were filled by himself.^[1]

In 1876, [Edward Lasker](#) (a Jewish parliamentarian in the [Prussian Landtag](#)) introduced the "Secession Bill" (*Austrittsgesetz*), which would enable Jews to secede from a religious congregation without having to relinquish their religious status. The law was passed on July 28, 1876. Despite the new legislation, a conflict arose whether "*Austritt*" (secession) was required by [Jewish law](#). Hirsch held this was mandatory, even though it involved a court appearance and visible disapproval of the Reform-dominated "Main Community" (*Grossgemeinde*). His contemporary [Isaac Dov Bamberger](#), [Rabbi](#) of [Würzburg](#), argued that as long as the *Grossgemeinde* made appropriate arrangements for the Orthodox element, secession was unnecessary. The schism caused a terrible rift and many hurt feelings, and its aftershocks could be felt until the ultimate destruction of the Frankfurt community by the Nazis.^[1]

Final years

During the final years of his life, Hirsch put his efforts in the founding of the "*Freie Vereinigung für die Interessen des Orthodoxen Judentums*", an association of independent Jewish communities. During the 30 years after his death this organization would be used as a model for the formation of the international orthodox [Agudas Yisrael](#) movement. Hirsch had a great love

for the [Land of Israel](#), which is apparent from his writings, but was opposed to the proto-[Zionist](#) activities of [Zvi Hirsch Kalischer](#).^[1]

From reports of his family members, it seems likely that Hirsch contracted [malaria](#) while in Emden, which continued to plague him during the rest of life with febrile episodes.^[1]

Hirsch died in 1888 in [Frankfurt am Main](#) and is buried there.^[1]

Hirsch's son [Mendel Hirsch](#) (German) (1833–1900) was a scholar and writer; his granddaughter [Rahel Hirsch](#) (German) (1870–1953) became the first female professor of medicine in [Prussia](#).^[3]

Works and activism

Other works (besides the ones mentioned above) were:

- Pamphlet: "*Jüdische Anmerkungen zu den Bemerkungen eines Protestanten*" (anon.), Emden, 1841 (response to a provocative pamphlet by an anonymous [Protestant](#));
- Pamphlet: "*Die Religion im Bunde mit dem Fortschritt*" (anon.), Frankfurt am Main, 1854 (response to provocations from the side of the Reform-dominated "Main Community");
- "*Uebersetzung und Erklärung des Pentateuchs*", 5 volumes 1867-78 (Hirsch's innovative and influential [Torah](#) commentary, see below);
- Pamphlets during the Secession Debate:
 - "*Das Princip der Gewissensfreiheit*," 1874;
 - "*Der Austritt aus der Gemeinde*," 1876
- "*Uebersetzung und Erklärung der Psalmen*", 1882 (Hirsch's commentary on the book of [Psalms](#));
- "*Ueber die Beziehungen des Talmuds zum Judenthum*", 1884 (a defense of [Talmudic](#) literature against anti-Semitic slanders in [Russia](#))

He left in manuscript at the time of his death a translation and explanation of the [prayer-book](#) which was subsequently published. The publication, in several volumes, of his collected writings (*Gesammelte Schriften* or *Nachalath Zwi*) was begun in 1902.^[1]

Most of Hirsch's writings have been translated into [English](#) and [Hebrew](#) by his descendants, starting with "Horeb" in the 1950s (by Dayan Isidore Grunfeld of London) and his [Torah](#) commentary in the 1960s (by his grandson Isaac Levi, also of London). The bulk of his Collected Writings, that had previously been published in [German](#) in 1902-12 under the title *Nachalath Zwi*, were translated during the 1980s and 1990s in memory of his grandson [Joseph Breuer](#).^[1]

Themes in his work

Hirsch lived in the post-[Napoleonic](#) era, an epoch when Jews had been granted civil rights in a large number of [European](#) countries, leading to assimilation and a call for [reform](#). A large segment of his work focusses on the possibilities for [Orthodox Judaism](#) in such an era, when [freedom of religion](#) also meant the freedom to practice [Torah](#) precepts without persecution and ridicule.^[1]

The principle of "Austritt", an independent [Orthodoxy](#), flows naturally from his view on the place of [Judaism](#) in his epoch: if Judaism is to gain from these civil liberties, it has to be able to develop independently - without having to lend implicit or explicit approval to [efforts at reformation](#).^[1]

His other major work involves the [symbolic](#) meaning of many [Torah](#) commandments and passages. Indeed, his work "Horeb" (1837) focuses to a large degree on the possible meanings and symbols in religious precepts. This work was continued in his [Torah](#) commentary and his articles in the Jeschurun journal (Collected Writings, vol. III, is a collation of these articles).^[1]

A final area of his work, which has only recently been rediscovered, was his etymological analysis of the [Hebrew language](#). Most of this work is contained in his [Torah](#) commentary, where he analyses and compares the *shorashim* (three-letter root forms) of a large number of Hebrew words and develops an etymological system of the Hebrew language. This approach is based on the idea that letters that share a phonetic similarity, have similar meaning. For example the words Zohar (light), Tzohar (translucent window), and Tahor (purity) are related words because the letters Zayin, Tzadie, and Tet are phonetically similar. This is an approach used in many places by the renewed biblical commentator Rashi as well. Although this effort was, in his own words, "totally unscientific", it has led to the recent publication of an "etymological dictionary of the Hebrew language".^[4]

Although Hirsch does not mention his influences (apart from traditional Jewish sources), later authors have identified ideas from the [Kuzari](#) ([Yehuda Halevi](#)) and the [Maharal of Prague](#) in his works. Nevertheless, most of his ideas are original.^[1]

In a 1995 edition of Hirsch' Nineteen Letters, commentator Rabbi Joseph Elias makes an extensive effort to show Hirsch' sources in [Rabbinic literature](#), parallels in his other works and those of other post-Talmudic Jewish thinkers. Elias also attempts to refute particular interpretations of his philosophy, such as the notion that much of his thinking was rooted in [Kantian](#) secular philosophy.^[5]

While the [Zionist](#) movement was not founded during his lifetime, it is clear from his responses to Rabbi [Zvi Hirsch Kalischer](#), and in several places in his commentary to the Bible and Siddur, that although he had a deep love for the land of Israel, he opposed a movement to wrest political independence for the land of Israel before the Messianic Era.^[1] In later works, he makes it clear that Jewish sovereignty is dependent only on Divine Providence.^[6]

Influence and controversy



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See also the [discussion](#) on this point, in the article on *Torah im Derech Eretz*.

There is considerable controversy over Hirsch's legacy; this is a matter of debate between three parties: [Haredi](#) (sometimes called Ultra-Orthodox), [Modern Orthodox](#), and Hirsch's descendants.

While it is undisputed that his [Torah im Derech Eretz](#) was his real innovation, the exact implementation has been greatly debated.

Those on Orthodoxy's right wing hold that Hirsch himself approved of secular studies as a "Horaas Sha'ah", or temporary dispensation, only in order to save Orthodox Jewry of the nineteenth century from the threat posed by assimilation. While a [yeshiva](#) student in Eastern Europe, Rabbi Shimon Schwab obtained the opinion's of various [Poskim](#) (authorities in Jewish law) to this effect (see Selected Writings "These and Those" where Schwab himself disagrees).

To the other extreme, some Modern Orthodox Jews understand Hirsch in the sense of [Torah Umadda](#), meaning a synthesis of Torah knowledge and secular knowledge - each for its own sake (this view is propagated in several articles in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, published by the Rabbinical Council of America). In this view, Hirsch thought that it was permissible, and even productive, for Jews to learn gentile philosophy, music, art, literature and ethics for their own sake.

In contrast, a third middle opinion held by Hirsch's descendants (his son-in-law and successor Rabbi [Solomon Breuer](#), his grandson Rabbi [Joseph Breuer](#) and the latter's successor Rabbi [Shimon Schwab](#)), Rabbi Joseph Elias in his commentary to the Nineteen Letters (Feldheim 1995) and some Jewish historians, says that both of these understandings of Hirsch's philosophy are misguided; they refer to these readings of Hirsch as improper historical revisionism. In response to the "temporary dispensation" theory, they point to Hirsch in Collected Writings as continually stressing the philosophical and religious imperative of Torah im Derech Eretz for all times (Note that Hirsch himself addressed this contention: "Torah im Derech Eretz ... is not part of troubled, time bound notions; it represents the ancient, traditional wisdom of our sages that has stood the test everywhere and at all times." (Gesammelte Schriften vi p. 221); see further Rabbi Shimon Schwab in Selected Writings- "These and Those"). In response to the "[Torah Umadda](#)" theory they say that Hirschian philosophy demands the domination of Torah over secular knowledge, not a separate synthesis. On this basis, many adherents of Hirsch's philosophy have preferred the natural sciences over the humanities as a subject of secular study, seemingly because they are easier to judge through the prism of Torah thought than the more abstract humanities.

From shemayisrael.com

The Ninteen Letters

by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Newly translated by Karin Paritzky

and with a comprehensive commentary by Rabbi Joseph Elias.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was a noted sage and commentator of the 19th century. His first published work, "The Nineteen Letters," serves as an excellent introduction to the Torah's universal vision for Jews and all humanity. It was written in the form of letters to a young Jewish intellectual who felt alienated from his spiritual roots. However, Rabbi Hirsch's intended audience was not only the assimilated Jewish intellectuals of his generation, but also those Jews

who had remained traditional, but who were fulfilling the mitzvos - precepts -of the Torah by rote, without comprehending their inner spirit. To both groups, Rabbi Hirsch taught what our sages refer to as Toras chaim - the Teaching of life, and he proclaimed:

There is but one road that leads to salvation; amends must be made precisely where the wrong was done. We must forget the views and prejudices that we inherited about Judaism and, instead, turn to the sources of Judaism, the Tanach (scriptures), the Talmud and the Midrash. We must read, study and comprehend them in order to live by them and to draw from them Judaism's views about God, the world, mankind and Yisrael. Thus Judaism must be studied and understood out of itself and be elevated, all by itself, to a science of wise living. (Letter Eighteen, p. 273)

In "The Nineteen Letters," Rabbi Hirsch explores how the study of Torah and its mitzvos leads to a true understanding of human identity, and how this study guides the human being in his relationship to other creatures. For the human being was created in the Divine image, and therefore has the capacity and the responsibility to emulate the Divine love and justice: Everything bestowed upon you - mind, body, fellowman, material goods, other creatures, every talent and every power - all are merely means to action, to further and to safeguard everything. With love and with justice! The earth was not created as a gift to you - you have been given to the earth, to treat it with respectful consideration, as God's earth, and everything on it as God's creation, as your fellow creature, to be respected, loved and helped to attain its purpose according to God's Will. (Letter Four, p. 56)

In this work, Rabbi Hirsch also demonstrates how an understanding of Torah is crucial for an understanding of Jewish identity. He lived in an age of growing nationalism, and he therefore emphasized the spiritual and universal *raison d'être* of the People of Israel:

Yisrael was given the Torah in the wilderness, and there - without a country and land of its own - it became a nation, a body whose soul was Torah. Thereby it came to be a *mamleches kohanim*, a "kingdom of priests," a nation serving as the guardian of God's Word in the midst of humanity, as a priest serves amidst his people. At the same time, by fulfilling God's Word, it was to become a *goy kadosh*, a "holy nation," standing apart in holiness... Torah, the fulfillment of the Divine Will, constitutes the foundation, basis and goal of this people. Its nationhood is, therefore, not tied to transitory things or dependent on anything of a passing nature; it is as eternal and everlasting as spirit and soul and the Word of the Eternal. (Letter Eight, pages 115-16)

However, this people was to enter history as a nation in the midst of other nations in order to become a social model of the Torah's teachings. "Therefore," writes Rabbi Hirsch, "a land, prosperity and institutions of statehood were to be put at Yisrael's disposal not as goals in themselves, but as means for the fulfillment of Torah." (Ibid)

"The Nineteen Letters" also helps us to understand that the Jewish journey through history is one which leads to a universal goal. As Rabbi Hirsch explains to his young student:

You wrote that the Torah isolates us. True! If it did not, Israel would long since have lost its identity. Look what struggles are required to preserve the purity of Yisrael's spirit within our people despite this isolation! But does this spell enmity? Or pride? As if God were not the Lord of all creatures, all men? An unfortunate misinterpretation indeed! After all, Yisrael has no other task than to acknowledge as its God the One Who calls and educates all human beings to His

service, and to make Him known as such through its destiny and way of life! (Letter Fifteen, p. 198)

"The Nineteen Letters" conveys a contemporary message. It helps us to renew our understanding of the Torah's universal vision for Israel and all the nations, and it serves as a reminder that "Judaism, correctly conceived and conveyed, constitutes a bond of love and justice encompassing all creatures." (Letter Nineteen, pages 333-34)

"The Nineteen Letters" is published by Feldheim, Jerusalem / N.Y.

From jewsagainstzionism.com

As the most renowned German Jewish leader of the nineteenth century, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote:

"We mourn over the sin which brought about that downfall (the Temple destruction -- author), we take to heart the harshness which we have encountered in our years of wandering as the chastisement of a father, imposed on us for our improvement, and we mourn the lack of observance of the Torah which that ruin has brought about. Not in order to shine as a nation among nations do we raise our prayers and hopes for a reunion in our land, but in order to find a soil for the better fulfillment of our spiritual vocation in that reunion and in that land which was promised, and given, and again promised for our observance of the Torah. But this very vocation obliges us, until G-d shall call us back to the Holy Land, to live and to work as patriots wherever He has placed us, to collect all the physical, material and spiritual forces and all that is noble in Israel to further the weal of the nations which have given us shelter. It obliges us, further, to allow our longing for the far-off land to express itself only in mourning, in wishing and hoping; and only through the honest fulfillment of all Jewish duties to await the realization of this hope. But it forbids us to strive for the reunion or possession of the land by any but spiritual means. Our Sages say G-d imposed three vows when he sent Israel into the wilderness: (1) that the children of Israel shall never seek to reestablish their nation by themselves; (2) that they never be disloyal to the nations which have given them shelter; (3) that these nations shall not oppress them excessively (Kesubos 111a)."

And, again, in his commentary on the prayer book, Rabbi Hirsch writes:

"During the reign of Hadrian when the uprising led by Bar Kochba proved a disastrous error, it became essential that the Jewish people be reminded for all times of an important, essential fact, namely that (the people of) Israel must never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power; it was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence."

The contradiction between loyalty to the lands in which the Jewish people dwell in their exile and Zionism, was also explained by Rabbi Hirsch:

"This close connection with states everywhere is not at all in contradiction to the spirit of Judaism, for the independent national life of Israel was never the essence or purpose of our existence as a nation but a means of fulfilling our spiritual mission."

"Land and soil were never Israel's bond of union..."

"For this (Messianic -- author) future which is promised to us in the glorious predictions of the inspired prophets as a goal of the Galus (exile -- author), we hope and pray, but actively to accelerate its coming is prohibited to us."

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Rabbi Solomon Schechter



Solomon Schechter ([Hebrew](#): ר' שלום שכתר; December 7, 1847 – November, 19 1915) was a [Moldavian](#)-born [Romanian](#) and English [rabbi](#), academic scholar, and educator, most famous for his roles as founder and President of the [United Synagogue of America](#), President of the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#), and architect of the American [Conservative Jewish](#) movement.

Early life

Born in [Focșani](#) to a [Jewish Romanian](#) family adhering to the [Chabad Hasidic](#) branch, he attended [yeshivas](#) in Eastern Europe. Schechter received his early education from his father who was a [shochet](#) ("ritual slaughterer"). Reportedly, he learned to read [Hebrew](#) by age three, and by five mastered [Chumash](#). He went to a yeshiva in [Piatra Neamț](#) at age ten and at age thirteen studied with one of the major [Talmudic](#) scholars, Rabbi [Joseph Saul Nathanson](#) of [Lemberg](#).^[1] In his twenties he went to the Rabbinical College in [Vienna](#), where he studied under the more modern Talmudic scholar [Meir Friedmann](#), before in 1879 moving on to undertake further studies at the [Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums](#) and at the [University of Berlin](#). Three years later he was invited to the [UK](#), to be [tutor](#) of [rabbinics](#) under [Claude Montefiore](#) in London.

Academic career

In 1890, after the death of [Solomon Marcus Schiller-Szinessy](#), he was appointed to the faculty at Cambridge University, serving as a lecturer in [Talmudics](#) and reader in Rabbinics.^[2] To this day, the students of the Cambridge University Jewish Society hold an annual Solomon Schechter Memorial Lecture.

His greatest academic fame came from his excavation in 1896 of the papers of the [Cairo Geniza](#), an extraordinary collection of over 100,000 pages of rare Hebrew religious manuscripts and medieval Jewish texts that were preserved at an [Egyptian](#) synagogue. **The find revolutionized**

the study of Medieval Judaism. [Jacob Saphir](#) was the first Jewish researcher to recognize the significance of the [Cairo geniza](#), as well as the first to publicize the existence of the [Midrash ha-Gadol](#), both later studied with great panache by Schechter.

Schechter was alerted to the existence of the Geniza's papers in May 1896 by two Scottish sisters, [Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Gibson](#), who showed him some leaves from the Geniza that contained the Hebrew text of [Sirach](#), which had for centuries only been known in [Greek](#) and [Latin](#) translation.^[3] Letters, written at Schechter's prompting, by Agnes Smith to [The Athenaeum](#) and [The Academy](#) quickly revealed the existence of another nine leaves of the same manuscript in the possession of [Archibald Sayce](#) at Oxford University.^[4] Schechter quickly found support for another expedition to the Cairo Geniza, and arrived there in December 1896 with an introduction from the Chief Rabbi, [Hermann Adler](#), to the Chief Rabbi of Cairo, Aaron Raphael Ben Shim'on.^[5] He carefully selected for the [Cambridge University Library](#) a trove three times the size of any other collection: this is now part of the [Taylor-Schechter Collection](#). The find was instrumental in Schechter resolving a dispute with [David Margoliouth](#) as to the likely Hebrew language origins of Sirach.^[6]

Charles Taylor took a great interest in Solomon Schechter's work in Cairo, and the [genizah](#) fragments presented to the University of Cambridge are known as the Taylor-Schechter Collection.^[7] He was joint editor with Schechter of *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 1899. He published separately *Cairo Genizah Palimpsests*, 1900.

He became a Professor of Hebrew at [University College London](#) in 1899 and remained until 1902 when he moved to America and was replaced by [Israel Abrahams](#).

American Jewish community

In 1902, traditional Jews reacting against the progress of the American [Reform Judaism](#) movement, which was trying to establish an authoritative "synod" of American rabbis, recruited Schechter to become President of the [Jewish Theological Seminary of America](#) (JTSA).

Schechter served as the second President of the JTSA, from 1902 to 1915, during which time he founded the United Synagogue of America, later renamed as the [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism](#).

Religious and cultural beliefs

Schechter emphasized the centrality of [Jewish law](#) (Halakha) in Jewish life in a speech in his inaugural address as President of the JTSA in 1902:

"Judaism is not a religion which does not oppose itself to anything in particular. Judaism is opposed to any number of things and says distinctly "thou shalt not." It permeates the whole of your life. It demands control over all of your actions, and interferes even with your menu. It sanctifies the seasons, and regulates your history, both in the past and in the future. Above all, it teaches that disobedience is the strength of sin. It insists upon the observance of both the spirit and of the letter; spirit without letter belongs to the species

known to the mystics as "nude souls" nishmatim artlain, wandering about in the universe without balance and without consistency...In a word, Judaism is absolutely incompatible with the abandonment of the [Torah](#)."

Schechter, on the other hand, believed in what he termed [Catholic Israel](#). The basic idea being that Jewish law, [Halacha](#), is formed and evolves based on the behavior of the people. This concept of modifying the law based on national consensus is an untraditional viewpoint.

It is alleged that Shechter openly violated the prohibitions associated with traditional [Shabbat](#) observance.^[8]

Schechter was an early advocate of [Zionism](#). He was the chairman of the committee that edited the [Jewish Publication Society of America Version](#) of the [Hebrew Bible](#).

Legacy

Schechter's name is synonymous with the findings of the Cairo Geniza. He placed the JTSA on an institutional footing strong enough to endure for over a century. He became identified as the foremost personality of Conservative Judaism and is regarded as its founder. A network of [Conservative Jewish day schools](#) is named in his honor. There are several dozen [Solomon Schechter Day Schools](#) across the United States and Canada.

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From JewishVirtual Library

Solomon Schechter

The [Conservative Movement](#), known in Europe as the Historical Movement, was a reaction to what its founders viewed as the overzealousness of the [Reform Movement](#). Many modern Jews felt that there should be innovations in [Judaism](#), but they wanted to retain more traditional practices than the reformers were willing to accept. Unlike Holdheim and Einhorn, they didn't view traditional practices as impeding the modern contract with the Divine.

[Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise](#) tried to create a rabbinical synod which would become the Jewish authority for all Jews in America. The more traditional Jews, led by Isaac Leeser, were suspicious, and the radical reformers were dissatisfied. When the reformers tried to push through a measure that dietary laws were no longer part of the modern Jewish world, the more traditional Jews left in disgust. They began organizing their own American Jewish representation.

In the early 1880's, they tried establishing a seminary and a movement, but they found very little support. The Reformers weren't interested, and the new Russian immigrants weren't interested. In 1902, they invited Rabbi Solomon Schechter to become president of a newly revamped school, the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Solomon Schechter was born in Rumania in 1847 to a [Chabad](#) Chassidic family. His Chassidic upbringing did not satisfy him, however, and, in 1879 he went to study at the Berlin Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums and at the University of Berlin. In 1882 Schechter was invited to be a tutor in rabbinics in London. He quickly rose to prominence as a rabbinic scholar and spokesman for Jewish traditionalism. In 1890 he was appointed lecturer in talmudics and in 1892 reader in rabbinics at Cambridge University. In 1899 he also became professor of Hebrew at University College, London.

He gained international fame as a scholar when he discovered and brought back to London more than 100,000 pages of rare manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza. Beyond sorting and filing the documents, Schechter wrote on the newly-found Ben Sirach materials, unknown until then.

Schechter accepted the invitation to become president of the Jewish Theological Seminary and succeeded in attracting an outstanding group of scholars to teach. The Jewish Theological Seminary became a recognized center of Jewish learning.

In 1913 Solomon Schechter was instrumental in founding the United Synagogue of America, the umbrella organization of all Conservative congregations.

Though a staunch traditionalist, Schechter admitted that there could be change in modern Judaism. However, he felt that changes should not be introduced arbitrarily or deliberately. Rather, "the norm as well as the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use—or, in other words, of Catholic Israel."

Although it may be apocryphal, my favorite quote from Solomon Schechter is, "Gentlemen, in order to be a success in the American rabbinate, you must be able to talk baseball."

From Sacred-texts.com

The Dogmas of Judaism

Chapter VI of Schechter's *Studies in Judaism, First Series*, Copyright, 1896 by the Jewish Publication Society of America (in the public domain)

Note: Scanned in and uncorrected text.

[Introductory material]

The object of this essay is to say about the dogmas of Judaism a word which I think ought not to be left unsaid.

In speaking of dogmas it must be understood that Judaism does not ascribe to them any saving power. The belief in a dogma or a doctrine without abiding by its real or supposed consequences (eg. the, belief in *creatio ex nihilo* without keeping the Sabbath) is of no value. And the question

about certain doctrines is not whether they possess or do not possess the desired charm against certain diseases of the soul, but whether they ought to be considered as characteristics of Judaism or not.

It must again be premised that the subject, which occupied the thoughts of the greatest and noblest Jewish minds for so many centuries, has been neglected for a comparatively long time. And this for various reasons. First, there is Mendelssohn's assertion, or supposed assertion, in his *Jerusalem*, that Judaism has no dogmas -- an assertion which has been accepted by the majority of modern Jewish theologians as the only dogma Judaism possesses. You can hear it pronounced in scores of Jewish pulpits; you can read it written in scores of Jewish books. To admit the possibility that Mendelssohn was in error was hardly permissible, especially for those with [p. 148] whom he enjoys a certain infallibility. Nay, even the fact that he himself was not consistent in his theory, and on another occasion declared that Judaism has dogmas, only that they are purer and more in harmony with reason than those of other religions; or even the more important fact that he published a school-book for children, in which the so-called Thirteen Articles were embodied, only that instead of the formula "I believe," he substituted "I am convinced," -- even such patent facts did not produce much effect upon many of our modern theologians. [n. 1] They were either overlooked or explained away so as to make them harmonise with the great dogma of dogmalessness. For it is one of the attributes of infallibility, that the words of its happy possessor must always be reconcilable even when they appear to the eye of the unbeliever as gross contradictions.

Another cause of the neglect into which the subject has fallen is that our century is an *historical* one. It is not only books that have their fate, but also whole sciences and literatures. In past times it was religious speculation that formed the favorite study of scholars, in our time it is history with its critical foundation on a sound philology. Now as these two most important branches of Jewish science were so long neglected -- were perhaps never cultivated in the true meaning of the word, and as Jewish literature is so vast and Jewish history so far-reaching and eventful, we cannot wonder that these studies have absorbed the time and the labour of the greatest and best Jewish writers in this century.

There is, besides, a certain tendency in historical studies that is hostile to mere theological speculation. The historian deals with realities, the theologian with abstrac- [p149] tions. The latter likes to shape the universe after his system, and tells us how things ought to be, the former teaches us how they are or have been, and the explanation he gives for their being so and not otherwise includes in most cases also a kind of justification for their existence. There is also the *odium theologicum*, which has been the cause of so much misfortune that it is hated by the historian, whilst the superficial, rationalistic way in which the theologian manages to explain everything which does not suit his system is most repulsive to the critical spirit.

But it cannot be denied that this neglect has caused much confusion. Especially is this noticeable in England, which is essentially a theological country, and where people are but little prone to give up speculation about things which concern their most sacred interest and greatest happiness. Thus whilst we are exceedingly poor in all other branches of Jewish learning, we are comparatively rich in productions of a theological character. We have a superfluity of essays on such delicate subjects as eternal punishment, immortality of the soul, the day of judgment, etc.,

and many treatises on the definition of Judaism. But knowing little or nothing of the progress recently made in Jewish theology, of the many protests against all kinds of infallibility, whether canonised in this century or in olden times, we in England still maintain that Judaism has no dogmas as if nothing to the contrary had ever been said. We seek the foundation of Judaism in political economy, in hygiene, in everything except religion. Following the fashion of the day to esteem religion in proportion to its ability to adapt itself to every possible and impossible metaphysical and social system, we are [p. 150] anxious to squeeze out of Judaism the last drop of faith and hope, and strive to make it so flexible that we can turn it in every direction which it is our pleasure to follow. But alas! the flexibility has progressed so far as to classify Judaism among the invertebrate species, the lowest order of living things. It strongly resembles a certain Christian school which addresses itself to the world in general and claims to satisfy everybody alike. It claims to be socialism for the adherents of Karl Marx and Lassalle, worship of man for the followers of Comte and St. Simon; it carefully avoids the word "God" for the comfort of agnostics and sceptics, whilst on the other hand it pretends to hold sway over paradise, hell, and immortality for the edification of believers. In such illusions many of our theologians delight. For illusions they are; you cannot be everything if you want to be anything. Moreover, illusions in themselves are bad enough, but we are menaced with what is still worse. Judaism, divested of every higher religious motive, is in danger of falling into gross materialism. For what else is the meaning of such declarations as "Believe what you like, but conform to this or that mode of life"; what else does it mean but "We cannot expect you to believe that the things you are bidden to do are commanded by a higher authority; there is not such a thing as belief, but you ought to do them for conventionalism or for your own convenience."

But both these motives -- the good opinion of our neighbours, as well as our bodily health -- have nothing to do with our nobler and higher sentiments, and degrade Judaism to a matter of expediency or diplomacy. Indeed, things have advanced so far that well-meaning, but ill-advised writers even think to render a service to Judaism [p. 151] by declaring it to be a kind of enlightened Hedonism, or rather a moderate Epicureanism.

I have no intention of here answering the question, What is Judaism ? This question is not less perplexing than the problem, What is God's world? Judaism is also a great Infinite, composed of as many endless Units, the Jews. And these Unit-Jews have been, and are still, scattered through all the world, and have passed under an immensity of influences, good and bad. If so, how can we give an exact definition of the Infinite, called Judaism?

But if there is anything sure, it is that the highest motives which worked through the history of Judaism are the strong belief in God and the unshaken confidence that at last this God, the God of Israel, will be the God of the whole world; or, in other words, Faith and Hope are the two most prominent characteristics of Judaism.

In the following pages I shall try to give a short account of the manner in which these two principles of Judaism found expression, from the earliest times down to the age of Mendelssohn; that is, to present an outline of the history of Jewish Dogmas. First, a few observations on the position of the Bible and the Talmud in relation to our theme. Insufficient and poor as they may be in proportion to the importance of these two fundamental documents of Judaism, these

remarks may nevertheless suggest a connecting link between the teachings of Jewish antiquity and those of Maimonides and his successors.

[The Bible]

I begin with the Scriptures.

The Bible itself hardly contains a command bidding us *to believe*. We are hardly ordered, *e.g.*, to believe in the existence of God. I say hardly, but I do not altogether deny the existence of such a command. It is true that we [p. 152] do not find in the Scripture such words as: "You are commanded to believe in the existence of God." Nor is any punishment assigned as awaiting him who denies it. Notwithstanding these facts, many Jewish authorities -- among them such important men as Maimonides, R. Judah Hallevi, Nachmanides -- perceive, in the first words of the Ten Commandments, "I am the Lord thy God," the command to believe in His existence. [n. 2]

Be this as it may, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt that the Bible, in which every command is dictated by God, and in which all its heroes are the servants, the friends, or the ambassadors of God, presumes such a belief in every one to whom those laws are dictated, and these heroes address themselves. Nay, I think that the word "belief" is not even adequate. In a world with so many visible facts and invisible causes, as life and death, growth and decay, light and darkness; in a world where the sun rises and sets; where the stars appear regularly; where heavy rains pour down from the sky, often accompanied by such grand phenomena as thunder and lightning; in a world full of such marvels, but into which no notion has entered of all our modern true or false explanations -- who but God is behind all these things? "Have the gates," asks God, "have the gates of death been open to thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? . . . Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof? . . . Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? . . . Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? . . . Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?" (Job xxxviii.). Of all these wonders, God, [p. 153] was not merely the *prima causa*; they were the result of His direct action, without any intermediary causes. And it is as absurd to say that the ancient world believed in God, as for a future historian to assert of the nineteenth century that it believed in the effects of electricity. We see them, and so antiquity saw God. If there was any danger, it lay not in the denial of the existence of a God, but in having a wrong belief. Belief in as many gods as there are manifestations in nature, the investing of them with false attributes, the misunderstanding of God's relation to men, lead to immorality. Thus the greater part of the laws and teachings of the Bible are either directed against polytheism, with all its low ideas of God, or rather of gods; or they are directed towards regulating God's relation to men. Man is a servant of God, or His prophet, or even His friend. But this relationship man obtains only by his conduct. Nay, all man's actions are carefully regulated by God, and connected with His holiness. The 19th chapter of Leviticus, which is considered by the Rabbis as the portion of the Law in which the most important articles of the Torah are embodied, is headed, "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your own God am holy." And each law therein occurring, even those which concern our relations to each other, is not founded on utilitarian reasons, but is ordained because the opposite of it is an offence to the holiness of God, and profanes His creatures, whom He desired to be as holy as He is. [n. 3]

Thus the whole structure of the Bible is built upon the visible fact of the existence of a God, and upon the belief in the relation of God to men, especially to Israel. In spite of all that has been said to the contrary, the Bible does lay stress upon belief, where belief is required. The [p. 154] unbelievers are rebuked again and again. "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for His wondrous work," complains Asaph (Ps. lxxviii. 32). And belief is praised in such exalted words as, "Thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Jer.ii. 2). The Bible, especially the books of the prophets, consists, in great part, of promises for the future, which the Rabbis justly termed the "Consolations." [n. 4] For our purpose, it is of no great consequence to examine what future the prophets had in view, whether an immediate future or one more remote, at the end of days. At any rate, they inculcated hope and confidence that God would bring to pass a better time. I think that even the most advanced Bible critic -- provided he is not guided by some modern Aryan reasons -- must perceive in such passages as, "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever," "The Lord shall rejoice in his works," and many others, a hope for more than the establishment of the "national Deity among his votaries in Palestine."

We have now to pass over an interval of many centuries, the length of which depends upon the views held is to the date of the close of the canon, and examine what the Rabbis, the representatives of the prophets, thought on this subject. Not that the views of the author of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, of Philo and Aristobulus, and many others of the Judaeo-Alexandrian school would be uninteresting for us. But somehow their influence on Judaism was only a passing one, and their doctrines never became authoritative in the Synagogue. We must here confine ourselves to those who, even by the [p. 155] testimony of their bitterest enemies, occupied the seat of Moses.

The successors of the prophets had to deal with new circumstances, and accordingly their teachings were adapted to the wants of their times. As the result of manifold foreign influences, the visible fact of the existence of God as manifested in the Bible had been somewhat obscured. Prophecy ceased, and the Holy Spirit which inspired a few chosen ones took its place. Afterwards this influence was reduced to the hearing of a Voice from Heaven, which was audible to still fewer. On the other hand the Rabbis had this advantage that they were not called upon to fight against idolatry as their predecessors the prophets had been. The evil inclination to worship idols was, as the Talmud expresses it allegorically, killed by the Men of the Great Synagogue, or, as we should put it, it was suppressed by the sufferings of the captivity in Babylon. This change of circumstances is marked by the following fact: -- Whilst the prophets mostly considered idolatry as the cause of all sin, the Rabbis show a strong tendency to ascribe sin to a defect in, or a want of, belief on the part of the sinner. They teach that Adam would not have sinned unless he had first denied the "Root of all" (or the main principle), namely, the belief in the Omnipresence of God. Of Cain they say that before murdering his brother he declared: "There is no judgment, there is no judge, there is no world to come, and there is no reward for the just, and no punishment for the wicked." [n. 5]

In another place we read that the commission of a sin in secret is an impertinent attempt by the doer to oust God from the world. But if unbelief is considered as [p. 156] the root of all evil, we may expect that the reverse of it, a perfect faith, would be praised in the most exalted terms. So we read: Faith is so great that the man who possesses it may hope to become a worthy vessel of

the Holy Spirit, or, as we should express it, that he may hope to obtain by this power the highest degree of communion with his Maker. The Patriarch Abraham, notwithstanding all his other virtues, only became "the possessor of both worlds" by the merit of his strong faith. Nay, even the fulfilment of a single law when accompanied by true faith is, according to the Rabbis, sufficient to bring man nigh to God. And the future redemption is also conditional on the degree of faith shown by Israel. [n. 6]

It has often been asked what the Rabbis would have thought of a man who fulfils every commandment of the Torah, but does not believe that this Torah was given by God, or that there exists a God at all. It is indeed very difficult to answer this question with any degree of certainty. In the time of the Rabbis people were still too simple for such a diplomatic religion, and conformity in the modern sense was quite an unknown thing. But from the foregoing remarks it would seem that the Rabbis could not conceive such a monstrosity as atheistic orthodoxy. For, as we have seen, the Rabbis thought that unbelief must needs end in sin, for faith is the origin of all good. Accordingly, in the case just supposed they would have either suspected the man's orthodoxy, or would have denied that his views were really what he professed them to be.

[The Mishnah]

Still more important than the above cited Agadic passages is one which we are about to quote from the tractate Sanhedrin. This tractate deals with the constitution of the supreme law-court, the examination of the witnesses, the functions of the judges, and the different punishment to be inflicted on the transgressors of the law. After having enumerated various kinds of capital punishment, the Mishnah adds the following words:

"These are (the men) who are excluded from the life to come: He who says there is no resurrection from death; he who says there is no Torah given from heaven, and the Epikurus. [n. 7]

This passage was considered by the Rabbis of the Middle Ages, as well as by modern scholars, the *locus classicus* for the dogma question. There are many passages in the Rabbinic literature which exclude man from the world to come for this or that sin. But these are more or less of an Agadic (legendary) character, and thus lend themselves to exaggeration and hyperbolic language. They cannot, therefore, be considered as serious legal dicta, or as the general opinion of the Rabbis.

The Mishnah in Sanhedrin, however, has, if only by its position in a legal tractate, a certain Halachic (obligatory) character. And the fact that so early an authority as R. Akiba made additions to it guarantees its high antiquity. The first two sentences of this Mishnah are clear enough. In modern language, and positively speaking, they would represent articles of belief in Resurrection and Revelation. Great difficulty is found in defining what was meant by the word *Epikurus*. The authorities of the Middle Ages, to whom I shall again have to refer, explain the Epikurus to be a man who denies the belief in reward and punishment; others identify him with one who denies the belief in Providence; while others again consider the Epikurus to be one who denies Tradition. But the parallel passages in which it occurs incline one rather to think that this word cannot be defined by one kind of heresy. It implies rather a frivolous treatment of the words of Scripture or of Tradition. In the case of the latter (Tradition) it is certainly not

honest difference of opinion that is condemned; for the Rabbis themselves differed very often from each other, and even Mediaeval authorities, did not feel any compunction about explaining Scripture in variance with the Rabbinic interpretation, and sometimes they even went so far as to declare that the view of this or that great authority was only to be considered as an isolated opinion not deserving particular attention. What they did blame was, as already said, scoffing and impiety. We may thus safely assert that reverence for the teachers of Israel formed the third essential principle of Judaism. [n. 8]

I have still to remark that there occur in the Talmud such passages as "the Jew, even if he has sinned, is still a Jew," or "He who denies idolatry is called a Jew." These and similar passages have been used to prove that Judaism was not a positive religion, but only involved the negation of idolatry. But it has been overlooked that the statements quoted have more a legal than a theological character. The Jew belonged to his nationality even after having committed the greatest sin, just as the Englishman does not cease to be an Englishman -- in regard to treason and the like -- by having committed a heinous crime. But he has certainly acted in a very un-English way, and having outraged the feelings of the whole nation will have to suffer for his misconduct. The Rabbis in a similar manner did not maintain that he who gave up the belief in Revelation and Resurrection, and treated irreverently the teachers of Israel, severed his connection with the Jewish nation, but that, for his crime, he was going to suffer the heaviest punishment. He was to be excluded from the world to come.

Still, important as is the passage quoted from Sanhedrin, it would be erroneous to think that it exhausted the creed of the Rabbis. The liturgy and innumerable passages in the Midrashim show that they ardently clung to the belief in the advent of the Messiah. All their hope was turned to the future redemption and the final establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Judaism, stripped of this belief, would have been for them devoid of meaning. The belief in reward and punishment is also repeated again and again in the old Rabbinic literature. A more emphatic declaration of the belief in Providence than is conveyed by the following passages is hardly conceivable. "Everything is foreseen, and free will is given. And the world is judged by grace." Or, "the born are to die, and the dead to revive, and the living to be judged. For to know and to notify, and that it may be known that He (God) is the Framer and He the Creator, and He the Discerner, and He the judge, and He the Witness," etc. [n. 9]

But it must not be forgotten that it was not the habit of the Rabbis to lay down, either for conduct or for doctrine, rules which were commonly known. When they urged the three points stated above there must have been some historical reason for it. Probably these principles were controverted by some heretics. Indeed, the whole tone of the passage cited from Sanhedrin is a protest against certain unbelievers who are threatened with punishment. Other beliefs, not less essential, but less disputed, remain [p. 160] unmentioned, because there was no necessity to assert them.

[The Caraites]

It was not till a much later time, when the Jews came into closer contact with new philosophical schools, and also new creeds which were more liable than heathenism was to be confused with Judaism, that this necessity was felt. And thus we are led at once to the period when the Jews

became acquainted with the teachings of the Mohammedan schools. The Caraites came very early into contact with non-Jewish systems. And so we find that they were also the first to formulate Jewish dogmas in a fixed number, and in a systematic order. It is also possible that their separation from the Tradition, and their early division into little sects among themselves, compelled them to take this step, in order to avoid further sectarianism.

The number of their dogmas amounts to ten. According to Judah Hadasi (150), who would appear to have derived them from his predecessors, their dogmas include the following articles:

1. *Creatio ex nihilo*;
2. The existence of a Creator, God;
3. This God is an absolute unity as well as incorporeal;
4. Moses and the other prophets were sent by God;
5. God has given to us the Torah, which is true and complete in every respect, not wanting the addition of the so-called Oral Law;
6. The Torah must be studied by every Jew in the original (Hebrew) language;
7. The Holy Temple was a place elected by God for His manifestation;
8. Resurrection of the dead;
9. Punishment and reward after death;
10. The Coming of the Messiah, the son of David.

How far the predecessors of Hadasi were influenced by a certain Joseph Albashir (about 950), of whom there exists a manuscript work, "Rudiments of Faith," I am unable to [p. 161] say. The little we know of him reveals more of his intimacy with Arabic thoughts than of his importance for his sect in particular and for Judaism in general. After Hadasi I shall mention here Elijah Bashazi, a Caraitic writer of the end of the fifteenth century. This author, who was much influenced by Maimonides, omits the second and the seventh articles. In order to make up the ten he numbers the belief in the eternity of God as an article, and divides the fourth article into two. In the fifth article Bashazi does not emphasize so strongly the completeness of the Torah as Hadasi, and omits the portion which is directed against Tradition. It is interesting to see the distinction which Bashazi draws between the Pentateuch and the Prophets. While he thinks that the five books of Moses can never be altered, he regards the words of the Prophets as only relating to their contemporaries, and thus subject to changes. As I do not want to anticipate Maimonides' system, I must refrain from giving here the articles laid down by Solomon Troki in the beginning of the eighteenth century. For the articles of Maimonides are copied by this writer with a few slight alterations so as to dress them in a Caraitic garb.

I must dismiss the Caraites with these few remarks, my object being chiefly to discuss the dogmas of the Synagogue from which they had separated themselves. Besides, as in everything Caraitic, there is no further development of the question. As Bashazi laid them down, they are still taught by the Caraites of to-day. I return to the Rabbanites. [n.10]

[Saadiah]

As is well known, Maimonides (1130-1205), was the first Rabbanite who formulated the dogmas of the Synagogue. But there are indications of earlier attempts. R. Saadiah [p. 162] Gaon's (892-

942) work, *Creeds and Opinions*, shows such traces. He says in his preface, "My heart sickens to see that the belief of my co-religionists is impure and that their theological views are confused." The subjects he treats in this book, such as

- creation,
- unity of God,
- resurrection of the dead,
- the future redemption of Israel,
- reward and punishment,

and other kindred theological subjects might thus, perhaps, be considered as the essentials of the creed that the Gaon desired to present in a pure and rational form. R. Hannaneel, of Kairowan, [n. 11] in the first half of the eleventh century, says in one of his commentaries that to deserve eternal life one must believe in *four* things:

1. in God,
2. in the prophets,
3. in a future world where the just will be rewarded,
4. and in the advent of the Redeemer.

From R. Judah Hallevi's *Cusari*, written in the beginning of the twelfth century, we might argue that the belief in the election of Israel by God was the cardinal dogma of the author. [n. 12] Abraham Ibn Daud, a contemporary of Maimonides, in his book *The High Belief*, [n. 13] speaks of *rudiments*, among which, besides such metaphysical principles as unity, rational conception of God's attributes, etc., the belief in the immutability of the Law, etc., is included. Still, all these works are intended to furnish evidence from philosophy or history for the truth of religion rather than to give a definition of this truth. The latter task was undertaken by Maimonides.

[Maimonides]

I refer to the thirteen articles embodied in his first work, *The Commentary to the Mishnah*. They are appended to the Mishnah in Sanhedrin, with which I dealt above. But though they do not form an independent treatise, Maimonides remarks must not be considered as merely incidental. [p. 163] That Maimonides was quite conscious of the importance of this exposition can be gathered from the concluding words addressed to the reader:

"Know these (words) and repeat them many times, and think them over in the proper way. God knows that thou wouldst be deceiving thyself if thou thinkest thou hast understood them by having read them once or even ten times. Be not, therefore, hasty in perusing them. I have not composed them with out deep study and earnest reflection."

The result of this deep study was that the following Thirteen Articles constitute the creed of Judaism. They are: --

1. The belief in the existence of a Creator;
2. The belief in His Unity;

3. The belief in His Incorporeality;
4. The belief in His Eternity;
5. The belief that all worship and adoration are due to Him alone;
6. The belief in Prophecy;
7. The belief that Moses was the greatest of all Prophets, both before and after him;
8. The belief that the Torah was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai;
9. The belief in the Immutability of this revealed Torah;
10. The belief that God knows the actions of men;
11. The belief in Reward and Punishment;
12. The belief in the coming of the Messiah;
13. The belief in the Resurrection of the dead.

The impulse given by the great philosopher and still ,greater Jew was eagerly followed by succeeding generations, and Judaism thus came into possession of a dogmatic literature such as it never knew before Maimonides. Maimonides is the centre of this literature, and I shall accordingly speak in the remainder of this essay of Maimonists and Anti-Maimonists. These terms really apply to the great controversy that raged round Maimonides *Guide of* [p. 164] *the Perplexed*, but I shall, chiefly for brevity's sake, employ them in these pages in a restricted sense to refer to the dispute concerning the Thirteen Articles.

Among the Maimonists we may probably include the great majority of Jews, who accepted the Thirteen Articles without further question. Maimonides must indeed have filled up a great gap in Jewish theology, a gap, moreover, the existence of which was very generally perceived. A century had hardly elapsed before the Thirteen Articles had become a theme for the poets of the Synagogue. And almost every country where Jews lived can show a poem or a prayer founded on these Articles. R. Jacob Molin (1420) of Germany speaks of metrical and rhymed songs in the German language, the burden of which was the Thirteen Articles, and which were read by the common people with great devotion. The numerous commentaries and homilies written on the same topic would form a small library in themselves. [n. 14] But on the other hand it must not be denied that the Anti-Maimonists, that is to say those Jewish writers who did not agree with the creed formulated by Maimonides, or agreed only in part with him, form also a very strong and respectable minority. They deserve our attention the more as it is their works which brought life into the subject and deepened it. It is not by a perpetual Amen to every utterance of a great authority that truth or literature gains anything.

[The Anti-Maimonists]

The Anti-Maimonists can be divided into two classes. The one class categorically denies that Judaism has dogmas. I shall have occasion to touch on this view when I come to speak of Abarbanel. Here I pass at once to the second class of Anti-Maimonists. This consists of those who agree with Maimonides as to the existence of dogmas [p. 165] in Judaism, but who differ from him as to what these dogmas are, or who give a different enumeration of them.

As the first of these Anti-Maimonists we may regard Nachmanides, who, in his famous *Sermon in the Presence of the King*, speaks of three fundamental principles:

- Creation (that is, non-eternity of matter),
- Omniscience of God, and
- Providence.

Next comes R. Abba Mari ben Moses, of Montpellier. He wrote at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and is famous in Jewish history for his zeal against the study of philosophy. We possess a small pamphlet by him dealing with our subject, and it forms a kind of prologue to his collection of controversial letters against the rationalists of his time. [n. 15] He lays down three articles as the fundamental teachings of Religion:

1. Metaphysical: The existence of God, including His Unity and Incorporeality;
2. Mosaic: *Creatio ex nihilo* by God -- a consequence of this principle is the belief that God is capable of altering the laws of nature at His pleasure;
3. Ethical: Special Providence -- *i.e.*, God knows all our actions in all their details.

Abba Mari does not mention Maimonides' Thirteen Articles. But it would be false to conclude that he rejected the belief in the coming of the Messiah, or any other article of Maimonides. The whole tone and tendency of this pamphlet is polemical, and it is therefore probable that he only urged those points which were either doubted or explained in an unorthodox way by the sceptics of his time.

Another scholar, of Provence, who wrote but twenty years later than Abba Mari -- R. David ben Samuel d'Estella (1320) -- speaks of the seven pillars of religion. They are:

- Revelation,
- Providence,
- Reward and Punishment, [p. 166]
- the Coming of the Messiah,
- Resurrection of the Dead,
- *Creatio ex nihilo*, and
- Free Will. [n. 16]

Of authors living, in other countries, I have to mention here R. Shemariah, of Crete, who flourished at about the same time as R. David d'Estella, and is known from his efforts to reconcile the Caraites with the Rabbanites. This author wrote a book for the purpose of furnishing Jewish students with evidence for what he considered the five fundamental teachings of Judaism, viz.:

1. The Existence of God;
2. The Incorporeality of God;
3. His Absolute Unity;
4. That God created heaven and earth;
5. That God created the world after His will 5106 years ago -- 5106 (1346 A.C.), being the year in which Shemariah wrote these words. [n. 17]

In Portugal, at about the same time, we find R. David ben Yom-Tob Bilia adding to the articles of Maimonides thirteen of his own, which he calls the "Fundamentals of the Thinking Man." Five of these articles relate to the functions of the human soul, that, according to him, emanated from God, and to the way in which this divine soul receives its punishment and reward. The other eight articles are as follows:

1. The belief in the existence of spiritual beings -- angels;
2. *Creatio ex nihilo*;
3. The belief in the existence of another world, and that this other world is only a spiritual one;
4. The Torah is above philosophy;
5. The Torah has an outward (literal) meaning and an inward (allegorical) meaning;
6. The text of the Torah is not subject to any emendation;
7. The reward of a good action is the good work itself, and the doer must not expect any other reward;
8. It is only by the "commands relating to the heart," for instance, the belief in one eternal God, the loving and fearing Him, and [p. 167] not through good actions, that man attains the highest degree of perfection. [n. 18]

Perhaps it would be suitable to mention here another contemporaneous writer, who also enumerates twenty-six articles. The name of this writer is unknown, and his articles are only gathered from quotations by later authors. It would seem from these quotations that the articles of this unknown author consisted mostly of statements emphasising the belief in the attributes of God: as, His Eternity, His Wisdom and Omnipotence, and the like. [n.19]

More important for our subject are the productions of the fifteenth century, especially those of Spanish authors. The fifteen articles of R. Lipman Muhlhausen, in the preface to his well-known *Book of Victory* [n. 20] (1410), differ but slightly from those of Maimonides. In accordance with the anti-Christian tendency of his polemical book, he lays more stress on the two articles of Unity and Incorporeality, and makes of them four. We can therefore dismiss him with this short remark, and pass at once to the Spanish Rabbis.

[Chasdai]

The first of these is R. Chasdai Ibn Crescas, who composed his famous treatise, *The Light of God*, about 1405. Chasdai's book is well known for its attacks on Aristotle, and also for its influence on Spinoza. But Chasdai deals also with Maimonides' Thirteen Articles, to which he was very strongly opposed. Already in his preface he attacks Maimonides for speaking, in his *Book of the Commandments*, of the belief in the existence of God as an "affirmative precept." Chasdai thinks it absurd; for every commandment must be dictated by some authority, but on whose authority can we dictate the acceptance of this authority? His general objection to the Thirteen Articles [p. 168] is that Maimonides confounded dogmas or fundamental beliefs of Judaism, without which Judaism is inconceivable, with beliefs or doctrines which Judaism inculcates, but the denial of which, though involving a strong heresy, does not make Judaism impossible. He maintains that if Maimonides meant only to count fundamental teachings, there are not more than seven; but that if he intended also to include doctrines, he ought to have

enumerated sixteen. As beliefs of the first class -- namely, fundamental beliefs -- he considers the following articles:

1. God's knowledge of our actions;
2. Providence;
3. God's omnipotence -- even to act against the laws of nature;
4. Prophecy;
5. Free will;
6. The aim of the Torah is to make man long after the closest communion with God.

The belief in the existence of God, Chasdai thinks, is an axiom with which every religion must begin, and he is therefore uncertain whether to include it as a dogma or not. As to the doctrines which every Jew is bound to believe, but without which Judaism is not impossible, Chasdai divides them into two sections: (a)

1. Creatio ex nihilo;
2. Immortality of the soul;
3. Reward and Punishment;
4. Resurrection of the dead;
5. Immutability of the Torah;
6. Superiority of the prophecy of Moses;
7. That the High Priest received from God the instructions sought for, when he put his questions through the medium of the Urim and Thummim;
8. The coming of the Messiah.

(b) Doctrines which are expressed by certain religious ceremonies, and on belief in which these ceremonies are conditioned:

1. The belief in the efficacy of prayer as well as in the power of the benediction of the priests to convey to us the blessing of God;
2. God is merciful to the penitent;
3. Certain days in the year -- for instance, [p. 169] the Day of Atonement -- are especially qualified to bring us near to God, if we keep them in the way we are commanded.

That Chasdai is a little arbitrary in the choice of his "doctrines," I need hardly say. Indeed, Chasdai's importance for the dogma-question consists more in his critical suggestions than in his positive results. He was, as we have seen, the first to make the distinction between fundamental teachings which form the basis of Judaism, and those other simple Jewish doctrines without which Judaism is not impossible. Very daring is his remark, when proving that Reward and Punishment, Immortality of the soul, and Resurrection of the dead must not be considered as the basis of Judaism, since the highest ideal of religion is to serve God without any hope of reward. Even more daring are his words concerning the Immutability of the Law. He says: "Some have argued that, since God is perfection, so must also His law be perfect, and thus unsusceptible of improvement." But he does not think this argument conclusive, though the fact in itself (the Immutability of the Law) is true. For one might answer that this perfection of the Torah could only be in accordance with the intelligence of those for whom it was meant; but as soon as the

recipients of the Torah have advanced to a higher state of perfection, the Torah must also be altered to suit their advanced intelligence. A pupil of Chasdai illustrates the words of his master by a medical parallel. The physician has to adapt his medicaments to the various stages through which his patient has to pass. That he changes his prescription does not, however, imply that his medical knowledge is imperfect, or that his earlier remedies were ignorantly chosen; the varying condition of the invalid was the cause of the variation [p. 170] in the doctor's treatment. Similarly, were not the Immutability of the Torah a "doctrine," one might maintain that the perfection of the Torah would not be inconsistent with the assumption that it was susceptible of modification, in accordance with our changing and progressive circumstances. But all these arguments are purely of a theoretic character; for, practically, every Jew, according to Chasdai, has to accept all these beliefs) whether he terms them fundamental teachings or only Jewish doctrines. [n. 21]

Some years later, though he finished his work in the same year as Chasdai, R. Simeon Duran (1366-1444,) a younger contemporary of the former, made his researches on dogmas. His studies on this subject form a kind of introduction to his commentary on Job, which he finished in the year 1405. Duran is not so strongly opposed to the Thirteen Articles as Chasdai, or as another "thinker of our people," who thought them an arbitrary imitation of the thirteen attributes of God. Duran tries to justify Maimonides; but nevertheless he agrees with "earlier authorities," who formulated the Jewish creed in Three Articles -- The Existence of God, Revelation, and Reward and Punishment -- under which Duran thinks the Thirteen Articles of Maimonides may be easily classed. Most interesting are his remarks concerning the validity of dogmas. He tells us that only those are to be considered as heretics who abide by their own opinions, though they know that they are contradictory to the views of the Torah. Those who accept the fundamental teachings of Judaism, but are led by their deep studies and earnest reflection to differ in details from the opinions current among their co-religionists, and explain certain passages [p. 171] in the Scripture in their own way, must by no means be considered as heretics. We must, therefore, Duran proceeds to say, not blame such men as Maimonides, who gave an allegorical interpretation to certain passages in the Bible about miracles, or R. Levi ben Gershom, who followed certain un-Jewish views in relation to the belief in *Creatio ex nihilo*. Only the views are condemnable, not those who cherish them. God forbid, says Duran, that such a thing should happen in Israel as to condemn honest inquirers on account of their differing opinions. It would be interesting to know of how many divines as tolerant as this persecuted Jew the fifteenth century can boast. [n. 21]

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Conservative Movement

Developing and organizing Conservative Judaism was Schechter's great work in America. He was able to find the center in the debate between the devotional Orthodox Jews and the iconoclastic Reform Jews who were questioning all aspects of the faith. The Conservative Judaism Schechter championed was a devotional doctrine in practice but one that kept Judaism contemporary. He bridged the gap between Western and Eastern Jewry with his notion of a "catholic Israel" (K'lal Yisrael), a Jewish option for the twentieth century. He believed that Judaism for each age was what that age made of it without abandoning ancient traditions.

"Conservative Judaism united what is desirable in modern life with the precious heritage of our faith ... that has come down to us from ancient times," he wrote. In 1913 he helped found the United Synagogue of America, a union of twenty-two congregations that had broken free of Orthodox Judaism. Schechter felt that the survival of Judaism in America depended on its adaptability to the emerging culture in the new century. Schechter also continued his own scholarly work, publishing the important two-volume *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* in 1909 and *Documents of Jewish Sectaries* in 1910. He died in November 1915.

Sources:

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