

INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM:

JwSt 3034

An Independent Study Course

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University of Minnesota

Minneapolis
University of Minnesota
Continuing Education and Extension
Department of Independent Study

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Course Information

Title Introduction to Judaism

JwSt 3034

4 degree credits--10 lessons

Author and Instructor

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University of Minnesota

With a Ph.D. in religious studies from Brown University, Professor Zahavy's published books are *The Traditions of Eleazar Ben Azariah*, *A history of the Mishnaic Law of Blessings and Prayers*, and *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Tractate Berakhot*. He has also written articles, study guides and software for computer-aided-instruction. He has been on the faculty at the University of Minnesota since 1976 and teaches courses in Midrash translations, medieval Hebrew literature, introduction to Judaism, rabbinic literature, and modern Judaism. He has also taught at Brown University, the University of California at Berkeley and the College of William and Mary. At the University of Minnesota he received the distinguished teaching award of the College of Liberal Arts in 1985. He is also director of the Center for Jewish Studies.

Telephone

You may phone Professor Zahavy about course questions or procedures at his office.

telephone: (612) 624-0221

If Professor Zahavy is not available, leave a message with the department secretary. He will return your call when possible.

Registration [to be supplied]

Required Texts J. Neusner, *The Way of Torah*, 4th edition, Wadsworth
_____, *Life of Torah*, Wadsworth
_____, *American Judaism, Adventure in Modernity*, KTAV

Supplementary for JWST 3034:

(S) _____, *Invitation to the Talmud*, Harper and Row

(S) _____, *There We Sat Down*, KTAV

The Tanakh=Hebrew Bible=Old Testament, any edition.

Readings in Judaism and Jewish History, Volume One, edited by Tzvee Zahavy;
additional readings to be added.

These materials may be purchased at the Information counter of the Minnesota Book Center, Williamson Hall (east bank of the Minneapolis campus), or by mail through the Department of Independent Study. For a mail order, use the form at the end of this Course Information. A mail order must include a \$3 service charge. Please make check or money order payable to the University of Minnesota or provide credit card information. Book prices are subject to change.

Note: A brief list of books that supplement the required reading can be found in Appendix A at the back of this Study Manual. A more complete bibliography may be found at the end of *Way of Torah*. In addition, if you wish to take further related courses after completing this course, refer to the list in Appendix B.

Reference Material You will find it useful to have a copy of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) at hand as you read through the course. If you do not own a Bible, you might consider borrowing one or checking out one from the library.

Supplementary Tapes: "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews"

The nine programs of this series comprise a supplement to this course. They reveal the texture and content of Jewish civilization at historic locations and with ancient artifacts, illuminated manuscripts, religious objects, and rare archival film.

Course Requirements The requirements for this course include reading this Study Manual and the required texts, watching the tapes (optional), and completing three written assignments and a mid-course and a final exam. You also have to submit an Independent Study questionnaire evaluating this course.

Course Format This course consists of the following components:

- this Study Manual
- required textbooks
- supplementary readings
- supplementary tapes

These components are integrated to provide a complete picture of the Jewish civilization. The Introduction at the end of this section explains the purpose of each component in the course.

How to Proceed

1. Look through the course materials and note the following:

In this Study Manual--Lesson 1 is an overview of the periods of Jewish history. The remaining nine lessons correspond to the nine supplementary tapes. The Course Outline at the front of the Manual lists the reading, viewing, and written assignments for each lesson.

2. Do the reading assignment for each lesson.

Read the assignment in the Study Manual first. Quickly glance through the dates, literary works, terms, and so on for a brief background on the period covered in the study notes that follow. Answer the study questions at the end of the lesson. Do not submit your answers for grading; use them to review the lesson material.

Then read the assignments in the **textbooks** and **supplementary readings**.

3. As you read the assignment look for major trends within the historical and cultural development of the Jews. Take brief notes and jot down questions.
4. Keep a journal of your reactions to the readings. Many events in Jewish history evoke strong emotions. Do not submit your journal for grading; use it to sort out your responses to the course.
5. If you have questions about the course, call the instructor or send a note with your assignments. To paraphrase a saying of the ancient rabbis, "The shy student does not learn as much as the inquisitive student."

Written Assignments

There are written assignments included in the appendix to this Study Manual for each lesson. For each assignment you must write an essay of 500 to 700 words (2 to 3 double-spaced typed pages) in response to a specific question. Your essays should show you have mastered the material in the readings.

Substantiate ideas in your essays with references (either direct quotes or indirect quotes). You can either use footnotes at the bottom of your pages, or, preferably, parenthetically incorporate the citations into the body of your essay as shown in the following example: (**Way of Torah**, p. 42). It is better to use your own words and not to use too many direct quotes. But under no circumstances should you use the exact words of another author without quotation marks. That is plagiarism.

You should type your essays, using double-spacing. Be sure to put your name, the name of this course, and the assignment number at the top of each page of your essays. The greatest educational benefits accrue to the student who completes the assignments in a timely fashion.

Examinations

There are two examinations for this course: a take-home midcourse exam printed in this Study Manual after Lesson 5 and a take-home final exam printed in this Study Manual after Lesson 10. For each exam you must write an essay of no more than 1500 words (7 double-spaced typed pages) in response to a specific question. You may use any books or notes you wish to substantiate your ideas.

Although the exams are open book, they should be approached very carefully. They will test your ability to apply what you have learned rather than your ability to reiterate facts.

A Note from the Instructor about your preparation

Most students taking this course have never formally studied Judaism or Jewish history. Some of you know about Judaism from familiarity with Jewish friends, from popular accounts of Jewish practice in the press, or from hearing about the Jews or Israelites in Bible study. Jewish students taking this course may know about Jewish practice or belief from family observance, synagogue, or Sunday school.

I have found that what students know before taking an academic course introducing them to this subject usually does not affect significantly their performance in the course. The scope and methods of this academic study require the student to go beyond what the average person knows about the Jewish religion and heritage.

Therefore, I have designed the assignments based on the assumption that the material you are studying is new and unfamiliar to you. Accordingly, the first assignment (to be completed after Lesson 2) asks only for **careful description** of a new subject. A good description is more than just a summary. An excellent paper (receiving a grade of A) usually brings a spark of new insight or creativity to the subject. Accurate summaries (receiving a grade of B) capture the important main themes of the subject and present them with clarity and thoughtfulness. I certainly do not expect sloppy or incomplete work (receiving a C or D).

The second assignment (after Lesson 4) requires that you go beyond simple description. In this second brief paper, I ask you to **compare** and **contrast** two important aspects of the course. The cumulative effect of your description of a subject in the first assignment and your comparison in the second increases for you the effectiveness of the learning process.

In the midcourse examination and the third assignment (after Lesson 7) I look for **analysis** of the subject at hand. You should feel more confident about writing short papers on Judaism and Jewish history after you reach the end of Lesson 5 and have completed the first two exercises. By that time I expect you to be able to approach more critically the new material you are learning.

When you have finished the course you will benefit from stepping back and looking at the sweep of the materials as a whole. Accordingly, for the final exam essay I ask you to **synthesize** some important aspects of the materials in the course. Once again, I look for creativity and insight, clarity and thoughtfulness.

I emphasize that the information needed to respond to the questions must be drawn from the course materials: the textbooks, supplementary readings and this Study Manual. This is an introductory course, not a seminar. Additional reading and research is not expected, nor does it add to your grade.

I also caution you to avoid substituting personal opinion or first-hand experience for the factual accounts expected from you in response to these assignments. A personal anecdote is useful, and can even be interesting and effective where it relates directly to the assignment. Otherwise, it has no place in the written work for this course.

Finally, in this course I permit the student the **option** of rewriting one paper out of the first three and then submitting it with the final exam for reevaluation for a higher grade. This affords the student another occasion for effective learning, the main purpose of this course.

Questionnaire

You are required to fill out the questionnaire included at the end of this Study Manual. Send in the questionnaire when you submit your final exam essay after Lesson 10. More information about the

questionnaire is given in the letter at the front of this Study Manual.

Submission of Written Materials

Attach a lesson form (included with this Study Manual) to each assignment and the exam. Send each to:

Department of Independent Study
University of Minnesota
45 Wesbrook Hall
77 Pleasant Street S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455

It is recommended that you keep either rough notes or copies of your assignments so that if necessary, you can easily resubmit them. Also, please do not destroy your written assignments when they are returned to you; occasionally instructors ask that papers be returned for reevaluation.

Your written assignments will be evaluated by your instructor and returned to you as soon as possible. However, please allow at least three weeks for grading and return of materials.

Course Grade

Your written assignments and final exam will be graded on content, form, and style. Each assignment is worth about 5 percent of your grade and the midcourse 25 percent. The final exam essay is worth about 25 percent of your grade. The instructor allows one notable exception to this formula for students who make visible progress during the course. If your grade on the final exam is significantly higher than the grades on your earlier assignments, more weight will be given to the final exam. For instance, if you received a grade of C on several assignments and a strong grade of A on the final exam, you may receive a grade of A for the course.

Course Completion

You are urged to complete this course in twelve weeks. If you cannot finish the course in this time, you have up to one year to finish it. If you do not complete the course by then, your registration will be dropped.

Refund Policy

Full tuition refunds will be granted in the following cases: illness or military enlistment, when appropriate documentation is presented; if the course is canceled by the Department of Independent Study.

Special questions and course administration

If you have any comments or questions about the course materials, send them to your instructor when you submit an assignment or contact him at his office.

Other questions should be directed to:

Department of Independent Study
University of Minnesota
45 Wesbrook Hall
77 Pleasant Street SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455

BOOK ORDER FORM

Introduction to Judaism: Civilization and the Jews
JwSt 3034

Please indicate the materials you want to purchase. (Book prices are subject to change)

Required Texts:

\$3.00 Required service charge for fourth class postage and handling.
For optional first class postage, please add \$3.00.

_____ TOTAL

Payment may be made by personal check or money order (made payable to the University of Minnesota) or by Visa or MasterCard.

Your name _____

Address _____

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If payment is to be made by Visa or MasterCard, please fill in the following information:

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Please send this form along with payment or credit card information to:

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**Course Outline
INTRODUCTION**

LESSON 1 PERIODS OF JEWISH HISTORY

LESSON 2 THE BIBLICAL HERITAGE OF JUDAISM (1400 to 586 B.C.E.)

LESSON 3 THE HELLENISTIC AGE (586 to 135 B.C.E.)

LESSON 4 THE RABBINIC OF TRADITION (1 to 1000 C.E.)

LESSON 5 THE JEWS OF EUROPE (1000 to 1600 C.E.)

MIDCOURSE EXAM

LESSON 6 FROM MYSTICISM TO MODERNITY (1492 to 1789)

LESSON 7 THE NEW JUDAISMS (1789 to 1917)

LESSON 8 JUDAISM IN AMERICA (1654 TO THE PRESENT)

LESSON 9 THE MASS MURDER OF EUROPEAN JEWRY (1932 to 1948)

LESSON 10 UNDERSTANDING CONTEMPORARY JUDAISM

FINAL EXAM

APPENDIX A: Reading and Written Assignments

APPENDIX B: Suggested Further Reading

APPENDIX C: Suggested Further Study

Introduction

Before you begin this course it is important you know the purpose of each of the course components (Textbooks, supplementary materials, video tapes, and Study Manual) and the perspective each offers on the subject of Jewish history.

Study Manual

This **Study Manual** serves several purposes. First, it lists the required readings and the assignments for the course. Second, it explains and summarizes information presented in the textbooks and supplementary readings. And third, it extends the scope of the course beyond the boundaries set by these course materials.

The Study Manual highlights the philosophical and religious developments that paralleled the historical unfolding of Jewish civilization. A major focus of the Study Manual is the study of Judaism. An analysis of the psychological, philosophical, and social aspects of the Jewish religion may be included under the study of Judaism. Therefore, the Study Manual emphasizes many internal developments of Jewish civilization, such as its religious practice and ritual, as well as the external forces that helped shape the story of the Jews. It concentrates, then, on the history of Judaism in the context of the history of the Jews.

Textbooks provide the main readings of the course. **Supplementary readings** are important to fill out many areas not covered in the main textbooks.

Video Tape Programs (optional)

The narrator of the nine programs in the PBS series "Civilization and the Jews" is Abba Eban, a distinguished statesman and political leader in Israel. Eban has served Israel as its ambassador to the United Nations and in many other diplomatic roles. In the introduction to one of his best-known books, he tells about his approach to the study of Jewish history.

The central fact in modern Jewish experience has been the renewal of Israel's statehood. The utter singularity of Jewish history, its rebellion against all historic law, its total recalcitrance to any comparative system of research, have all been brought home to me at every stage. I have also come up against the impossibility of understanding, and therefore explaining, the current Jewish reality without a constant probing of ancient roots. There is no other modern nation whose motives of existence and action require such frequent reference to distant days. This is true of Israel in the Diaspora, as it is of Israel in the community of nations. And when all is said and written, the Jewish career remains an unpenetrated mystery. The mark of interrogation is written everywhere. The problems can be illuminated but never solved. I recall Kierkegaard's words: "Life must be lived forward, but it can only be understood backward." (**My People: The Story of the Jews**, New York, 1968, p. v)

Although Eban takes a historian's point of view in this series, he is as much concerned with understanding the present as he is with describing the events of the past. Therefore, in his interest in events that shaped Jewish history, he focuses foremost on factors that shaped the present day.

Eban speaks first about selected political events involving the Jewish people from their earliest times to today. He prominently includes in his discussions the major victories and tragedies that the Jews experienced from the earliest period of their history.

Overall, the programs take a broad historical perspective. They speak more about global trends than about particular details that affected only small groups of Jews. The programs refer more to the reverberating

national trends that shaped the destiny of a people than to the quiet birth of new ideas or cultural developments whose impact was felt over the long span of history.

Definitions

Since I speak often in this course about civilization and religion, I wish to suggest working definitions for each of these terms. Defining the term **religion** first makes sense, since **religion** is generally considered a central aspect of a civilization. Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist, has proposed a widely accepted general definition of religion:

It is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions in such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seen uniquely realistic.

The symbols, stories, and practices in a religious system help provide meaningful interpretation of the human situation. In our study of Jewish history we will encounter many examples of religious symbols and stories.

The definition of the concept **civilization** is more difficult, since it includes within its broad boundaries so many aspects of human history and endeavors. A study of civilization may require attention to the things people create or destroy, and the circumstances of these actions. It may also necessitate investigation of the forces that have preserved or threatened the ideas, values, customs, and institutions of civilizations at particular periods of development.

Civilization, then, is a broad concept which encompasses many aspects of religion and history. Accordingly, the study of Judaism and Jewish history are both dimensions of the study of Jewish civilization.

The contrast between studying a body of evidence in order to understand the history of a religion or, alternatively, to analyze the historical development of a civilization, may be made more clear through an example. The Hebrew Bible tells the story of man's creation and of Israel's early development. The general historian looks at this material as a source of positive historical facts about the early development of a people--the formation of a group of tribes into a national civilization. Indeed, this is a central focus of the first unit on the early Biblical period.

In contrast, religious historians frequently look at the same evidence in other ways. For them, biblical narrative becomes a source for understanding the philosophical meanings of Judaism. From this perspective, the stories of the Bible describe events of timeless significance. They tell of events both historical and heavenly, real and symbolic.

Some biblical stories that lend themselves to symbolic interpretation include the creation of heaven and earth, the creation of man, and the future redemption of Israel at the end of time. There is little temptation to locate these events in actual history. They are the basic concepts of the biblical view of human life.

The creation of the world is symbolically reenacted, for instance, in Jewish holidays and celebrations. The story of the first man and woman in paradise is integrated into the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony. And the idea of the redemption of the world figures prominently in many Jewish prayers and blessings.

Other biblical stories which may be viewed either as historical or symbolic accounts include the narratives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai; and the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. One can ask what these events mean within a timeless religious philosophy of life. Or one can explore the historical realities of ancient times and try to locate these stories in a real time and

place.

The story of the exodus of Israelites from bondage in Egypt may be seen as a historical account with imaginative elements added over the course of time. From another perspective, it may be read as a symbolic story of redemption. It thereby becomes a drama in which the observer, the reader, is the prime participant. It lifts the reader from the present to a higher reality-another dimension of existence.

A Discussion of the systemic analysis of Judaism

A systemic analysis is the study of the representations of a religion based on the premise that religions, like culture in general develop not along a simple linear progression, but as a series of separate, sometimes overlapping, systems. The theory of the applied systemic analysis of a religion was recently articulated and developed by Jacob Neusner in his studies of the history of Judaism.

According to the view of Neusner, to engage in the construction of the broader history of Judaism, one must consider independently each Judaic system and its data in light of its metaphoric social personification, its "Israel."¹ "Given the diversity of Judaisms past and present," Neusner says,

we cannot find it astonishing that the name for the social entity constituted by Jews, the name "Israel," has carried a variety of meanings, and . . . each of these served not as concrete description of real people living in the here and now, a merely factual statement of how things are, but as a metaphor. The metaphor might take genealogical or political or supernatural or taxonomical and hierarchical or ontological or epistemological character, as systems varied (p. 39).

The vitality of Neusner's analysis is its insistence on placing primacy for description on the social group. "*A Judaic system derives from and focuses upon a social entity, a group of Jews who (in their minds at least) constitute not an Israel but Israel* (p. 13)." A strength of the approach is the clarity of the definition of a system: a "Judaism" articulates a distinct world-view and a well-defined way of life for its society. "I understand by a religious system three things that are one," Neusner says:

- [1] a world-view, which by reference to the intersection of the supernatural and the natural worlds accounts for how things are and puts them together into a cogent and harmonious picture;
- [2] a way of life, which expresses in concrete actions the world-view and which is explained by that world-view;
- [3] and a social group, for which the world-view accounts, which is defined in concrete terms by the way of life, and therefore which gives expression in the everyday world to the world-view and is defined as an entity by that way of life.

In further initially defining his concepts, he adds:

A religious system is one that appeals to God as the principal power, and a Judaic system is a religious system that identifies the Hebrew Scriptures or "Old Testament" as a principal component of its canon. A Judaism, then, comprises not merely a theory -- a book -- distinct from social reality but an explanation for the group (again: Israel) that gives social form to the system and an account of the distinctive way of life of that group. A Judaism is not a book, and no social group took shape because people read a book and agreed that God had revealed what the book said they should do.

The recovery of the details of systemopoesis, the making of Judaic systems, constitutes one important element of the task of the historian of Judaism of tracing the development of the religion.

Neusner uses a systemic approach for the interpretation of official Judaic legal and hermeneutical texts and

¹Jacob Neusner, *First Principles of Systemic Analysis: The Case of Judaism Within the History of Religion*, Lanham, MD, 1987, pp. 35-36.

narrative. He deals mainly with the literary criticism of texts of late antique Judaism within their proper systemic framework. Let me consider further a few additional strengths and weaknesses of this method for its application to late antique Judaic and other pertinent data.

Initially it seems, counter-intuitive as this may be, that in order to reconstruct the history of Judaism of a distant age through the investigation of far fewer and less eclectic writings of late antique Hebrew and Aramaic texts, scholars, like Neusner, utilize an apparently more complex agenda, than that which others employ to critically study the near contemporary and current representations of religion of the past generation.

Systemic analysis studies religions as ecological systems, ordered and closed cultural entities. Neusner's systemic view originates in large part in Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system,² and derives in the main without question from the classical Weberian vision of social structures.

Systemic analysis rests on two premises:

[1] *No religious system recapitulates any other.*

[2] *All religious systems within a given social and political setting recapitulate the same resentments.*³

Neusner aims to compare systems one to another. This enterprise requires, he says, study of the setting, the literary and material evidence of the system and, "the consequent system and its definition of urgent questions and self-evidently true answers." Because each system stands ecologically distinct from another we can ask about the particular "resentment" confronting the vision of a certain group and how it, through the representations of its system, "responded to that inescapable question."⁴

It is quite obviously fruitful to bring the methodology of the history of religions into conversation with literary critical, philosophical modes of thought. By insisting on greater heuristic sophistication we may dissuade contemporary critics from jumbling together the data of many diverse Judaisms and their respective representations when they speak of religious categories and employ its metaphors.⁵

In this course we study multiple Judaisms and their discursive spheres. Historians of Judaism following the prevailing systemic paradigm of analysis work with a multiplicity of Judaisms. The classical Judaism of the dual Torah, rabbinic Judaism, took shape after a catastrophe of 70 C.E. (the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and loss of independence to the Roman Empire) and persists in one or another configuration through the middle ages to the present day where spokesmen claim it is approximated as one or another form

²See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966, pp. 1-46 and the references assembled there on pp. 44-46.

³P. 19.

⁴P. 20.

⁵Some recent books by Neusner related to the description of systems include, *From Description to Conviction: Essays on the History and Theology of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1987, *The Systemic Analysis of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1988, *Canon and Connection: Intertextuality in Judaism*, Lanham, 1987, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse*, Lanham, 1987, *Ancient Judaism and Modern Category Formation: "Judaism," "Midrash," "Messianism," and Canon in the Past Quarter-Century*, Lanham, 1986.

of contemporary Orthodoxy or Conservative Judaism.

Jews in Nineteenth century Europe formulated several new Judaisms. Dominant among these were utopian and messianic movements leading to Reform and Zionism, and other forces giving rise to Conservative Judaism and Yiddishism. They also participated in and helped shape a variety European secular cultural alternatives, like socialism, anarchism and communism, all movements conceived of and articulated in significant measure by Jews.

Another example may be drawn from the system of the organized American Jewish Community. North American Jews have created two systemic worlds of Judaic expression. The Judaism of the synagogue and home is expressed in the officially stated beliefs and practices of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements. A second "Judaism" takes its shape within the realm of the civic, mainly secular, public life of the community. Neusner calls this official communal system in America, "the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption, with its interest in the destruction of European Jewry as paradigm of evil, then the creation of the State of Israel, as compensation renewal after the ultimate catastrophe (p. 119)."

American Jews form, "a shared corporate experience of polity (p. 120)," and thus constitute a differentiated social unit, an "Israel." Their interests are expressed by such bureaucratic structures as Federations for Jewish Service, fund-raising groups with a self-interest in actively propounding an ideology of distinctiveness. Organizations like those preach the public doctrines of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption. Though some argue the motivation is manipulative, the result nevertheless is substantive and the system has taken definitive form.

Neusner expands on the meanings imputed to the murder of the six million and the creation of the State of Israel:

The world-view of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption stresses the unique character of the murders of European Jews, the providential and redemptive meaning of the creation of the State of Israel. The way of life of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption requires active work in raising money and political support for the State of Israel (p. 122).

He is openly critical of the value of this systemic expression and, characteristically, does not hesitate to spell out his view. This Judaism, "offers as a world nightmares made of words." He goes on:

First, the message of Holocaust and Redemption is that difference is not destiny but disaster -- if one trusts the gentiles. Second, the media of Holocaust and Redemption leaves the life of the individual and family untouched and unchanged. . . [It] turns on its head the wise policy of the reformers and enlightened of the early nineteenth century: a Jew at home, a citizen out there. Now it is an undifferentiated American at home, a Jew in public policy (p. 128).

Lapsing theological, he concludes that the enduring Judaism of the dual Torah has the power to transform the inner life of the Jew, this other Judaism does not. On this Judaism we will have more to say in the last two lessons of the course.

Our study of the Jewish people commences in Lesson 1 with an overview of the periods of Jewish history and with a brief survey of the historical evidence of the Jewish heritage.

LESSON 1 Periods of Jewish History

Study Notes

This course is divided into ten lessons: this overview lesson and nine lessons that cover Jewish history through the following major periods:

1. Biblical age: 1400 to 586 B.C.E.
2. Hellenistic period: 586 to 135 B.C.E.
3. Talmudic era: 1 to 1000 C.E.
4. Early medieval age: 1000 to 1600 C.E.
5. Late medieval period: 1492 to 1789
6. Modern era: 1789 to 1917
7. American Jewish community: 1654 to the present
8. Holocaust: 1932 to 1948
9. Contemporary trends: 1948 to the present

Note: The abbreviations B.C.E. and C.E. ("before the common era" and "of the common era") are equivalent to B.C. and A.D.

Jewish history is divided into distinct periods in this course so that the three millenia it covers can be dealt with more readily. The following factors determined how the divisions were made:

1. the kind of evidence that exists concerning the period,
2. the language of the Jews during the era,
3. the major institutions and unifying forces of the age, and
4. the geographic location of the majority of Jews in that time.

Following is an overview of the major periods of Jewish history covered in the next nine lessons.

1. Biblical Period (1400 to 586 B.C.E.)

Jewish history began about 1300 B.C.E. with a people called the **Israelites**. The main source of information about the early Israelites is the Hebrew Bible. It is the most valuable historical resource for knowledge about the early development of this people, who are the predecessors of the Jews.

Traditionally Jews have called the writings of the Hebrew Bible the Tanakh, an abbreviation of the words **Torah** (the five books of Moses), **Nevi'im** (the historical and prophetic books), and **Ketuvim** (the remainder of the inspired writings in the Hebrew Bible). The term **Old Testament** is the Christian name for the Hebrew Bible. But because the word **old** in the title carries with it the theological overtone that the "old" has been replaced with the "new," most academic settings avoid the term.

At this point in the course you should obtain a copy of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Furthermore, references are made in the beginning of the course to narratives in the Hebrew Bible, especially to the books of Genesis and Exodus; so you should become familiar with these books. Finally, you will find it helpful at this time to make a list of all the books of the Hebrew Bible. Then when a reading assignment refers to a selection in a book, you will be able to consult the text itself in the Hebrew Bible.

The original language of almost all biblical narrative, poetry, and law is Hebrew. Therefore, historians or other scholars who wish to study the primary evidence of the history of the Israelites in their earliest period from the fourteenth to the sixth century B.C.E., must master the Hebrew language.

Several factors give this historical period further unity. First, during this era the Israelites lived primarily in one geographic location. They began together in ancient Egypt as a nation of slaves made up of twelve tribes, the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. They became a nation with a territory after they conquered Canaan under Joshua. This people further solidified when Solomon built the Temple and established it as the centralized place of worship in Israel.

The people of Israel were united by tribal and family relationships, and by a common language, a common literature, and a common relationship to a centralized place of worship. This gave coherence to the heritage of this people in the formative Biblical period.

The historical and cultural development of the Israelites was disrupted in the sixth century B.C.E. by the capture of Jerusalem by an invading foreign force under Nebuchadnezzar, and the exile of the leaders of the nation to Babylonia. Under Ezra and Nehemiah, the leaders of the nation returned and began to rebuild the institutions of Israelite society.

In the late Biblical period the nation's leaders began to encourage the lay populace to study the Torah. Following this period the Israelite nation confronted challenges of another sort, the intrusion of Hellenism and its culture into the civilization of Israel.

2. Hellenistic Period (586 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.)

Also called the "Second Temple period" because the Jews returned from Babylonia and rebuilt the Temple at the start of the era, this epoch ends shortly after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in the first century C.E.

Many also refer to this time as the "Intertestamental period," because most of the books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) were written before this age, while the early Christian writings (New Testament) do not appear until the late first century. But use of the term **intertestamental** tends to diminish the importance of this age. It implies that Jewish history remained in, at best, a steady state of development, during these centuries. In reality, these years produced numerous formative developments within Israel.

At the outset of the Hellenistic period, the people of Israel inhabited, for the most part, the Judean hills around Jerusalem. In earlier times these people, known as the **Judeans**, worshiped many different gods; thus they could not be identified with one form of religion. During the Hellenistic period, however, the people of this geographic area became increasingly identified with the monotheistic religion of the Temple in Jerusalem. The name **Judean**, then, not only referred to residents of a particular area, but also to adherents of one specific form of religion. For the first time the following equation arose:

Worshiper of one God of Jerusalem = Judean = Jew

During this time the Judeans became known by a new name, the **Jews**. They also began speaking new languages.

By the end of the Hellenistic age few Jews spoke Hebrew, though it remained the language of sacred Jewish literature and of study and prayer. But in the marketplace, the language of the Jews at the close of this period was Aramaic, a close relative of Hebrew but still a wholly distinct language.

By the end of this era many Jews used Greek, the official language of the Hellenistic world, for commerce and trade. The origins of Greek in the Mediterranean go back to the time of Alexander the Great. When he conquered the civilized world in the early fourth century B.C.E., a tide of Greek-speaking Hellenistic traders and teachers followed in the wake of his armies.

Some of the great works of Jewish literature first appeared in the Hellenistic period. To read and analyze these works today, a scholar must master three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The Mishnah, one of the primary collections of rabbinic wisdom, was written in Hebrew. Even though the Mishnah is primarily a law code for Jewish practice, this work makes many references to historical, cultural, and religious developments of the latter part of this era.

The Greek works of Flavius Josephus are the best-known purely historical sources of the period. Indeed, to reconstruct the events of the age one must inevitably take his descriptions into account. References to Judaism in early Christian literature, such as the Gospels, also contribute to the picture of the Jews and Judaism during this era.

The Aramaic writings of the two Talmuds published several centuries later in 450-500 C.E., contain numerous references to the events of earlier ages. The major talmudic work was written over a span of years in Babylonia between the third and sixth centuries. The Palestinian Talmud, a less authoritative compilation of rabbinic law and lore, was assembled in Israel around the same time. Properly interpreted, these works expand our knowledge of Jewish heritage in the Hellenistic age.

3. Talmudic Era (1 to 1000 C.E.)

After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by Romans in the first century and the abortive revolt by Jews in the second century, the general living conditions for Jews in Israel deteriorated steadily. Large numbers of them migrated eastward away from Rome, to the empire of the Sassanian Persians in Babylonia. There, Aramaic speaking Jewish communities sprang up rapidly and flourished for centuries thereafter.

Because the Temple in Jerusalem existed no more, Jewish communities of this time developed a form of faith independent of any geographic religious center. Thus the culture of this age focused on books and learning (an easily transportable center of religious life), particularly on the Torah and its rabbinic interpretations collected in the anthologies of the Midrash and in the influential body of talmudic works.

The institution of the synagogue took firm root in the Jewish nation during the Talmudic era. Archaeological finds confirm the construction of several hundred synagogues in Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee between the years 200 and 600 C.E.

The Talmud was the crowning contribution to Jewish heritage from the community of Babylonia in late antiquity. This long, complex work, written in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, has assumed the central position of importance in the revered writings of the Jews from the time of its publication in the sixth century until the present. Most of Jewish law, custom, and belief has some roots in the writings of the Talmud. Since the Middle Ages, Jews have considered mastery of the talmudic works one of the highest intellectual and religious achievements. Furthermore, the cultural and religious heritage of the Jews in this era cannot be reconstructed without drawing heavily on the records of the Talmud.

During this time Judaism spawned its most important "daughter religions," Christianity and Islam. The interaction and competition between these new religious groups and the Jewish people form an important element of Jewish history in the Talmudic period.

4. Early Medieval Age (1000 to 1600 C.E.)

As the Jewish population spread in the Middle Ages to North Africa, Spain and Portugal, and northern Europe, Jews came into contact with new forms of language, culture and society. In Muslim Spain Jews encountered Arabic translations of classical Greek and Roman masterpieces. Spanish Jewry rose to great political and cultural heights during this time. Its leaders, writing in Hebrew and Arabic, produced masterpieces of poetry, philosophy, and spirituality. Indeed, many of their writings persist to this day as classics of Jewish creativity.

The central European communities of German Jews, called **Ashkenazim**, produced another sort of intellectual and cultural Jewish heritage. They placed talmudic study at the center of their lives and their creative endeavors. As a result, these communities produced massive writings (mainly in Hebrew) related to the authoritative classical works of the Talmud.

To know the minds of Jews during this time, you would have to contemplate hundreds of the volumes they produced of commentaries to the Torah and the Talmud and sift through thousands of letters written by rabbis in response to specific questions of law or theological belief. You would also have to analyze the systematic codes of Jewish law, compiled in this era by rabbinic figures of great learning and vision.

The time of the Middle Ages was both a bright era of accomplishment and a dark time of antagonism for Jews in Europe. Under Christian domination in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Jews were persecuted on the Iberian peninsula and throughout Europe. Unfortunately, during this era in medieval Europe the basic notions of antisemitic beliefs developed. These insidious beliefs served as the foundation for later anti-Jewish attacks throughout European history, culminating centuries later in the physical annihilation of European Jewry during World War II.

5. Late Medieval Period (1492 to 1789)

As the Jews approached modernity, they developed new languages and new ideas, and refined their investigations of their heritage from the previous thousands of years. The main centers of Jewish population in this period remained in Europe, both in the east and in the west. By the nineteenth century, the Russian and Polish centers had grown significantly.

Yiddish, a language somewhere between German and Hebrew, became the unofficial, commonly used language of Jewish family life and of popular Jewish culture. Earlier in history, Spanish and Portuguese Jews had cultivated Ladino, a hybrid Judeo-Spanish tongue.

In many ways this was an age of hopes, symbols, and secrets. The intellectual creativity of the era can be understood only by entering the minds of the great Jewish mystics of the time, the masters of the **kabbalah** (tradition). Out of the culture created by the Jewish mystics came the great messianic pretenders of the era and, ultimately, one of the central movements of modern Judaism, the **Hasidim**, pietists of eastern Europe.

6. Modern Era (1789 to 1917)

The recent past has seen several important changes in Jewish history, demography, and thought. First, the Jews came to grips with modernity along several different paths. Many European Jews achieved a measure of political emancipation as they were granted citizenship in the various countries of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As a result, large numbers of Jews chose to assimilate into the culture of European society during the decades of the nineteenth century. Some accepted Christianity as their religion. Others chose as their beliefs the ideas of the humanistic Enlightenment. And still others chose to actively pursue socialist activism, or even anarchism. But the largest number chose to remain identified directly with the Jewish people.

Those European Jews who retained a strong link to their traditions, refined and reconstructed many of the age-old forms of Jewish practice and belief. Reform Judaism, a modern utopian form of Judaism, began in this age. Zionism, another future-oriented system of Jewish belief and action, grew up in the nineteenth century.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the center of Jewish population shifted from the Old World to North America. New kinds of Jewish belief and practice developed in the wake of the immigration of three million eastern European Jews to America. Conservative Judaism was the most prominent of the new forms of Judaism to take root on the shores of the New World.

Modern Jews entered with enthusiasm into the politics and history of their times. Though they spoke Yiddish and a variety of other European languages, they soon learned English and began translating into that New World tongue the classical works of the Jewish tradition.

The main historical and cultural trends of the time include the following: **acculturation**, the entry of the Jews into a new culture; **antisemitism**, the systematic persecution of the Jews--most virulent in Europe; and **Zionism**, the new ideology that emphasized the national destiny of the Jewish people to return to their own homeland.

7. American Jewish Community (1654 to the present)

American Jews are perhaps the most affluent and secure community in the history of the Jewish people. They have produced numerous creative works of literature, made many scientific and mathematical discoveries, and developed new forms of entertainment and the arts. The American Jews are a highly successful immigrant community.

Sociology is one important tool for studying the American Jewish community. Sociologists have found that Jewish leaders put a number of religious and ideological beliefs ahead of even socioeconomic success or acceptance into the host culture of America. These leaders believe that literature, politics, and financial success come after the three main issues of American Jewish life: the state of Israel, maintenance of Jewish identity, and concern with the demographic implications of intermarriage.

8. The Holocaust (1932 to 1948)

The Holocaust not only was the greatest tragedy to befall the Jews, but surely it was the greatest tragedy to befall any people in human history. For more than two decades the destruction of the European Jews loomed so awesome that few thinkers could bring themselves to study its consequences or to raise questions about its meaning. To be sure, the facts are nearly beyond belief. While the world watched, the Germans, aided by Europeans throughout the continent, systematically rounded up and murdered six million Jews in Europe.

This was, to say the least, a demographic disaster of great proportions. The Nazis destroyed, with the lives of the Jews, the institutions of continental Jewish life. Gone in 1945 were the **yeshivas** (schools of advanced talmudic learning), the synagogues, and the sources of art, literature, and language of European Jewry. What remained were a few survivors, along with some little poetry, and the scattered memoirs of the nightmare. The Western world read the **Diary of Anne Frank** and wept. But such literature could convey only a small fraction of the fear and sorrow of the times.

The Holocaust has sparked a new theological crisis in the worlds of both Jewish and Christian religious thought. How could the righteous suffer? The age-old question of Job was asked with renewed intensity. Some theologians went so far as to ask: Is God there? Does he watch over the Jews? The religious issues persist.

Out of the ashes of the Holocaust emerged the modern state of Israel. In 1949 the United Nations voted to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine (the name used for the area of ancient Israel).

To comprehend the events of this traumatic age one must be attuned partly to sociology, partly to history, and partly to theology, literature, and the arts. So many questions about the Holocaust persist that at present this era is studied and analyzed with greater intensity than any other epoch in Jewish history.

9. Contemporary Trends (1948 to the present)

The Jews of Israel, the United States, and the Soviet Union constitute the three major contemporary communities. Since 1949 Israel has developed into the leading center of Jewish learning, and religious and cultural creativity. Still, this small democratic nation in the Middle East is splintered politically into many factions and is constantly beset by economic woes.

The several million Jews of the Soviet Union face problems that raise questions about the ability of that community to survive for more than another generation or two. These Jews are virtually denied cultural expression by the political authorities of Russia, yet they are forbidden to leave the country. Despite the efforts of many Americans to secure the freedom of Jews who wish to emigrate, Soviet authorities give no indication of easing exit requirements in the near future.

The American Jewish community continues to prosper economically. Still it faces several problems. The population is declining. In addition, major rifts between Progressives and Conservatives appear to be growing wider. Nevertheless, we need to consider the future in light of the past. In the next nine lessons we shall survey the full sweep of the Jewish heritage. Though premature at this point in the course, I suggest that in the perspective of the long and trying history of the Jewish people, it is safe to predict that the Jewish community will persist, will thrive even under adversity, and will continue to contribute to the cultural life of the Western world.

Study Questions

1. What languages have the Jews spoken during their history?
2. Where were the major population concentrations of the Jews during the past three thousand years?
3. What institutions were important to the Jews in the Biblical and Hellenistic ages?
4. What were the primary sources for the reconstruction of Jewish history in antiquity? In modernity?
5. What were some of the most authoritative works of Jewish theology?
6. What were some important works of Jewish literature?

LESSON 2 The Biblical Heritage of Judaism (1400 to 586 B.C.E.)

Lesson Objective To understand the origins and history of the ancient Israelites and the development of the Hebrew Bible.

Important Dates B.C.E.

	2000	Abraham
ca.	1200	Moses and Joshua
ca.	1200-1000	Judges
ca.	1013-973	David
	973-933	Solomon
	722	Fall of northern kingdom
	639-609	Josiah
ca.	600	Jeremiah
	586	Fall of Jerusalem
	590	Ezekiel
	538	Return to Zion

Major Literary Works

Hebrew Bible: also called the Tanakh or Old Testament, it contains the Torah (Pentateuch), Prophets, and Writings (Hagiographa).

Basic Terms and Ideas

Monotheism: the belief there is only one God--an important aspect of the Israelite faith.

Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the "founding fathers" of Israel.

Exodus: the dramatic exit of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, ca. 1300 B.C.E.

Twelve tribes: each of these factions of the Israelite nation was said to be descended from a son of Jacob.

Temple cult: the sacrificial ritual of worship conducted by the priestly families in the Jerusalem Temple.

Background and Context

Egypt and Mesopotamia: two dominant nations in the second millennium B.C.E.

Tribal life: from Abraham to Moses, the Israelites lived as tribes in Canaan and Egypt.

Exodus from Egypt to the revelation at Mount Sinai: the formative events in the transition of Israel from separate tribes to one nation.

Conquest of Canaan, ca. 1200 B.C.E.: the acquisition of a national homeland for the nation of Israel.

Judges: rulers of the Israelites before the establishment of the hereditary kingship.

Monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon established a strong centralized leadership for the Israelites in Canaan.

Construction of the Temple: the central shrine of the Israelites in Jerusalem served as a strong administrative and symbolic center for the nation.

Division of the kingdom: after the reign of Solomon, the nation divided along geographic lines, north and south.

Other Near Eastern civilizations: Hittites, Phoenicians, Moabites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Chaldeans.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Giving of the law at Mount Sinai: the single most important religious event in the history of Israel and Judaism.

Israelite doctrine: beliefs of the people, such as the stories of the creation of the world and the early history of the tribes of Israel in the book of Genesis, or the doctrines of reward and punishment and the specific rules of Israelite religion in the book of Deuteronomy.

Centralized cultic worship: in the Temple of Jerusalem, the early Israelites worshiped God through rites of animal sacrifice.

Levites: served at the Temple of Jerusalem as the leaders of the Temple service.

Prophecy: a form of teaching and writing that predicted the future punishment or redemption of the nation and called on the people to return to God through charismatic teachers, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.

Idolatry: other forms of religious practice in ancient Israel, such as the worship of Baal, a fertility god, usually denounced by the prophets as false religions or abominations.

Fall of Jerusalem: the end of the Biblical period is often located in the sixth century at the time of the exile of Judean leaders to Babylonia.

Study Notes The Biblical Heritage

The history of the Jewish nation goes back nearly four thousand years to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the land of Canaan (Israel). From its start in the family of Abraham, a shepherd who worshiped a single God, Israelite belief was passed to Abraham's son Isaac, and next to his grandson Jacob. The 12 tribes of Israel trace their descent to the children of Jacob, who was also known by the name Israel.

As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew Bible is the main source for historical knowledge of the early development of the Israelites. But the biblical writings are much more than just a historical record of a group of tribes and a small nation in the Middle East. This literature was the sacred collection of writings of the Israelites and later of the Jews. Its heroes permeate the symbolic imagination of Jewish liturgy, literature, poetry, and folklore; its laws and teachings comprise the essential core of Jewish doctrine; and its spirit guides the inner life of the Jewish people.

The Hebrew Bible is organized into three divisions. The first division, called the Torah, or the Pentateuch, consists of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The second division, the books of the Prophets, consists of classical homilies attributed to great prophetic teachers of ancient Israel, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah. The third division, the books of Writings, contains wisdom literature, like the

Book of Job, apocalyptic writing, like the visions of the Book of Daniel, and poetry, like the lyrical Song of Songs.

The books of the Hebrew Bible are the following:

Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Prophets:

Historical books--Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

Prophetic books--Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

Twelve minor prophets--Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles

Please note that sections you should read are: Genesis, Leviticus, Samuel I and II, and Amos.

Let us focus here on the first section of the Hebrew Bible--the Torah. **Torah** has often been mistranslated as "law," from the Greek **nomos**. A better translation for the word is "teaching." Genesis, the first book of the Torah, begins with the creation of the world, and continues through the lives of the patriarchs and the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt. The Book of Exodus recounts the slavery and redemption of the Israelites and the revelation at Mount Sinai. Leviticus presents the rules for priests in the conduct of Tabernacle worship and festivals. Numbers tells of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. And Deuteronomy concludes with a reprise of the history of the people and calls for dedication to God and his laws.

The Torah, then, serves as more than a history of the Israelites. It also directs the way of life of the Israelites by spelling out rules for ritual and observance, such as what days are sacred, whom one may marry, and what foods are **kosher** (fit to eat according to dietary laws). The dietary laws in Leviticus, for instance, instruct Israelites on the animals they may eat and those that are taboo. The Torah also spells out actions that are not permitted by law, like boiling a kid in the mother goat's milk.

However, in addition to being a history and a collection of law, the Torah is also a book of religious philosophy. Many crucial theological concepts of Judaism first appeared in the Torah. This scriptural collection makes statements about the basic theological grounds of Israelite existence, such as the covenants between God and man, and between God and Israel. It also describes the nature of God's attributes and actions. Moreover, the Torah enunciates the idea that Israel is a chosen people and that God watches over its destiny.

But the Torah goes beyond story or philosophy. This sacred book, the scroll of the law, functioned as a living symbol in the development of Judaism through the ages. Furthermore, as Judaism developed, the Torah became an ingredient in every aspect of Jewish life.

Even today the Torah is a part of many rites and rituals. The ceremony of the circumcision, the Brit Milah, of a newborn boy on the eighth day after his birth, marks his entry into the covenant God made with Abraham. In the short service that accompanies this rite, the prayers conclude with several remarks about the hopes of those gathered with the child for his future destiny. Among those phrases recited, all present at the occasion declare their hope that the child will grow to fulfill a life of "Torah, marriage, and good deeds." Thus, at the outset of a boy's life, the Torah is mentioned as a focal goal for a young man in Israel.

Later in a boy's life at his second rite of passage, the Torah figures prominently once again. At the Bar

Mitzvah, which marks his coming of age, the young man is called to read publicly in the synagogue from the Torah. In this unusual way, he demonstrates that he accepts his responsibility as an adult Jew.

The Torah also takes its place as the central object enshrined in the synagogue. Most Jewish houses of worship are remarkably devoid of physical symbolism. Still, the ark (cabinet) of the Torah with the scrolls therein, stands in the front and center of every synagogue.

Reading the Torah is frequently a part of the synagogue service. While the congregation prepares to read it, the leader slowly marches to the ark to take the scroll. All the congregants rise out of respect for the Torah. The leader then takes out the handwritten parchment scroll of the Torah (reading from a printed book is not acceptable). As he carries it to the center of the room to place it on the special reading stand, many congregants come forward in the synagogue to kiss the Torah as a symbol of affection.

As Judaism developed through the centuries, the Torah played an increasingly crucial role in the life of the religion. Rabbinic Judaism emphasized the importance of the study of Torah as a religious obligation--study as ritual. Jewish theologians declared study of the Torah valuable for its own sake. This is not a totally original idea, since the Torah itself prescribes that Jews study and teach to their children the works of the Torah. Yet the rabbis of later generations carried the notion to an extreme. They said that Torah study was the weightiest act of piety among all the commandments, even of greater import than the obligation to love or fear God.

The centrality of the symbol of the Torah and the study of the Torah is apparent in every aspect of Judaism. It is clear, for instance, in the Jewish religious calendar, first introduced in the laws of the Torah and later developed throughout the generations down to the present.

Each holiday of the sacred cycle of the year has numerous levels of meaning. The three most prominent aspects of each holiday are the historical (mythic) meanings of the day, the seasonal (agricultural) aspect of the celebration, and the symbolic interpretation of the sacred time through its connection to Torah.

The primary holidays include the three pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost), and Sukkot (Tabernacles); the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement); and the minor holidays, Hanukkah and Purim.

Passover, the springtime festival, is associated with a prominent historical episode of Israelite history. When the Israelites left Egypt, the Book of Exodus tells us, they brought the Passover sacrifice. The festival also coincides with the celebration of spring, parallel to Easter in the Christian calendar.

[insert picture here]

What is the link between this holiday and the Torah? Since rabbinic times in the first or second century, this holiday has been celebrated in part by a feast combined with an evening of learning. At the Seder, the traditional meal on the first eve of the eight-day holiday, the participants recall the biblical narrative of the exodus, display the symbols of spring--greens, eggs, and new unleavened bread--and eat a large and sumptuous feast. They also study the verses of the Torah concerning the Passover festival, using special rabbinic methods of analysis.

Other Jewish festivals also have intimate connections to the Torah and its symbolism. The Torah describes the late spring festival of Shavuot (Pentecost), seven weeks after Passover, as the celebration of the first fruits. But later tradition associates this holiday with the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Special prayers and customs mark the day. It is said that the ancient Israelites stayed up throughout the night, awaiting the revelation of the Torah the next morning. One prominent feature of the festival is the custom of all-night studying as a symbolic preparation for receiving the Torah on the following morning.

The Sukkot (Tabernacles) holiday in the autumn recalls the late harvest in the agricultural life of the Israelite. The people are told to move out of their houses and to live in booths. The Torah specifies a historical reason for this custom: the Jews lived in temporary housing as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years after God brought them out of bondage in Egypt.

Like so many other celebrations, this one also has a close connection to the Torah and its study. In rabbinic Judaism, the last day of the eight-day festival was designated "the festival of the rejoicing for the Torah." On this day the scrolls are carried throughout the synagogue, accompanied by singing and dancing, as the congregation completes the Book of Deuteronomy and the yearly cycle of public readings from the five books of Moses and begins again reading from the first portion of Genesis.

Most of the festivals of the Jewish calendar are based on biblical passages. It is helpful to review the cycle of celebrations:

1. Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) are times of solemnity during which Jews celebrate the creation of the world, the kingship of God, and the covenant between God and his people. On the Day of Atonement, Jews confess their sins of the past year, they recall the service of the Temple, and they fast. These festivals are aptly called "the days of awe."

2. During Sukkot-Aseret (eight days), or Tabernacles, Jews recall the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert, celebrate the onset of winter and the long-awaited rainy season, and ask God to guarantee the fertility of the land. The last day of the festival is the joyous celebration of the Torah.

3. One holiday that postdated the Torah is Hannukah, the winter holiday of lights. It commemorates the military triumph of the Hasmoneans against Hellenizing Jews in the middle of the second century B.C.E. and the rededication of the Temple.

4. The Torah also preceded the institution of a second holiday. Purim is the late winter celebration of victory over persecution in the ancient Persian empire. It is a day of eating, drinking, merrymaking, and masquerade.

5. Passover is the feast of spring, freedom, and redemption.

6. Shavuot (Pentecost) is the time of the revelation of the Torah and a holiday of the first fruits.

7. Tisha B'Ab (ninth of Ab) is a postbiblical day of mourning over the destruction of the Temple. This summer commemoration includes fasting, the recitation of the Book of Lamentations, and the recollection of tragedies that befell the Jewish people throughout the ages.

These special days of the year mark the sacred time of the Jewish calendar. They are an important part of the biblical link in the Jewish heritage.

Without a doubt, the laws, teachings, narratives and poetry of the Hebrew Bible have been central to Jewish civilization from the time of ancient Israel, down to the present. We shall see in the lessons to come that the history of the Jews is, in many ways, the story of how messages from biblical sources guided this people through the centuries.

LESSON 3 The Hellenistic Age (586 to 135 B.C.E.)

Lesson Objective

To understand the encounter of ancient Israel with Greece and Rome.

Important Dates

536-444 Return of Jews from Babylonia and rebuilding of Temple under leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah

332 Alexander the Great; spread of Hellenism

300 Septuagint: Greek translation of Hebrew Bible

176 Beginning of rule of Seleucid Antiochus IV

167 Revolt of the Maccabees under Mattathias, led to independence of Jewish state

63 Roman governorship of Judea

70 C.E. Jewish rebellion resulting in destruction of Temple by Romans; Jews exiled to Rome.

Major Literary Works/Authors

Ezra and Nehemiah: Biblical books recounting the history of return of Jews to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Chronicles: an official biblical history of Israel

Daniel: the story of Daniel and his apocalyptic visions, thought to date to the time of the Maccabean revolt.

Maccabees: apocryphal accounts of the history of the Maccabean revolt.

Pseudepigrapha: writings of the Biblical period not accepted into the canon or the apocrypha.

Philo Judaeus: Hellenistic Jewish writer and philosopher.

Dead Sea Scrolls: literature of the Jewish community at Qumran in the Judean desert.

Basic Terms and Ideas

Hellenism: the influence of Greek language and culture, design and decoration, business, scholarship, and technology.

Apocalyptic writing: imaginative visions of the end of time.

Wisdom literature: writings that emphasize the value of learning and the scribal arts.

Maccabees: a group of priests and their followers who revolted against the rule of the Seleucid Greek Kingdom in the second century.

Background and Context

Greece and Rome: the two major powers that dominated the Near East during the Hellenistic age.

Alexandria: the site in Egypt of the major Hellenistic Jewish community.

Elephantine: the site on the Nile of a small Israelite village in fifth century B.C.E.

Alexander the Great: his conquests brought with them the influences of Hellenistic civilization.

Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms: after Alexander's death, his successors divided his kingdom into these two kingdoms.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Rebuilding of the Temple: after a short exile in Babylonia, Cyrus permitted the Jews to return and rebuild their sanctuary.

Hellenization: the spread of Greek culture.

Jewish philosophy: thinkers, such as Philo of Alexandria, who used the ideas of Hellenistic learning to interpret the Jewish heritage.

Translation of Bible to Greek: the writings of the Septuagint demonstrated how deeply Hellenized were the Jews of this era.

Revolt against religious oppression: the Hasmoneans' revolt brought independence from foreign rule to the Jews, who today celebrate the victory with the holiday of Hannukah.

Sectarianism in the first century C.E.: this turbulent period produced the new Christian religion and accelerated the rabbinic reinterpretation of traditional Judaism.

Study Notes The Heritage of the Hellenistic Age

The years between 600 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. have been given several names. Each name indicates a different aspect of the era. Some scholars call this time the "Intertestamental period," referring to the fact that most of the books of the Old Testament were written before this era and the books of the New Testament thereafter. Others have seen this age, incorrectly, as a time of "late Judaism"--a time of decline in the religion because of few innovative developments.

Many Jewish scholars refer to the age as the "Second Temple period" because the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem stood during this time as a major center of Judean worship. Most common, however, is the frequently used label the "Hellenistic Age," which emphasizes the character of the substantive development of Judaism in this time.

Major changes took place in the seven hundred years of this epoch. It was a time of innovation, expansion, and transition for the Jewish people. It was also a time of political achievement and adversity. In the second century B.C.E., under the leadership of the Maccabees, the Jews achieved independence from foreign domination. In 70 C.E. they lost their temple to the Romans and their right to self-government. It took nearly two thousand years for the Jewish nation to reverse this loss.

The victory of the Maccabees is surely the highlight of Jewish history in this period. In the middle of the second century B.C.E., after more than three centuries of contact with Hellenistic civilization, the Jews faced a deep and irresolvable crisis. Some elements of the population favored radical Hellenization, including the introduction of many Hellenistic cultural practices in Jerusalem and the reform of religious worship at the Temple. Many more conservative factions opposed such unprecedented change in religion and culture.

In the civil war that followed, the Seleucid Empire in Syria supported the radical Hellenizers and took control of Jerusalem and the Temple. Historical accounts tell of the persecution of Jews loyal to the traditional ways. Many were oppressed for maintaining their allegiance to the conservative priests, for continuing to study and teach Torah, and for refusing to eat the swine's flesh of the Hellenizers' sacrifices.

Religion was at the center of the revolt that followed. Under the Hasmonean princes, the priestly family of Mattathias of Modiin, loyalist Jews rallied to expel the radical factions and to drive the Seleucids from their borders. After some initial setbacks, they were successful in liberating the Temple and in reinstating traditional forms of worship and sacrifice.

The contemporary holiday of Hannukah commemorates the victory of the Hasmonean priests and their forces. One story of the events of that time accounts for the custom of lighting lamps for eight days to celebrate the winter holiday. In purifying the sanctuary in Jerusalem from the pollution of the Hellenized cult, the priests found just one jar of untainted oil, enough to burn for one day. With faith and thanksgiving the priests lit the oil and set about to prepare new oil, a process that took several days. Miraculously, as the story goes, the oil burned for eight days. The lighting of lamps thus serves to remind Jews of both the historical military victory of the loyal Maccabean forces and the faith of religious leaders of the past in the guidance of their God.

The importance of these military and historical events cannot be understated. Still, the impact of the cultural development of the Jewish people in the Hellenistic age may be even more crucial for the destiny of the Jewish people.

The Hellenistic age was a time of innovation. At the outset of this long era, the Jews built for themselves a new temple. During this time Jewish scribes developed a sophisticated wisdom literature, emphasizing for the first time the idea that not only the priest and the scribe but also every layman and peasant, had an obligation to study, to learn, and to seek after knowledge. No priest of Israel had previously suggested with such persistence that the greatest value of all was the acquisition of wisdom. The apocryphal Book of Ben Sirah, and parts of the biblical Book of Proverbs, reinforced for the Hellenistic Jew the importance of study--of pursuit of the scribal idea.

Still, this expansion of the Jewish values of the time did not go unchallenged. Qohelet, the Hellenistic author of the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, skeptically and fatalistically challenged all the values of the ancient Israelite. This author, who probably wrote during the middle of the third century, asked whether wealth, strength, family, fame, or even the piety of wisdom had any lasting value in the larger scheme of the universe. Accumulation of any tangible or intangible substance is, he said, merely ephemeral.

Qohelet, the preacher, called all the strivings of men "vanity." In the book he issued a challenge to the prominent factions of his time: the priests, the prophets, and the wise men.

Qohelet took a Hellenistic conceptual approach to the issues of life. The book stands as a universalist essay critical of previous works of the wisdom movement. Yet in later centuries, Qohelet's book became part of the canon of the books of the Tanakh. When the rabbis gathered at Yavneh, centuries later in 100 C.E., they debated the propriety of including the skeptical wisdom of Qohelet in the canon. However, they finally accepted the work on the basis of the book's epilogue, which called for people to fear God and keep his commandments. After all, Qohelet coexisted, though uneasily to be sure, with the great traditional works of the wisdom writers and other leaders of Israel.

Other important intellectual and spiritual innovations mark the Hellenistic age in Israel. In the turbulent time of the Maccabean revolt, a new literary and religious form of expression emerged: **apocalyptic writing**. This imaginative and expressive literary genre relied heavily on cosmic imagery and surreal symbolism. Of course the greatest Hellenistic works of Jewish apocalyptic writing are the visions of Daniel. Later, early Christian apocalyptic visions of that era were expressed in the writings found in the Book of Revelations.

Modern students of apocalyptic writing differ greatly in their assessment of the phenomenon. Some conclude that the weird character of its symbolism reflects the disoriented minds of its authors. But more recently,

other interpreters of apocalyptic writing have shown that its strange expressive forms belie a carefully crafted anti-establishment literary attack.

The visions of Daniel, for instance, reveal on close scrutiny the inner world of Jews who struggled to overcome their powerlessness during the persecutions of the age of Antiochus IV. Through the cosmic expressions and mythical beasts of the visions, these religious spokesmen who preached the words of these otherworldly events, carried a message of hope to the people who heeded it. They told the Jews not to despair. The era of their suffering soon would end and the time of redemption shortly would be upon them.

Most scholars agree that the visions of the Book of Daniel were written to carry a concealed message of hope and imminent salvation to the Jews, who felt powerless under the oppression of the radical Hellenizers and the Seleucid overlords. The book predicts the fall of the Seleucid Kingdom and the ultimate triumph of the forces of good.

In addition to the wisdom literature and apocalyptic writings of the age, another intellectual mode of thought entered Judaism in the Hellenistic milieu of the time. By the first century B.C.E., many Greek-speaking Jews were studying not only the language of the Greek world but also its culture. Jews in Alexandria, for instance, came into contact with the world of Greek grammar, rhetoric, and the crowning glory of Greek learning, philosophy.

In the first century, a great writer and thinker, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, took the best of Greek thought and applied it to interpret the literature and wisdom of the Jews. Philo used the eclectic Hellenistic philosophy of his day to explain the stories and laws of the Hebrew Bible. Some say that in Philo can be found the beginnings of all of Western philosophy for the next two millennia. While that assessment may be an overstatement, there is no doubt that Philo and others to follow brought innovative modes of philosophical thought to the world of Jewish learning.

The Hellenistic age was a time of transition, too. In the sixth century, Jewish people were called **Israelites**, a title indicating tribal or family associations. By the third century they had become **Judeans**, identified by geographic locale with a specific form of religious life. This period, then, witnessed the transition from the Israelite religion of an ancient civilization to the Judaism of a Hellenistic culture.

The evidence of the papyri (writings on a paperlike substance) from the Egyptian island of Elephantine, is one indicator of the transitional character of Jewish religion in the early part of the Hellenistic age, the fifth century B.C.E. The small Jewish military colony on this island worshiped a God they called **Yahu**, a name close to **Yahweh**, the Hebrew name of God usually translated as "Lord." The Jews there observed many of the festivals of the Israelite calendar. The religious life of this small group appears to lie somewhere between the standards set forth in the biblical law and the practices accepted by the Jews of Judea later in the Hellenistic period.

Another important transitional movement was the division between the Samaritans and the rest of the Jewish people between the third century B.C.E. and the beginning of the first century C.E. The Samaritans split off from those Jews who supported the Temple in Jerusalem, to start their own cultic center in Samaria to the north. There they established their own temple with a separate priesthood and kept their own version of the Torah.

The Samaritans claimed, of course, to be the true heirs of the Israelite heritage. At the close of the Hellenistic era of transition and change, many other groups took similar paths, parting ways with the traditional Jews in control of the Temple in Jerusalem and, at the same time, claiming that they and not the Jerusalem Jews represented true Israel.

This age of transition brought to the Jewish people new languages and new forms of cultural life, which resulted from new connections with civilizations far and near. The Israelite people entered the Hellenistic age speaking only a semitic language, Hebrew. At the end of the period the Jews spoke Greek and Aramaic, languages which brought them into conversation with two great cultural spheres. Through Greek they interacted with the Graeco-Roman world; through Aramaic they talked to the empire to the east, the great Persian power.

The appearance of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible indicates how deeply Greek language and learning had penetrated into Jewish life. In studying antiquity it is rare to find the sacred literature of a people translated into another language for religious purposes. Occasionally, however, a sacred work was translated by commission of a foreign king interested in knowing the sacred writings of the people he sought to govern.

Legend has it that Ptolemy Philadelphus in the third century B.C.E., summoned to Egypt seventy elders of the Jews to translate the Hebrew Bible to Greek. According to one version of the legend, he put each elder in a separate chamber and ordered him to translate the scriptures. Miraculously, the story reports, they each produced identical translations, thus demonstrating beyond question that God had inspired their work.

Scholars suggest that the historical facts regarding the origin of the Septuagint may not be in exact accord with the legends. Some historians place the time of the translation later, between the middle of the second and first centuries C.E. Most agree that the likely place of the original translation was in Egypt at Alexandria. Still, some surmise that Jews translated the books of the Bible for their own use in study and in liturgical recitation in the Hellenized synagogues of the day. In any event, the translation of the sacred scriptures to Greek is another factor indicating how significantly Judaism changed in this historical era.

The Israelites moved, in the Hellenistic period, from existence as a people of limited geographic and cultural breadth to a nation with a rich and wide civilization and with far-flung international interests.

Unfortunately, the age ended in confusion and destruction. In the turmoil of the first century C.E., the Jews splintered into many competing factions. With great intensity one group or another took up the banners of apocalypticism, the wisdom movement, scribal tradition, priestly interests, messianic fervor, and political extremism.

By the end of the first century, extremism cost Jews their independence. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E. The interests of the scribes, the teachers of wisdom, and the priests combined in the formation of a new mode of religious expression called **Pharisaism**, later to develop into rabbinic Judaism. The apocalyptic and messianic hopes of some were translated into the beliefs of early Christianity.

Clearly, the heritage of the Hellenistic age, especially at its culmination, was a significant and long-abiding contribution to the religion and culture of Judaism and the entire Western world.

Study Questions

1. What did Ezra and Nehemiah institute after the return of the exiles from Babylonia?
2. What is the importance of the colony at Elephantine?
3. Explain some characteristics of **Hellenism**.
4. What is wisdom literature? Name some works from this period.
5. What were the motives for the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible?
6. Describe the conflict between the factions in the time of the Maccabean revolt.
7. What is the message and meaning of Jewish apocalyptic writing?
8. Identify the following: Philo of Alexandria, the Samaritans, Hannukah, Mattathias, and Cyrus.

LESSON 4 The Rabbinic Tradition (1 to 1000 C.E.)

Lesson Objective To trace the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism in the time of early Christianity and Islam.

Important Dates

70	Destruction of the Temple
135	Bar Kochba revolt
200	Publication of the Mishnah
236	Beginning of Sassanian rule in Babylonia
450	Publication of the Talmud of the land of Israel
500	Publication of the Babylonian Talmud

Major Literary Works/Authors

Mishnah: an early third-century rabbinic compilation of rules and concepts. Considered by later generations to contain the oral Torah, which Moses received from God on Mount Sinai.

Talmud: a collection of many volumes of rabbinic teachings organized around the Mishnah. Contains comments about and explanations for the Mishnah, independent legal discussions, stories, biblical interpretations, and so on.

Midrash: rabbinic writings explaining the verses of Scripture in a sometimes fanciful or farfetched manner, often with great insight into the text.

Josephus: the Jewish historian of the first century who chronicled the war with Rome and who wrote a history of Israel from its beginnings to his day.

Basic Terms and Ideas

Pharisees: a group of Jews active in the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., who are referred to in the writings of Josephus, in the New Testament, and in rabbinic writings. Rabbis trace their roots to the earlier Pharisaism.

Saducees: a group of Jews of the same time period as the Pharisees, who were said to have rejected some basic beliefs of Pharisaism.

Essenes: the Jews who lived in the desert community of Qumran by the Dead Sea. The study of their belief and practices helped scholars understand the nature of Hellenistic Judaism and the origins of early Christianity.

Rabbinism: the Jewish movement that flourished after the destruction of the Temple, it produced the literature of the Mishnah and the Talmud, influential in guiding Judaic religious life for two thousand years.

Oral Torah (law): rabbinic teachings said to derive from divine inspiration.

Exegesis: the interpretation and explanation of biblical verses.

Messianism: the belief in the coming of a new age of redemption as foretold in the writings of the classical prophets.

Background and Context

Roman Empire; a dominant power in the Mediterranean in the first century.

Sassanian Babylonia: the other empire that dominated the East in the ancient world, where a great Jewish community grew up and where the Talmud was written between the third and the sixth centuries.

New Testament: the literature of early Christianity that portrays the Pharisees as the opponents of Jesus.

Church Fathers: early Christian leaders whose writings sometimes serve as indirect sources for historical information about the development of Judaism in late antiquity.

Decline of Rome in the third century: paralleled by the decline of the Jewish community in Israel.

Byzantium: the center of the Roman empire in the early Middle Ages.

Rise of Islam: the major cultural and political change of the early seventh century in the Middle East.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Responses to destruction of the Temple: the demise of the central religious, economic, educational, and social institutions of Israel provoked a variety of changes in Jewish life and thought. Many different factions in Israel, such as the Pharisees, Essenes, Saducees, Zealots, Sicarii, Scribes, and early Christians responded in different ways to this event.

Rabbinic schools: Hillel and Shammai were among the earliest known members of schools of Jewish intellectual leaders (later called rabbis). The teachings of the rabbis formed the core of a new system of Judaism that took root in Israel in the first through the third centuries and flowered in Babylonia in the third through the sixth centuries.

Rabbi Akiva and the Bar Kochba revolt: in 132 to 135 C.E., a generation after the Romans destroyed the Temple, a charismatic leader supported by a prominent rabbi led an unsuccessful revolt against Rome.

Influence of Mishnah on Jewish culture: the publication and reception of Mishnah as an authoritative code of Jewish law was one of the most important changes in the internal development of Jewish life.

The rise of rabbinic influence: by the fifth century, rabbinic leadership was acknowledged in the major Jewish communities.

Study Notes The Roman Period and the Synthesis Called **Rabbinic Judaism**

The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. radically changed the course of Jewish history and significantly altered the development of Judaism. The Temple had served as both a symbol of the independence of the Jewish state and a center of Judaic worship. When the Roman legions took Jerusalem and burned the Temple, they brought an end to the dreams of many zealous Jewish leaders of restoring the political integrity and self-governance of the Jews in their homeland. The Jews would have to wait nineteen centuries until the rise of the modern state of Israel in 1947, before they once again had a government of their own in the land of Israel.

The burning of the Temple in Jerusalem also forced major changes in the religion of the Jews. It marked the end of worship through the rituals of the Temple with its sacrifices and priesthood. In addition, it forced Jewish spiritual leaders to more vigorously develop other forms of worship, outside of the formal structures of a centralized Temple religion.

One farsighted leader, Yohanan ben Zakkai, escaped from the impending disaster in Jerusalem and fled to

Yavneh, a seashore town in southern Israel. There he and a small group of his followers, called **Pharisees**, set up an academy. At this point we see the first flowerings of the religious system now called **rabbinic Judaism**.

The Pharisees began as a religious fellowship in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple. They believed in practicing the rituals of a religious life apart from and in addition to worship in the Temple. More specifically, they emphasized that Jews should observe rules of purity and agricultural laws, regardless of whether or not they went to the Temple to worship. Each Jew was to think of himself as if he was a priest and, accordingly, lead a holy life. The Pharisees urged their followers to observe the Sabbath and festivals in their homes and their villages. For instance, a central element in the Pharisaic religious life was the communal meal in the village. Thus, the Pharisees did not accept the Temple as the sole center of their spiritual lives.

After the destruction of the Temple, the religion of the Pharisees had an even greater meaning to the average Jew in the land of Israel. Without the Temple, the Jews needed an alternative system of worship. Pharisaism provided them the basis for such a system. Yohanan ben Zakkai at Yavneh cultivated many of the components of Pharisaic religion and combined with them the classical scribal idea of the importance of Torah study for the rabbi, the master and teacher, and for the layman as well. Yohanan laid the foundations for the development of rabbinic Judaism over the next two millennia.

During this era the priesthood and sacrifice of the Temple ceased. Yohanan and his followers emphasized that Jews should replace them with the customs and laws of the Pharisees and with deeds of loving-kindness. These and other religious actions took the place of sacrifice to help procure atonement for the Jew in the first century.

The Roman era brought to Israel a new social order in the wake of the destruction of the Temple. Small groups formed around individual charismatic religious leaders, such as the rabbi. Rabbis emphasized the importance of the master-disciple relationship. Stories of the rabbis report that Yohanan, for instance, had five excellent disciples, each with a different and outstanding trait. Each of these rabbis in turn developed his own disciples. Within two generations, rabbinic Judaism emerged out of the ashes of the Temple to dominate the religious life of the Jews.

In the first generation following the Roman war, a group of political extremists attempted to regain control of Judea (Greco-Roman name for an area now comprising southern Israel and southwestern Jordan) and Jerusalem and to reestablish an independent state and the ancient Temple religion. Under the leadership of Simon Bar Kochba between 132 and 135 C.E., many rabbis joined with other groups to rebel against Roman domination. However, the war that ensued was disastrous. The destruction suffered by the Jews in this war far exceeded that of the previous conflict 65 years earlier, in 70 C.E. As a result, after 135 the entire economic and social order of Israel was disrupted, and the Jews finally abandoned any hope of freedom or of immediate redemption.

The rabbinic understanding of the meaning of things made sense to the people who had suffered so much. Instead of insisting that history soon would come to a culmination, the rabbis focused on the ongoing activities of everyday life. Instead of seeking relief in the future, they found holiness in the present--in the simple activities of the household routine.

To understand better the rabbinic system of religious life and belief, you need to know something about the literature the rabbis produced. The Mishnah is the magnum opus of early rabbinic Judaism. Compiled by the rabbis between the first and third centuries C.E., this document is a combination of law code, a book of legal disputes, a collection of stories, and an authoritative source for theology. The rabbis said Moses received the basic contents of this collection of wisdom and law from God on Mount Sinai, along with the first five books

of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, that comprise the Torah. They called the Mishnah the "oral Torah" because, they said, it was taught orally from teacher to student for generations before the rabbis of the early third century wrote it down. Six orders, or books, comprise the Mishnah:

1. The Order of Seeds contains laws of agriculture, including rules for planting, harvesting, and preparing food according to rabbinic precepts.
2. The Order of Festivals contains rules for the observance of sacred times and holidays. Its regulations deal with the observance of the Sabbath and festivals.
3. The Order of Women addresses the customs of marriage, divorce, and family life in general.
4. The Order of Damages organizes the civil laws of the rabbinic system, including rules for judges, courts, torts, and crimes and their punishments.
5. The Order of Sacrifices codifies the laws of the Temple, even though the institution was destroyed around 200 C.E., long before the compilation of the Mishnah.
6. The Order of Purities details the system of regulations governing what is deemed ritually clean and what is considered by the rabbis unclean. Further, it explains how uncleanness can be transferred from one person or object to another. Only the ritually clean person could enter the Temple and worship through its sacrificial system.

The first three orders contained laws which might be put into practice by the Jews in rabbinic life in the third century and thereafter. The laws of Damages and of Sacrifices also were presented as if the authority rested in the hands of the rabbis to bring people to trial and to punish criminals and sinners. The laws of Purities were enunciated in the Mishnah as if they really were to be observed--as if the Temple and the priesthood were still operating.

In reality, however, the Temple was long gone and the Jews had no autonomous civil legal system. Apparently the rabbis wrote the Mishnah with no regard for the historical realities of their day. The compilation looks like a practical source of law, but in actuality it is a metaphysical document of protest against the realities of rabbinic life. The rabbis were powerless; the Temple was gone. Yet the rabbis said through the Mishnah that they accepted another version--a more philosophical understanding of the reality of their political and social contexts.

In part through rituals of the village and of the household, the rabbis said that Jews could control their own lives and destinies. Rituals of planting, celebrating, eating, and marriage could bring sacrality and some measure of holiness into their lives. Rabbinic Judaism gave them hope that the redemption they sought was not off in the distant future but could be found in some measure in their own time.

According to the rabbis, one of the primary activities that would lead the Jews to redemption was the study of the Torah. The rabbis believed that two Torahs were given to Moses on Mount Sinai: the written Torah (the Pentateuch), and the oral Torah (the Mishnah and other collections of law, lore, and tradition). The rabbinic Jew could fulfill his basic purpose in life, the obligation to study the substance of revelation, by reading and analyzing the words of the written Torah and the oral Torah.

Judaism in Babylonia in Late Antiquity

Rabbinic Judaism began in Israel in the first century but came to full flower in Babylonia in the third through the seventh centuries. Before we turn to the development of Judaism in this area, we will briefly review its historical background. Babylonia, an empire in what may be called the third world of late antiquity, stood geographically between the Greco-Roman and the Persian empires. Three languages were spoken in

Babylonia: Iranian for government business, Greek for commerce, and Aramaic for conversation. Rome and Persia (known as Iran since 1935) continually struggled for control over this region of the globe.

Babylonia was a great commercial center. It was one of the centers of silk trade on its route from the Orient to the markets of the Roman Empire. Here the raw, coarse silk of the East was processed into the fine fabric so desired in the West. This area also supported a major agricultural economy. Irrigation of the land was achieved through a massive system of canals.

The rulers of Babylonia from 240 B.C.E. to 226 C.E. were the Parthians (a Persian people). They were succeeded from 226 to 640 by the Sassanians (a people from a southwestern province in Persia).

Many religions flourished in the area. The Sassanian rulers fostered Zoroastrianism, whose deity was Ohrmazed, the god of light. The religion of Mani, known as Manichaeism, a dualistic religion, also developed in this era. However, the followers of one religion, that of the Christians, were particularly persecuted—perhaps because the Roman Emperor Constantine was a Christian. As a result, between 345 and 410 C.E. the Christian community was virtually eliminated.

Now we turn directly to the history of Judaism during this period. It is interesting to stop at this point and consider some questions about the methods historians use to reconstruct the story of the past. How do historians know about the Jews of Babylonia of late antiquity? What are the sources of information? What problems are encountered in interpreting the evidence?

The best evidence about the rabbinic Jews of this period comes from a complex document called the Talmud. The Talmud is a sixth-century collection of rabbinic stories, legal discussions, and interpretations of the Bible and the Mishnah. This massive compilation was edited into a document consisting of tractates (short books) arranged as a kind of commentary to the Mishnah. Some discussions included in the Talmud attempt to clarify the laws and the language of that earlier rabbinic document, the Mishnah. But overall, the Talmud is a true composite. Between its covers are a collection of statements attributed to many rabbis who lived over a span of several generations.

In the Talmud can be found discussions of laws, stories about the rabbis performing miracles or interpreting dreams, legends, homilies, theological maxims, and much more. What cannot be found in the Talmud is history. The rabbis do not pay attention to the historical development of their own group or of the Jewish people, except in a general folkloristic sense. Because the rabbis who put together the Talmud were so oblivious to the style of Western history writing, the reconstruction of history from these books is difficult, at best.

Still, the Talmud is the richest potential source for a historian who wishes to piece together the story of the rabbis in Babylonia from the third through the sixth centuries. In their study of the Talmud, historians have asked the following questions about the social order of the rabbis in Babylonia: Who were the leaders of the group? How did they exercise their authority? Were there competing groups within the community?

In addition, historians have asked about the power of the rabbis and the function of their laws in society. And beyond this, historians have sought to know how the rabbis reshaped the beliefs of rabbinic Jews to suit the interests and needs of their time.

In answering these questions, scholars have learned that the rabbis were not the only sources of authority in the ancient Jewish community of Babylonia. They competed for power with the exilarchs, the government-sanctioned political rulers of the Jews. We shall see that the rabbis and the exilarchs struggled for power.

Behind that struggle lay a deep difference in religious focus. To defend their own beliefs and power, the rabbis reshaped the theology of their religion. When they spoke of Moses, they called him "Moses our rabbi".

Furthermore, they said that God studied the Torah in heaven, just like the rabbi studied it in the academy. Scholars have concluded that the rabbis of the Babylonian period shared many traits with other types of religious leaders of the time. However, they see the rabbi of this period as a kind of "holy man" among many competing religious leaders from a variety of religious systems. What made the rabbis unique was that they believed their powers were derived from mastering the teachings of the Torah.

Now let us look closely at the following fact. The rabbis struggled with others for leadership of their community. Why should this be of interest to us? The answer is clear. People live in groups. Within each group there is a leader, or authority figure. By examining the relationship between the leader and the group, between the elite class and the masses, or between competing authority figures within a group situation, we can better understand the workings of a religion within a society. For Judaism in Babylonia, the "cast of characters" was the following: the "elite" class was the rabbis; the masses, or common folk, were the ordinary Jews; and the competing authority figure was the Exilarch.

Let us now consider the role of the rabbi. His authority was linked to his status within the community as religious authority and holy man. The average Jew believed it was dangerous to anger a rabbi, because he could control many of the forces of nature and even perform miracles. They also believed that rabbis had the ability to interpret dreams. In some stories rabbis were even said to be able to raise the dead and to exorcise demons. The rabbis explained that they had a special relationship with heaven. In their academies, they said, they felt the nearness of the divine presence of God. Furthermore, they said their power derived from their perfect knowledge of the Torah.

The rabbis extended their power to many aspects of life. For example, rabbis could control the evil impulse (sexual urge) and, with effective prayer, could bring rain. However, they were careful to explain that the power of magicians was bad, while the power of rabbis was good. They believed the Torah was a source of their power. It was also an intermediary between man and God. The rabbi alone knew the way to perform the commandments properly. He alone knew the secret doctrines of Judaism. In addition, he was a distinctive member of society. He dressed in an unusual way, ate in a specific way, and even had marital relations according to certain practices and in observance of certain taboos.

The rabbi exercised a certain amount of control over his followers. He insisted that his way was correct, and he instructed the people to follow the laws as he interpreted them. To spread his teachings and to strengthen his authority, he developed many students as disciples. Because the rabbis understood they could not be elitist, they opened the doors of their academies and welcomed all students. They believed it was their destiny to make the entire Jewish people into a nation of rabbis -- experts and virtuosi in the Torah.

The rabbi served in Babylonian Jewish society as a teacher and holy man; but he was also much more. He was the judge, administrator, and philanthropist. He enforced public laws through edicts, decrees, and court actions. Moreover, his new interpretations of the law backed up his authority. He even enforced private laws (those which could not be controlled directly by the rabbi because they were performed in private) through the power of the curse and through the promise of punishment. "God knows," he said, "what goes on behind closed doors".

What new teachings did the rabbi propose for his people? He told them that Moses was a rabbi. And he explained to them that David the king studied Torah. He showed them how the school of the rabbis reflected their divine counterparts, the heavenly schools. And, he said, God prayed in the heavens above, as the rabbis prayed in their synagogues on Earth.

As I said earlier, some figures competed with the rabbi for leadership of the Jews. The Exilarch, the official political head of the Jewish community, vied with the rabbis for the loyalty of the people. But even his role changed through different periods in history. For the most part, he was in charge of local government and

collected taxes for the Babylonian rulers. The exilarchate was passed on through a hereditary process, within one family. (In contrast, the rabbis were an open caste -- an "extended family" of the academy). Exilarchs, because of their direct political administrative functions, emphasized the meanings of history and the ultimate destiny of the Jews. They focused their teachings on the events of temporal redemption, particularly on the ultimate messianic redemption at the end of time.

In sum, the Babylonian rabbis served as the primary religious leaders in their communities. They reinterpreted the history of Judaism by emphasizing new theological ideas and by portraying the great leaders of the Jews of the past as rabbis. But the rabbis did much more. For instance, they rabbinized Judaism by giving rituals involving the holidays new meanings. They made the Passover holiday into a rabbinic festival and transformed the Passover meal, the Seder, into a collective study experience. In addition, they required the Jews to recite the rabbinic Haggadah -- a collection of exegeses and rabbinic statements about Passover and the exodus from Egypt. They also shifted the emphasis of many other aspects of Jewish rituals and focused them on the symbol of Torah. For example, they made Shavuot (Pentecost) less of an agricultural celebration of the harvest of the first fruits by transforming it into a holiday commemorating the revelation at Sinai. Likewise, they declared the end of the agricultural celebration of Sukkot (Tabernacles) to be the festival of rejoicing of the law and the study of Torah.

Judaic Systems, Laws and Discourses

Law has played diverse roles in the varied systems that have dominated Jewish societies from Israelite times to the present. The ruling class or leadership of the two most prominent and continuous systems, that of ancient Israel (c. 1300-250 B.C.E.) and one of its successors, the early rabbinic religious system (c. 70-640 C.E.), produced differing types of narrative or mythic discourses to serve as basic explanations and justifications for the authority of the legislation they produced. These laws themselves comprised a significant percentage of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) and a major proportion of Rabbinic literature.

The late antique rabbinic system accounts for some aspects of the conspicuous transformations of Judaic laws and disparities from their earlier Israelite formulations to the rabbinic codes that replace them. In the initial parts of this paper I address how some early rabbis quite self-consciously explored the internal tensions of their ongoing historical system.

I then briefly examine how modern historians of religions interpret the disjunctures in religious life and thought from one Judaic system to another. We first describe the character of Israelite law to understand the extent of the discontinuity between Israelite and subsequent systems.⁶

Israelite and rabbinic law

The ancient Israelite system produced the books of scripture and operated in the society against which all successive Judaic manifestations sought to be measured. Mythic expressions in historical and cosmic modes of articulation dominated these religious texts. In their central narrative statements concerning law and its authority, the redactors of the Pentateuch sought to convey the overall impression that Yahweh revealed the law to his people through Moses in the desert prior to the national conquest of the land of Canaan. Israelite editors were careful to insinuate ambiguity into the text so that it implies to the reader that the totality of the legislation derives from the deity.

The admirable bid by recent scholars to distinguish among the variety of forms of biblical law, their origins

⁶Other examples of issues of comparative systemic interest are: the law in the Biblical systems (Deuteronomy and P in particular) and "discovery" by Josiah of the book of Deuteronomy; rabbinic denigration of the Sinai narrative in Mekhilta; medieval rabbinic and anti-rabbinic postures, such as Karaism; the virtually symbolic role of law in modern post-enlightenment forms of Judaism.

and social significance does not blunt the over-arching impression of divinely attributed origins for all of Israelite law. Alt, in his classic study of Israelite law recognized the strength of the propounded mythic basis:

The only tradition we possess of the origins of Israelite law is that of the canonical books of the Old Testament, and the account it contains seems at first sight consistent and unambiguous. According to this tradition, every legal ordinance observed in Israel was laid down by the divine will of Yahweh, and had been revealed by him in the last generation before the tribes came out of the desert to settle in Palestine, at the moment when they united as one people under the guidance of Yahweh in the covenant delivered through Moses. All the laws in the Old Testament, therefore, are given a context in the history of that early period, as it is told in the central section of the Hexateuch, and for the most part are adapted to this context by being presented in the form of speeches by Yahweh or Moses to the people. Later on, anything not found in these books would clearly not have been regarded as obligatory in the same unconditional sense. Legal codes that were obviously of a different or later origin would not have been accorded the same value.⁷

Alt then went on to differentiate the cultural antecedents of Israelite casuistic laws from their apodeictic counterparts. The former stemmed from what he called the "ordinary Israelite secular jurisdiction," a non-sacral environment of legal activity (p. 117). While he correctly pointed out that these statutes evince no national consciousness (p. 119), and did not depend directly on Yahweh (p. 123), Alt overlooked his own essential point. True, some or all of Israelite casuistic law may have derived from Canaanite origins. Alt further made a convincing distinction between a more sacral context for Israelite apodeictic law, and a more juridical set of origins for the casuistic materials. As he pointed out regarding the former, the levitical priests asserted their role as "mouthpiece of Yahweh ... making his demands known to Israel (p. 161)."⁸

But there was little chance an Israelite would have publicly attributed any form of their law to Canaanite or secular antecedents. The redacted text of the Pentateuch implies otherwise. In biblical terminology the blurring of the categorical distinction was pervasive: all law derived from God. The same word, Elohim, in fact, is used to connote the deity in some contexts and the judges or courts in others. Those judges, the hereditary families of priests, tribal kings and local administrators had much to gain by advancing the ambiguities of legal derivations and were keen to perpetuate them.⁹

Accordingly, in Israelite times law served as basis for the idea of the intervention of divine authority through covenant or commandment. The ruling aristocracies of ancient Israel promulgated a wide range of civil, criminal, ceremonial and cultic laws. Various modes of legal discourse established the identity and individuality of the legal elite. Their authority in the society in turn derived often from abstract law codes and from collected case decisions based on actual internal legal disputations. Mythic narratives of divine revelation provided the sanction of authority for these codes, located their origins at Sinai, and their continued promulgation in the Tabernacle and implicitly in its successor institution, the Temple in Jerusalem.

The dual Torah system of Rabbinic Judaism contrasts vividly with its Israelite predecessor. If, as I have suggested, one might most generally categorize the Israelite system of discourse as one of narrative history and cosmic mythic expression, then Rabbinism by comparison was a system of discourse based on legal argumentation and its stylized idiom, and on mystical theological expression. In rabbinism, one could say, law suffused society.

⁷Albrecht Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, New York, 1968, p. 103.

⁸Alt (pp. 163-171) more speculatively associated the origin of apodeictic law with Israelite worship recited during the Tabernacles festival at a renewal of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

⁹For a summary of the relationship between law and the wisdom and scribal tradition, see J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, Oxford, 1983.

Not so in the antecedent system. In the Israelite instance law derived from a national source based on a widely condoned assumption of divine origin. In rabbinism the source of authority was the rabbi, who in turn laid claim to an attenuated link back to the same source of revelation. In the Judaism of the dual Torah, the rabbis asserted that Moses received a twofold revelation on Sinai. The Pentateuch was one part of that corpus, the written law. The second part was the oral law.

The doctrine of revelation encompassed in the rabbinic assertion of a dual Torah is complex, elastic and fraught with deliberate ambiguity. Its promulgators suggested that the oral law remained abstract, transmitted from teacher to student, until given a sanctioned written form in the teachings of rabbis. So it was assumed that Mishnah, the first of the canonical writings of rabbinism, contained the substance of the oral Torah, although no rabbinic sources said this outright. It further was to be presumed that the subsequently redacted official literature of the rabbis including the Tosefta, Talmud Babli and Talmud Yerushalmi, and the early midrashic compilations, also contained substantive elements of the oral Torah. And again, no single rabbinic source claimed or repudiated outright this supposition.¹⁰

So both Israelite and rabbinic legislators and administrators used to their best advantage the ambiguities of their respective system's associations of law with divine authority. The different ways these two cultural entities developed and fostered their respective norms of legal discourse was more sharply defined.

Discourse and the law

The fundamental rabbinic religious system of discourse rested on law, legal training and social associations of legal experts. Rabbinism placed strong value for instance on the relation between the master of the Torah and his disciple and on legal training, based on defined paradigms of logic and argumentation, techniques for the manipulation of texts, and training in rituals of study. The system emphasized obeisance to the master and mimicry of his official rituals and personal mannerisms.

The relationship of master to disciple virtually dominated the official articulations of the system. Accordingly rabbinic anecdotes themselves at times exaggerate the intensity of the bond in the system, but in doing so illustrate one of its salient facets. A caricature of the rabbi-disciple link appears in the following talmudic pericope:

R. Kahana [a disciple] went and hid under Rab's [his master's] bed. Hearing Rab "discoursing" and joking with his wife ... [Kahana] said [out loud], "You would think that Abba's [Rab's] mouth had never before tasted the dish." [Rab] said [upon discovering his voyeur-disciple], "Kahana, are you here? Get out! This is disgraceful!" [Kahana] replied, "My lord, it is a matter of Torah, and I have the need to learn" (B. Ber. 62a).

This pointed rabbinic self-satire claims that even by learning the proper methods for love-making a disciple fulfills his obligations to study diligently the discursive practices of Torah of his master.

The more familiar and accepted modes of legal discourse in rabbinism were highly aphoristic, and basically *sui generis* to the system. Hence it is common for later critics tautologically to describe rabbinic style as "Mishnaic" or "Talmudic." Curiously, though they claimed common divine origins for their laws, the late antique rabbis made little attempt to imitate the style of Israelite discourse. And although the sacred writings of both shared the same language, there was very little similarity between the individual or collective expressions of the varied components of the earlier Hebrew scriptures, the Tanakh, and of these later

¹⁰Neusner summarizes the evidence in *Judaism: The Classical Statement. The Evidence of the Bavli*, Chicago, 1986, pp. 215-222.

compilations of the rabbinic corpora.¹¹

The early rabbis self-consciously explored the tension in their legal system between officially sanctioned modes of reasoning and behavior and their perceived historical antecedents of their system.

Rabbinic tradition openly recognized the discontinuity of its discourse and dealt with it after its own fashion. An intense and poignant text juxtaposes Moses with Aqiba, a prominent second century rabbi, one of the most frequently cited sages in rabbinic literature. He was a leading component of rabbinic discourse and messianic political rebellion against the Imperial Rome. Aqiba was captured and tortured by the Romans along with other rabbis of the time after supporting Bar Kokhba's revolt against Rome in 135 C.E. The rabbis seek to explain why he met this tragic end. Did this master go too far in his political activism? Did he carry his cultural innovations beyond sanctioned limits?

- A. Said R. Judah said Rab, "When Moses went up to the height, he found the Holy One, blessed be he, sitting and tying crowns to the letters [of the Torah]."
- B. "He said to him, 'Lord of the universe, why is this necessary?'"
- C. "He said to him, 'There is a certain man who is going to come into being at the end of some generations, by the name of Aqiba b. Joseph. He is going to find expositions to attach mounds and mounds of laws to each point [of a crown].'"
- D. "He said to him, 'Lord of the universe, show him to me.'"
- E. "He said to him, 'Turn around.'"
- F. "[Moses] went and took his seat at the end of eight rows [in Aqiba's study hall], but he could not understand what the people were saying. He felt weak. When discourse came to a certain matter, one of [Aqiba's] disciples said to him, 'My lord, how do you know this?'"
- G. "He said to him, 'It is a law revealed by God to Moses at Mount Sinai.'"
- H. "Moses' spirits were restored."
- I. "He turned back and returned to the Holy One, blessed be he. He said to him, 'Lord of the universe, now if you have such a man available, how can you give the Torah through me?'"
- J. "He said to him, 'Be silent. That is how I have decided matters.'"
- K. "He said to him, 'Lord of the universe, you have now shown me his mastery of the Torah. Now show me his reward.'"
- L. "He said to him, 'Turn around.'"
- M. "He turned around and saw people weighing out his flesh in the butcher shop."
- N. "He said to him, 'Lord of the universe, such is his mastery of Torah, and such is his reward?'"
- O. "He said to him, 'Be silent. That is how I have decided matters'" (B. Men. 29b).

In their respective systems Moses and Aqiba served as venerated sources of legal authority. Yet, the pericope relates, because of the self-acknowledged divergence of discourses, the former could not understand the lecture of the latter (F), and was satisfied only after the proper attribution of authority was established (G-H). So impressed with Aqiba was the modest Moses that he suggested to God he reveal the Torah through the less humble Rabbi Aqiba. The text finally implies that the latter's discourse surpasses the former's. The unit

¹¹To be precise: Mishnah is a middle Hebrew text in syntax more Indo-European than its Israelite predecessor. The Talmudic corpora freely mix Hebrew and Aramaic.

allays any suspicion that Aqiba met his fate because he did not show adequate respect for the authority of the past. Aqiba's martyrdom remains an unexplained act of God.

This pericope provides us an opportunity to reflect on other contrasts between the narrative discourse of the successive Judaic systems. Israelite tales were often situated in some open natural or national setting. Rabbinic stories usually took place in the classroom, the study hall, the home. Israelite heroes, such as Moses, succeeded in politics or warfare. Contrastingly, as suggested in this and other stories, political activism doomed rabbinic leaders to torture and martyrdom.

The rabbis overtly recognized the discursive disconnection but rarely acknowledged substantive divergences in ritual and theology from their Israelite counterparts. These masters of late antique Judaism industriously renovated their received traditions through a process of imposing modes of predominantly legal discourse and interpretation on an antecedent heritage, or "rabbinization." They converted major elements of the cultural substance of the Israelite past to a radically different rabbinic setting.

In the process of rabbinization of ceremony and theology and revision of discourse, rabbinic authorities made Moses "our rabbi" and made other heroic Israelite figures likewise take on rabbinic characteristics. They made the major seasonal festivals into occasions for the celebration of the Torah and for its study. They transformed Pentecost, the Israelite festival of the first fruits, into the rabbinic celebration of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai, and Passover, the Israelite national festival of animal sacrifice at the Temple in the Jerusalem, into the time for technical discourse at the rabbinic Seder-symposium, in the homes of the rabbis and their followers.

That which they did not transform in Israelite practice or scripture, they atomized in midrashic analysis into brief pericopae and practiced on those their analyses based on their accepted discursive, mainly legal techniques and conventions. They thereby both created and resolved glaring incongruities, ambiguities and contradictions of rabbinic theology and ideology.

The later emergence of the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur serves as a dramatic illustration of how thoroughly legal discourse permeated rabbinic ritual and how sharply rabbinic practice diverged from Israelite ritual. Yom Kippur was thought to be a somber occasion of penitence and atonement. In the Israelite Temple cult it was the only time of the year that the High Priest licitly entered the Holy or Holies. The rite of the sacrifice of the scape-goat dominated the festival.

In rabbinic practice the festival began in the synagogue at sundown with the following public mainly legal declaration renouncing the year's vows and declaring them null and void. Though its formal institutionalization is thought to have been post-talmudic, this litany refracts the centrality of legal discourse in rabbinism. In the most somber of Judaic chants, the following was recited three times to inaugurate the service on Yom Kippur eve:

All vows, renunciation, promises, obligations, oaths, taken rashly, from this Day of Atonement till the next, may we attain it in peace, we regret them in advance. May we be absolved of them, may we be released from the, may they be null and void and of no effect. May they not be binding upon us. Such vows shall not be considered vows; such renunciations, no renunciations; such oaths, no oaths.¹²

A religious system pervaded by law could elevate such a set of formulae to one of the esteemed pinnacles

¹²*The High Holy Day Prayer Book*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser, New York, 1959, p. 258.

of its liturgy.¹³

In light of the components of the system now summarized, it is not surprising that rabbinism revered the discourse itself as ritual and attributed its highest value to the study of Torah, as defined by the rabbinic paradigms of practices of analysis. In rabbinic idiom, the study of Torah outweighed all other commandments. *Torah leshma*, Torah-study for its own sake, was the pinnacle of religious activity.

Political and social authority and the law

In tracing the role of Jewish law within successive and overlapping Judaic systems we may note several stages of cultural "shifts" from sacred to secular legal discourse. Thus far our analysis has highlighted the change from law in a system with a national legal emphasis in ancient Israel, to legal discourse in a Judaism dominated by a brotherhood of rabbinic lawyers.

In the historical situation of late antique Judaism, the emergence of this system as dominant was not merely happenstance. One might have expected the Roman authorities in Israel and the Sassanian governors in Babylonia to support a religious system that served national their interests by constraining and localizing the religious authority and aspirations of local community leadership.

Of course rabbinism itself developed diverse and complex relationships towards political life. Mishnah's (c. 200) basic legal theology involved a combination of fantasy and reality. That corpus combined laws for prayer, agricultural taboo, festival and family law, that the rabbis could have actually influenced, with laws for damages, civil and criminal codes, over which they might have had localized control, and with rules for Temple sacrifices and ritual purity, totally irrelevant to the real life of the community.¹⁴

Babylonian rabbinic authorities, such as Samuel (third century) articulated practical legal principles such as, "The law of the land is the law," a dictum aimed at encouraging cooperation with the governing Sassanian authorities (Bavli Gittin 6b). For rabbis like Samuel it was enough that Rabbinic law served the limited local community under the domination of individual charismatic figures.¹⁵

¹³We find references to the Kol Nidre by the Geonim beginning in the eighth century and subsequent debate over the propriety of reciting it. Sages in Sura condemned it. Some modern scholars speculated that it originated in Israel as reaction to Karaism. Others thought it was opposed by the sages because some saw a connection between it and formulae meant to annul magical incantations, like those on the Aramaic incantation bowls of the Talmudic era. This theory seems far-fetched and represents at best a secondary meaning, associated *post facto* with these clearly legal declarations. For a discussion of the litany see, R. Posner et. al. eds., *Jewish Liturgy*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 177.

¹⁴Thurman Arnold (in *The Symbols of Government*, New York, 1962, cited in *The Sociology of Law*, ed. V. Aubert, New York, 1969, p. 47) theorizes, "The principles of law are supposed to control society, because such an assumption is necessary to the logic of the dream. Yet the observer should constantly keep in mind that the function of law is not so much to guide society, as to comfort it. Belief in the fundamental principles of law does not necessarily lead to an orderly society. Such a belief is as often at the back of revolt or disorder."

¹⁵Peter Brown's recent research underscored the emergence of the holy man in the late antique world. Brown understates the connections between cultural change and the political circumstances in the imperial Roman and Sassanian contexts. Richard Horsely better accounts for the political roots of religious change but his research lacks Brown's subtle insight into the primary data. See Peter Brown: *The World of Late Antiquity*, London, 1971; *The Cult of the Saints*, Chicago, 1981; *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1978. Also see Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, San Francisco, 1987; Richard A. Horsely with John S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, San Francisco, 1985.

The rabbinic holy men of the late antique era claimed the sole authority to author and interpret the law for their communities. They openly asserted the strict limitations of divine power. They thereby entrenched their prestige firmly as masters of discursive analysis, denying it to rival claimants such as those who based their stature on mystical revelation or other forms of charismatic expertise or feats. One prototypical rabbinic source begins with this point and then goes beyond it.

- A. It was taught: On that day [that the sages declared a certain kind of ovens unclean against the ruling of R. Eliezer] R. Eliezer brought forth all the arguments in the world to support his view, but they refused to accept them.
- B. He said to them, "If the law agrees with me, let this carob tree prove it."
- C. The carob tree was uprooted and hurled from its place a hundred cubits [or according to some, four hundred cubits].
- D. "No proof can be brought from a carob tree," they said to him.
- E. Again he said to them, "If the law agrees with me, let this stream of water prove it."
- F. The stream flowed backwards.
- G. "No proof can be brought from a stream of water," they said to him.
- H. He said to them, "If the law agrees with me, let the walls of the study hall prove it."
- I. The wall started to lean in as if about to fall.
- J. R. Joshua rebuked them and said [to the walls], "When the disciples of the sages dispute the law what business do you have to interfere?"
- K. The walls did not fall in on account of the honor of R. Joshua and they did not revert to upright on account of the honor of R. Eliezer...
- L. Again R. Eliezer said, "If the law agrees with me, let it be proved from heaven."
- M. A heavenly voice came forth and said, "Why do you dispute R. Eliezer, as the law agrees with him in every case?"
- N. But R. Joshua stood up and exclaimed, "It is not in heaven" (Deut. 30:12).
- O. What did he mean by this? R. Jeremiah said, "He meant the Torah has already been given at Mount Sinai so we pay no attention to a heavenly voice since you long ago have written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, "You must follow the majority opinion" (Exod. 23:2).
- P. R. Nathan met Elijah [the prophet in a mystical encounter] and asked him, "What was the Holy One Blessed Be He doing at that time [when the rabbis ruled against the heavenly voice]?"
- Q. He replied, "He laughed and said, 'My sons have defeated me, my sons have defeated me'" (B. Baba Mesia 59a-b).

The pericope's anecdote in the law-laden discursive style of the system itself explained certain incongruities inherent in the shift in discourse from Israelite religion to rabbinic Judaism. A sets the action in an internal debate on a matter of technical ritual law. B-I develop Eliezer's charismatic challenge to rabbinic authority. Joshua parries the thrust at J-K. L-M raises the ante of the challenge and N closes the debate. The first post script (O) invokes majority rule, a simple legal justification for rejecting Eliezer. The second post script at P-Q cites a mystical teaching to further bolster rabbinic claims to exclusive regulation of matters of religious law.

The unit cleverly closes with an indirect avowal of mystical knowledge of God in a parody of what the rabbis

seem to be claiming for themselves. Nathan asserts that when God learned that the sages rejected direct mystical revelation and defended their decision in terms of the singularity of the revelation at Sinai (at O), God could not help but laugh. The rabbis of late antiquity after all maintained that they were the sources of law and that they possessed the continuing capacity to add new elements and interpretations to their Oral Torah.

In its later history Judaism evolved in Europe and North Africa to become a medieval religious subculture broadly infused with legal discourse, with but a circumscribed authority for enforcing religious law. The rabbis of this era developed the *responsa*, legal publications of case decisions. To enforce them, they could mainly resort to threats of future punishment in the world to come or excommunication from rabbinic society. Hasidism represented a late eighteenth and nineteenth century popular rebellion against the suffusion of law within the religious culture of Eastern Europe.

In more recent history an anti-legal reformed religious system has made use of messianic world view to overthrow the dominant suffusion in Judaism of rabbinic legal culture. This Judaism in competition with Zionism, another non-legal salvific system, thrived in post-enlightenment Western secular society where the role of law was more and more targeted to preserve the balance between the dominance of the state and the individual rights of the person.¹⁶ In one contemporary radical application, Jewish law has reverted to serve another function, reminiscent of a previous time, to become a tool of obstructing contact between fundamentalist apocalyptic Orthodox Jews and the rest of society at large.

Accordingly, in the systems of Judaism, law took on a variety of roles. It served primarily as a tool of various ruling political elites within a society. It facilitated discourse within a scholastic group. And at times it became a manipulative implement against society at large in closed anti-social religious settings.

In the modern systemic perspective, discussed above in Lesson 1, the classical Judaism of the dual Torah, rabbinic Judaism, does not derive directly from its predecessor, ancient Israelite culture. In fact it is a distinct system that took shape after a catastrophe of 70 C.E. (the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and loss of independence to the Roman Empire) and persisted in one or another configuration through the middle ages to the present day where it is most closely approximated as a form of contemporary Orthodoxy or Conservative Judaism.¹⁷

Conclusions: Judaisms and the law

In the course of two millennia numerous shifts occurred in the sources and functions of law and of legal authority in Judaic systems. Our comparison of aspects of rabbinic and Israelite law in their respective systems demonstrated one of the stages of the shift of legal authority from divine to human sources. Rabbinism was an extended intermediary way station along this journey.

The issues I have raised here illustrate stages in the "shift from sacred to civil law," and they highlight for us some special cases of "the nature of the contradictions that ensue when the attempt is made to construct

¹⁶In Henry Maine's classic articulation (*Ancient Law*, Dent, 1917, pp. 99-100), "The movement of progressive societies has been uniform in one respect. Through all its course it has been distinguished by the gradual dissolution of family dependence and the growth of individual obligation in its place... [It has been] a movement *from Status to Contract*."

¹⁷As I have indicated, Jews in Nineteenth century Europe formulated several new Judaisms. Dominant among these were utopian and messianic movements leading to Reform and Zionism, and other forces giving rise to Conservative Judaism and Yiddishism. They also participated in and helped shape a variety European secular cultural alternatives, like socialism, anarchism and communism, all movements conceived of and articulated in significant measure by Jews, but clearly not Judaic systems.

law as a predominantly (but not entirely) this-worldly discourse, and to ground legal and moral issues in the contingent and profane realm of human preferences."¹⁸ In creating, recognizing, and trying to come to grips with these contradictions, the rabbinic sages thereby took important steps in the direction of moving the source for legal authority and its processes out of their former exclusive association with the domain of the deity, as they were in an earlier religious systemic conceptualization, and placing them more squarely into the territory of human authority, as these masters generated new and more complex systems of prescriptive discourse.

Rabbinic Judaism developed over the middle ages for a thousand years in many directions. In the lessons that follow we shall see how talmudic Judaism encountered more philosophical modes of thought during this period. Further, we shall see the melding of mystical interpretations into the traditional beliefs of the Torah, the Talmud, and rabbinic Judaism.

Study Questions:

1. Who were the Pharisees? What was their relation to the rabbis?
2. Describe some responses to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.
3. Define the following terms: Mishnah, oral Torah, Talmud.
4. What were the six orders of the Mishnah?
5. Where was Babylonia? When did the Jewish community begin to flourish there?
6. Who was the Exilarch? How did he compete with the rabbis for leadership of the community?
7. What were some of the social and religious roles of the rabbis in Babylonia?

¹⁸Bruce Lincoln and William Malandra, "Conference Proposal, Religious Law: the Construction of Law as a Sacred Discourse," University of Minnesota, 1989, p. 2.

LESSON 5 The Jews in Europe (1000 to 1600 C.E.)

Lesson Objective To study the development of Jewish communities in central Europe, and in Spain and Portugal.

Important Dates (C.E.)

- 975 Death of Hasdai ibn Shaprut, courtier to the caliphs of Cordoba
- 1096 First Crusade; massacre of Jews
- 1105 Death of Rashi, France's best-known commentator to the Torah and the Talmud
- 1141 Death of Judah ha-Levi, prominent theologian and author of the **Kuzari**
- 1204 Death of Maimonides: philosopher, codifier, and physician
- 1492 Expulsion of Jews from Spain

Major Literary Works

Talmudic commentaries: interpretations and discussions of the major rabbinic sources.

Law codes: the systematic expressions of Jewish rules and regulations based on the Talmud.

Responsa: official questions and answers circulated by the religious authorities of the Jews.

Philosophy and poetry: new modes of intellectual and literary expression by the Jews of Spain and North Africa.

Basic Terms and Ideas

Reconquista: the reconquest of Spain by Christian forces.

Golden Age of Spain: a descriptive label of Jewish history in the Middle Ages emphasizing the positive achievements of the community in Andalusia (Muslim Spain).

Conversos: Jews who publicly converted to Christianity to escape persecution but privately maintained their own faith.

Ashkenazim: the Jews of central Europe.

Sephardim: the Jews of Spain and North Africa.

Blood libel: false accusation of ritual murder against Jews in order to incite hatred and physical violence against them.

Background and Context

Population shifts, Charlemagne to 1492: center of Jewish population moved from Middle East to Europe.

Expulsion from Spain, 1492: persecution caused demographic shifts and changes in Jewish thought.

Emergence of major Jewish communities in western Europe: France, England, and Germany in the West; Russia and Poland in the East.

Persecutions and book burnings: one aspect of persecution was attacks on cultural life of the Jews.

Jews as bankers and middlemen: Jews served as professionals in the expanding economy of Europe.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Golden Age, 900-1100: an era of intense literary and philosophical creativity for Jews in Spain and Portugal, which led to cultural splendor for Jews in Moorish Spain, a proliferation of Arab-Jewish poets and philosophers, and the expansion of Arabic-Hebrew culture.

Maimonides: famous Jewish philosopher of the twelfth century.

Talmudic culture in central Europe: an emphasis on the mastery of difficult and esoteric talmudic texts created a unique cultural milieu in the Jewish communities of Europe.

Rashi's commentaries to the Torah and Talmud: the most famous of all Jewish commentators, he wrote pedagogic explanations to the Torah and Talmud that brought them into the intellectual realm of the average person.

The Code of Jewish Law: Joseph Caro authored this work in the sixteenth century. He put in new form the results of talmudic decisions of over a thousand years of activity.

Study Notes Philosophical Thought and Rabbinic Judaism

As a result of the Arab conquests in the seventh century, the religion of Islam became a major force in the Mediterranean world. The spread of Islamic culture in the centuries that followed brought with it many Arabic translations of classical Greek (Hellenistic) philosophical masterpieces. Through the Arabic translations, the Jews of many lands in the Middle Ages learned the philosophy and science of the ancient world. In this way the teachings of Plato and Aristotle made a considerable impact on the development of medieval Jewish thought.

For centuries rabbinic Judaism had been dominated by the study of the Talmud in the major academies of Babylonia. In fact, the teachings of rabbis in the traditional works totally shaped the ordinary Jew's vision of reality. The ideal Jew knew the Torah only as taught by the talmudic rabbis and followed its dictates as they interpreted. The Talmud, with its own established modes of thinking, guided Jewish civilization from 500 to 1000 C.E.

During the Middle Ages, however, the longstanding and complex set of rabbinic teachings underwent major reinterpretation. At this time the powerful methods and concepts of classical philosophy entered Jewish culture. Philosophy brought to the Jewish tradition new ways of thinking and new concepts to think about.

One example illustrates how deeply felt was the transformation of Jewish thought in the Middle Ages. The Talmud, central to Jewish life for centuries, contained within it many insights into issues also important to the philosopher, such as, the nature of God, revelation, and prophecy, and the relation of God to man. The Talmud scattered its insights into the crucial theological issues throughout its many tractates. In medieval times, philosophers started methodically considering such issues as continuous problems. They insisted that any discussion of the nature of God begin with basic principles, not with stories and allegories. Then by way of deductive reasoning, philosophical reflection would take up all aspects of the subject and conclude with an account of the current state of knowledge or list the beliefs and dogma of the topic.

Any traditional Jewish thinker who supposed that philosophy had value for directing the people's thought, faced a real challenge. Could the massive talmudic body of stories, law, and interpretations be made to yield the kind of substance that a philosopher could remold according to his new needs? Between the years 1000 and 1300, several Jewish intellectuals found that the answer to this question was yes. But to accomplish this ambitious program of rewriting the Jewish tradition in philosophical form, they had to master the manifold

teachings of the rabbis and apply to them the principles of the philosopher.

[insert picture here]

Some thinkers of the time accepted the content of rabbinic teaching but only the mode of thought used by the philosopher. Other thinkers accepted not only the mode of thought used in philosophy but also the substantive teachings of the philosophers.

It could be said that the recasting of Jewish tradition in the Middle Ages was a complete reinterpretation of the Torah (revelation) in light of philosophy (reason). It also changed the external form of Jewish writings. Until this period, few independently-authored books were accepted within Jewish circles. All creative thought was expressed in the mode of the "commentary." Prominent rabbis wrote books full of glosses (commentaries in the margins of a text) to the Torah, the Mishnah, and the Talmud; few dared to write independent treatises of thought. But in the Middle Ages for the first time, rabbis dared to author discourses with introductions, bodies of discussion of some length, and conclusions-independent and self-contained books. Not since the Biblical period did so many new and diverse forms of writing enter the world of the Jewish intellect.

The Middle Ages, then, was hardly a dry time, or an intermediary period, as its name might erroneously imply. Moreover, it was not just the era between the classical epochs of antiquity and the explosion of the Enlightenment. In the centuries of the Middle Ages the great thinkers of Judaic tradition completely reshaped Jewish civilization.

Medieval reinterpretations of the Torah touched to the heart of Judaic teachings. Previously, no Jewish thinker asked whether the dictates of reason or the teachings of the Torah were in conflict. More important, before this time no one would even suggest that reason might be superior to the Torah. But in the Middle Ages several thinkers contemplated these questions. For example:

1. Saadia Gaon in the tenth century showed that reason supports the Torah, the revelation of Judaism, and the traditions of the rabbis.
2. Judah Halevi demonstrated that reason alone is not enough. He believed that revelation, miracles, the prophets, and the Torah not only supplement the faculties and conclusions of the reasoning process, but they are the center of the system that tells Jews the meaning of life. Reason would never have been able, by itself, to bring the message of the Torah to the world.
3. The philosophy of Maimonides is the crowning glory of the development of Jewish thought in the Middle Ages. His conclusions about the relationship between the Torah and philosophy later led to controversy that lasted for generations, even to the present. Philosophical knowledge for him was the highest goal. The philosophically inclined reached it through reason; others achieved it through the commands and teachings of the Torah. Because philosophy was equivalent to Torah for Maimonides, the end was the same in either case. Let us consider two of these philosophers in more detail.

Judah Halevi--**The Kuzari**: A Defense of a Despised Religion

The major philosophical work of Judah Halevi is a dialogue called the **Kuzari**. This book is more a theology of history than a true philosophical treatise. The work, in essence, is an antirationalist polemic (a refutation of a doctrine or an opinion) designed to show the superiority of revelation over reason.

Halevi wrote for the educated among the Jews who had received a philosophical training and education. In

many ways this book also serves as a defense against the charges of other religions--most notably against Islam and Christianity.

Halevi wrote this treatise as a dialogue between the leaders of the major religions and a king of the Khazar people. The setting is based on the legend of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. In the book a Moslem and Christian are called before the king. In their statements both refer to Judaism as the basis of their respective religions. Therefore, the king calls a rabbi to find out more about Judaism.

Halevi then presents the rabbi's argument. Judaism, he says, is not based merely on rational principles. This religion also has a distinctive historical character. At Mount Sinai God revealed the law before the 600,000 witnesses--the single most authentic event in the religious history of the Jews. The rabbi explains that all other religions are a derivative of Judaism. At the end of time, adherents of all these other religions will convert to Judaism, the religion of truth.

Halevi emphasizes the difference between historical religion and the religion of reason. He also develops the concept of the election of the Jews as the chosen people. In spite of that notion, he says, any observer of the state of affairs in his (Halevi's) time, would see that the Jews are living in despair. He states further that philosophy cannot reveal the higher truth of the meaning of events and conditions; only revelation can do so.

Philosophers say that the intellect, if sufficiently developed, can reach to God; however, Halevi insists that only revelation can do this. As proof he suggests considering the history of revelation. Philosophers, he points out, are never prominent among the great prophets. Communion, therefore, is a gift of God. God is not just an object of knowledge for Halevi (for example, a first cause or preeminent being), God is also a part of religion, to be lived with and experienced. Halevi talks of the God of Abraham, not the God of Aristotle.

Halevi also describes the special religious faculty of the Jewish people called the **inyan elohi** (divine element). According to him, this extraordinary trait gives Jews the power to perceive the message of revelation. Furthermore, this ability to know God was transmitted from Adam to Noah to Jacob to the 12 tribes (sons of Jacob) to all the Israelites of Sinai. It is, Halevi states, an inherited quality.

Halevi also emphasizes the special character and inherent virtue of the Hebrew language. He speaks further of the special nature of the land of Israel. Ritual law, he argues, enables man to come closer to God.

In the **Kuzari**, Halevi proposes that there is a distinction between the Jews and other nations of the earth. But he argues that in the time of the Messiah, at the end of the world, all peoples will received the "divine element." He explains further that Jewish destiny may be understood through the image of the seed in the earth: the Jewish people, sometimes immobilized like seeds in the ground, will soon grown and flourish. In Halevi's frame of interpretation, the Jews are the God-bearing people of the Earth.

Halevi's historical theology is still read today in some circles of Judaism. His arguments are based on a fundamentalist reading of the narratives of the Torah about the revelation at Sinai, the witness of history, and a positive promise for the future. Many elements of the book are popular enough to appeal to a wide audience, yet sophisticated enough to be taken seriously in his own day and long after.

One major point of the historical argument of the **Kuzari** deals with the chain of tradition. Halevi emphasizes that from Moses to his time the chain had remained unbroken. By proving a continuous transmission of Jewish tradition, Halevi demonstrated the authenticity of religious teachings using the methods of his day. Though this argument may not be as convincing in modern times, it was a common means of justifying these teachings within the culture of the time.

You should not get the impression that all Jews agreed with Halevi and his readers. One sectarian group of the time, the Karaites, accepted only the literal laws of the written Torah and rejected all notions of an oral Torah. Others, such as Maimonides, disagreed with the emphases of Halevi's writings and sought to develop a more philosophical approach to Judaism.

Maimonides: Rationalist and Philosopher

The general cultural context of the Jews in the Middle Ages influenced the style and thought of Judaism. In examining the thought of Judah Halevi we saw, for instance, how he used the style of philosophical discourse. Still, Halevi rejected the content of the philosopher's message. Reason and rationality, he said, were subservient to revelation, philosophy, and tradition. Maimonides presents a sharply contrasting approach.

Maimonides was born in Cordova, Spain in 1135 C.E. In his early education and training he was the beneficiary of many generations of developed Jewish culture in Spain. Later, he was driven from his home by invading fanatical Almohades (Berber Muslims). When he settled in Egypt outside Cairo, he was already thoroughly versed in rabbinic and philosophical thought. In addition, he was a scientist and physician by profession and a widely respected personality in his own time.

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Maimonides wrote several major intellectual works. His **Book of Commandments** enumerates the 613 commandments of Jewish law according to a well-conceived set of principles. In his great work, the **Mishneh Torah**, he reorganized all major aspects of talmudic law (**halakhah**) into 14 short and well-organized books.

Why was this a daring move? Because Maimonides took the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmud and extracted from them the main legal rulings. But in his books he gave only the decisions of the law, not the longstanding discussions and disputes of the talmudic rabbis. Maimonides began this work with a discussion of philosophical and ethical principles. He then turned to the remainder of the laws, such as those regarding holidays, civil laws, and sacrifices. But he did not present them according to the principles of arrangement used in the Mishnah. Instead, he reordered them in a new and more logical fashion.

His contemporaries were astonished that he dared to take such liberties. Furthermore, his own avowed explanation was outrageous to some of his colleagues. He said that his work was an attempt to replace the standard texts: with his books, students would not have to master the Talmud. Of course, such an undertaking caused much controversy during the decades that followed. Still, the clarity and utility of the **Mishneh Torah** overcame much of the opposition. Its language was in clear mishnaic Hebrew. Its approach to the content of Jewish tradition was systematic and rational. Yet in the end, his books did not replace the Mishnah and the rest of the authoritative literature of rabbinic Judaism. To this day they still serve as valuable supplements to and restatements of the major statements of the talmudic traditions.

Maimonides is also famous for his main philosophical work, **The Guide of the Perplexed**. Though I cannot go into detail regarding its philosophy, I can point out some of the most prominent characteristics of the book. The primary trait of this treatise is its difficult literary character, which helps to obscure the meaning of the writing. In contrast to the clarity and directness of the **Mishneh Torah**, **The Guide** is almost a secret writing. In content, the central themes of the book are based on the rationalist principles Maimonides learned from his philosophical predecessors within the Arabic culture.

The Guide uses some of the nonlegal sections of rabbinic interpretations to construct a view of man and of God based on rationalist principles. It addresses many topics on the philosophical agenda of the time,

including the clash between reason and revelation; questions about the existence, unity, and incorporeality (lack of physical body) of God; God's actions, especially his creation of the world; the meanings and authority of law and prophecy: the distinction between good and evil; and the basis for the commandments of the Torah.

Although **The Guide** addresses these subjects, this book cannot be "read" by the average student. Maimonides wrote it to be a semisecret work of speculation: he wanted only those initiated in the philosophy and the rabbinic thought of his time to be able to study it. Therefore, he wrote it in a kind of code by consciously making the organization of the book puzzling and by placing in it some outright contradictions. As a result, scholars down to the present have disagreed on many specific passages in the book and on the book as a whole.

What remains clear to the reader of **The Guide** is that Maimonides sought to harmonize the highest goals of philosophy with those of Judaism. Just as philosophers insisted that reason alone was sufficient to bring man into a direct encounter with God, so too did Maimonides argue that the well-trained mind within Judaism could also apprehend God through philosophical reason. Based on this understanding of the religion, Maimonides explained that the commandments of the Torah were most necessary for the average person, not for the philosopher. For ordinary Jews the commandments served as an alternate route to bring them closer to God.

Commentaries, Codes, and Responsa

The Jews of the Middle Ages wrote much philosophy and poetry. Still, the bulk of Jewish cultural development took place within the study of talmudic and scriptural traditions. As I have emphasized several times, Torah study, considered to be an act of great piety, was central to the history of Judaism.

In addition, through Torah study Jews learned all the necessary directives for the proper performance of the religious acts in Judaism--acts which defined their lives.

To explore the development of methods for Torah study in the later Middle Ages, we need to turn to the great masterpieces of the time. First let us consider the medieval commentaries to the Torah and to the Talmud.

Instead of completely rewriting the Torah of the rabbis (as Maimonides attempted in the **Mishneh Torah**), most of the great Torah scholars of the medieval period wrote commentaries to the Torah (to the written and the oral Torah), to the Tanakh, and to the Talmud and the Mishnah. Among the greatest commentators was Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac (Solomon son of Isaac, died 1105 C.E., Troyes, France), also known as Rashi. Rashi was judged a great commentator on two accounts: his explanations to the Torah and the Talmud were simple and accessible to a wide public, and his work was enormous in its scope.

He wrote a masterpiece of commentary to the Torah. The greatness of this achievement lay in the way Rashi culled from the earlier sources of the Talmud those interpretations which helped show the average reader the important meanings of the text. Rashi systematically quoted relevant selections from the Talmud or the Midrash (written 500 or more years earlier) to help the reader understand each verse of the Torah.

Rashi also mastered the scientific study of Hebrew grammar and then used this knowledge to help interpret the Torah. He searched through Aramaic translations of the Torah to help clarify difficult passages. In addition, he translated many difficult words into French for his readers. Rashi's commentary to the written Torah is a classic still studied piously in many Jewish circles.

Rashi's most impressive feat, however, was his composition of an extensive running commentary to the Talmud. Up to Rashi's own day the Talmud remained a closed book for many Jews. Its words, phrases, and

rhetoric were so difficult that a deep examination of the text was difficult, if not impossible, for all but the most advanced masters of Talmud study. In his Talmud commentary Rashi, again with the appearance of great simplicity, explained every line of the text and thereby enabled a much wider audience of students to master the basic talmudic traditions.

Rashi's work had a great impact on the Jews of central Europe. His grandchildren and many others after him went on to found institutions for the study of Torah, where they advanced and refined the study of the Talmud with the aid of the tools Rashi had fashioned for them.

Codes of Jewish Law

Another important achievement of medieval Jewish thought was the development of codes of Jewish law. Recall how the code of Maimonides, the **Mishneh Torah**, took the legal and philosophical traditions of talmudic Judaism and set them in logical and orderly fashion. Maimonides was only one of several rabbis to author codes in the Middle Ages. Most of the work of codification had as its aim more than just a philosophical restructuring of the content of Jewish thought. The rabbis involved in compiling codes wanted to provide a way for Jews to learn the proper procedures for the practice of Jewish customs and laws.

In the fourteenth century, Jacob b. Asher wrote the **Tur**, a comprehensive summary of law based on the ruling of the rabbis in the Talmud and on the interpretation of later authorities throughout Europe, including Maimonides, and Rashi and his descendants.

Of the other codes compiled during this period, the best known is Joseph Caro's **Shulchan Arukh** (the set table). Published in 1567, this work became the authoritative guide to Jewish law and life for many centuries after its compilation. In fact, Orthodox Jews today still consult this work as the primary guide for Jewish living.

Caro combined in his personality several of the most prominent aspects of medieval Judaism. He authored an authoritative law code and he was a great mystic. In fact, Caro believed he had his own personal **maggid** (mystical spirit-teacher) with whom he communicated mystically and through whom he often was able to understand the difficult legal discussion of the Talmud. Caro, as lawyer and mystic, combined two central strands of medieval Judaism. In the next lesson we shall turn in greater detail to the development of Jewish mysticism in the intense historical setting of the Middle Ages.

Study Questions

1. Who was Saadia Gaon?
2. Describe the **Kuzari**.
3. Summarize some features of Maimonides' works: the **Mishneh Torah** and **The Guide of the Perplexed**.
4. What was the Golden Age of Spain?
5. Explain the need for commentaries to the Torah and Talmud.
6. What were the **Responsa**?
7. What was the **Shulchan Arukh** of Joseph Caro?

LESSON 6 From Mysticism to Modernity (1492 to 1789)

Lesson Objective To examine the growth of Judaism and understand the search for redemption by the Jews

Important Dates

1492	Jews expelled from Spain
1496	Jews expelled from Portugal
1516	Jewish ghetto established in Venice
1546	Luther denounces the Jews
1553	Burning of the Talmud in Italy
1565	Caro's Code of Jewish Law published
1648	Massacres of Jews in Poland
1666	Messianic movements
1670	Jews expelled from Vienna, Austria
1760	Death of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the first Hasidic master
1772	Rabbis in Poland denounce Hasidism
1786	Death of Moses Mendelsohn, an Enlightenment thinker

Basic Terms and Ideas

Messianism: the belief that the Messiah, the savior of the Jews, will come and usher in a new age.

Hasidism: the popular movement founded by Israel Ba'al Shem Tov and led by dynasties of charismatic rabbis.

Haskalah: the enlightenment or modernization of Judaism.

Background and Context

Renaissance and Reformation: major political and cultural upheavals that occurred from around the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries.

Eastern and western Europe: contrast of cultures in which the bulk of the world's Jews were found.

Amsterdam, seventeenth century: Jews occupied important positions as merchants and middlemen.

European history, the Black Death: Jews were widely suspected of spreading bubonic plague, the disease that inflicted much destruction on Europe's population.

Enlightenment: the spread of philosophy and modern political ideas in eighteenth-century European society.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Spread of mysticism.

Shabbetai Zevi: the best-known false messiah of the age.

Rise of **Hasidism** and opposition to it.

Study Notes Jewish Mysticism

Mystical ideas had been a part of Jewish belief since its earliest times. But only in the Middle Ages did the

doctrines of Jewish mysticism come to full flower. Some historians think that the bleak historical circumstances of the riots, expulsions, and persecutions of the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries forced many Jewish thinkers to retreat into the complicated and esoteric realms of mystical contemplation.

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To understand this important side of medieval Jewish thought, we need first to set out a general definition of mysticism. Rufus Jones, an interpreter of mysticism, defines it as follows: "Mysticism expresses the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage."

This definition focuses on the experience of God and the extreme feeling of the participant. According to this view, the mystical "moment" is far from a routine and quiet contemplation. It is an alive and vibrant dimension of religious life.

Gershom Scholem, a leading authority on the subject of Jewish mysticism, emphasized another side to the world of religious mysticism--the role of tradition in mysticism. Scholem demonstrated how firmly mysticism was grounded in a specific and complex belief system. He divided the religious experience of humankind into two stages.

In the first stage, God surrounds man in nature. No gap is felt between man and God; therefore there is no room for mystical experience and, indeed, no need for it.

In the second stage, humanity is separated from God. Only God's voice through revelation can link persons to the Divine.

The myths of religion give concrete form to expressions of the main ideas of religion: creation, revelation, and redemption. Mysticism within a religion, then, can make use of these ideas developed in history and give them, according to Scholem, new and different meanings reflecting the characteristic feature of mystical experience, the direct contact between the individual and God.

Mysticism in the second stage becomes inexorably linked with the traditions of a religious system. Jewish mysticism at this stage of development is called **kabbalah** (tradition). It combines elements of teachings available to all who wish to learn them and a host of secret doctrines accessible to only a few elite initiates.

Mysticism has developed in every generation of Jewish history, from Rabbi Aqiba in the first century to the present. Some concerns are common to all eras of Jewish mysticism. Two such issues are the desire to know the attributes of God and the search for the symbolic meanings of the Torah. Mystics have suggested alternative readings to the stories of the Torah. A mystic who reads the story of the exodus from Egypt might interpret it to be a narrative of a different sort of journey: the release from one's inner Egypt, the bondage of the human situation. In addition, Jewish mysticism has often dealt with eschatological ideas (those concerned with the final events of mankind or of the world) and cosmogonic notions (those concerned with the creation or origin of the world).

In the Middle Ages Jewish mysticism burst forth in defiance of the pressures of the times. True, the Jews remained concerned with talmudic precepts and ritual, but they turned also to mystical and messianic teachings in search of a way to understand the implications of their particular historical conditions.

The Jews of the Rhineland, for example, sent a query to one of the leading rabbis of the day regarding two seemingly unrelated issues. First, they inquired about the proper way to slaughter an animal so that the meat would be **kosher** (fit to eat according to dietary laws). Second, they wanted to know when the Messiah

would come to redeem the Jewish people.

Mysticism flourished in both cultural spheres of Judaism: in the **Ashkenazic** (central European) and the **Sephardic** (Spanish and North African) worlds. In early times the main focus of mystical tradition was on the doctrines concerning the creation of the world by God.

The expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 had a great impact on the Jewish community. After this event the emphasis of Jewish mysticism shifted to issues relating to the redemption of the people, not the creation of the universe.

The **kabbalah** of Isaac Luria (also called the **Ari**) had a great effect on Jews of this time. Luria taught that Jews themselves could bring about the redemption of the nation and the world. Further, through the observance of the **mizvot** (commandments), Jews could alter the course of history. His doctrines attributed a universal significance to rabbinic Judaism. To express these doctrines **Lurianic kabbalah** developed a symbolic language. It taught that to bring redemption to the world, Jews had to rescue the sparks of light by fulfilling God's will to change the flow of primal light.

The development of **kabbalah** took a significant turn at the juncture of the sixteenth century when mystical thought became linked with messianic yearnings. This connection changed the character of Jewish mysticism by transforming the **kabbalah** from a strictly doctrinal system to a more salvific worldview. In the seventeenth century, mysticism was carried forward to its ultimate logical conclusion by Shabbetai Zevi, the false messiah. In later historical periods, Zionism and Reform Judaism developed further (as we shall discuss in Lesson seven) the doctrines of utopian messianism.

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Let us now examine more specifically some doctrines of the **kabbalah**. The **Zohar** was the original classic work of Jewish mysticism. It was written in the thirteenth century by Moses deLeon (though he did not sign his name to the work). He wrote the **Zohar** in the style of earlier works of rabbinic Judaism, such as the Midrash and the Talmud. It is a long and complex work, difficult to decipher in many instances.

The **Zohar** teaches that there are ten **sefirot** (spheres or emanations of divine powers) of God: supreme crown, wisdom, intelligence, mercy, power or judgment, compassion, lasting endurance, majesty, foundation, and kingship. Often these are drawn as a tree or as a man.

The **Zohar** calls God the **En Sof** (the Infinite). According to the **kabbalists** there are ten fundamental attributes of God, that is, ten stages through which God, the Divine Life, pulsates back and forth. Every stage has its own symbolic name. The sum total of these teachings comprises a highly complex system in which almost every biblical word corresponds to one of the **sefirot**. In this view of things some say that the Torah is one long name of God. It cannot be understood according to ordinary methods; it can only be interpreted.

The mystical treatise of the **Zohar** is the first Jewish book that identifies the four methods of interpreting the Scripture: the literal, homiletic, allegorical, and mystical. Only the last method really matters to the author of the **Zohar**.

A further idea important to the mystical world of the **Zohar** is the notion of creation from the "mystical nothing." This concept could be compared with the idea of the mathematical point that, by moving, generates two- and three-dimensional objects. Wisdom is said to be that point. With this notion the **Zohar** presents a mystical interpretation of a verse from the beginning of Genesis. "In the beginning God created" means that with wisdom the mystical nothing unfolds and reveals the nature of **Elohim** (God).

There are many sexual aspects of **kabbalistic** teaching. Often the **kabbalah** speaks of the mystical union between man and God in explicit terms. And frequently reference is made to the love story in the biblical Book of the Song of Songs.

The **kabbalah** retells in its own idiom the primary stories of Judaism. The creation of the world takes on a new aura through mystical revision. Some basic themes of Jewish thought revised in mystical form could be summarized as follows.

Originally God was united with his **Shekhinah** (Divine Presence). There was a mystical flow uniting all **sefirot**. Then man sinned. As a result, a disruption developed in the harmony of the system. Now, through religious acts (Torah, commandments, and prayer) man can restore and repair the world to its pristine state. This process is sometimes called the mystical **tikkun** (repair of the world).

In this view of life, all actions on earth have an effect in heaven. For Jews of the Middle Ages, such a belief was a crucial doctrine. It said to the individual that all was not lost. Indeed, every little thing had some cosmic meaning, but the larger picture of historical circumstance meant essentially nothing.

Luria, mentioned earlier, propounded a new doctrine called **tsimtsum** (retreat). According to his belief, God retreated out of the world. In mystical idiom he told of the exile of the **En Sof** into seclusion to make room for the world. Luria's system of thought emphasized the exile and restoration of God's **Shekhinah**.

He focused on redemption in times of crisis and physical exile--the **tikkun** of humanity's existence. Man could accomplish this through mystical prayer and **kawwanah** (extreme concentration), a special frame of mind in the performance of the commandments and in the recitation of prayers. Luria predicted that the Messiah would come in 1575. But even after that time, his system of thought retained its hold on his many followers.

We have moved far into the medieval period in the history of Judaism. In Lesson 5 we examined the philosophers within the period, notably Maimonides and Halevi. They struggled with a definite challenge to the established structures of the religion. In Lesson 6 we examined some developments that might be called mystical. It is important to recall at this point that Judaism is not a monolithic (uniform) system. Within the complex history of the Jewish people many choices of belief and practice coexist.

From country to country during the Middle Ages and after, Judaism developed along several different lines. The Spanish Jews, for instance, were strongly interested in ideas associated with redemption and the Messiah. The German and French Jews were less intrigued by these ideas, but they spoke of them nonetheless. Mysticism took on different shapes in various areas of the globe. Methods for the study of Torah developed along many different lines. Practice, prayer, and piety varied from community to community. It is out of this diversity that the Jewish people encountered modernity.

Study Questions

1. Identify several occurrences of violent antisemitism in this period.
2. Who were the major Jewish mystics of the time? What was the **Zohar**? the **Lurianic kabbalah**? What were the **sefirot**?
3. How did the Jews get along with their Christian neighbors in Italy, Germany, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire?

LESSON 7 The New Judaisms (1789 to 1917)

Lesson Objective To analyze the nature of new definitions of Judaism in Europe and new political freedoms.

Important Dates

1789	French revolution
1791	Jews receive French citizenship
1812	Jews receive Prussian citizenship
1881	Pogroms against the Jews in Russia
1882	Mass immigration to Palestine
1888	Death of Rabbi Hirsch, leader of German Jews
1896	Publication of Herzl's Jewish State
1897	First Zionist World Congress in Basel, Switzerland

Major Literary Works

The Jewish State: an early statement of the aims of political Zionism.

Musar writings: ethical teachings that emphasized the importance of personal development along with intellectual development.

Basic Terms and Ideas

Emancipation: the granting of equal citizenship to Jews.

Enlightenment: the introduction of modern ideas within Jewish life and thought.

Nationalism: a European movement that emphasized the unique national destiny of each people.

Industrialism: an economic system based on large-scale manufacturing rather than on independent agricultural life.

Socialism: an ideology based on the notion that workers should govern society and all wealth should be equally distributed.

Pogrom: a violent physical attack on a Jewish community.

Wissenschaft des Judentums (the science of Judaism): a modern scholarly study of traditional Jewish sources.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Yeshiva movement: the establishment of many academies for advanced Jewish learning.

Zionism: an ideology based on the concept of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. (Zion is the name of a sacred hill in Jerusalem.)

Reform Judaism: a modern form of Judaism that began in Germany in the early nineteenth century.

Assimilation: Freud, Offenbach, and Schnitzler are all examples of acculturated European Jews.

Study Notes The Jewish People Confront Modernity

The years from 1100 to 1750 witnessed a steady development within Judaism. Many new ideas entered Judaic thought and numerous forces influenced Jewish history. But change in this period came gradually, mainly through a process of evolution.

After 1750 Jewish history began marching to a faster beat. Many critical events of the modern period directly affected the Jews of Europe, by then the bulk of the world's Jewish population. In addition, the winds of cultural change on the continent wafted into Judaic society as well. Jewish belief rapidly assimilated many new ideas of the modern age.

Throughout Europe, in both the east and the west, the Enlightenment led many to reexamine the traditional ways of their ancestors. The elite of European society entered into new involvements in culture, in the arts, and in philosophy.

Emancipation, the granting of equal rights of citizenship to the Jews of many European countries, encouraged Jews to participate more vigorously in the cultures of their respective countries. Jews in significant numbers joined the ranks of the elite society of European life as poets, philosophers, and political leaders. The story of Jewish achievement in modern European life closely paralleled the general growth and development of the continent.

In this period many shifts and new trends altered the course of Jewish religious life as well. In eastern Europe, Poland, Russian, and the neighboring lands, significant changes affected the traditional systems of Judaism. To highlight this we will focus on two examples of change internal to Judaic life of this era. First, we will examine the importance of the Gaon (religious leader) of Vilna and the beginning of the **yeshiva** as a central institution in Judaism. Second, we will look at the rise of **Hasidism**, a popular, pietistic movement that preached new meanings for traditional Judaism. **Hasidism**, a more mystical form of Judaic practice, emphasized emotive contact with God, feeling, folk piety, and prayer.

The Gaon Elijah ben Solomon (1720-1797) of Vilna was one of the most important Jewish personalities of his time. His work changed the ways in which the Torah and the Talmud were studied in Europe. Many stories are told extolling the personal accomplishments of this religious leader. It is said he studied eighteen or more hours per day, sometimes immersing his feet in ice water to keep himself awake. Moreover, Elijah was a true intellectual of the Torah and of other learning as well. He is said to have studied many languages and to have written a book on mathematics.

His intellectual approach to the study of the Torah was extraordinary. He approached the traditional texts with a new courage. For instance, if while studying a passage in the Talmud he saw that the text before him contradicted a conclusion he had reached on the basis of logical reasoning, he suggested that the text be emended (corrected).

But Elijah relied on more than sharp reasoning. He mastered the entire body of rabbinic literature--the Babylonian Talmud, Palestinian Talmud, Tosefta, Midrashim, and the commentators that preceded him. Rarely was one authority able to so thoroughly absorb the entire body of rabbinic learning.

Still, the Gaon did not himself compose commentaries to the Talmud and to the Shulkhan Arukh. His students took down his "lecture notes" and published many of his insights after his death. He personally did not organize an institution for Torah study. But after his death, his students--one in particular, Chaim ben Isaac--founded an academy for higher Talmud study at the city of Volozhyn in Poland.

These two factors, the Gaon's renewed emphasis on the power of the intellect, and the emergence as a result of his student's efforts of the institutionalized study of Talmud, molded the face of Judaism from his time to the present.

The rise of the **yeshiva** was an important development internal to the Jewish community in the early nineteenth century. The **yeshiva** was a unique institution. David Singer explains many important characteristics of this institution of higher Jewish learning in his article "The Yeshiva World" (**Commentary**, Oct. 1976).

One of the main features of the great **yeshivas** was their professed ideology. The leaders of these institutions taught that their aim was to promote the study of the Torah for its own sake. To broaden the capacity of the **yeshiva** to teach the most students possible, the leaders introduced many new methods of study. One such innovation they devised was a system of collegial study called the **havruta** (buddy system).

The leaders of the **yeshiva** also propounded ideas to justify ongoing advanced study. For instance, they emphasized, based on traditional sources, that the study of Torah led to the direct knowledge of God. In addition, the **yeshiva** focused its training on the rigorous analysis of texts.

These institutions maintained high entrance requirements. Within the Jewish communities of Europe, the **yeshiva** student was accorded high prestige. In the nineteenth century, the **yeshiva movement** reached its peak. Many institutions patterned after the earlier Volozhyn Yeshiva were established.

The development of higher Jewish learning was one important trend in this era. Judaism in this period saw the rise of other forces as well. **Hasidism** on one extreme, and the **Haskalah** (Enlightenment) on the other, tore at the fabric of the Jewish consensus. In the middle of this tug of war arose another force, the **Musar movement**.

The Gaon of Vilna and the type of Judaism he represented emphasized the power of the intellect and the religious significance of study. **Yeshiva** students were inculcated with the need to apply logic and to master the intellectual tradition of rabbinic Judaism. In this context, partly as a corrective to the intense focus on cognitive achievement, the **Musar movement** developed within Judaism.

The word **musar** means "instruction." It usually signifies a kind of teaching that deals with the moral and personal obligations of the individual. The founder of the **Musar movement** was a member of the fourth generation of students following the time of the Gaon. Elijah of Vilna's student, Chaim of Volozhyn, had a disciple, Yosef Zundel. His student was Israel Salanter, founder of the **Musar movement**.

From Zundel, Salanter learned that it was the goal of **musar** instruction to shape a person's behavior rather than just to teach correct ideas. One essential way to achieve this goal was to facilitate one's personal involvement with and observation of a rabbi who was a **musar** master. This was even more important than the study of **musar** handbooks, which proliferated in this time. By patterning himself after a master, a Jew could develop the "good conduct" that **musar** taught and thereby learn the ways to live a proper life.

Salanter taught that there are two sides of the psyche: the intellectual side and the subconscious side (the deep layer of the psyche containing instincts and dark forces). Salanter, even in this pre-Freudian age, evinced a distinct awareness that the subconscious side is the generator of behavior. As he put it, "The imagination is a churning river in which the intellect drowns."

Salanter taught that the subconscious is a powerful and potentially dangerous force. According to Salanter, it is also a positive force. Through the study of **musar**, he said, proper behavior can be perpetuated. This curriculum included the study of ethical Torah texts, carried on with great emotion. **Musar** taught that the Torah's dictates must be stated aloud and repeated over and over through singing and even shouting, all at regular intervals.

The basic tenets of the **Musar movement** made for a system that was palatable to a large segment of the

Jewish population. The emotional elements of its curriculum, such as the personal and individualistic dimensions of soul-searching and other attributes, were sufficiently down-to-earth for the common man. By subsuming the **musar** teachings under the larger general heading of "Torah study," Salanter enabled the masses in eastern Europe to feel an equal sense of participation in the highest religious ideal of traditional Judaism.

This movement effectively fended off two challenges to traditional Judaism: **Hasidism** on the one side, and the **Haskalah** (Enlightenment) on the other. **Hasidism** was an emotionally packed approach to Judaism, rapidly spreading through eastern Europe. The **Haskalah** brought with it a complex set of secular ideas and attitudes to challenge traditional Judaism in western Europe.

In 1857 Salanter took up residence in Germany to combat the forces of the **Haskalah**. There he wanted to restore the stature and respect of talmudic learning. Though he was not fully successful in his program, Salanter left a rich legacy. He developed a new curriculum of **musar** study, including the **musar** talk combined with ecstatic prayer, shouting, weeping, moaning, or humming maxims from the Bible, Talmud, or classical **musar** literature; group analysis; self-appraisal in geographic isolation; and, above all, close observation of the **musar** master. In many times of trial and tribulation, the Jewish people of Europe found personal solace and guidance in the teachings of the **Musar movement**.

The Birth of Reform Judaism and Modern Orthodoxy

We have already considered one central movement in nineteenth-century Europe--the **Musar movement**. This internally developed system also served as a response to some of the newest challenges facing the continued survival of the classical modes of Judaism--**Hasidism** and the **Haskalah**.

Still, the **Musar movement** did not respond directly to the "spirit of nineteenth-century Europe." It is not easy to briefly characterize the spirit of this age. Because artistic creations often capture some major facet of a culture, it is of value to recall one of the great musical works of the time: the last movement of Beethoven's famous Ninth Symphony, which sets Schiller's "Ode to Joy" to music. It proclaims "all men are brothers under the canopy of heaven." Published in 1824, the symphony captures the tone of European ideology during that time. Through the advancement of culture, it says, a universal society--a utopia-- will be created.

The emancipation of Jewry in Europe allowed many Jews to be a part of the European culture of their time. Thus this era witnessed the Europeanization, or the reformation, of Judaism. Nineteenth-century Europe gave birth to Reform Judaism.

The reformation of Judaism affected different segments of the population in various ways. For example, Reform ideals gave those in the upper classes, the educated and wealthy elite who remained faithful to Judaism, a mode of thinking about life that made sense within the context of their particular social milieu. Let us look at some of the theological precepts of Reform Judaism.

"Essential Judaism," as Reform Judaism was called, did not require that Jews observe measures that separated them from other enlightened men; rather it consisted mainly of beliefs and ethics. A main belief of early Reformers was that Judaism was a rational religion. In time, they thought, this system was destined to apply to all humanity.

The Reformers emphasized that the ethics of Judaism were universal and advanced beyond any derived from other sources. The founders of Reform Judaism found the basis for the tenets of Reform in the Tanakh--especially in the prophetic writings.

Solomon Freehof, a spokesman for Reform, described the new system as follows: "Reform Judaism is the first flaming up of direct world idealism in Judaism since the days of Second Isaiah." The "golden age" of Jewish history, according to Reform thought, was that of the prophets. Those ancient spokesmen of Israelite theology stated all that was essential for Judaism. Much of the rest of Jewish tradition was superfluous.

In consonance with the spirit of European thought of the age, Reform Judaism preached a kind of idealism for the future -- a dream of the coming utopian age. Reform leaders were quick to abandon the classical system. The theological traditions of rabbinic Judaism, along with its deep heritage of Torah learning developed over centuries, was no longer meaningful in the European context, said the Reformers. The "way" of Judaism was no longer compatible with the directives of the rabbinic Torah. Instead, the Reformers stated, the way of Jewish life should be more compatible with contemporary culture.

The Reformers accepted the notion of divine revelation. But their Torah did not allow for the Mishnah and the Talmud of rabbinic leaders in the past. They accepted as the central message of Judaism the teachings of classical biblical prophets. However, only a small number of intellectuals among the Reformers held these tenets deeply. Other followers who wished to assimilate into the mainstream of European culture accepted Reform as a compromise, for it permitted many Jews to be Jewish and German or Jewish and French, for example, at the same time. They could then accept the spirit of the European age and proclaim that Judaism was the ideology that would save Europe.

Only with the development of Reform was there any awareness of the existence of a movement called "Orthodoxy". Most factions within traditional Judaism chose to ignore or to denigrate the proclamations of the Reformers. Only a few formulated concrete responses to the new challenge of Reform.

Samson Raphael Hirsch (died 1888) sought to fend off Reform in Germany. He developed the concept of "Torah with proper conduct". Jews remaining true to the Torah in the traditional sense could, Hirsch said, contribute to the universal goals of society. Keeping the commandments was possible, he preached, for those who also sought to enter into the intellectual culture of contemporary Europe and to seek a secular education. Hirsch believed that Israel had a mission to redeem mankind through adherence to and propagation of the traditional values of the Torah.

The Orthodox and Reform movements in Germany during this era engaged in a struggle for the allegiance of the German Jews. Orthodoxy had several inherent factors that tipped the scales in its favor: it was the religion of the parents and grandparents, and it claimed to represent, the "true Judaism" -- though, of course, so did Reform.

Reform attracted many who were less serious about Judaism but wanted first to be like their neighbors in all ways, including worship. To this end, those in the Reform movement developed modes of service similar to the Protestants of the day: They introduced organ music and prayer in the vernacular; they held on to few rituals and developed much doctrine and belief; and they encouraged Jews to adopt the language, the dress, and the actions of Europeans.

After almost fifteen centuries of rabbinic Judaism, Reform reorganized the religion of Jews in nineteenth century Europe. A formal kind of Orthodoxy developed as a response to Reform, when traditional rabbinic Jews were forced to clearly define the role they envisioned for Judaism in the modern world.

Antisemitism and the Birth of Modern Zionism

One of the basic ideological systems of modern Europe was antisemitism, although its extent is sometimes underestimated. It entailed more than just a hatred of Jews as individuals and went beyond single instances of persecution and discrimination. Antisemitism was a full-blown system of belief and policy of government officials. Political anti-semites asked who was responsible for the ills of the time? Who was standing in the

way of redemption? The answer was always the same: the Jews. The solution many proposed was the same: eliminate the Jews from society; then it will improve.

Antisemitism was more virulent in eastern Europe than in the west. Indeed, physical attacks against Jewish communities and villages were commonplace. In western Europe, antisemitism was more sophisticated, more ideologically based, and more an official part of local and national policy. However, in both eastern and western Europe, the Christian Church added fuel to the fires of the anti-semitite. For centuries the Church had preached hatred and resentment against the Jews, whom Church leaders saw as the heirs of the Pharisees of Gospel literature.

Scholars have attempted to explain in other terms why Jews were singled out. Some believe it was due to the nature of the Jewish community, where Jews were well-organized in self-sufficient, internally-governed, tightly-linked communal structures. Because the community had its own institutions -- synagogues, charitable organizations, schools, care for young and old -- it was a small world of its own.

Antisemitism became more intense as the nineteenth century moved forward. The reaction of the Jews was limited to three choices: they could live in an essentially unbearable situation in Europe; they could try to change society, as many did through active participation in political movements, such as socialism or anarchism; or they could leave for another homeland. Many dreamed of Palestine; some went. Many others immigrated to America.

In eastern Europe, life became more difficult for Jews after the assassination of the Czar in 1881. Because the Jews were blamed for many ills of society, this political event led to increased pogroms and further persecution. In western Europe, antisemitism gradually became an acceptable and even fashionable way of thinking. To be a member of the intellectual aristocracy of the times, a person could not help but accept prevalent racial ideas -- especially the idea that the Jews were key contributors to all of society's ills. For the betterment of mankind, the anti-semitite concluded, Jews had to be expunged from society.

Zionism provided the most positive alternative for Jews in Europe. Early Zionists proposed that Jews could only be at home in a land of their own. Out of that land and the society they would create, they could contribute to the betterment of their situation. Zionist thinkers proposed that from the example of this new society, the world would learn and be saved. Thus Zionism would eventually usher in a redemptive era for Jews and for all humanity.

Zionism took many forms in its early development. There were socialist, political, religious and cultural Zionists. But in time it was the political Zionists who took the initiative. They proclaimed that through political action they would have the best chance to bring the Zionist dream of a Jewish state to reality.

Theodore Herzl made the dream more of a reality. In 1897 he convened the first Zionist World Congress at Basel, Switzerland. In the midst of pomp and ceremony, and with little real power behind him, Herzl boldly proclaimed, "Here the state was founded". He believed that it would be a matter of routine to convince European heads of state to accept the ideals of Zionism. Indeed, Herzl could not envision any rational leader who might reject the requests of the Zionist activists. Surely, he thought, the leaders would accede to an idea that would remove the Jews from Europe, a goal they so often sought. Herzl hoped that the age of redemption could be achieved through the ideals of the Zionist. But Herzl miscalculated. It wasn't until fifty years later, after the world had allowed the destruction of European Jewry during World War II, that the state of Israel was founded on the positive ideals Herzl and his colleagues had laid out at Basel. Israel brought to fruition many of the positive ideals they sought: a unified nation, a common language and culture, and a better world.

Zionism was a radical new movement within Judaism. For centuries no one proposed that the Jews would reestablish their own homeland. But in nineteenth-century Europe, Jews flocked to the Zionist leaders. In

fact, many considered Herzl a king among the Jews. Even if the state was never achieved, many believed at the turn of the century that the movement had at least restored national dignity to the Jews. In Europe every people had dignity. But the Jews were not included in the ultimate goals of any of the European nations. Through Zionism, the Jews had established ultimate goals for a utopia of their own.

Finding the Sources of Deliverance

At this point it is appropriate to make some larger observations about the history of Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism is a meta-historical system, that is, history did not figure centrally in the thought of talmudic rabbis. What mattered most was the meaning of everyday life. For instance, the rabbis paid close attention to the notions of their religious system that dealt with sacred time, sacred space, purity, the meal, and ritual. Further, they sought to interpret the symbolic structures of reality. For rabbinic Judaism everything on earth had a counterpart in heaven. All of creation was joined together through parallel lines of being.

Throughout its history, Judaism has been concerned with messianic component of life. Rabbis from the first to the nineteenth centuries hoped for the culmination of time. Actually, throughout Jewish history there are many variations of thought on the subject of messianic redemption. For example, Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai, one of the founders of rabbinic Judaism in the first century, said, "If you are in the process of planting a tree and someone comes and announces, 'the Messiah has come', first finish planting, then go and greet the Messiah". Recall also that exilarchs and rabbis in Babylonia confronted in different ways the issue of messianic hope.

Over the centuries of the Middle ages many messianic pretenders arose and declared that they were about to bring in the age of redemption. Many rabbis proclaimed that they had calculated the secret time of the coming of the Messiah. He would come, they said, in a year or a decade, usually at some time just beyond the present. Of course the basic idea of national redemption through a messiah, or an anointed one, goes back to the classical prophecy of the Tanakh.

In the nineteenth century the two newest movements of the Jews, Reform Judaism and Zionism, carried forward the messianic hopes of Israel. Reform Judaism concentrated on the message of the prophets. Its leaders called for dedication to ethics and for restoration of the basic values of Judaism. They proclaimed that Jews no longer needed to live their lives within the structures of rabbinic Judaism. Instead, they could accept the new ideas of Reform and live a kind of religion in the messianic mode. Reform placed a great deal of emphasis on belief in the coming redemption, combined with practice ordinary life interpreted only through the eyes of contemporary society. Reform Judaism rejected the rabbinic concept of the world.

Zionism in many of its expressions also abandoned the rabbinic ideals. Most Zionists cared little about the higher meaning of reality; instead they sought to understand and interpret the higher meanings of world history. The Zionist vision was a clear new drama of Jewish life. The destiny of the Jews was to found an ideal state.

In this new drama the Jews were the central actors, the Gentiles (persons of non-Jewish faith or of non-Jewish nations) the supporting characters. The rabbis had no role in this script. Their teachings, symbolic structures, and practices and precepts had no meaning for the Zionists. Judaism for the Zionists was completely directed towards a historical view of reality. And in history, the Jews looked forward to the coming of a new era.

The rabbinic Jew also found a place within Zionism, for religious Zionists continued utilizing the structures of rabbinic Judaism. They employed the festivals and the laws to interpret the meanings of life and of history. They also attached a more mystical significance to the ideals of Zionism. The land -- Israel -- and the language -- Hebrew -- endowed life with a higher reality.

These leaders, along with others in the Zionist movement, discovered new values for the Zionist. They saw fulfillment in working the land. Digging, planting, and cultivating became positive religious activities. In Europe many Zionists were middle - and upper - class members of society -- professionals and businessmen. But in Israel they worked the land.

The state of Israel today combines elements from both the "secular Jews", oriented within the society, together with the "religious Jews", who accept the rabbinic world view and add to it revolutionary new aspects. Many of the internal political and social problems of Israeli society grow out of the combination of so many approaches within one framework.

Many European Jews rejected the hopes of Zionist leaders. Of those who sought other solutions to the impossible situation of Jewish life in Europe, many came to America. We turn to American Judaism in the next lesson.

Study Questions:

1. What was the impact of the Vilna Gaon?
2. What is a **yeshiva**?
3. Explain the ideas of the **Musar movement**. Who was its founder?
4. What new modes of Jewish thought and practice are found in Reform Judaism?
5. What is modern Orthodoxy?
6. Describe the events that led to the growth of Zionism in Europe.
7. What two modern movements are expressions of Jewish longings for redemption?
8. Who were the **Hasidim**?

LESSON 8 Judaism in America (1654 to the present)

Lesson Objective To understand the emergence of the Jewish community in America.

Important Dates

- 1654 Founding of Jewish community in New Amsterdam
- 1881 Publication of major views of Reform Judaism in Columbus Platform
- 1886 Founding of Jewish Theological Seminary for rabbinic training of Conservative rabbis.

Basic Terms and Ideas

Religious pluralism: the American ideal of free practice of religion.

Sweatshops: overcrowded factories where many Jewish immigrants worked at the turn of the century.

Acculturation: the process of adopting American cultural and social ways.

Background and Context

Early colonial period: first flowerings of the Jewish community.

Mid-nineteenth century: beginnings of Reform Judaism in America.

Eastern European immigration, 1880-1920: a major influx of new population.

Cultural and Religious Developments

Lower East Side: the impoverished first area of settlement for new eastern European immigrants; a rich cultural climate.

Unions, Yiddish theater, movie industry: important contributions of new immigrants.

The "culture of organizations": a phrase used to describe the character of organized Jewish communal life in America.

Study Notes Contemporary Versus Historical Judaism

Strangely enough, it is more difficult in many ways to study the developments of Jewish history in the modern age than it is to study the developments of past historical periods. To analyze contemporary affairs one must separate fact from opinion and reality from wishes. Accordingly, in the study of modern Judaism one must understand the difference between the real beliefs and practices of the contemporary Jew on the one hand, and the hopes of the community--the theology and ideology that project a view of what the ideal life and thought of the Jew should be--on the other hand.

It has been said that the Jewish community in the United States is a "culture of organizations." This means that through belonging to Jewish organizations many Jews assert their identification with Judaism and Jewish history. Undoubtedly, this is a characteristic of organized American life in general. In fact, many social critics have argued that belonging to clubs, fraternal orders, or religious organizations anchors the life of the average American in a communal identity.

What then are the central organizations or institutions of modern American Judaism? The synagogue (or temple) is an obvious one. Religious affiliation with an organized body gives the average modern American

Jew a strong sense of attachment to the Jewish community and to people worldwide. Let us examine this religious institution more closely.

The synagogues of America are, for the most part, affiliated with national synagogue agencies representing the most prominent denominations of American Jewry. There are three major movements within Judaism. Each has its own umbrella organizations. An individual synagogue usually joins the Union of Orthodox Congregations, the United Synagogues of the Conservative movement, or the Reform Union. To better understand the differences between one movement and another, it is helpful to look more closely at the traits of some congregations.

Several traits differentiate the Orthodox congregation from the others. First, the prayers recited within the congregational services are said almost entirely in Hebrew. Second, in the synagogue itself there is usually either a balcony or a separate section for the women of the congregation. Women sit separately from men and play no active role in leading the service. Understandably, this is a bitter point of contention nowadays in many communities. All of the synagogue ritual, the Orthodox theologians say, follows the **Halakhah** (Jewish law of the rabbis) as it was practiced thousands of years ago. For example, Orthodox Jews hold weekday synagogue services twice daily, early each morning and in the evening at sunset, as was the ancient rabbinic practice.

The average Orthodox synagogue service is generally well attended by the members of the congregation. The members adhere to other traditional practices as well. On the Sabbath, for example, members are encouraged to walk to synagogue, not ride. Riding in an automobile is considered to be a transgression of the Sabbath rest. Why? In the view of the Orthodox, fires may not be lit on the Sabbath day. Since the internal combustion engine of the automobile runs on the burning of gasoline, it is forbidden to drive a car on the Sabbath.

In contrast, all Conservative congregations have mixed pews, that is, men and women sit together in the synagogue during the services. Like Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews conduct their services in Hebrew, though many congregations intersperse a fair amount of English prayer in the services. The focal service of the Conservative synagogue takes place on Friday night. By design this has become a "family service," whose time and character follow the dictates of contemporary convenience as much as the traditions of the ancient rabbis.

Conservative leaders assert that their forms of practice and thought conform to the traditional dictates of Judaism. They do not claim that they replicate the practices of ancient rabbis, as much as they say that if the rabbis of old were alive today they too would practice according to Conservative ritual.

Reform Judaism is the most liberal, or modernized, form of American Judaism. In the Reform temple (the term synagogue is not favored by Reform leaders) almost all the service is conducted in English. The main gathering of the week for Reform Jews is Friday night; in fact it was they, and not the Conservative leaders, who originated the idea. In the temple it is common to find organ music accompanying the service. Some Conservative synagogues also emulate this practice, which originated with Reform Judaism in western Europe. Reform leadership frown on overindulgence in ritual, a preference that parallels the practice of many forms of Protestant Christian worship. It is the custom of most Reform Jews to keep their heads uncovered during prayer. Furthermore, many temple leaders discourage the wearing of the **tallit** (ritual prayer shawl) during services. Within the last decade, though, Reform temples have relaxed many of these customs in response to demands by Reform youth.

The three major movements differ not only on ritual preferences within the synagogue, but also on important ideological issues. Orthodoxy is the most fundamentalist of the movements, and the Orthodox are the most resistant to change of ritual or practice. Even within Orthodoxy there is no unanimity regarding change and

adaptation to modernity. **Hasidic** groups (pious Jews who give allegiance to a chosen charismatic leader) make outward show of their resistance to acculturation by wearing distinctive black suits and long frock coats. Nevertheless, these Jews have entered into many segments of the modern American economy, including high technology and electronics. Though they do not wish to appear modern, their actions indicate that they accept the demands of modernity in many areas of life.

Many other Orthodox Jews reject the distinctive garb of the **Hadisim** in favor of typical modern dress. Though many "modern Orthodox" attend synagogues where men and women are separated during services and where a rather traditionalist form of Judaic piety is accepted, they embrace modern economic and social life in America with much more positive fervor than their **Hasidic** compatriots.

On the other end of the spectrum lie the Reform thinkers. Long ago in the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism embraced modernity with a messianic fervor. Since then, Reform Jews have been proud to participate fully in the life of the modern world and to bring to it the prophetic message of Judaic ethics and wisdom. Usually they are the most positively inclined to accept change and modification within Judaic practice and belief.

The view of change and modernity expressed by Conservative Jews is the most problematic of the three major movements. They assert the importance of tradition, rabbinic wisdom, and ritual practice; yet they reject the ways and beliefs of the Orthodox as too "fanatical and medieval." Conservative leaders also accept the ideal of the Jew fully embracing modernity. Yet they see Reform Jews as being not Jewish enough--too much like the "Gentiles around them." Not surprisingly, Conservative Jewish thought focuses heavily on the crisis of Jewish identity, as the Conservative Jew tries to mediate between tradition and modernity.

As we consider the nature of American Jewish synagogue life, the leader of organized worship, the rabbi, must not be neglected. In past lessons we have seen that the rabbi played different roles in the Jewish community throughout history. Recall that in ancient Babylonia the rabbi was considered a holy man, whose power to perform miracles and chase away demons was derived from the Torah.

In the Middle Ages the rabbi often served as judge of his community, administrator of communal affairs, and as **posek** (decision maker in questions of Jewish law). In both the talmudic and medieval eras, the rabbi functioned as educator of his community. He was considered to be a possessor of sacred knowledge and, therefore, was a highly respected individual and a true leader of his community.

In America the role of the rabbi shifted. He became a pastor to his flock, like the minister of the Protestant church. He directed his efforts to pastoral duties, like visiting the sick, counseling congregants with personal problems, and settling marital disputes. In taking up the new responsibilities of the American rabbinate, the new rabbi left behind many of the functions of the traditional rabbinic calling.

Most recently, synagogues with younger congregants have gone back to expecting the rabbi to serve primarily as an educator rather than a preacher. The trend has been to place less responsibility on the rabbi to deliver the weekly sermon and to do traditional pastoral counseling. More emphasis is being placed on his offering adult education classes and participating in the education of teenage children and in Hebrew school for the youth.

It is important to know how rabbis are trained in the United States today. The decision to enter the rabbinate is not said to be a response to a calling. Usually it is a career decision that entails significant professional training and three to five years of postgraduate education at one of three major seminaries. The Hebrew Union College, based in New York City and in Cincinnati, Ohio, trains the bulk of Reform rabbis in America. Both men and women can attend this institution. The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City produces most of the Conservative clergy. Just recently this institution decided to allow women to enroll

in the rabbinical training program. Yeshiva University, also in New York City, trains most of the Orthodox rabbis in the United States. Many other smaller and less demanding Orthodox seminaries may be found in New York and around the country.

What do students at these seminaries do to prepare for the rabbinate? At Yeshiva University, the Orthodox seminary rabbinical students follow a traditional course of study, the main subject being Talmud. At the conclusion of their training, students study rabbinic law codes so that they know how to consult them when confronted in congregational life by questions of practice, belief, or ethical behavior. At Yeshiva, students are expected to adhere strictly to Jewish ritual and tradition.

The course of study at the Jewish Theological Seminary is geared more to the practical needs of the modern Conservative rabbinate. The curriculum there resembles that of a typical graduate school, with a range of courses on subjects of Jewish interest. It is designed to prepare new rabbis to fulfill their roles of teachers to general congregations. Therefore, stress is placed on expertise in the study of Hebrew and its texts. The leadership of the seminary requires students to observe the dictates of the **Halakhah** (Jewish law).

The most liberal of the seminaries is the Hebrew Union College. Much of the instruction in this institution is carried on in English. In fact, students often study translations of the Bible and the Talmud rather than the original texts; though changes of late have restored some of the emphasis on text study. HUC places an emphasis on professional training for the pulpit and on pastoral training. Overall, HUC prepares its students for ministerial careers.

The picture of the Jewish experience in America would be incomplete if left to a description of the synagogue and its rabbinic leadership. A major part of American Jewish life thrives outside of the synagogues and temples of America's Jews. We now turn to other experiences of the Jewish community in order to understand the pressing philosophical and social questions of American Jewish life and its transformations of the classical religious characteristics of Judaism.

For American Judaism one key issue of existence has remained constant: How can a minority culture be assimilated into American society without losing its identity. Recall that the American Jewish community developed in the latter half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries through massive immigration into the United States from Europe, mostly from eastern countries. This was a conflicted mass of immigrants: one segment of the population was made up of traditional rabbinic Jews; another segment was comprised of secularist socialist activists.

In the 1880s to the 1920s, several million Jews came to the shores of the United States, bringing with them their culture and their religion. Those that maintained a strong religious identity clung to a classical rabbinic Judaism (Orthodoxy). Their first challenge was to become "Americans"--to give up old ways and foreign practices. This process was difficult and often impossible for the immigrants. Nevertheless, their children frequently succeeded in acculturating. They felt it was necessary to rid themselves of appearances that marked them as outsiders to American culture; so they changed their dress, their names, their way of speaking and acting, and their religious actions.

[insert picture here]

Some children of immigrants in recalling the experiences of their parents, have imaginatively portrayed them casting their religious articles from the boat as it pulled into New York harbor past the Statue of Liberty. Though that was how some children viewed the experiences of their parents, in reality it was the second generation that sought to complete the process of acculturation begun by their parents.

What is acculturation? Mainly a social phenomenon, it is the process of leaving behind one's previous

cultural affinities and adopting the ways and ideas of a new society. The children of the immigrants acculturated with a vengeance. They wanted nothing of the ways of their foreign parents. But the grandchildren of the immigrants remembered that there was a crucial Jewish ingredient to the culture of their ancestors. Overall, third generation American Jews tried to recover elements of their grandparents' religion.

However, third generation American Jews were selective in retrieving their religion from the past. They would not permit the basic outlines of their religion to differ too greatly from the religion of their neighbors. Hence, many of this generation flocked to Reform, while others adopted and developed a newly vitalized system--Conservative Judaism.

During the 1950s and 1960s, such questions as "How can I find my identity in the great American melting pot, and how will I recognize the components of that identity once I find it?", became important for the third generation of American Jews. For many, these questions were answered by a combination of nostalgia and religious practice. They set out to remember their parents and grandparents by participating in a religious ritual--the recitation of the **Kaddish** (memorial prayer) in the synagogue. Formerly in history this prayer was only a minor aspect of Jewish observance. But in American Judaism this ritual became a primary religious act--the only one that many American Jews participated in during the year. Recitation of the **Kaddish** symbolizes the acculturation process of the American Jew. It is a symbol of religious identity associated with a sense of recollection of past generations and perhaps even of guilt for having abandoned the old ways for the new life of American society.

For a large segment of the American Jewish population, the processes of acculturation and of identity definition went on side by side. As they became integrated into their surrounding culture, American Jews formed for themselves ways of maintaining a sense of Jewishness. They accepted most of the values of American culture. In addition, they lived as Americans both internally, in their conceptions of the world and goals for living, and externally, in their day-to-day living. They even accepted the prevalent practices of American society as the important turning points of life (rites of passage). But it is accurate to say that while American Jews shared the goals of the American dream and welcomed the success of the process of acculturation, they forged for themselves at the same time a new identity.

What characterized the new Jewish identity most strongly was its emphasis on externals. The grandchildren of the immigrants had a strong wish to be Jewish, but how? They chose for themselves new modes of expressing their identity through changes in their religious lives and by directing their interests to practices mostly external to themselves. By joining synagogues and Zionist organizations, and by giving money to Jewish causes, and to Israel, the American Jew said, "I am Jewish." By protesting discrimination in public and in the press, and by standing up against antisemitism, they asserted Jewish values--values that were little different from the values of their neighbors. They valorized ethical behavior and a good life, spoke highly of the value of education, and respected success in business and professional life.

But what became of the traditional beliefs of Judaism, which had defined the internal meaning of life for Jews? American Jews did not wholeheartedly embrace traditional Jewish concepts and practices. These beliefs did not afford them elements of identification external to their lifestyles. And so the third generation, the grandchildren of the immigrants, pushed forward the redefinition of Judaism in America.

The fourth generation, the contemporary American Jews, renewed their search for definition and inner meaning. In the sixties, along with many others in America, a segment of young Jews rediscovered meaningful inner structures of Judaism. They found new relevance in the meanings of traditional ceremonies and observances. Moreover, they found that the old ways helped them express their Jewishness.

In this era many Reform congregations reviewed their opposition to Jewish ritual. Some allowed the restoration of the Bar Mitzvah celebration. In the fifties few Reform congregations had permitted ancient

rituals in their services, but the Reform leaders of the sixties reversed this trend. They allowed their congregants to take up those aspects of the tradition that they found meaningful.

In this same period Conservative Jews, whose parents identified with Judaism solely through the synagogue, found that personal observance of the Sabbath at home added more meaning to their Jewish identity than their attendance at synagogue service to say the **Kaddish**. Abstention from "work" one day a week became an important part of defining inner Jewish life. Thus in the lives of fourth generation Jews, rituals regained some importance not seen by preceding generations.

Meanwhile Orthodox Jews moved in the other direction, to adopt many elements of the new American Judaism into their system. They added external aspects to a formerly heavily ritualistic and personal religion. We see, therefore, that in recent years all sectors of the American Jewish community have found it necessary to speak out and make their voices heard in the resounding choruses of American life.

Study Questions

1. Explain the main traits of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism in the United States.
2. How are rabbis trained in each of the three religious movements?
3. What is acculturation?
4. How did German immigrants differ from eastern European immigrants?

LESSON 9 The Mass Murder of European Jewry (1932 to 1948)

Lesson Objective

To investigate the history and the impact of the Holocaust in Europe. To understand the theological responses to the Holocaust.

Important Dates

- 1917 Balfour declaration supported proposal of Jewish national homeland in Palestine.
- 1938 November 9, **Kristalnach** (night of broken glass): the physical destruction and burning of all Jewish synagogues in Germany.
- 1942 Nazis declare intention to annihilate European Jews in the "Final Solution" (German phrase referring to solution to the so-called Jewish problem of Europe).
- 1943 Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto (confined area of Warsaw, Poland in which Jews were forced by Nazis to live).
- 1945 Concentration camps: forced labor camps throughout Europe where Jews were imprisoned and murdered; liberated end of World War II.
- 1945 Jewish survivors of Holocaust sent to Displaced Person (D.P.) camps.
- 1948 Partition (division) of Palestine proposed by United Nations. State of Israel established and immediately attacked by Arab nations who rejected the plan of the United Nations.

Background and Context

German antisemitism: deeply rooted and virulent form of racist doctrines that comprised the core of Nazi ideology.

Rise of Nazism: Hitler's rise to power in 1933 spurred by economic collapse of Germany and embarrassment over loss in World War I.

"War Against the Jews": the phrase used to describe the main intent of Hitler and the Nazis in World War II.

Zionism, settlement of Palestine: ideologies and activities of nineteenth-to-twentieth century Jews that led to the establishment of the state of Israel.

Study Notes The Holocaust in Europe

To comprehend the events of the Holocaust, the annihilation of European Jews by the Germans in the Second World War, you must understand the nature of the Nazi doctrines concerning the Jews. German antisemitism of the early twentieth century was not just a campaign of discrimination against the Jews. And Adolf Hitler was not just a German-speaking bigot. Unfortunately, Nazi belief was a deep and virulent form of racist hatred directed mainly against the Jewish people.

Nazi antisemitism espoused notions that were as deeply held by its adherents as were their religious beliefs. The Nazis said that the Jews were the cause of all the troubles of Europe and of the world. They characterized the Jewish people as a pariah nation, outcast among other nations.

Nazi doctrine misused science, philosophy, sociology, and history to build its case against the Jews. Some German scientists made pseudo-scientific claims to defend prevailing racist theories. These false theories claimed that the Aryan German race was superior to all others and that the Jewish race was inferior. This racist thinking pervaded all areas of academic learning and, from there, all aspects of daily life. To maintain a position at a German University, for example, a professor had to espouse racist beliefs.

This hatred of the Jews did not spring up suddenly in Europe. As we learned in Lesson seven, Europeans had persecuted Jews for centuries. Continental antagonism to the Jews was fed in part by the anti-Jewish teachings of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages. Through distortion of Christian doctrine and misuse of the message of the Gospels, some Christian clerics in Europe promulgated antisemitic diatribes and promoted anti-Jewish sentiments and actions.

The role of Jews in European society put them in a vulnerable situation. For centuries Jews had played an important role in the commerce between the nations of Europe. They were seen by some as a people of international moneylenders, or as wealthy bankers. In reality, only a small number of Jews participated in the banking profession. Most of the Jews in the population occupied minor roles in various professions or ran small businesses. Nevertheless, the authors of Nazi hate literature during the thirties and forties exploited the vulnerable position of the Jews and distorted history to serve their purposes. Eventually the Nazis aimed to evict all Jews from Europe.

[insert picture here]

Means of Destruction

Hitler implemented his deadly plan to remove the Jews from Europe with the aid of technological tools of his day. In his rise to power Hitler manipulated the mass media of his time: newspapers, radio, and motion pictures. By using modern forms of propaganda, the Nazis consolidated their hold over the German people and concealed the true intentions of their actions. World War II was well under way by the time the world realized that it had been victimized by the "big lie."

The Nazis put technology to work to destroy the Jews of Europe. By 1943 the Germans were using transcontinental railroads not only to transport the hardware of war from one front to the other, but also to carry Jewish victims of the Holocaust to death camps that dotted the landscape. To many who have experienced or studied the events of the time, thoughts of the boxcars that brought the Jews like cattle to the concentration camps stir especially dark memories.

Technology was also employed to speed up the murder of Jews in Europe. The Nazis found that firing squads could not kill Jews fast enough, so their "scientists" came up with a poison gas formula that could kill large numbers of people quickly and easily. After 1943 Hitler put this formula to use in the gas chambers of concentration camps. Large crematoria (furnaces for cremation of human bodies) were built to dispose of the bodies of millions of Jews killed in the camps.

The Nazi plan became widely known during the war. Yet the nations of the world did little to stop Hitler's mass murder of the Jewish people. Before the war the United States and other major powers had closed their harbors to boatloads of European Jewish refugees. Thus many Jews who had been refused entry in America or England were sent back to Germany and later perished in the Holocaust.

As the war progressed and news of the death camps reached the Allies, some proposed that bombers be diverted from their military targets to destroy the death camps, or at least to blast the railroad tracks leading to the gas chambers. But this plan was never carried out. The munitions factories were bombed, but the other factories of death continued to operate.

In all, six million Jews were killed by the Nazis during World War II. Hitler nearly achieved his "Final Solution." Along with the lives of victims, much of Jewish culture in Europe was lost. Many great academies of Jewish learning--the **yeshivas**--were destroyed; and poets, painters, writers, musicians, philosophers, theologians and so many more, were lost.

Most of those who survived went to America or to Israel. Many European Jews who were spared death waited in Displaced Person camps until they could make the journey to Israel and help build a new homeland for the Jewish people. In 1948 the world recognized the right of the Jews to establish an independent state in Palestine, the site of ancient Israel—an area occupied in the first part of this century by the British.

Many believe that if the terrible events of the Holocaust had not occurred, the state of Israel would never have come into being.

Theological Responses to the Holocaust

The unprecedented magnitude of the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust provoked some old and some new theological questions for the Jewish people: Why did all this happen to the Jews? Why did God allow evil of such magnitude to exist in the world? Why should people remain Jewish after the challenges to their faith raised by the Holocaust? Is there a meaning to the terrible trauma of the **Shoah** (Holocaust)?

Great philosophers and theologians have grappled with these trying issues. Below are six responses to questions raised by the destruction of the Jews of Europe.

1. Fundamentalist response: This overly simplistic explanation of the suffering caused by the Holocaust was offered by some ultraconservative Jewish theologians. These thinkers have suggested that the Holocaust was a form of punishment for Jews who left traditional religious life to become secularists, socialists, or Zionists. To the modern sensitivities of the Western observer, this seems a somewhat crude response.
2. Classical response: The response of many philosophers has been to recall the story of the biblical figure Job. God goes along with Satan in a test of his righteous servant Job's loyalty. He brings ruin on Job and his household; yet Job refuses to admit he has sinned. He resists advice that he curse God on account of his troubles and thereby choose to die. Job's friends suggest one or another explanation for his baffling predicament; yet Job accepts none of the justifications. The narrative of the biblical story ends with God's appearance to Job out of a whirlwind, proclaiming to him that mere mortals cannot possibly understand the actions of the creator of the universe and cannot ever hope to know the ways of God.

Some recent theologians have extended the message of the Book of Job to the tragic events of the Holocaust. They believe the Holocaust was a test of Israel's faithfulness. And certainly it has been difficult for Jewish theology to account for the era of suffering it brought to the Jews.

3. Response of survival: Some responses have emphasized an active existential posture to the **Shoah**. Emil Fackenheim, considered to be one of the foremost theologians on the Holocaust, has suggested that the proper answer to the events surrounding the destruction of European Jews is an affirmation of Jewish identity. Hitler wanted to destroy the Jews and Judaism. To respond to that Jews must stand firm in their faith and identity, and not allow the Nazis a posthumous victory. As Fackenheim puts it, the questions of the Holocaust are unprecedented questions. They require unprecedented responses. **Why not suicide?** Because after the Nazi celebration of death, life has acquired a new dimension of sanctity. **Why not flight into madness?** Because insanity has ruled the kingdom of darkness, hence sanity, once a gift, has now become a holy commandment. **Why hold fast to mere Jewishness?** Because Jewish survival after Auschwitz is not "mere," but rather in itself and without any further reasons or theological justifications a sacred testimony to all mankind that life and love, not death and hate, shall prevail. **Why hold fast to the covenant?** Former believers lost Him in the Holocaust kingdom. Former agnostics found Him. No judgement is possible. All

theological arguments vanish. Nothing remains but the fact that the bond between Him and His people reached the breaking point but was not for all wholly broken. Thus the survivor is a witness against darkness in an age of darkness. He is a witness whose like the world has not seen. (Fackenheim, cited by Neusner in **Understanding Jewish Theology**, pp. 171-72)

4. Answer to the enigma of God and the death camps: Richard Rubenstein, another well-known theologian whose work addresses questions raised by the Holocaust, says that the most difficult challenge to theology is raised by the following question: How could God have allowed the Nazis to set up and operate the death camps of Europe? He rejects the notion that the events of the Holocaust can be likened to the story of the testing of Job. In fact, Rubenstein thinks that any such assertion makes it seem as though the Nazis were the tool of God, a thought he cannot entertain.

Rubenstein considers, and rejects, the stance that on account of the Holocaust people must conclude either that God is dead or that God does not watch over their lives. He does draw constructive conclusions from his consideration of Auschwitz and of the martyrdom of the six million Jews who died: "Death in Europe was followed by resurrection in our ancestral homeland. We are free as no men before us have ever been. . . . We accept our nothingness--nay, we even rejoice in it--for in finding our nothingness we have found both ourselves and the God who alone is true substance. . . all that we receive is truly grace." (Rubenstein, cited by Neusner in **Understanding Jewish Theology**, pp. 185-86).

5. Response of new symbolic narratives: Rubenstein's philosophic reflections on the meanings of the Holocaust lead to another kind of response, based mainly on the historical events of the forties. History has always played a central role in Judaism. The stories of the Jews in antiquity as preserved in the Torah are part of the heritage of the Jewish nation.

Throughout our study of Jewish history we have seen time and again how historical events took on symbolic significance in the sacred literature of Judaism. For example, the story of the slavery of Israelites in Egypt became more than just a narrative about a band of peasant tribes enslaved to the Pharaoh. Indeed, this story stands out within Jewish tradition as the great symbolic account of suffering followed by divine intervention and redemption under Moses' leadership, and conquest of the promised land under Joshua's leadership.

These ancient stories carried a powerful significance throughout the generations of Jewish history. No story of enslavement or persecution, no matter how severe, ever threatened to supplant the classical narrative of the biblical tale of Egyptian bondage. And no account of any triumph, no matter how glorious, ever threatened to replace the canonical recounting of the acquisition of the land of Israel. None, that is, until the stories of the past generation.

Rubenstein and Fackenheim both allude to the theological link between the death and suffering of the Holocaust and the new life and redemption of the founding of Israel in 1948. But it is not just in the minds of elitist philosophers that this link makes logical sense. The imagination of the average Jew does not hesitate to connect the dark age of the Holocaust with the bright light of the redemption in Israel. It could even be said that the history of the Holocaust and the state of Israel has in large measure successfully contended with the classical story of slavery in Egypt and redemption in the promised land of Israel for dominance in narratives that influence the religious imagination of the modern Jew. In a sense, modern history is replacing classical narrative in the symbolic world of the Jewish people.

The outlines of the new narrative are basically familiar. After a long slavery in Europe, culminating in destruction, the survivors undertake a hard journey. They tarry awhile as displaced persons, and

then go on to join other pioneers in the early days of the state of Israel.

This young and brave new nation had to struggle against native inhabitants of Israel (the Arabs) until they were able to secure their conquest of the land and achieve independence in 1948. Thereafter in the new country, the Jews continued their ongoing struggle to establish a new kingdom of God in Israel.

For a brief period of time it appeared they had succeeded. In the Six Day War in 1967 they achieved redemption: the world recognized the invincibility of the Jewish people. It seemed that the demon of the Holocaust had been exorcised from the soul of the Jewish people and that some sort of messianic age had dawned.

But in 1973, after only a brief interlude, the nation of Israel returned to its prior situation. With a near disaster in the Yom Kippur War, as the Jewish state teetered on the brink of oblivion, the people again realized they were truly enmeshed in the struggle of human life. The end of time had not come and the struggle for existence continued unabated.

6. Response of Judaism to the crisis itself: Religion has perhaps its greatest impact on individuals during times of intense and personal crisis. In the daily trials of Jewish life during the Holocaust, many Jews turned to their spiritual leaders, the rabbis, for guidance on personal religious issues and on matters of concern for the communities at large. The rabbis' responses not only guided the suffering Jews in making unprecedented moral decisions, but rabbinic teachings bolstered their sagging souls. Religion, therefore, served as a form of resistance against the terrors of the Nazi onslaught.

The rabbis' responses to questions from Jews in towns, ghettos, and concentration camps who were experiencing intense suffering and separation, show us the effects of religion in its most intense mode. In trying to respond to the thousands of religious crises that arose during the Holocaust, the rabbis of Europe set forth and clarified for modern Jews many of the traditional Jewish answers to moral issues that people confronted in the darkness of death camps and ghettos.

Some questions put to the rabbis of this time included questions of moral choice or dilemmas of conscience, such as, Who will live and who will die? Often the Nazis gave their victims a cruel choice: they could save one member of their family but not the other--many times, only one child out of two (as recently depicted in William Styron's book, and the film of the same name, **Sophie's Choice**). Many turned to the rabbis for guidance in such situations. The rabbis, in turn, searched the Bible and Talmud to find solutions to such distressing problems.

Similar issues abounded: Must I risk my life to save another? May I endanger others to save my own life? Sometimes the problem was wholly confined to an individual. In the worst possible trials people had to stop and ask, When may a person commit suicide? The rabbis sought some kind of precedent for these issues as well.

Not every instance for inquiry was one of life and death. Some quandaries involved other crucial moral or religious issues. Some asked, May a Jew convert to another religion to escape death? Others, who sought solace in religious ritual, contemplation, and study asked, May or must a Jew risk his life to study Torah?

Prayer and piety played an enormous role in the spiritual resistance of Jews in the Holocaust. The following testimony, given during the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi war criminal, illustrates how important ritual was for some Jews in the camps:

One day I was lying down on my bunk in the children's block at Auschwitz, and I saw one of the officials of the block coming with a thick rubber truncheon to beat someone. I jumped off my bunk to see whom he was going to beat. Beatings were given for every "sin," and the number of blows was according to the severity of the crime. This was the first time the rubber truncheon was used. Generally they would use a stick, which often would break in the middle of the beating. . . . I wanted to see how the rubber truncheon worked; perhaps someday I would meet up with it myself. The official approached one of the bunks. The boy who was there already knew what was in store for him. . . . He bent over and the beating began. The rest of us watched and counted. The boy neither cried nor screamed, he did not even sigh. We wondered, we did not understand what this meant. The count passed twenty-five--this was the usual maximum number of blows. When the count reached forty, he began to beat the boy on the head and feet. The boy neither sobbed nor cried out--a fourteen-year-old boy--and he didn't cry.

The official finished fifty blows and left wrathfully. I remember a tremendous red welt on the boy's forehead made by the rubber truncheon. We asked him what he had done to incur the beating. He replied, "It was worth it. I brought some **siddurim** !prayer books½ to some of my friends so they could pray. It was worth it'." He said not another word. He got up, returned to his bunk and sat down. (cited in Rosenbaum, **The Holocaust and Halakhah**, p. 53)

In the oppression of the times, many small but urgent problems confronted religious Jews who prayed daily. In the death camps, where Jews were subjected to forced labor while awaiting their turn at the crematoria, some asked the rabbis, Can Jews still say the line in the daily liturgy, "Blessed art thou, Lord our God who has not made me a slave?"

Many pious Jews posed a variety of related questions: How can Jews observe the Sabbath in the death camps? Can Jews recite a blessing before eating forbidden nonkosher foods? What was to be done to the property of those who died in the camps? The rabbis gave reasoned responses to each question, based on Scripture, on the Mishnah and Talmud, and on medieval codes and responsa.

Even to the last moment of life, many Jews concerned themselves with the proper fulfillment of their religious rituals. In many cases the rabbis were asked, What blessings does one say at the time he faces death? This is one response:

Those who are about to undergo martyrdom are obliged to recite the benediction: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to love the revered and awesome Name, which was, is, and will ever be, with all our hearts and all our souls; and to sanctify His name among the multitude. Blessed art thou, O Lord who sanctifies His name amidst the many." Let them say, "Hear O Israel. . ." and give up their lives for the sanctification of His name. (ibid., p. 64)

Religion, therefore, gave many Jews a spiritual beacon of hope in the night of the camps and the darkness of the ghettos.

Judaisms and Memories: Systemic Representations of the Holocaust

"In every generation they rise against us to exterminate us."
-- the Passover Haggadah

For the historian of Judaism the Holocaust was not a "unique event" and should not be subjected now

to a special brand of critical analysis. The multiple and complex events and representations of the Holocaust or *Shoah*, from this academic standpoint, ought to be studied and understood within the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences just as any other analogous set of data out of the Jewish historical experience.

That is so because, unfortunately, from the perspective of the study of the Jews, the demented and massive persecutions and killings of the Holocaust era were not singular severe ruptures of history. Jewish history teaches to the contrary. For millennia, institutionalized oppression in the form of anti-semitism has been for millennia a conspicuous fact of the Jew's struggle for existence. Indeed, its ostensible absence or decrease in one or another setting, such as the present context in America, marks a conspicuously atypical era of Jewish life. Given the lessons of history, that historians of the Jews and of Judaism may fittingly resist objectivizing or theorizing one epoch of destruction as a unique event.

Self-constrained by such suppositions, the consequences of the Holocaust for Jewish studies as a proper subset of the liberal arts are still quantitatively substantial if not qualitatively remarkable. The disciplines have to come to grips with the immense body of historical data preserved in our recent past with a high level of technological thoroughness. These diverse data are material, statistical, documentary, literary, poetic, artistic and in other modes.

Recent contributions to the study of the Shoah share the conviction that the Holocaust as an epoch and a set of issues for contemplation ought to be subjected to more extensive and rigorous criticism. The Holocaust and its representations have to be dealt with and explained by serious Humanists concerned with understanding the philosophical traditions of Western Culture since the Enlightenment and especially by critics involved in the analysis of modes of symbolic representations of the human experience in the West.

Within Jewish Studies then, to interpret conscientiously that history and each of the multiple forms of narrative and representation of the survivor and successor generations responding to the events of the Holocaust, we ought to use the active discourses of its various types of disciplinary inquiry.

I. Disciplinary basis: vertical literary studies

When the interpretation of the Holocaust and its representations is carried out according to the accepted standards of academic interpretation in our fields, such as that of religious studies in general, and the history of Judaism in particular, we posit that literary representations that pertain to experiences in the context of a religious tradition and its social manifestations cannot be pulled out and thrown together with other data for an indistinct form of universal analysis. They must be understood as components within a "Judaism," a coherent cultural system.

It appears conventional to maintain that literary representations and ritual articulations pertaining to a Judaism are comprehended best when interpreted in relation to the religion of the Jews as it developed through history. So, for example, Alan Mintz's, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*,¹⁹ presents for us studies of classical Hebrew and modern Israeli literary representations of the Holocaust and other catastrophes in Jewish history. Mintz utilizes a vertical cultural approach based on his examination of Judaic precedents over a span of more than two thousand years.

David Roskies, in a complementary study, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*,²⁰ presents and interprets Yiddish literary expressions of the *dritten Hurban*, the third destruction, the Holocaust, against the backdrop of the Shtetl, the Ghetto and, as in the previous instance, in the context of selected vertical sections of the classical modes of Judaic discourse of over two millennia.

Both of these representative inquiries accept as their suppositions that when we examine literary representations it is essential to specify *whose* past, *which* subset of human memory, *whose* special narratives, we treat. They posit implicitly that generalized statements about "memory" lack vitality, and that the less exact we make our parameters of cultural inquiry, the less precision do we achieve in our conclusions.

¹⁹New York, 1984.

²⁰Cambridge, 1984.

These two studies are based on a vertical model of literary analysis, and thereby firmly anchored in a widely accepted methods of the disciplines of Judaic Studies. But the age of sentimental a-cultural criticism has not yet passed. A recent book by James Young²¹ uses weaker forms of vague universalism in its attempt at critical analysis and represents a brand of assailable and perhaps methodologically capricious inquiry. He examines representations of the Holocaust by removing them from a discourse-specific investigation. As he openly declares, "Historical memory and ritual commemoration are nothing if not a refiguring of present lives in light of a remembered past." "Jewish memory and tradition," he says, "depend explicitly on the capacity of figurative language to remember the past."²² An historian of Judaism might object and demand to know, as I have suggested: Whose history? What view of ritual? What mode of language?²³

Young studies the literary representation of the Holocaust, as a new, independent and isolated phenomenon, "How historical memory, understanding and meaning are constructed in Holocaust narrative (p. vii)." In this latter artificial category he ventures to encompass discourses out of a multiplicity of contexts that had spawned such accounts. But his chaotic account intermixes numerous genres and data, from a broad and diverse span of time and space, from the Holocaust era itself, to the present, from the setting of Europe, to our North American continent. He much too quickly glosses over the particulars of the linguistic, cultural, religious or artistic systems of their origins.

To be fair, Young cautioned that we constrain those aspects of deconstruction and semeiotic analysis that divert attention from historical realities and that we recognize the inter-penetration of history into literature (p. 3). But stating the premise does not exempt Mr. Young from accounting for *whose* history and *whose* literature. Young does refer to a "perspective ridden" analytical framework (p. 5) just making a connotative allusion to concerns that might need to be explored. However, he tries to survey too broad a landscape and his aerial view eloquently misses the point of cultural specificity.

Confining one's criticism to a single context does not guarantee methodological sophistication or success. Looking at Holocaust literature specifically within Judaic culture, Mintz and Roskies covered far less territory and achieved greater sophistication and rigor. Yet they still managed to conceive of an artificially broad setting for their investigations because they glossed over the details of systemic development within Judaism. Proper method is essential to correct analysis.

It seems counter-intuitive that in order to reconstruct the history of Judaism of a distant age through the investigation of far fewer and less eclectic writings of late antique Hebrew and Aramaic texts, scholars, like Neusner, utilize an apparently more complex agenda, than others employ to study critically the near contemporary and current representations of the Holocaust of the past generation.

It is quite obviously fruitful to bring the methods of the history of religions into conversation with literary critical, philosophical modes of thought. By insisting on greater heuristic sophistication we may dissuade contemporary critics from throwing together the data of many diverse Judaisms and their respective representations when they speak of religious categories and employ its metaphors.²⁴

²¹*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1988.

²²Young, p. 84.

²³When Young resorts to undefined terms, like "tradition," he must expect that, no matter what his intent, he conjures images of Sholom Aleichem's dancing Tevye.

²⁴Some recent books by Neusner related to the description of systems include, *From Description to Conviction: Essays on the History and Theology of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1987, *The Systemic Analysis of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1988, *Canon and Connection: Intertextuality in Judaism*, Lanham, 1987, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse*, Lanham, 1987, *Ancient Judaism and Modern Category Formation: "Judaism," "Midrash," "Messianism," and Canon in the Past Quarter-Century*, Lanham, 1986.

Multiple Judaisms and discursive spheres

As we said above, historians of Judaism, following the prevailing systemic paradigm of analysis, work with a multiplicity of Judaisms. The classical Judaism of the dual Torah, rabbinic Judaism, took shape after a catastrophe in 70 C.E., the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and loss of independence to the Roman Empire. It persists in one or another configuration through the middle ages to the present day where spokesmen claim it is approximated as one or another form of contemporary Orthodoxy or Conservative Judaism.

Jews in Nineteenth century Europe formulated several new Judaisms. Dominant among these were utopian and messianic movements leading to Reform and Zionism, and other forces giving rise to Conservative Judaism and Yiddishism. They also participated in and helped shape a variety European secular cultural alternatives, like socialism, anarchism and communism, all movements conceived of and articulated in significant measure by Jews.

Undoubtedly, as the Holocaust ruptured the whole fabric of European Jewish life, representations of its events emerged within each Judaism of the time. Accordingly, one may argue, only within each system can they in turn be fully understood.

The various systems we call *Judaisms* employ a multiplicity of modes of thought and expression, or as some might prefer, of discourses and discursive practices. Let me turn to several examples of discursive representations of the Holocaust in Judaic systems.

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the renewed development of systems of Judaisms, as I have said. Among them we find: an American communal Judaism, a state-sponsored Zionism in Israel, popular counter-cultural Judaic expressions in America (ostensibly non-systemic), and serious modifications of the synagogue-connected official Judaisms of Conservative, Reform and Orthodox Jews.

Accordingly, within the wide range of possibilities of how the Holocaust (whatever that category may include) becomes embedded in the memories of several systems, we consider two sharp contrasts:

- the Holocaust as represented within two ranges of North American discourse: the coherent communal American Judaic civil system and, by contrast, popular non-systemic (counterculture) American folk and literary representations.
- the Holocaust as represented in ordinarily disjoint discursive systems: as represented in official state-sponsored Zionism in Israel compared with one of its embodiments in the Conservative Judaism of the American synagogue.

The Holocaust in the Discourse of the Organized American Jewish Community

North American Jews have created two systemic worlds of Judaic expression. The Judaism of the synagogue and home is expressed in the officially stated beliefs and practices of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements. A second "Judaism" takes its shape within the realm of the civic, mainly secular, public life of the community. Neusner calls this official communal system in America, "the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption, with its interest in the destruction of European Jewry as paradigm of evil, then the creation of the State of Israel, as compensation renewal after the ultimate catastrophe (p. 119)."

American Jews form, "a shared corporate experience of polity (p. 120)," and thus constitute a differentiated social unit, an "Israel." Their interests are expressed by such bureaucratic structures as Federations for Jewish Service, fund-raising groups with a self-interest in actively propounding an ideology of distinctiveness. Organizations like those preach the public doctrines of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption. Though some argue the motivation is manipulative, the result nevertheless is substantive and the system has taken definitive form.

Neusner expands on the meanings imputed to the murder of the six million and the creation of the State of Israel:

The world-view of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption stresses the unique character of the murders of European Jews, the providential and

redemptive meaning of the creation of the State of Israel. The way of life of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption requires active work in raising money and political support for the State of Israel (p. 122).

He is openly critical of the value of this systemic expression and, characteristically, does not hesitate to spell out his view. This Judaism, "offers as a world of nightmares made of words." He goes on:

First, the message of Holocaust and Redemption is that difference is not destiny but disaster -- if one trusts the gentiles. Second, the media of Holocaust and Redemption leaves the life of the individual and family untouched and unchanged . . . [It] turns on its head the wise policy of the reformers and enlightened of the early nineteenth century: a Jew at home, a citizen out there. Now it is an undifferentiated American at home, a Jew in public policy (p. 128).

Lapsing theological, he concludes that the enduring Judaism of the dual Torah has the power to transform the inner life of the Jew, this other Judaism does not. Thus one historian of Judaism has rendered his analytic judgment and, in addition, expressed his personal preference.

The Holocaust in the Discourse of Popular American Jewish Culture

The role of the Holocaust in the civil discourse of American Jews comes more sharply into focus through critiques in contemporary imaginative fiction. It plays an important role in popular Judaic non-systemic (counterculture) folk representations. Consider the blunt example of the writings and experiences of Philip Roth.²⁵

Roth in *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography*²⁶ recounts an anecdote that he calls his "excommunication" at a Yeshiva University symposium on fiction he participated in New York in 1962. At this "trial" he tells us he was grilled mercilessly by a moderator and audience who began after him with the question: "Mr. Roth, would you write the same stories you've written if you were living in Nazi Germany?" As framed, the query was merely a cloak for a dagger aimed at the heart of Roth's literary expressions. The questioner transparently meant, "Are you not a self-hating Jew?" Roth was so shaken by the attack, he could not respond at the time. Instead, he says, he has given his answer many times over in the fiction he has published, in his discourse, since that incident.

Of course, Roth could have answered easily and obviously. He was a product of Jewish cultural processes over several generations in an American democracy. He wrote for an American non-racist audience. He was nurtured on the great achievements of English literature. Jews within German society had no such nurture and faced an openly hostile racist culture. Roth could only have written his oeuvre for us. We read him, understand him, despise him or laugh with him and respond to his characters and caricatures.

Through his fiction he challenges the basic discursive truths of Judaic life and, in my view, allows us to better judge their cultural value and purpose. Roth's recent parody of Holocaust memory within American Judaism and the Zionist setting was also one of his most radical. In *The Counterlife* he developed the following.

The book's protagonist Nathan Zuckerman finds himself on a jet flight from Israel sitting next to Jimmy Lustig, of the West Orange Lustigs. Jimmy is a psychotic reversioner returning from study in the Diaspora Yeshiva. He plans to hijack the plane to Germany and issue a press release aimed at "regeneration for the Jews,"²⁷

²⁵Cf. Young, pp. 109-112, for further discussion of Roth.

²⁶New York, 1988, pp. 127-130.

²⁷Philip Roth, *The Counterlife*, New York, 1988, pp. 188-9.

FORGET REMEMBERING

I demand of the Israeli Government the immediate closing and dismantling of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem's Museum and Remembrance Hall of the Holocaust. I demand this in the name of the Jewish future. THE JEWISH FUTURE IS NOW. We must put persecution behind us forever. Never must we utter the name "Nazi" again, but instead strike it from our memory forever. No longer are we a people with an agonizing wound and a hideous scar. We have wandered nearly forty years in the wilderness of our great grief. Now is the time to stop paying tribute to that monster's memory with our Halls of Remembrance! Henceforth and forever his name shall cease to be associated with the unscarred and unscarable Land of Israel!

ISRAEL NEEDS NO HITLERS FOR THE RIGHT TO BE
ISRAEL!

JEWS NEED NO NAZIS TO BE THE REMARKABLE
JEWISH PEOPLE!

ZIONISM WITHOUT AUSCHWITZ!
JUDAISM WITHOUT VICTIMS!
THE PAST IS PAST! WE LIVE!

In the novel, but a few pages later, Jimmy backs off. The press-release was just an irrepressible, offensive Jewish joke. As Jimmy says, "Come on, you think I'd be crazy enough to f--k around with the Holocaust? I was just curious, that was all. See what you'd do. How it developed. *You* know. The novelist in me."²⁸

Roth's artifice is an inversion of remembrance. He casts the scene in terms of the most visible contemporary context of political violence - airline hijacking. Roth pits recent reversionary forms of Judaism against accepted American communal forms, and against State-sponsored monumental discourse. These fictive memories have undoubtedly been shaped and cultivated under the repression of the corporate personality of the system of civic American Judaism. Roth's characters express as their response a fierce struggle over the acceptance or rejection of the central belief system.²⁹

The Holocaust in the Discourse of the Zionist State

Zionist representation in the State of Israel postulates that the Holocaust was not a complete rupture of the Jews' cultural context. It posits that in effect Zionism adumbrated the Holocaust, was waiting for it, and knew it was coming. The Holocaust is proof of the validity of the essential Zionist enterprise and in the destined failure of diaspora Judaism.

The official Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, is one main discursive representation of the Holocaust within that secular state-sponsored system. It stands as a testimonial to martyrdom and resistance.³⁰ Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel, Yom Hashoah, promotes the ideology of the State as it perpetuates the memory of the victims. It does so in public civil ceremonies, decidedly disassociated from the "religious" rituals of Israeli Orthodoxy.

The rituals, shrines and commemorations as "texts," and literary narratives of the Zionist system are comprehensible as components of that state-bound ecology of culture. Those, like Young, who discuss aspects of such representations without accounting for their systemic foundations cannot reach a competent

²⁸Ibid., p. 193.

²⁹Roth has consistently shown an unwillingness to accept the classical representation in Judaism of the book of Lamentations, historical interpretation based on the notion of desecration. He has little sensitivity for that concept.

³⁰See Young's discussion (pp. 27-28) of two diaries, the one of Anne Frank, secular and assimilated, and the other of a Zionist youth, Moshe Flinker, for a sharp contrast of memories molded by varying systemic forces.

level of interpretation or explanation.

The Holocaust in the Ritual Discourse of the American Synagogue

Official synagogue representation of the Holocaust in text or ritual has been rare and just now beginning to become more prevalent. The official Judaisms of the synagogue have for the most part chosen not to deal with the Holocaust. At best, official attitudes towards memorializing its victims in the past have been superficial.

One may contrast this with how synagogue members today frequently associate Judaism solely with the commemoration of death. Alan Mintz explains that this association began in the middle ages as a popular representation of a "cult of the dead" grew up as a subset of Judaic practice:

In the generations immediately following the First Crusade the ceremony of remembering the dead began to be practiced not only in the case of renowned rabbinical martyrs of public persecution but also simply for all who died natural deaths, entirely irrespective of the conditions of persecution. A bereaved son would recite the Kaddish, an Aramaic doxology, for the memory of his recently departed father or mother, in the conviction that such recitation had the power to save the deceased's soul from tortures beyond the grave. The practice gained headway in the thirteenth century and by the fifteenth a new custom emerged: the *Yorzeit*, the recitation of the Kaddish on the anniversary of the death of a relative. And soon there was further established the *Yizkor* or *Hazkarat neshamot*, the Kaddish together with various supplications for the souls of the departed, recited on the Day of Atonement and the last days of the Pilgrimage Festivals. Taken together, this amounts of a kind of cult of the dead that began in medieval Ashkenaz and later spread to all of world Jewry.³¹

Mintz comments further,

The astounding tenacity of this outlook is observable in the simple sociological fact, known to all, that in the process of secularization, and especially in the acculturation of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to America, the recitation of the mourner's Kaddish with its attendant rites is the very last particle of tradition to be given up.

Recently American Conservative Judaism developed a Kaddish for death camps. Based in part on the last passages of Andre Schwarz-Bart's novel, *The Last of the Just*,³² this ritual representation and text is a perfect logical cultural extension of Conservative Judaic systemic values. The rite was originally incorporated into the Martyrology of the 1972, *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, of the Rabbinical Assembly. Rabbi Jules Harlow, editor of the *Mahzor* describes the impetus for the innovation as follows:

The text of the martyrology incorporates Rabbinic narratives about some of the martyred rabbis as well as words from the Psalms and from modern authors, including Bialik, Hillel Bavli, Nelly Sachs, A.M. Klein and Soma Morgenstern. At the conclusion of the narrative recalling martyrs of various times, we wanted to articulate the tension between faith on the one hand and, on the other, the questioning doubt which arises out of our confrontation with even the recollection of the murder of those Jews. And we did not want to articulate that tension in an essay or in a footnote . . . We chose the statement of faith *par excellence* in Jewish tradition, the Mourner's Kaddish. After the death of a family member, when a Jew

³¹Mintz, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

³²New York, 1960.

has perhaps the strongest reasons to question God, he or she is obliged to stand in public to utter words in praise of God.

Harlow explains the motives of the liturgy:

We interrupt these words, this statement of faith, with the names of places where Jews were slaughtered, places which therefore cause us to raise questions, to have doubts. The tension is resolved, liturgically, by the last four lines, whose words are uninterrupted by the names which give rise to questioning, thus concluding in a framework of faith.³³

The original Aramaic text alternates with a register of sites of extermination in the new liturgy.³⁴

We rise
Yitgadal
Auschwitz
ve'yitkadash
Lodz
Sh'mei raba
Ponar
b'alma di v'ra khir'utei,
Babi Yar
v'yamlikh malkhutei
Maidanek
b'hayeikhon u-v'yomeikhon
Birkenau
u-v'hayei d'khol beit yisrael,
Kovno
ba-agala u-vi-z'man kariv,
Janowska
v'imru amen.
Y'hei sh'mei raba m'vorakh l'alam u-l'almei almaya.
Yitbarakh v'yishtabah
Theresienstadt
v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam
Buchenwald
v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar
Treblinka
v'yit'aleh v'yit-halal
Vilna
sh'mei d'kudsha,
Bergen-Belsen
brikh hu l'ela
Mauthausen

³³Jules Harlow, personal communication, March 2, 1989. He adds that there are intentionally seventeen places named, signifying that life, represented by the Hebrew *Chai*, numerically eighteen, "can never be complete, can never be the same, after such slaughter." This is not noted in the prayer book.

³⁴I cite the Kaddish of the *Siddur Sim Shalom*, ed. Jules Harlow, 1985, pp. 841-843. The more extensive Kaddish of the Martyrology of the Day of Atonement is not limited to communities and camps where the Jews were killed during the Second World War. It includes Kishinev, Hebron, Mayence, Usha and Jerusalem, places where Jews were slaughtered in other historical eras.

min kol birkhata v'shirata,
 Dachau
tushb'hata v'nehemata
 Minsk
da-amiran b'alma,
 Warsaw
v'imru amen.
Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya v'hayim aleinu v'al kol yisrael,
v'imru amen.
Oseh shalom b-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael,
v'imru amen.

The new Kaddish is a text with no narrative. It creates an intrusion into the death-liturgy, thus depicting the disruption of death within the historical reality of the people. It is a violent representation. Names of locations of destruction, in language read from left to right, confront the doxology of praise, in the liturgy recited from right to left.

The new powerful ritual sustains the particularity of violence. Unlike many other forms of ritual, it resolves nothing. The new Kaddish confuses and traumatizes the soothing cadence of the expected traditional prayer. This unconventional form of the prayer breaks the somber beat of the chant of the Kaddish, one of the only sure rhythms and universally recognized prayers of this American Judaic system.

Ideology and the Holocaust

The Holocaust finds expression in the discourses of Judaic systemic alternatives according to the needs and expectations of each. For the differing Judaisms, we expect and find divergent memories.

Of these we must ask what is the role of a representation in a particular systemic cultural setting? What is the function of a depiction of a Holocaust in a Judaism? What is the meaning a social metaphor or entity called an "Israel" imputes to an historical or ritual account of a catastrophe, destruction or Holocaust?

Those who claim uniqueness and universality for the Holocaust, who insist on transcending individual cultural perspectives and contexts, perhaps in effect wish to profess an ideological basis for the Humanities, an essential element in an emergent mythic structure of the liberal arts.

What this means must be the subject of self-discovery for the current academic generation much as it was for one lonely poet a generation ago. John Berryman concludes as follows his story, "The Imaginary Jew," where he, an Irishman engaged in a street-corner political debate, was mistaken for a Jew:

In the days following, as my resentment died, I saw that I had not been a victim altogether unjustly. My persecutors were right: I was a Jew. The imaginary Jew I was was as real as the imaginary Jew hunted down, on other nights and days, in a real Jew. Every murderer strikes the mirror, the lash of the torturer falls on the mirror and cuts the real image, and the real and the imaginary blood flow down together.³⁵

Study Questions

1. Define the following terms: death camps, "Final Solution," crematoria, antisemitism.
2. How important did the Nazis think the solution to the "Jewish problem" was to the success of their nefarious program?
3. In what ways did theologians attempt to explain the meaning of the Holocaust?
4. How did Jewish practice and belief serve as a form of spiritual resistance for the Jews during the Holocaust?
5. What new historical narrative has the modern Jew accepted as central to Jewish life? What narrative has it in some ways replaced?

³⁵John Berryman, "The Imaginary Jew," in *Recovery*, New York, 1973, p. 252.

LESSON 10 Understanding Contemporary Judaism (1948 to the present)

Lesson Objective To understand the character of world Jewry today and important trends to watch for in the future.

Important Dates

- 1948 State of Israel established
- 1967 Israel wins Six Day War; Jerusalem reunited
- 1972 First Woman rabbi in Reform movement in United States
- 1973 Yom Kippur War; Israel set back by losses
- 1979 Camp David peace treaty

Cultural and Religious Developments

Diaspora: Jews living outside the state of Israel.

American Jewish community: the largest and most influential Jewish community in the modern world.

Modernization and assimilation: social processes affecting the religious and cultural life of the American Jewish community.

Women's rights: a major issue of the seventies in the Jewish community in the United States.

Study Notes The Impact of Israel on World Jewry

The Jewish settlers of Palestine, with significant support from American Jews and with great pride and hope, established the state of Israel in 1948. Over the first two decades of its existence the citizens of Israel struggled to build cities, to cultivate the land, to maintain a strong defense against hostile neighbors, and to recreate a Jewish culture in the ancient homeland of the Jewish people. Under difficult conditions, the Israelis achieved a great deal in the span of a few short years. They developed a highly advanced, westernized society in the midst of third world countries in the Middle East.

The Israeli founders brought tiny Israel to worldwide prominence among nations. (In size, Israel is about the same area as the state of New Jersey.) Recently one observer remarked that judging from the prominence it is given in the press, Israel must be the third greatest power in the world, just after the United States and the Soviet Union, and just ahead of France and Great Britain. While this is not an objective assessment, it nevertheless indicates how successful Israel has been in the community of nations.

American Jews aided in establishing the modern state of Israel from its earliest beginnings. One of Israel's most prominent statespersons was Golda Meir, a past prime minister of Israel, who was originally an American Jew from Milwaukee. This is but one indication of how closely tied together are the Jewish community of the United States and Israel.

The American government has always been a strong supporter of Israel. The United States understands the value of a strongly democratic, pro-Western ally in the Middle East. Israel has always emphasized civil rights for all its citizens, dual access to voting for members of its parliament, the right of women to vote, and universal service in the nation's armed forces for men and women.

One guiding principle of Israel's government has been to provide a haven for all Jewish refugees from persecution or hardship. Therefore, the state guarantees citizenship to any Jew who wishes to settle, whether seeking a safe haven or searching for spiritual fulfillment.

In 1967 a sudden and dramatic conflict once again ignited the fears of the world's Jews. Israel confronted a united front of hostility from its Arab neighbors. Faced by unfavorable odds, the Israeli armed forces defeated its enemies in six days and in the process expanded its borders as a future defense against aggression. The victory of Israel in this crucial struggle had a deep and lasting impact on Jews throughout the world.

The new image of the victorious Israeli, which emerged after the Six Day War, did much to help change the Jewish self-identity. Jews began to see themselves not as a tormented and an embattled, wandering second-class people, but as an achieving, winning, and proud nation. In the years that followed, many Jews from the United States, Britain, and other countries took up residence in Israel. These new **Olim** (those who rise up to the land of Israel from exile) came to live in the cities and in the **kibbutzim** (collective agricultural settlements). They came with a deep idealism for the future of the Jewish people.

The strength of this new Jewish identity opened up the previously suppressed process of discussing the dark events of the Holocaust. For more than three decades Jews had recognized the enormous tragedy of the destruction of European Jews but had never been able to sustain any serious public discussion of its history or its theological implications. After the apparently "redemptive" war of 1967, serious discourse was led by prominent Jewish intellectuals into the history and interpretation of the Holocaust.

But the sense of salvation that followed the war in 1967 dissipated quickly after a near defeat for Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In a surprise attack on the Jewish nation during its holiest day of fasting and prayer, the Arab armies inflicted significant losses on the Israeli forces. For several weeks Israel teetered on the brink of defeat. The world's Jews quickly realized that no nation is invincible, that no redemption was yet complete, and that the realities of the up-and-down cycles of history catch up to all peoples.

Since 1973 Israel has been plagued by an ongoing war of attrition and by attacks of Arab terrorists. Led by Yassir Arafat, militant Palestinian Arabs attempting to grab power in the third world have tried to sway world attention to the problems of the region. The "Palestinian issue" (a reference to the problems of resettlement of Arab refugees from Israel) has haunted the Israeli government in its attempts to secure peace in the region. In 1987 this issue spawned civil unrest in the Gaza Strip and West Bank which continued several years and led to a political shift to more right-wing political expressions within Israel.

In 1979 under American sponsorship, a treaty was signed with Egypt in which Israel agreed to return all the Egyptian land it had acquired in the war of 1967 in exchange for guarantees of peace. Though problems still remain, this was a breakthrough in the normalization of affairs in the Middle East. American Jews and the American government remain significant supporters of the state of Israel.

The American Jew and the State of Israel

In Lesson 8 we observed that a major problem for Jews in America was the defining of Judaism in the new cultural and religious contexts of the New World. One element that figured prominently in the redefinition of Jewish identity was the role of the new state of Israel in the thought processes and the lives of American Jews.

Consider that the earliest Jewish immigrants to the United States were not ardent Zionists. After all, they came to live in America not Israel. The attitude of the German Reform immigrants illustrates this point: their leaders unashamedly proclaimed that America was their Zion. "We are Americans by nationality and Jews by religion," they said.

But over the years two factors worked to change this attitude. Jewish immigrants, like all others, sought to identify with a homeland. However, they were not absorbed immediately into American society. The completion of the process of assimilation of any minority into a majority culture takes generations. For the

Jews it took perhaps longer because of strong exclusionistic policies in the predominantly Protestant American society. Until they could say they were Americans, they needed to lean for their identity on the memory of a homeland.

German Jewish immigrants did not recall Germany with any particular nostalgia. And Polish Jews could never call the antisemitic and inhospitable Poland their fatherland. So the Jews of America longed for a homeland they could call their own. They had none until after 1948 when Israel became their adopted mother country.

The creation of the state of Israel left many lasting effects on the imagination of Jews in the United States. Within the last few years that impact has deepened. Even Reform Jews, formerly cool to Israel, recently started a Reform kibbutz in Israel. The Reform movement held its world conference in Jerusalem. There its leaders asked to be recognized by the Israeli authorities as a legitimate group within Judaism. This indeed indicates a remarkable turn-about in attitude of American Jews to Israel.

In the last decade or so, Israel has entered deeply into the thoughts and actions of American Jews. Almost all groups identified as Jewish urge support of Israel in public and expect their members to make a yearly donation to the state. In major cities many Jews march together in a parade to make the Israeli independence day. Furthermore, prominent Jewish businessmen and civic leaders join in attending the fundraising dinners and activities of the annual United Jewish Appeal (a charity for support of Israel). It is also popular in the Jewish community to support Israeli commercial products.

The uniform public support of Israel among the mainstream of America's Jews solved several problems of identity. After generations, the immigrant community of Jews had a homeland--not Russia or Poland, but Israel. Jews eagerly learned aspects of their culture: Israeli dances, songs, and customs, and Hebrew, the language of the Jewish state. Moreover, Jews in America willingly accepted this new mode of "ritual." In this way they found a way to be Jewish in the modern American cultural context.

Within the new patterns of identity and action in American Jewry, some striking contradictions and ironies remain. One question many ask is, How can American Jews claim to be Zionists and yet not move to Israel? But as the components of American Judaism are better understood, visits to Israel are accepted as meaningful actions that visibly support the Jewish state. And to be sure, a small but significant percentage of American Jews have moved permanently to Israel, or gone on **aliyah** (going up to the land). Nevertheless, most American Jews remain in the United States, with no plans to relocate in Israel. The Jewish state gives them a symbolic homeland and affords them a new set of actions to perform to preserve their modes of being Jewish while they remain in their promised land, the United States.

Modern Jewish theologians have explored the religious significance of the state of Israel for the modern Jew. Some thinkers believe that Israel serves as a crucial symbolic component of the religious imagination of American Jews. In the theological structures of the Jewish imagination, as we saw in Lesson 9, the classical religious themes of creation, suffering, revelation, and redemption reappear with intensity. Many see in the events of the Holocaust the symbolism of suffering. Thus Israel takes on special meaning as the symbol of creation and redemption for the modern Jews.

Orthodox Jews make clear their symbolic understanding of Israel's significance. They recite a prayer in many American synagogues and in all Israeli synagogues for "the welfare of the state of Israel, the first flowering of our redemption."

Many of the more liberal Conservative congregations arrange annual pilgrimages to Israel and emphasize the mastery of modern Hebrew in the synagogue school curriculum. Some argue that this activity, too, is based on a symbolic understanding that redemption lies in Israel. But the more liberal American Jews do not

want to be redeemed just yet. American life is perhaps too comfortable, or day-to-day living in Israel too difficult. In either case, adaptation to a difficult economic life in Israel and to a basically foreign culture and society make it easier to postpone the actuality of "redemption" to some time in the future.

Israel will undoubtedly remain one of the most powerful symbols of modern Jews. For the future, though, many issues connected with Israel and world politics remain to be solved. It is not yet clear whether the complex political balance of the Middle East will move towards resolution of conflicts and peace, or towards increased tension and another war.

Also unclear is the future of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union. This community, comprised of almost three million people, has faced persecution and pressure for decades. Russian antisemitism and anti-Western sentiment combine to make life difficult for many of these Jews. In the last decade thousands have emigrated to the United States and to Israel. But recently the Soviets have tightened emigration restrictions, and the flow has slowed to a trickle. Because the Soviets do not permit the free expression of Jewish religion or culture, the future of this community is uncertain.

Contemporary trends in American Jewry point in definite, yet conflicting, directions. On the one hand, demographics indicate a shift to the right, to a more fundamentalist and orthodox population. The Jewish birthrate is declining most rapidly among the assimilated, liberal-modernist families; however, it is rising rapidly among the fundamentalist and ultra-Orthodox, who do not allow the practice of birth control. Jewish fundamentalism has gained strength in numbers, political influence, and economic power. The right-wing leaders frequently preach conservative beliefs, including the traditional observance of ritual and separatism from other Jewish groups and from the mainstream of American popular culture.

The increasing involvement of women in Jewish ritual and leadership in liberal factions of the community, is another strong identifiable trend in contemporary American Judaism. In many ways the new Jewish women's movement for equal rights of access to religious practice, to Jewish education, and to political leadership roles in the community comes into direct conflict with the contemporary demographic shift to the right in the American Jewish community.

Liberal Jewish women currently have secured equal participation in synagogue rituals in the Conservative and Reform movements. Women may even be ordained rabbis in these movements. However, though Jewish feminism has redefined in many ways the traditional role of the Jewish woman, the growing Orthodox population shows no signs of willingness to accept radical redefinitions of the roles of women in Judaism.

The current economic conditions in America and Israel pose another equally clear conflict with ramifications for the future of Judaism. No doubt, the overall economic prosperity in the United States has had a positive effect on the prosperity of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, economic hardship in Israel, magnified in recent years by runaway inflation and by large balance-of-payments deficits, has given impetus for many native Israelis to leave the country of their birth. In the seventies and eighties several hundred thousand Israelis emigrated to America in search of the prosperity they saw in Jewish communities in the United States. The process of **yeridah** (going down, or emigrating, from Israel to the Diaspora) has created problems in Israel, as many talented citizens have left the country.

In Israel in the last decade, partly due to the emigration of many liberal Israelis, the policies of the government have become more nationalistic and conservative. It appears that the near future will bring greater internal political difficulties to the state of Israel and significant challenges to the Israeli system of proportional representation.

In this course we have seen again and again that Jewish history teaches many lessons of culture and courage, of crisis and creativity. Though scholars and statesmen may disagree about the future trends of the Jewish

people, all will surely agree that this people have survived and even thrived in times of challenge and crisis, and will continue to do so.

Study Questions

1. What were some crucial events in the recent history of the state of Israel?
2. In what ways does Israel serve as a symbol for the American Jew?
3. How does Israel affect the actions of American Jews?
4. What is the situation of Soviet Jews?
5. What conflicting trends can be identified in American Jewry?

Appendix A: Assignments and Exams for Each Lesson

1. Reading *Way of Torah*, chs. 1-2.

Written Assignment: Why do scholars divide the study of Judaism into periods?

2. Reading: *Way of Torah*, chs. 3-4

Life of Torah, chs. 1-3

Optional: "Heritage," tape 1

Written Assignment: Discuss three components of the ancient Israelite world that define later Judaic belief and practice.

3. Reading: "The Hellenistic Age"

Optional: "Heritage," tape 2

Written Assignment: Describe three cultural or literary developments of the Hellenistic period. Give one illustration of how Jews accepted Hellenistic influences and one example of how they resisted Hellenistic reform.

4. Reading: *Way of Torah*, chs. 5-16

Life of Torah, chs. 12-14

Invitation to the Talmud, chs. 1, 4

There We Sat Down, chs. 1-3

Optional: "Heritage," tape 3

Written Assignment: What was the role of a Rabbi in antiquity? What is the nature of the Talmud and how does it relate to the written Torah of ancient Israel and especially to its laws?

5. Reading: *Way of Torah*, chs. 17-18

Supplementary readings: "Philosophy, commentaries, codes"

Optional: "Heritage," tape 4-5

Written Assignment: Why is the work of Maimonides or Halevi important to the history of Judaism?

Midcourse Examination: Explain the origins and early development of rabbinic Judaism as a system and its main components.

6. Reading: *Way of Torah*, chs. 19-20

Life of Torah, chs. 15-34

Supplementary readings: "Mysticism, Hasidism, Musar, and the Yeshiva"

Optional: "Heritage," tape 6

Written Assignment: (a) Define Jewish mysticism and describe how two of its major trends in the **Zohar** and in **Lurianic kabbalah** provided the Jews with hope in the intense persecutions of the late Middle Ages. (b) Explain how the Reform movement and the **Musar** tradition responded in different ways to the new situations of the people as Jewish civilization confronted modernity.

8. Reading: *Way of Torah*, chs. 25-27

Life of Torah, chs. 35-44

American Judaism, pp. 15-86

Optional: "Heritage," tape 7

Written Assignment: What are the main philosophical concerns of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism respectively?

9. Reading: *American Judaism*, Introduction; ch: "Holy Torah"

Optional: "Heritage," tape 8

Written Assignment: How do at least two different forms of Judaism come to grips with the Holocaust and with the historical sufferings of the Jews?

10. Reading: *American Judaism*, last chapter

Life of Torah, chs. 45-47

Optional: "Heritage," tape 9

Written Assignment: In what ways does the modern state of Israel serve as a symbol for the Jews of America?

Final Examination

Directions For this exam, you have to write a 3 to 5 page essay (1200 word maximum) in response to the Exam Subject given below. Before you begin your essay, review the directions concerning the "Final Examination" given in the Course Information section of this Study Manual. Be sure to put your name, the name of this course, and the words "Final Exam" on each sheet of paper you use. Also, attach a lesson form to your Final Exam essay when you send it in for evaluation.

Exam Subject

Discuss ways that modern American Judaism brings together elements of the Jewish heritage from various periods of its development.

- Give an example of an important idea or institution from each of the following time periods--biblical, rabbinic, and medieval--that has been adopted by modern Jews.
- Show how modern Judaism accounts in new ways for the situation of Jews in the contemporary world.
- Include in your discussion Jewish responses to the events of the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel.

APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

LESSON 1: Periods of Jewish History

Schwartz, Leo, **Great Ages and Idea of the Jewish People**, 1956.
Finkelstein, Louis, ed., **The Jews: Their History**, 1980.

LESSON 2: The Bilical Heritage of Judaism

Kaufman, Yehezkel, **The Religion of Israel**, 1969.
Bright, John, **A History of Israel**, 3rd ed., 1981.

LESSON 3: The Hellenistic Age

Bickerman, E. J., **From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees**, 1975.
Russell, D. S., **Between the Testaments**, 1965.

LESSON 4: The Rabbinic Tradition

Neusner, J., **From Politics to Piety**, 1973.
_____, **There We Sat Down**, 1978.
_____, **Invitation to the Talmud**, 2nd ed., 1984.

LESSON 5: The Jews of Europe

Anthology, **Three Jewish Philosophers**, 1976.
Twersky, I., **A Maimonides Reader**, 1976.

LESSON 6: From Mysticism to Modernity

Scholem, G., **Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism**, 1954.
_____, **Sabbetai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah**, 1975.
Katz, J., **Exclusiveness and Tolerance**, 1962.
Weiner, Herbert. **9-1/2 Mystics**.

LESSON 7: The New Judaisms

Hertzberg, A., **The Zionist Idea**, 1975.
Elon, A., **Herzl**, 1975.
Goldin, J., ed., **The Jewish Expression**, 1976. (Esp. chs. 10-18).

LESSON 8: Judaism in America

Glazer, N. **American Judaism**, 1972.
Neusner, J., **American Judaism: Adventure in Modernity**, 1978.
Howe, I., **World of Our Fathers**, 1976.

LESSON 9: The Mass Murder of European Jewry

Dawidowicz, L., **The War Against the Jews**, 1976.
Rosenbaum, I., **The Holocaust and Halakhah**, 1976.

Neusner, J., **Understanding Jewish Theology**, 1973.

LESSON 10: Understanding Contemporary Judaism

Neusner, J., **Stranger at Home**, 1981.

Elon, A., **The Israelis**, 1978.

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTED FURTHER STUDY

Refer to the following list for courses that complement the information covered in each lesson. The courses are offered by the College of Liberal Arts and, if marked with an *, Extension Independent Study.

Lesson 2: The Biblical Heritage of Judaism

Hebrew (Hebr), all levels
Ancient Israel (ANEJ)
The Bible (ANEJ)
A Book of the Bible (Hebr)
Modern Study of the Old Testament (ANEJ)
Ancient Near Eastern Texts in Translation (ANEJ)

Lesson 3: The Hellenistic Age

Ancient Israel: The Hellenistic Period (ANEJ)
The Bible: Wisdom, Poetry, & Apocalyptic (ANEJ)
The Dead Sea Scrolls (ANEJ)

Lesson 4: The Rabbinic Tradition

Judaism in the Time of Early Christianity (JwSt)
Mishnah and Midrash in Translation (JwSt)
Rabbinic Texts (Hebr)
Talmudic Texts (Hebr)

Lesson 5: The Jews of Europe and Lesson 6: From Mysticism to Modernity

Judaism in the Middle Ages (JwSt)
Medieval Hebrew Literature (Hebr)
*Jewish-Christian Relations (Hist)

Lesson 7: The New Judaisms and Lesson 8: Judaism in America

*Modern Judaism (JwSt)
Modern Hebrew Essay (Hebr)
Comparative Sociology of Jewish Communities (JwSt)

Lesson 9: The Mass Murder of European Jewry

*The Holocaust (Jwst)

Lesson 10: Understanding Contemporary Judaism

Modern Hebrew Poetry (Hebr)
Modern Hebrew Short Story (Hebr)
Contemporary Israeli Literature in Translation (JwSt)
Middle Eastern Politics (PolS)