

Modern Judaism

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Edited by

Nicholas de Lange
Miri Freud-Kandel

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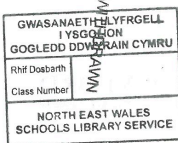
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Ruth Langer

Introduction

Traditional Judaism integrates the holy into every aspect of life. Consequently, prayer and the synagogue represent only one, not particularly privileged, subset of Jewish sacred activities and locations. Other activities, like Torah study, being charitable, or even eating, and other places, like the study hall or the home, are also sacred. However, the Christian world's stricter separation of sacred and secular spaces and activities meant that the synagogue took a leading role in Judaism's move into modernity. If Jews and Judaism were to be accepted as legitimate parts of western society, then public Jewish religious life, to which Christians would first look in characterizing Judaism, needed to be 'presentable' in Christian eyes. Beginning in some places as early as the eighteenth century, this concern resulted in a far-reaching set of revolutions in public and private Jewish ritual life, the impact of which still reverberates today. Affecting mostly Western Europe (and its colonies), the New World, the large cities of Eastern Europe and the Arab world, and Israel, these changes neither occurred in all places nor did they occur uniformly in any one place or at any one time. In many cases, the transformations in more traditional settings were responses to the challenges raised by liberal reforms. The analysis that follows characterizes mostly the experiences of pre-Holocaust Western Europe and America, and contemporary America and Israel. It needs to be understood within the larger history of the modern movements of Judaism.

The aesthetics of the synagogue

Christian visitors to a typical pre-modern Jewish synagogue would not have comprehended most of what they encountered. Although local architectural and decorative norms often influenced the building's style, its iconography was distinctively Jewish. That the liturgy was entirely in Hebrew would not have been so strange to Catholics accustomed to the Latin Mass, but Protestants would have noticed the absence of vernacular worship. A member of the congregation, not clergy, led the

services, generally with minimal musical sophistication, especially on weekdays. For most parts of the service this man stood directly before and below the ark containing the Torah scrolls, in a deliberately humble position. Like the Catholic priest before the twentieth-century liturgical reforms, he stood with his back to the congregation, but he did so for the entire liturgy, acting as the congregation's representative before God rather than its spiritual leader. The synagogue's seating also spoke to his relative unimportance. Rather than the forward-facing formal pews characteristic of western churches, many synagogues oriented their seating towards the raised platform located in the middle of the synagogue floor, from which the Torah was read. Most striking to the visitor, particularly in an Ashkenazi synagogue, would have been the lack of decorum. Many worshipers arrived after the service started, prayed at their own pace, and studied or wandered around visiting friends during the service. Although the congregation would join the prayer-leader for certain prayers, particularly for special holiday rituals, this would not have overridden the outsider's general impression of strangeness, cacophony, controlled confusion, and lack of reverence.

In many communities, first steps towards modernization of the synagogue addressed these perceptions. To do so required only superficial alterations that did not contradict—and often were supported by—the laws (*halakhah*) governing the conduct of the liturgy. A trained cantor could lead the prayers, improving their general performance as well as their musical aesthetics. A men's choir could accompany him, often enhanced by the addition of pre-adolescent boy sopranos. Congregations insisted on greater personal decorum, quieting the gossipers, limiting their wandering, and encouraging greater focus on the prayers. Reconfiguration of the synagogue space to conform more closely to public religious spaces in the greater community encouraged this enhanced decorum. Congregants could sit in rows, facing the front of the building, often even in pews as in a church. Some synagogues placed increased visual emphasis on those leading the prayers, moving more activities to the front of the synagogue and creating elaborate elevated lecterns, often still situated below and before an ornate and even more elevated ark. Once granted rights of residence in leading European cities, Jews built grand synagogues that accommodated and even demanded such changes. The newly emancipated Jews rejoiced in their citizenship in European societies and sought to lessen those factors that marked them as different.

Other changes challenged not just customs of Jewish prayer, but the actual laws governing it. No matter how good a cantor and choir, the musical expression of a traditional synagogue could not rival that of a church, where instrumental music and mixed-gender choirs provided a richer variety and sophistication. Among the earliest issues of synagogue reform was the introduction of an organ and of women singers—and the styles of music appropriate to them. Various aspects of instrumental music, permitted during the week, violate the traditional laws of Sabbaths and holidays, the occasions of the most elaborate liturgies. The strict separation of the sexes in traditional Judaism includes a prohibition on men's listening to women's singing. While

some communities tried to answer these halakhic concerns and make changes—sometimes by employing only Gentiles to provide music—for others this became a locus for public rejection of tradition and definition of themselves as modern and open to reforms. As musical tastes changed, some congregations, particularly in America, broadened this musical repertoire to include other instruments, including, in recent decades, the guitar. All Reform congregations permit both musical instruments and female vocalists. No Orthodox congregations allow either. Between these extremes exists a spectrum of practices. Increasingly, Conservative congregations do not use musical instruments on the Sabbath, but do not differentiate between male and female vocalists. In all cases, the shifting musical norms of the surrounding cultures have penetrated, to greater and lesser degrees, the melodies of the synagogue.

The location of people in the synagogue created some other issues. Traditionally, men and women sit separately, with a barrier separating them physically and visually. Generally, women were in a balcony or on the periphery of the main floor. While in Europe this differed little from Gentile customs, American churches had developed the concept of family pews. American Reform Jews adopted mixed seating, first as a matter of convenience when, in 1851, an Albany congregation purchased a church equipped with pews, but this quickly became a matter of ideology. Mixed seating spread as far as some left-wing Orthodox congregations in the United States (these congregations usually designated three sections, only one of which was mixed), but by the close of the twentieth century separate seating had become one of the defining factors of an Orthodox service. Few synagogues continue compromise seating today.

Building a grand synagogue created another practical challenge: making the liturgy audible. One solution was for the prayer-leader to turn around and face the community. However, traditionally, certain key prayers must be physically directed to the Jewish world's center of holiness in Jerusalem, and synagogue architectural norms dictated that the Torah ark be placed on the Jerusalem-facing wall. A prayer-leader facing the congregation would have his back to both the ark and Jerusalem. Nineteenth-century Reformers found theological justifications for this change. They rejected the messianic hope for an ingathering of the exiles and the reconstitution of the Jewish state. They also rejected the ongoing holiness of the site of the Jerusalem Temple. Instead, they understood themselves to be loyal citizens of their countries of residence; true holiness was present in all synagogues. Confining God to a particular locale made little philosophical sense. Consequently, if the available synagogue site made orienting the sanctuary to Jerusalem awkward, some communities abandoned the traditional geographical direction of prayer altogether. Eventually, the invention of the microphone and then the rise of Zionism made this theological shift less necessary. However, because microphones generate an electrical current, considered by most traditional Jews to be a form of fire and hence prohibited on the Sabbath, this too became a dividing line between Orthodox and more liberal congregations. In liberal communities some prayer-leaders do pray facing the ark for at least part of the service today.

The aggregate of these changes radically transformed the aesthetics of the synagogue service. From a participatory community of individuals, each with primary responsibility for fulfilling his or her own prayer obligations, loosely led by the prayer-leader, the congregation became more of an audience sitting politely and passively through a ritual performed by professionals. To answer the need for congregational participation, liberal Jews crafted responsive readings. Unlike the litanies of the church, where the congregation responds fervently with the same response (or set of responses) to each line, most Jewish responsive readings divided translations of traditional prayers into sentences recited alternately by the reader and the congregation. Such readings became a standard part of Reform liturgies and a frequent phenomenon for English prayers in Conservative synagogues as well. Israeli liberal liturgies also adopted this mode of congregational prayer. Deeper education in Hebrew and encouragement of communal recitation of English prayers is now increasing participation in many synagogues.

Reaction to these changes—other than their rejection outright by the most traditional Jews—emerged in the latter decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the Haverah movement, that strove to recapture much of the atmosphere of the traditional synagogue without necessarily sacrificing other liberal ideals. These deliberately smaller prayer communities (*havurot*) encourage universal participation, congregational rather than performed singing, and informal seating, often in the round. In imitation, many liberal synagogues built in recent decades feature flexible seating, smaller and less hierarchical worship spaces for more intimate services, congregant-led services, and less formal music. Decorum persists, but it is decidedly more ethnically Jewish. The explosion of Jewish folk music, inspired by Israeli and neo-Hasidic culture, has affected most parts of the Jewish world, including many Orthodox synagogues. Most contemporary Jews seek spiritual engagement, not Teutonic awe and reverence.

Evolving ritual roles

These aesthetic changes caused alterations in the roles of the various players in the synagogue service. Mixed seating moved women from the physical periphery into the centre of activity. As women gained access to education, and as suffragism grew into modern feminism, women gradually became less accepting of peripheral ritual roles. Traditional separation of the sexes meant that women were never called to the Torah, never served as a prayer-leader, never became rabbis, and exceedingly rarely became synagogue presidents. By the early twentieth century liberal Jews had accepted, in principle, that nothing excluded women from these roles, but only with the general calls of the 1960s for equal rights and roles in the greater society did this begin to penetrate the synagogue reality. Today, in liberal settings, women assume all ritual roles. In the Orthodox world public segregation of the sexes in worship remains an

absolute legal norm. However, some communities address the challenges raised by feminism by reconfiguring the synagogue space so that the women's section is not peripherally located; by developing separate women's services at which women lead prayers and read Torah; by encouraging women to engage in serious study and teaching of traditionally men's texts; and by welcoming women's lay leadership in non-ritual matters. In all these settings, the traditional prayer that God bless 'this holy congregation . . . them, their wives, sons and daughters and all that is theirs' no longer describes the reality: the congregants now have husbands too. In all but the Orthodox world, since 1972 women have become rabbis and cantors.

These changes helped reshape the roles of synagogue professionals. Rabbis and cantors existed in pre-modern communities, although their presence was not a prerequisite for public prayer. The cantor (*hazzan*) functions as a professional prayer-leader, expected to be an expert in the intricacies of the liturgy and its musical presentation. Thus, communities preserving the traditional Hebrew liturgy but lacking Jewishly educated men often hired a cantor before a rabbi, giving the cantor a ministerial title. The aesthetic changes discussed above also led to a professionalization of the cantorate. Competition with Christian liturgical music required the cantor to have musical sophistication. This, together with grander synagogues, required operatic-quality voices. Decorum meant that congregants paid attention to the cantorial performance. The aesthetics of the musical performance of the prayers and the aesthetics of the synagogue structure were deeply entwined. However, this change also led to the diminishment of the cantor in some liberal settings. There, organs and choirs took over the musical responsibilities. With the turn to spoken rather than chanted vernacular prayers, the cantor's expertise became dispensable. Thus, by the turn of the twentieth century, while some synagogues adopted elaborate cantorial musical styles, others eliminated the cantor entirely, handing non-musical ritual tasks to the rabbi. While in more traditional settings cantors or lay prayer-leaders retain responsibility for the performance of the liturgy, in more liberal settings the interface between the liturgical roles of cantor and rabbi remains rather fluid, differing greatly from one synagogue to another. Although cantors traditionally learned their craft by apprenticeship, a need to professionalize and revitalize the cantorate has resulted in the American movements' post-Holocaust turn to investiture of cantors by schools associated with their seminaries.

Modernity transformed the rabbi's ritual role even more dramatically. The pre-modern rabbi was a teacher and a legal decisor for his community. If he led prayers, it was simply as a member of the community. Most preached only twice a year, on the Sabbaths before Passover and the Day of Atonement. Frequently his primary appointment was by the community rather than a specific synagogue within that community. Along with the modernization of the synagogue arose a demand that rabbis take on roles more similar to that of Christian clergy. They became pastors to their flock, expected to minister in times of joy and sadness, and, most importantly, to preach frequently and well. In liberal synagogues the rabbi became the chief liturgical

officiant, leading the performance of spoken prayers, vernacular and Hebrew, and reading Torah. More so than the cantor, many rabbis came to see themselves and be seen as embodiments of holiness, set apart from the rest of the community in priestly manner. Although Orthodox rabbis did not take over the leading of services, and legal leadership of their community remained a significant part of their roles, they too found themselves now ministering and preaching, at least in the Diaspora. While Orthodox women may not become rabbis, they do share in these new pastoral and educational roles.

The prayers themselves: vernacular language, changing theologies

The Christian visitor to the pre-modern European synagogue could perhaps comment on its aesthetics, but could not comprehend the statements of its liturgy, not only because then it was entirely in Hebrew with a smattering of Aramaic, but also because its theological assumptions and structure bore little resemblance to that with which he was familiar. The formal structure and basic theological content of that liturgy dated to early rabbinic times, around the end of the first century CE. The precise wording of the prayer book, encoded by law and tradition, had evolved more gradually, but had changed little from the end of the first millennium. It had become mandatory to recite a virtual torrent of words, lasting for about two hours on an ordinary Sabbath and much longer on holidays. Daily prayers were shorter, but primarily because they were recited even faster.

However, the aesthetic changes that modernity introduced into the synagogue included calls for shorter services and vernacular prayer. Challenged by the need to construct a liturgical experience that would attract assimilating Jews and prevent their conversion to Christianity (a significant problem in early nineteenth-century Germany), reform-minded leaders complied. The result, though, was much more far-reaching.

Some have described the Jewish prayer book as anthological. Throughout history, Jews had addressed new liturgical needs by adding to the prayers. As Jakob J. Petuchowski observed, though, one generation's spontaneous prayer became the next generation's fixed required prayer. Shortening the service meant a revolutionary upset of this dynamic, an elimination of 'required' prayers. To do this in a meaningful fashion meant establishing criteria by which to judge the contents of the received prayer book. Ideally, on the model of the Protestant Reformation, Reformers could retrieve some 'original' form of the prayers. However, modern Jewish liturgical scholarship and its search to reconstruct early liturgy was, at best, in its infancy. The Talmudic-era library preserves only occasional discussions of prayer texts; our earliest liturgical manuscripts date only from the end of the first millennium, and these

were only discovered at the very close of the nineteenth century. To the extent that early Reformers used this method, they discerned which prayers were more essential and preserved them before others.

The call for vernacular prayer generated another mode of liturgical reform. The evolved Jewish liturgical texts are highly poetic, constructed of a Hebrew in which almost every word alludes to a biblical verse or a rabbinic concept. They are open to multiple interpretations. The sheer volume of words forces the worshipper to privilege some words and concepts over others, unpacking some poetry and letting some slip by. This is fundamentally untranslatable. A translator, no matter how adept, must choose a particular single meaning, ignoring most poetic valencies. Consequently, there were few translations of the prayer book before this period, and most of these were more commentaries to aid less educated traditional Jews participate in the Hebrew prayers.

In contrast, translations meant to be used as the synagogue's primary prayer texts must be theologically appropriate and aesthetically pleasing. Nuances culturally specific to their Hebrew context can become embarrassments in a modern European language. Once the prayer is in the vernacular, its content must convey the right impressions, both to the non-Jew and the assimilated Jew. Consequently, on a number of levels, vernacular prayer raised a new set of challenges, ultimately leading to much more radical changes in liberal liturgies. Translation effectively moved Jewish liturgy from a Jewish cultural context into a western cultural context, with its consequent demands.

Early nineteenth-century German Reformers were very conscious of living in new times. The first forays into aesthetic changes in the synagogue had pre-dated Jewish emancipation. This new situation demanded more coherent, theologically grounded moves to fit into western society. Reformers therefore rejected increasingly explicitly anything that contradicted their understanding of the 'truths of religion', especially any allusion to Jews' being in exile from the Land of Israel. They eliminated prayers for a messianic return there, for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple, and the creation of a Jewish state under messianic Davidic rule. They also eliminated most references to Jewish particularism and any negative references to Gentiles. If Jews truly believed that they were at home in Europe, and if they wanted Christians to accept this unhesitatingly, they could not in good conscious even want to pray for a change in circumstance. Theological changes of this sort, which introduced new meanings and language for canonized prayer texts, received an added boost from the burgeoning scientific study of Judaism, especially from Leopold Zunz's attempt to reconstruct original prayer texts in his book on Jewish preaching (*Die gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden*, 1832). This suggested that the apparent stability of Jewish liturgy was illusory, and that there had been significant change since the original compositions of the prayers. If so, contemporary Jews could justifiably adapt the texts to suit their changed circumstances.

Literally hundreds of liberal liturgies have been published in the past two centuries, both by national movements and by individual rabbis and congregations. These

represent a vast spectrum: from minimal changes in the earliest years of reform; to prayer books with no or almost no Hebrew, that barely preserve recognizably any structures of the traditional liturgy; to retrieval of traditional structures and prayers; and, most recently, to transliterated Hebrew texts, encouraging congregational participation. Prayer books also reflect the intellectual currents and historical experiences of their times. During the peak of nineteenth-century rationalism, Reformers eliminated hints of the supernatural. Prayer books published in the 1960s and 1970s added reflections on the Holocaust and began to celebrate the State of Israel. Feminism and egalitarian language, first about humans and then about God, appeared in the 1980s. These more recent prayer books also admit to a search for spirituality and to non-rational approaches to God. Even humanism, a Judaism without God, finds its place in the 1975 American Reform prayer book *Gates of Prayer*, but alongside nine other services, each representing a distinct theology. Typical of the America of that time, this prayer book represents an 'anything goes' approach to Judaism and Jewish worship. Revised editions of it, its successor in the works, and liberal prayer books published in England and Israel, have reduced the numbers of options. In general, they point to a selective retrieval of tradition and a greater comfort with Jewish particularism, reflecting the development of a truly modern Jewish, Hebrew-speaking culture in Israel, and the Holocaust's message that Jews cannot escape antisemitism by blending in.

Reform Judaism's destabilization of the liturgy challenged its neighbours to respond. Modern Orthodoxy continues to teach that the received prayers are legally non-negotiable. However, this does not apply to the poetic embellishments to these prayers. Accepting a late medieval Sephardi legal argument that liturgical poetry interrupts and hence invalidates required prayers, the nineteenth-century Orthodox Ashkenazi Jewish communities also shortened their liturgies. Today most traditional Jews only retain this poetry on the High Holy Days. Many also added weekly sermons to enhance the intellectual quality of the services. Although many Orthodox prayer books include vernacular translations, these are often too infelicitous for actual public prayer.

Conservative Judaism did not produce many identifiable liturgical changes until, with the growth of the movement, it began in 1927 to publish its own liturgies in the United States. The 1946 *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* presents a very traditional liturgy, but designed many translations and new English prayers for actual use, sometimes as responsive readings. More significantly, the editors, especially where they could find precedents in older liturgies, retrieved versions of prayers that they found theologically more appropriate. Therefore, some prayers ask for peace for all the world, not just for Israel; the additional service, instead of praying for the restoration of sacrifices, simply recalls their offering in the past. The movement's current prayer book, *Sim Shalom*, perpetuates these changes, makes more allowances for English prayer, and makes the prayers for peace all pray for universal peace. In addition, its most recent 1998 version adds egalitarian language in English and an optional reference to matriarchs along with the patriarchs in the *avot*, a key paragraph of the prayers.

A full survey of the liturgical variants of the past two centuries, even in Germany and America, let alone in Israel, England, and other western communities, is impossible in this space. All make liturgical decisions according to the theological, historical, and aesthetic challenges discussed here, placing themselves along the spectra of tradition versus innovation, Jewish versus western cultural identity, and theological particularism versus universalism.

Rationalism and mysticism

Translation of Hebrew prayer into the vernacular presupposed a rationally accessible text in which the words, in their simple, obvious meanings, transmitted the ideas of the prayer. These ideas, then, could readily transfer from Hebrew to a modern European language without significant loss of content. However, in the history of Jewish liturgy this had not, for centuries, been an obvious assumption. Jewish mystics, beginning at least in the traditions of the Rhineland Hasidei Ashkenaz recorded and preserved in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, continued by the various schools of kabbalist mystics, and reshaped yet again by the modern Hasidic masters beginning in the eighteenth century, had understood the prayers to operate on other levels too. Prayers recited properly, that is, with the correct words, in Hebrew, and with correct intention, had positive impact on the divine realms. The true meaning of the prayers lay not in the dictionary meaning of their words, but in their cosmic impact. While for centuries this approach to prayer was esoteric knowledge confined to the mystic adept, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries parts of this system were increasingly common practice, shaping the communal perception of the meaning of prayer. Indeed, the fixed prayer texts of Jewish liturgy retained their vitality precisely because of the communities' abilities to infuse them with new and timely meanings. Particularly important in the early modern period was the sense that, through prayer (and proper performance of the commandments in general), Jews might be able to affect the course of history and bring the Messiah. This understanding was and is characteristic of much of modern Hasidism and ultra-Orthodox Judaism, and thus remains a piece of our portrait of Jewish worship in the modern period. Because the effectiveness of mystical meditation on prayer requires that the prayer texts be precisely correct in all respects, this also contributes to the resistance to liturgical modernization in these circles.

Prayer book commentaries give us a glimpse into this dynamic. From the medieval world we have inherited three genres of commentary: those providing halakhic commentary on correct performance of the prayers; those focusing on the literal meaning and derivations of the language of the prayer book; and those providing mystical insights. By the early modern period we find a preponderance of two genres: those providing philological and grammatical commentary, attempting to correct 'printers' errors', and kabbalistic commentaries. This suggests that the *meaning* of the prayer, for

large numbers of Jews, resided in its mystical import. By the nineteenth century a new dynamic arises, beginning in Germany: historical and rational commentary that utterly ignores and even rejects the mystical teachings. Even among Orthodox Jews the spirit of rationalism prevailed, replacing the commentaries of the mystically oriented Isaiah Horowitz and Jacob Emden with those of Wolf Heidenheim, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Seligman Baer.

In recent decades many modernized Jews have come to find rational approaches to prayer to be spiritually barren. While most have no desire or ability to re-access authentic kabbalistic approaches, various trends speak to a search for and a validation of less intellectual approaches to worship. Ironically, one expression of this desire to delve more deeply into the prayer book is the recent publication of many prayer books with significant commentary, much of which points the reader to the spiritual potential of the text. Notable on this account is the new prayer book series from the American Reconstructionist movement, entitled *Kol Haneshamah*. Another expression of this trend is the movement towards more participatory services with the inclusion of Hasidic-inspired music. The melodies of Shlomo Carlebach, a neo-Hasid, shape Orthodox and Reform liturgies alike. Crowded Carlebach *minyanim* (prayer quorums) are widespread, with Sabbath services significantly extended by meditative communal singing. Particularly in liberal contexts, Jews are also experimenting with the use of meditation within worship contexts.

Non-liturgical prayer

To this point we have discussed exclusively the scripted, halakhically mandated worship of God that constitutes the liturgy of the synagogue. The Jewish tendency to fixed liturgy was such that even those places in the liturgy initially designated for private supplication had been scripted by the high middle ages. Personal incidental prayer penetrated the formal liturgy only on its margins, if at all, and it is only starting to be part of the normative discourse of Jewish liturgical scholars. Some of the interest in private prayer arises from the interest in the history of women's spirituality. Because women were largely marginalized in the synagogue, they frequently developed other loci of spiritual expression deserving of our attention.

Where Christians, especially Protestants, expect that one should be able to generate an extemporaneous prayer to fit any occasion, this model never penetrated deeply into the Jewish world. Even where Reform liturgies imitated Protestant models and deviated far from traditional forms, rabbis scripted and published the new texts. While Judaism certainly never discourages private prayerfulness, it does not particularly encourage it either. Where even minimally literate women developed their own times for prayer, they too scripted these prayers. Unlike official synagogue prayers, though, when times changed these prayers could be jettisoned or rescripted.

The nature of traditional women's prayerful expression varied greatly. In some communities women learned Hebrew and recited the traditional liturgy. In others, women's education focused on Yiddish or a European language; although women attended the synagogue, at least on important days, they could not follow the service. Elsewhere, especially among Jews from Muslim countries, women were totally illiterate and took no role in synagogue life. Particularly in this last group, a non-scripted, action-oriented women's spirituality developed, centred around rituals like candle-lighting, visiting tombs, and food preparation. In Europe women developed their own verbal prayer texts that were, at least eventually, recorded and published. These prayers accompany rituals specific to women, especially candle-lighting and fertility-related rites, but also include many prayers for recitation in the synagogue in parallel to, but quite distinct from, the official liturgy of the institution.

With modernization, these prayers largely lost their force. Fanny Neuda's German 'translation' in the mid-nineteenth century, *Stunden der Andacht* (Hours of Devotion), translates not the words but rather the entire world-view, from a rich, folksy Yiddish spirituality to a German rationalism. This genre remains a rich source of creativity. In many corners of today's Jewish world new collections of liturgical suggestions for 'women's' moments emerge frequently. These collections include not only parallels to established men's life-cycle rituals, but they also celebrate previously ignored moments unique to women's lives, like weaning and menopause.

Conclusion

The contemporary synagogue continues to address the evolving challenges of modernity. Thus, contemporary Jewish communities do not answer precisely the same questions as their ancestors two centuries ago. Feminism, the search for spirituality, or negotiation with Israeli culture were unimaginable then, but shape Jewish religious life today. However, the fundamental question remains: how can Jewish religious life be a harmonious piece in the larger cultural quilt of the civilized world without giving up its authenticity? In seeking to answer this question, Jews have evolved a diverse richness of answers that shape the shifting textures of their public and private religious lives.

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