

Europe. Within a few years of Gutenberg's invention of movable type, printed prayer books were circulating. Among the incunabula (books printed prior to 1500) one finds many *siddurim*, primarily Spanish and Italian. Jews became very active in the printing business after 1500 and Hebrew printing enjoyed a lively boom.

As we have seen, the liturgy came into its present form through a process of accretion, of accumulation, with new prayers, poems, and hymns being added over a period of some two thousand years. Until the nineteenth century, no one had challenged this process or its result. But several events took place in Europe in the early part of the century that would lead to a radical disruption of this process, changing the shape of Judaism forever.

## THE RISE OF DENOMINATIONS

### REFORM JUDAISM

The rise of the Enlightenment in Europe with its flood of new ideas like tolerance, democracy, and the equality of man before the law made the climate for Jews in the Christian West a little less uncomfortable. The triumphant march of Napoleon's armies across the continent meant the forceable importation of the French Revolution's trio "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," into previously inhospitable locales. Napoleon was a firm supporter of the emancipation of Europe's Jews, another idea that he imposed on the countries he conquered.

The ideas of the Enlightenment had their own impact on Jewish thought as well. As we will see in several later chapters, Judaism experienced its own Enlightenment, called the *Haskalah*; one of the first and most influential thinkers to emerge from that period was the German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786). (Incidentally, his grandson was the composer Felix Mendelssohn, who was baptized as a Christian.) Although Mendelssohn himself never ceased to be an Orthodox Jew, his writings and thought had an incalculable impact on a group of German Jews who were rethinking the relationship between Judaism and modernity. Mendelssohn was a formidable advocate of the idea that Jews could live as free and equal citizens, that the ideas of Judaism could be understood in a rationalist context.

The Jews of the *Haskalah* were coming out from behind the ghetto

walls, seemingly forever. It was in that atmosphere that Israel Jacobson built and opened a new synagogue in Seesen, Westphalia, in 1810. When French occupying troops left Westphalia, Jacobson followed suit, moving his pulpit to Berlin in 1815. Three years later another congregation was established in Hamburg, using its own revised *siddur*.

Emancipation had meant an end to the special judicial power of local rabbis and Jewish community leaders who had served as political officials as well at the behest of absolutist Christian monarchs. As a result, Jacobson and the reformers in Hamburg could challenge the rule of the Orthodox rabbinate with impunity.

What did the early practitioners of Reform Judaism, as they called their new version of the old religion, believe and why did they enrage the Orthodox rabbinate?

First, they encouraged prayer in the local vernacular rather than in Hebrew, a way of diminishing the difference between them and their non-Jewish neighbors. Sermons were delivered in German, which traditional rabbis denounced as a violation of Jewish tradition. In 1832 Leopold Zunz, a scholar of considerable attainments, demonstrated that sermons in the local tongue were, in fact, the norm before the establishment of the ghettos in the late Middle Ages.

Second, men like Jacobson believed that their mission was to bring Judaism into line with modern thought, a mission that they took into the schools and seminaries. The "new" Jewish thinking held that rabbinical training should not be limited just to Talmud and Torah.

Jacobson and another prominent German Reform rabbi who would follow him, Abraham Geiger, came to believe that Judaism was an evolving process of belief, not a fixed set of historically mandated rules and regulations. The center of Judaism was the idea of ethical monotheism; now that Jews were no longer confined in literal and metaphorical ghettos, they needed to shift the focus of their liturgy away from nationalistic ideas like a return to Zion or the restoration of the Temple and animal sacrifice. They no longer needed to pray in Hebrew or to completely abstain from certain behaviors on Shabbat.

As Reform Judaism evolved in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, its practice came to resemble liberal German Protestantism. Services were conducted almost entirely in the local tongue, with minimal Hebrew. Prayers were led by a rabbi, spoken in unison, often responsively with the rabbi; no more of the "indecorous"

free-form of Orthodox worship. Organ music was introduced. The new music composed for Reform worship bore a striking resemblance to German Protestant hymns. (A key model of "decorum" for the German Reform congregations was the behavior of their Sephardic neighbors.) In England, Reform rabbis were even called "Reverend" and "ministers." Some Classical Reform congregations even went so far as holding their Shabbat services on Sundays.

The United States proved the most fertile ground for Reform Judaism. An egalitarian and tolerant society almost from its birth (in theory, if not always in practice), America lacked the infrastructure of a long-standing Orthodox tradition like Western Europe's. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, an immigrant from Bohemia, pioneered a specifically American brand of Judaism, one that would reconcile the variety of practices coming out of Europe. In 1857 Wise authored a new prayer book, *Minhag America*, and tried to devise a Jewish practice that would be suited to the New World.

Ironically, Wise found himself opposed by another German transplant, Rabbi David Einhorn, who was more concerned with reform of ritual practices than with finding an American voice for Jewish worship. In direct response to *Minhag America*, Einhorn devised his own prayer book, *Olat Tamid*, written mostly in German and omitting prayers for the restoration of animal sacrifice in the Temple, the return to Zion, and the resurrection of the dead. A controversy ensued over just how much and what kind of reform was needed. Eventually, after a series of conferences, the various Reform rabbis met in 1873 to establish the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), which remains the umbrella organization of Reform Judaism in America to this day. The Union's first priority was to establish its own rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College, in 1875 in Cincinnati. In 1885 a rabbinical conference headed by Wise but dominated by Kaufman Kohler, Einhorn's son-in-law, issued the "Pittsburgh Platform," a document that made a clear break between Reform Judaism and the *halakhic* past. (For the texts of all major platforms released by U.S. denominations, see Appendix 1.) The UAHC would adopt *The Union Prayer Book* in 1895, a *siddur* that drew heavily on Einhorn's model.

The new Judaism that Classical Reform advocated featured several telling changes. The *bimah* was moved from the center of the sanctuary to the front and was elevated, a change that was indicative of the

"Protestantization" of the role of the rabbi. The rabbi's weekly sermon was now given greater weight in the worship service, all the more so since once-a-week worship gradually became the norm rather than the exception. Where the *Amidah* had been the key prayer in the service, a prayer for which the congregation respectfully stood, Reform liturgy shifted its attention to the *Sh'ma*, a less particularistic prayer.

The turn-of-the-century Reform leadership hadn't reckoned on the tides of history. With the rise of Fascism in Europe and the accompanying tide of anti-Semitic atrocities around the world in the 1930s, the United States experienced an influx of Eastern European Jews who felt little affinity with Classical Reform. There was a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the Pittsburgh Platform within the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Reform movement's rabbinical organization. In 1937 the CCAR adopted the Columbus Platform; it represented an adjustment towards a somewhat more traditional Judaism. For example, while not calling for a renewed belief in the return to Zion, it did urge all Jews to recognize an obligation to aid in the building of Palestine as a Jewish homeland.

The Reform movement enjoyed explosive growth in the post-World War II years, the product of a post-Holocaust return to Judaism and the suburbanization of American Jewry with its concomitant financial prosperity. Between 1940 and 1980, the number of Reform congregations in the United States doubled. Hebrew Union College added New York, Los Angeles, and Jerusalem campuses, ordained women for the first time in 1975, and ordained its first Israeli student in 1980.

The most significant trend within the Reform movement in the past two decades, spurred by the then president of the UAHC, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, was a swing back towards more traditional observance in many key areas (accompanied by a new support for Zionism, once low on the Reform agenda). In the newest version of the movement's prayer book, *Gates of Prayer* (1975), and its High Holy Day prayer book, *Gates of Repentance* (1978), many of the prayers that had been omitted from the *Union Prayer Book* were restored. It should be noted that this new emphasis has gone hand-in-hand with the Classical Reform concern with a "prophetic" Judaism that is based firmly in action for social justice. Thus, more Hebrew was introduced into services at the same time that the *siddur* was being rewritten to include gender-neutral God-language.

Additionally, the UAHC and CCAR have encouraged more personal observance outside the confines of the synagogue. Under Schindler, the Reform movement has moved in a direction that encourages a greater emphasis on spirituality and has even broached the possibility of restoring many traditional practices without sacrificing its commitment to social action.

### CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

Zacharias Frankel had seen at first hand what Reform Judaism would mean for liturgy and worship. Frankel was head of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau at the same time that Abraham Geiger was serving as rabbi in that city. Frankel was anything but happy with what had transpired. A gifted scholar, he was dissatisfied with Orthodoxy's rejection of scientific study of sacred texts; for the Orthodox, the Torah and Talmud were the products of divine revelation, so a philological analysis of them was anathema. At the same time, Frankel was unhappy with the budding Reform movement's rejection of Jewish nationalism and its willingness to discard *mitzvot* of which it didn't approve.

What was needed, he reasoned, was a third way, a middle-ground approach that didn't reject *halakhah* but wasn't a slave to it. Judaism, he asserted, was not the ahistorical product of revelation at Sinai; it had evolved over time. Yet its traditions were worthy of preservation, and Jewish nationalistic impulses had to be respected, particularly in an age when new nation-states were forming all the time to accommodate the longings of other peoples.

Frankel's anxieties on this matter undoubtedly came to a head when he stormed out of a conference dominated by the young Reform movement in 1845. He argued that changes in liturgy and worship practice shouldn't be made simply to conform to the mores of the day. He offered instead what he called "Positive Historical Judaism." Within eleven years of his completion of his tenure at the seminary in Breslau in 1875, his ideas would find a permanent home in the United States.

A group of scholars and rabbis of traditional bent who were dismayed by the Pittsburgh Platform decided to establish their own Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), this one in New York City. Initially, led by Sabato Morais, they had hoped to unite all the traditionalist elements in American Judaism in opposition to the rising tide of Reform. Perhaps

they cast their net a bit too wide to accommodate such a disparate group of men; whatever the reason, the seminary faltered, struggling along until 1902, when Rabbi Solomon Schechter took over.

Schechter succeeded where his predecessors had not. JTS became a home of distinguished scholars and a training ground for a body of new rabbis and cantors who espoused what he called "historical" Judaism, a name it would eventually shed in exchange for Conservative Judaism. Like Morais before him, Schechter hoped to make the Conservative umbrella big enough to encompass a wide range of observant Jews and, in fact, to this day there is a broad spectrum of degrees of observance within Conservative Judaism.

The movement was a perfect answer to the needs and changing demographics of the American Jewish community. The new wave of Eastern European Jews arriving on the East Coast found the German Jews who constituted the bulk of the Reform movement too unwelcoming, but looked at Orthodoxy as a hangover from the world of pogroms and poverty that they had left behind. In the Conservative movement, they found a home that offered "authenticity" leavened by a modern, intellectual approach to faith. In the years after World War II, the Conservative movement enjoyed unprecedented growth and became—and remains today—the largest branch of American Judaism.

That success was not without its price.

Under the chancellorship of Gerson D. Cohen, JTS moved to more progressive positions on some key issues, dragging the lay leadership of the movement along. In 1955, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Conservative equivalent of the CCAR, allowed women to come to the *bimah* to read Torah. In 1973, women were to be counted toward a *minyan* and, in 1983, JTS admitted its first female students to both its rabbinical and cantorial programs. At a time when Orthodox Judaism in the United States was undergoing its own divisions, these changes in the Conservative movement created a left-right split and in the past decade some pro-feminist Modern Orthodox and the "right" wing of Conservative Judaism have pulled together in a small way. The result has been a new movement, the Union for Traditional Judaism, which established its own rabbinical seminary in Westchester in the mid-1990s.

Ironically, as Reform rabbis and lay leaders moved to embrace Zionism and Jewish nationhood and restored many rituals and prayers to their practice, the lines between Reform and Conservative have blurred

somewhat. In Israel, both the Reform and Conservative movements have had to fight, usually together, for acceptance in the face of staunch opposition from the ultra-Orthodox rabbis who control the state-religious nexus that includes the religious courts. At present, both movements remain small in the Jewish homeland, in startling contrast to their widespread membership in the United States and, to a slightly lesser extent, Great Britain (where Reform synagogues are called Liberal and Conservative synagogues are labeled Traditional).

## RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Although the Reform and Conservative movements have enjoyed their greatest success in the United States, each was born in Germany in the mid nineteenth century. Reconstructionism, by contrast, can honestly claim to be the only major stream of American Judaism to have come into existence in the United States. Indeed, the movement is little known outside America, although its influence in American Jewish thought vastly outweighs its small size (approximately three percent of affiliated American Jews belong to Reconstructionist congregations).

Its founder, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, is a figure who bridges every one of the four streams of American Judaism. Born in 1881, he was educated and began his career as an Orthodox rabbi. Becoming dissatisfied with Orthodoxy, he went on to a teaching position at Jewish Theological Seminary which he would hold for fifty-four years while also serving as the rabbi at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, a synagogue he founded in 1922 in New York City. Kaplan had a tremendous influence on the thinking of the post-World War II Reform movement and, of course, fathered Reconstructionism.

Ironically, as his biographer, Mel Scult has said, "Kaplan never intended to start a new movement within American Judaism. He wanted to shift the emphasis within the Conservative movement," to reconstruct what he saw as a religion that was not meeting the needs of American Jews.

For Kaplan, Judaism was not merely a religion or a nationality. It is, rather, an evolving religious civilization, a body of customs and folkways, history, language, and culture, a sense of attachment to Israel, an ethical worldview, all of which are informed and unified by a set of religious beliefs. Thus, the *mitzvot* are seen as part of an ethnography, a set

of customs that have changed in the past and which can be changed again, as each new generation brings its intelligence and experience to bear on them. The sacred texts, he said, are not the product of divine revelation but are the creation of the Jewish people. As such they represent four thousand years of Jewish aspirations towards God.

On the organizational level, Reconstructionism is the most democratic of all four movements of American Judaism. Reconstructionist rabbis are taught to strive for a breakdown of the hierarchical relationship between rabbinat and laity that exists even in the egalitarian world of Jewish worship. The synagogue is seen as a Jewish community center fulfilling a multitude of communal needs; indeed, it was Kaplan who first devised the idea of the Jewish Community Center (JCC), now a common feature of the Jewish-American landscape. And even more than Reform, Reconstructionism is deeply committed to gender equality. The *bat mitzvah* ceremony for twelve-year-old girls was created by Kaplan, and his daughter was the first young woman ever to go through it; Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) has been ordaining women since it opened its doors in 1967.

In terms of theology, Kaplan and his successors pushed the envelope even further than Reform in some important ways. Because Reconstructionism emerged from the Conservative movement and retained an attachment to many traditional practices—dietary laws, a considerable amount of Hebrew in the liturgy, men in *yarmulkes* (the Yiddish word for *kippot/skullcaps*)—Reconstructionist practice looks like Conservative practice. But the Reconstructionist *siddur*, *Kol Haneshamah*, is as gender-free as *Gates of Prayer*, and the movement rejects the concept of the Jews as the Chosen People (see sidebar, p. 73) and the idea of a personal Messiah. Indeed, in 1945 when the Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* was published in the United States, a group of Orthodox rabbis condemned it and held a public burning of copies.

The reach of Kaplan's ideas far exceeds the size of the movement he helped begin. Today, the *bat mitzvah* is a common feature of Reform and Conservative synagogue life, the synagogue as community center is the norm in those movements, and the *havurah*, the small prayer group as a self-sustaining organization, has been an integral part of the growth of Reconstructionism (and has helped revitalize the Conservative movement as well).

Intriguingly, the Reconstructionist movement has undergone a small

transformation. Kaplan described his successors as having turned the early

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transformation not unlike the one shaking up Reform Judaism. Where Kaplan devised a rationalist, intellectual version of Judaism, some of his successors, many of them current and former faculty members at RRC, have turned their sights back to the mystical side of Jewish thought, to the early Hasidic masters and spirituality.

## MODERN ORTHODOX

Before the *Haskalah*, there was no such thing as "Orthodox" Judaism. There were only Jews, non-Jews, and apostates. Although there were many different strains within Jewish liturgy and practice, every version of Judaism that was practiced in, say, 1600 would be instantly recognizable to a modern Jew as "Orthodox." But with the Enlightenment and the beginnings of Reform and the movements that came after it (and the rise, particularly in the United States, of another new phenomenon: the "secular" Jew), Orthodoxy was no longer the only kind of Judaism, it was merely one of several kinds of Judaism. Of course, the Orthodox didn't see it that way and, even now, many of them still believe that their way is the only legitimate carrier of Jewish identity and tradition.

With the advent of Reform Judaism, traditionally observant Jews characterized themselves as "Orthodox" for the first time. To their way of thinking, Reform Judaism was a betrayal of the very nature of Judaism, a direct affront to divine revelation by its rejection of *halakhah* in the form of dietary laws, dress, and the entire infrastructure of the liturgy. Conservative Judaism was no less inauthentic with its concern with scientific analysis of sacred texts and historical development of *halakhah*.

There were two ways to react to the forces of modernity that had spawned these new movements. One could withdraw from contact with the modern world and the non-Jewish world as much as possible, which is what much of the East European Jewish community did (aided immeasurably by the brutal anti-Semitism of the Polish and Russian regimes for whom emancipation of the Jews was utterly inconceivable). Or one could make some kind of reluctant peace with this new world, incorporating the values of modernity that were compatible with traditional Judaism.

The latter line of thought led to what is commonly known in the United States as Modern Orthodox (as distinct from "ultra-Orthodox" as some call it, or "Torah-true" as it proclaims itself) Judaism. Unlike

the other streams within Judaism, what separates Modern Orthodoxy from other paths of traditional belief is not rooted in liturgy or ritual practice. Rather, the aspects of Modern Orthodoxy that diverge from its ultra-Orthodox counterparts almost all concern the relationship between Orthodox Jews and the rest of society, including other Jews.

Generally, the Modern Orthodox believe in participation in the general culture of society; Yeshiva University, the foremost academic product of the movement, offers a full complement of academic courses. Modern Orthodox rabbis will participate in cross-denominational Jewish organizations with other, non-Orthodox rabbis. The Modern Orthodox are actively pro-Zionist, unlike many ultra-Orthodox groups who believe that there can only be a Jewish State when the Messianic Era comes. And, finally, Modern Orthodox interpretations of *halakhah*, while still adhering to the basic structures of Jewish religious-legal thought, are slightly more flexible than those of their predecessors.

### BA'AL TESHUVAH

The growing interest in spirituality in the United States has led to a relatively new phenomenon among American Jews, that of the *ba'al teshuvah* (pl. *ba'alei teshuvah*). This Hebrew term, which might be literally translated as "one who has returned," refers to a previously nonreligious or unaffiliated Jew who chooses to become traditionally observant. Orthodox synagogues have been making a special effort in recent years to attract these young men and women, often educated urban professionals, who are seeking a return to what they perceive as their religious roots. (Incidentally, in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek piece of slang, some Orthodox Jews will distinguish between B.T.s and F.F.B.s—*From/Traditionally "observant" From Birth.*)

In recent years, the Modern Orthodox have found themselves under extraordinary pressure from the right. The ultra-Orthodox communities enjoy certain clear demographic and social advantages: they have large families, discourage any interest in secular activities, and have been successful in establishing their own network of educational and social institutions. One result of this pressure has been the division that led to some pro-feminist Modern Orthodox joining with right-wing Conservatives to form the Union for Traditional Judaism. This is ironic, since it was the

ordination of women as rabbis and cantors that drove them out of the Conservative Movement. It is too soon to tell in what direction events will take Modern Orthodox Judaism, a movement whose future is at present uncertain. But other forces, right out of today's headlines, are shaking up Jewish worship from the opposite direction.

### HAVURAH

Living in an open and pluralistic society, American Jews are as influenced by the events of their time as anyone. The best example of how that influence can make itself felt in the sphere of ritual and worship is the birth in the late '60s of the *havurah* movement. Many young Jewish men and women raised in Conservative congregations were experiencing a disillusionment with the large and often impersonal synagogues of suburban America, a perhaps inevitable by-product of the movement's rapid post-World War II growth. As a natural outgrowth of the politics and counter-culture of the '60s, these young people attempted to create a new format for their worship, one that would accommodate their fervor, their seriousness, and their need for a more intimate religious experience.

The first of *havurot* (fellowships) was founded in Denver in 1967; it was a small and knowledgeable group of Jews who came together to worship collectively without the need of a rabbi or cantor. The next year, another *havurah*, this one structured more like a commune, was founded in the Boston suburb of Somerville; unlike the Denver group, the members of the Somerville *havurah* not only worshipped together, but lived together as well.

More recently, *havurot* have also been established within larger mainstream liberal congregations, usually with a considerable amount of autonomy granted by the larger parent body.

What made the *havurah* movement significant was not only that it enabled potentially alienated young Jews to find an outlet for their spiritual needs within Judaism at a time when many were experimenting with Eastern religions, cult groups, and other spiritual disciplines, but equally important, it became a birthing ground for many prominent Jewish intellectuals who emerged from *havurot* in the late 1970s and the 1980s to preach a newly revitalized Jewish spirituality. Influential books like the three *Jewish Catalogs* compiled by Michael and Sharon Strassfeld, and Paul Cowan's *An Orphan in History* came from the movement.