

In Conjunction with the

Jewish University in Cyberspace

A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE JEWS

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1 Introduction

Welcome to a new semester of J.U.I.C.E. and our course on Jewish cultural history. As always, feel free to e-mail questions or comments about any issues raised or that should have been and I will write back as quickly as possible.

By cultural history I mean the study of not what was done to the Jews but how the Jews understood their experiences and transmitted such understandings from one generation to the next and how subsequent generations then understood their heritage. This process, therefore, creates a reality that has an independence from any objective historical reality. In fact, much of the study of history in general and Jewish history in particular attempts to mine cultural creations in search of grains of historical truth, an approach that is often identified as positivism, or as the German historian Ranke described the study of history, “as it actually was,” “wie es eigentlich gewesen.” As part of this process, much that is considered false or distorted is jettisoned.

This course will eschew the positivistic approach to the cultural history of the Jews because many texts that seem to contain false information, inventive interpretations, or outright distortions in fact constitute true sources of history, reflecting the cultural developments and the mentalities of the periods in which they were produced as well as the people who produced them.

In other words, this is a course about the production and the transmission of Jewish memory based on the fundamental assumption that there is a big difference between history and memory. As the historian Collingwood said about history, “If it could be remembered, there would be no need for historians.” Thus the historian is not simply a caretaker of memories, but an active agent in understanding their construction, including what has been forgotten, repressed, or altered. Involved in the process of understanding the culture through criticism, interpretation, and reconstruction, the historian’s understanding cannot be far removed from her or his own values. Thus as both Croce and Voltaire have said, “All history is modern history.” This means that each generation records history in light of its own experiences and we continue to do so as well.

For this course I will draw on some of the basic texts of the Jewish experience from the Bible (Tanakh: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim, that is The Five Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings) to modern Israeli literature, as this body of material has been called, from Tanakh to Palmakh (the pre-state Jewish army in Palestine).

The Bible: Six Interpretations in Search of a Text and Author

This course begins with the Bible, not merely as the earliest strata in the bedrock of Jewish cultural development, but because each subsequent generation continued to project its own experiences and values on to the Bible, a work which to this day is embedded in almost all Jewish cultural creativity. To think that we can obtain an objective understanding of the meaning of the biblical text is either an act of religious faith or positivistic self-aggrandizement that overlooks the cultural developments that have connected each generation of Jews to the biblical text as a living work. As a living work it has been subject to anachronism, internalization, re-enactment, and much emotional energy. In this lecture I will take one biblical text, the stories of the Creation of the world, and present six different interpretations of it, showing both the divergencies among them as well as their interconnectedness.

(To follow this discussion, it would be best to have a Bible text in front of you, you can either pull one off your shelf, log on to one on line <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/diobiblical.html#bibles> or <http://bible.ort.org/bible/index/inx-pent.htm>, or check into a motel.)

I. The Peshat:

The simple, literal exposition of the story. Genesis chapters 1-3 basically contains two different versions of the Creation of the world. The first, 1:2-4a (meaning the first half of the verse), tells how God created the “heavens and the earth,” in that order, and then gives a well ordered description of a seven day procedure which moves from vegetation, to animal life, to humans, “male and female,” who are then placed in charge, to the Sabbath. In the second version, 2:4b-3:24, the Lord, as opposed to God, creates in a different arrangement that is much less ordered, “the earth and the heavens,” but places man first, then vegetation, then animals, and then woman. In this account there is no reference to the creation of day, night, seas, luminaries, or marine life. Here human beings have less control, although they get much more of the narrator’s attention.

A study of the peshat could note many of the literary aspects of the stories that are based on Hebrew word play and folk etymologies, such as human/earth (adam/adamah), man/woman (ish/ishah), clever/naked (arum/erumim). Another direction that could be taken in the study of the peshat is a comparison with other descriptions of Creation found elsewhere in the Bible, an intertextual reading. For example, Job 38:1-11 contains references to the following order of Creation: the earth, its cornerstone, the morning stars, the sons of God, the doors of the sea, clouds, and darkness. Proverbs 5:22-28 presents another order: wisdom, the beginning of the earth, depths, wells, water, mountains, hills, land, fields, dust, heaven, skies, fountains, and the sea. These two additional biblical readings could constitute inter-biblical commentary on the original story or they could originate in entirely different traditions of Creation. Either way, they show that the order of creation was not a matter of great concern or dogmatic rigidity.

Thus reading the peshat of the biblical text we get a sense of contradiction. For many readers this sense of contradiction is overwhelming because they turn to the Bible not only for cultural enjoyment or even religious inspiration but for scientific truth. Thus a concern with the order of events takes on great significance. It is this sense of contradiction that drove many subsequent readers to devise strategies for dealing with the text.

II. Midrash and Parshanut: Traditional Rabbinic Bible Commentary.

Rabbinic Judaism, emerging from obscure origins in pre-Christian Roman Palestine, developed a system of interpretation of the biblical text that became vital to the transition of Jewish life once the sacrificial cult center in Jerusalem was destroyed in the year 70 CE (Common Era, what is often called AD). In their commentaries to the Bible the rabbis responded to two challenges simultaneously. 1) They believed that God wrote, dictated to Moses, or inspired the entire Bible. This made the problem of apparent contradictions in the peshat even more pronounced because they could reflect imperfections in the divine Author. 2) The rabbis had to adjust Jewish life and practice to the change in circumstances while basing it on what they perceived to be a divine, eternal, and perfect document.

Midrash, from the root to seek, thus developed during the early centuries of the common era and into the middle ages as a vehicle for extensive, often wide-ranging and diffuse rabbinic discourse on the biblical text, but spread into many other areas as well. Much midrash was compiled either in separate works of midrash, especially in the Galilee, or gathered into the pages of the Talmud, primarily in Babylonia. During the middle ages rabbis edited the midrash down to its most succinct comments on the actual text of the Bible (The Midrash's Greatest Hits, Part I), a genre which became known as parshanut, or commentary. During this course we will continue to look at these creations as maps for Jewish cultural development, but for now what is of immediate interest is how the rabbis dealt with the contradictions in the biblical story of Creation.

It is clear that the rabbis recognized contradictions. Some went so far as to articulate the view that the Torah was not given at once but in separate units, scroll by scroll (Gittin 60a), that the Torah does not present matters in strict chronological sequence—there is no early or late in the Torah (Pesachim 6b), and that the Torah spoke in human terms, meaning that the literary devices of human authors are found there as well (San. 64b). The most common tendency was to harmonize the conflicting passages.

For example, in the Talmud a dispute concerning the order of Creation was reported as having taken place between two early schools of rabbis. According to the House of Shammai, the heavens were created first and then the earth, a view based upon Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” However, according to the House of Hillel, the earth was created first and then the heavens, based upon Genesis 2:4: “On the day that the Lord made earth and heaven.” The apparent contradiction is resolved by the anonymous sages who split the difference by saying that God made heavens and earth at the same time by

invoking Isaiah 48:13: “And my hand established the earth and my right hand spread the heavens, I called to them and they will stand together.”

Similarly, based on midrashic materials, the medieval French rabbinic biblical commentator, Rashi, Rabbi Shlomi Itzhaki (1035-1105), explained in great detail that the first verse does not teach the order of the creation and does not report what happened at the beginning of time, only since the beginning of Creation. Hence he tacitly acknowledges that there are aspects of the narrative other than a doctrinal discourse on either the order of Creation or Creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Rashi was also aware of the fact that the text used two different names for the deity, a phenomenon which he attributed to two aspects of the deity, justice (The Lord) and mercy (God).

Thus inherent within the traditional rabbinic approach to the biblical text is a critical sense that the biblical text is contradictory, anachronistic, and rooted as much in historical development as divine revelation, subtly stated and tactfully resolved, but nevertheless present. Such views become particularly pronounced in the commentaries of the Spanish Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167) and subsequent rabbis from Provence, reaching their most powerful expression in the work of the excommunicated Dutch Jew of Portuguese background, Benedictus or Barukh Spinoza (1632-1677). Jewish commentators continued to offer traditional and critical insight to the text through the enlightenment of the eighteenth century up to the present.

III. The Critical Approach to the Biblical Text: The Documentary Hypothesis:

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century European biblical scholarship became dominated by Christian theologians, especially German Protestants, who usually served as university professors. The field of Semitic scholarship blossomed as discoveries, often by amateurs, of ancient artifacts and inscriptions in the near east which shed much light on the biblical text and heightened enthusiasm for the field in general. Most European Bible scholars, nevertheless, based their methods only on those literary investigations they borrowed from Homeric scholarship, the attempt to reconstruct levels of textual development in the classic works such as the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and ignored findings in the field.

The fullest presentation of classical Christian biblical criticism which developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was presented by Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) in his *Prolegomenon to the History of Israel* in 1878. The documentary hypothesis, the view that the Biblical

text, based on a careful reading of the peshat, its contradictions and inconsistencies, emerged out of four basic documents that were ultimately redacted into the final text of the Bible. These documents, usually designated by a simple letter, J, E, D, or P represent, with additional nuanced variations, four different schools of writing and editing.

1. J: The J stands for the first letter of the Lord's name, usually represented as YHVH (yod heh vav heh) in Hebrew or Jehovah in English. The school associated with this document is considered to have been the oldest of the schools, dating back to the tenth century BCE (Before the Common Era, what is often called BC), the time of King David and the southern Kingdom of Judah after the Hebrew nation divided in about 925 (thus the mnemonic also associates J with Judah as well as JHVH). This document, the most incisive stylistically, presents direct contact between the deity and the early Hebrew patriarchs and allows for individuals to control their own destiny. Although the deity is not introduced formally as YHVH until Moses' encounter at the burning bush in chapter 3 of Exodus, this name for God does appear in Genesis as early as chapter 4 in the story of Adam and Eve.

2. E: The E stands for the first letter of the word for God, Elohim. The school associated with this document is considered to have flourished in the eighth century BCE, in the northern Jewish kingdom, called Ephraim (thus the mnemonic also associates E with Ephraim as well as with Elohim). This document presents much less direct contact between God and the early Hebrew patriarchs, communicating instead through dreams, visions, and angels. This school appears less bold than J, often justifying and explaining instructions received from God.

3. D: The D stands for the first letter of the word Deuteronomy or Devarim in Hebrew, the fifth book of the Torah. Based on reports in 2 Kings 22, in the seventh century (622 BCE) King Josiah of Judah promulgated religious reforms and a rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, during which time a book, later identified as the book of Deuteronomy, was found, whose authenticity was verified by the woman prophet Hulda. Scholars identify Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomist school, which includes much of the later historical books from Joshua to Kings, as a separate and very late level of development in the biblical text.

4. P: The P stands for the first letter of the Priestly school, associated with the authorship of a narrative that runs throughout much of the Torah that presents events in a systematic and well organized manner and stresses the cultic aspects of holidays and events, usually indicted by sacrifices and priests. This school does not allow

individuals as much control over their own destiny as authors of the other schools do. The issue that has concerned scholars the most, and which has produced the most controversial aspects of the documentary hypothesis is the question of when to date the P school.

According to Wellhausen P represents a very late addition to the development of the biblical text, which he dates as late as the sixth century BCE, that is after the destruction of the first Temple and the Babylonian exile. His reasons for doing so, according to the latest studies of Wellhausen (see for instance Robert Oden's fascinating book *The Bible Without Theology*), were his commitment to the liberal German Protestant idealism of the nineteenth century. He saw a slow evolutionary rise of Israelite religion which reached its height in the ethical monotheism of the prophets in the eighth century BCE. The purest of the four documents, therefore, was J which represented a pristine, folk religion. From these heights the Israelite religion began to degenerate into formalism and institutionalism, including the monarchy and nationalism. The degeneration culminated, according to Wellhausen, in P during or after the exile, a document that to him reflects narrow legalism and nationalism constructed for a small Jewish enclave in the Persian empire.

Wellhausen's schema made it possible to see that the apparent contradictions of the Creation story could be the result of multiple authors and emphases, the first orderly story is attributed to P and the second more personal story is associated with J. However, he also made the terms of biblical criticism unpalatable to Jews, not only because he questioned the traditional Jewish view in divine or at least Mosaic authorship, but because he presented the development of the Jewish people, nation, and religion in terms of degeneration. Inherent in his discourse lurks a Christian polemic indicating that Jesus thus arose during what Christians used to call "late-Judaism." Jesus thus came to remove from them the burdens of the cult, law, and nationalism.

While some Jews simply lashed out at biblical criticism, referring to it as antisemitic and rejecting it entirely, others, among them the few Jews who engaged primarily in biblical studies, especially those in Palestine and the early State of Israel, took on Wellhausen by questioning some of the fundamental assumptions of his views of the biblical text. (Part of the vehemence may be in part due to the fact that the Hebrew term for this approach is *Torat Hateudut*,; the term *Torah*, especially in biblical studies, suggests a much more doctrinal attitude than the more fluid and suggestive English word hypothesis. In Hebrew biblical scholarship, by the way, the documents are identified as yod, aleph, kaf (cohanim), and dalet.)

Chief among these Jewish scholars was Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889-1963). Born in the Ukraine, educated in both modern traditional circles in Russia and at the University of Berne, and after a period in Berlin, which was a major center of Jewish scholarship and Hebrew culture during the 1920s, he moved to Palestine in 1928. For almost two decades he taught high school at the famous Reali School in Haifa until he was appointed Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. During this period he wrote his monumental Hebrew eight volume History of the Israelite Religion in which he formulated a militant response to Protestant biblical criticism, especially Wellhausen. (The Various volumes of Kaufmann have been condensed and translated into English by Greenberg and Efrøymson).

Kaufmann is important because almost every study of the Bible which originated in Israel refers back in some way to his views. For similar reasons Wellhausen continues to live not only in Kaufmann's critique, but in reactions to Kaufmann.

Kaufmann's views of the Bible are constructed around two basic assumptions: 1) Rather than being late, the P source was early, perhaps from the eighth century BCE. This means that the nationalistic and cultic elements that Wellhausen saw as signs of degeneracy Kaufmann saw as original aspects of the religion of Israel. Thus the religion of the Torah rather than being a product of late post-exilic events after the first Temple was destroyed in the year 586 BCE reflects the original quality of Hebrew monotheism. 2) Monotheism, therefore, was not a gradual development for the Hebrews but an entirely new innovation. He took this view to the extreme by asserting that nowhere in the Bible is there a trace of mythological elements, of battles between primordial forces, or the birth and death of competing Gods. Among the Hebrews this battle was waged and won before the compilation of the Bible. Israelite monotheism began with Moses and the conquest of the Land of Israel was done for religious—to eliminate backsliding to the ways of the other nations—and not national purposes. While at times Kaufmann criticized biblical criticism for atomizing the grandeur of the texts, he, nevertheless, accepts it with his own modifications.

IV. The Mythic Elements of the Bible

As scholars discovered the ancient Babylonian creation story and local versions of it on clay tablets throughout the middle east, the similarities and differences between it and the biblical creation story caused scholars to reassess many aspects of the Bible, especially questions of its originality and its purely monotheistic basis. The ancient Babylonian account, the Enuma Elish, meaning "When on high . . .," dates from the second millennium BCE and was traditionally read for

the Babylonian new year celebration. Thus it not only ante-dates the period in which the Jewish Bible was edited, but appears to have been a major source of influence on the Bible because of similarities in detail and order. Incidentally, the theme of the connection of creation and the new year is also found in the Jewish Rosh Hashanah liturgy, “Hayom harat ha-olam,” “today is the birthday of the world.”

(English translations of Enuma Elish are available in Pritchard’s collections of ancient near eastern texts published by Princeton. The Hebrew translation of the epic was made by the great modern Hebrew poet Saul Tchernichowski, connecting the ancient epic to modern Hebrew culture as well).

The Enuma Elish, an account of a primordial cosmic battle between the gods, explains both the origins of the gods and the cosmos. Apsu, the male god of sweet water and Tiamat the goddess of the salt water produced offspring. Because they were noisy, Apsu tried to kill the offspring, but instead they killed him. Tiamat and Kingu thus turned against the other gods led by Marduk, the storm god. Marduk killed Tiamat and from her corpse formed heavens and the earth. When Kingu complained, he was killed and his blood became the source of humanity.

A comparison of the biblical account with the Enuma Elish shows a very similar sequence of events:

1. In Genesis, in the presence of primordial waters, the divine spirit creates cosmic matter and the earth is desolate and darkness covers the deep (Tehom). In the Enuma Elish the divine spirit and primordial cosmic matter exist together in chaos and Tiamat is enveloped in darkness.
2. In Genesis light is created by God. In the Enuma Elish light comes from the gods.
3. In Genesis God creates a firmament. In the Enuma Elish a firmament is created with Tiamat’s body.
4. In Genesis the creation of a firmament causes the appearance of dry land, a step that is also implicit in the Enuma Elish.
5. In both stories luminaries then appear.
6. Man then appears in both stories.
7. In Genesis God rests and sanctifies. In the Enuma Elish the gods rest and celebrate.

Certain basic differences emerge between the two stories: The Enuma Elish presents an obvious polytheism of gendered deities, a vicious battle among the gods, and the notion that people were created to serve the gods, a notion that is not as clear in biblical account when mankind is instructed to tend the garden-is it for themselves or for God?. Finally, in the Enuma Elish people are created from blood whereas in Genesis they were created from the nothing or from the earth. It seems that Kaufmann may have been right, the biblical text here presents

little evidence of a cosmic battle, indeed it appears that the Genesis narrative has artfully removed all such traces.

However, the recent studies of Jon Levenson of Harvard Divinity School in his book *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, explicitly challenges Kaufmann's assumptions. Marshaling an impressive array of biblical evidence, Levenson has show that while the creation narrative may not have any overt signs of a cosmic struggle among the gods, many other passages reveal a completely different picture. In these God must assert his control over the other gods and many of the forces represented in the Enuma Elish as deities appear in various guises as monsters with whom God must do combat. For example, he cites Psalm 82:1, 6-7: "God takes his stand in the assembly of El; among the gods He pronounces judgment . . . I had said, 'You are gods, sons of Elyon. . . but you shall die like a man . . .'" Psalm 74: 13-17 also reflects a primordial battle among the gods and echoes of Enuma Elish: "O God, my king from of old, who brings deliverance throughout the land; it was You who drove back the sea with Your might, who smashed the heads of the monsters in the waters; it was You who crushed the heads of the Leviathan, who left him as food for the denizens of the desert; it was you who released the springs and torrents . . ." Kaufmann had already addressed the apparent challenge this Psalm presented to his views by saying that it reflected a rebellion against God and was not about Creation. Levenson, however, responded by noting that there is no language of rebellion here, and the Psalm is about Creation which therefore did include combat between God and mythic watery beasts. Similar examples could be adduced from Isaiah 27:1; 30:7; 51:9-11; Habakuk 3:8; Psalm 89:10-15; 104: 6-9; 93; Proverbs 8:27-29; Job 7:12; 9:13; 26:7-14; 38:8-11; 40:25-32, Jeremiah 5:22; and Exodus 15:1-8.

Locating these ancient mythical watery beasts is much a question of the development of Jewish culture as it is a question of identifying remnants of Babylonian culture. At stake here is the question of how willing Jews are to recognize that their culture, and particularly the central cultural artifact, the Bible, was influenced by external culture. Paradoxically, as in so many other cases as we shall see, it is the secular Israeli scholar, safely ensconced in his own country where Hebrew has been reborn who is unwilling to made such concessions while it is the religious Jewish scholar, teaching abroad at Christian divinity school, who is willing to see the interactions between Judaism and surrounding cultures.

V. Modern Orthodoxy confronts the Creation Story and Biblical Criticism

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, rabbi of Yeshiva University in New York and the Maimonides School in Boston, the leading modern Orthodox rabbi in

the United States with influence around the world, wrote a very important article, "Lonely Man of Faith" (Tradition 7, 1965) in which he discussed in depth the implications of the two different creation stories: "We all know that the Bible offers two accounts of the creation of man. We are also aware of the theory suggested by Bible critics attributing these two accounts to two different traditions and sources. Of course, since we do unreservedly accept the unity and integrity of the Scriptures and their divine character, we reject this hypothesis which is based, like many other Biblico-critical theories, on literary categories invented by modern man, ignoring completely the eidetic-noetic [don't ask me what these words mean!] content of the Biblical story. It is, of course, true that the two accounts of the creation of man differ considerably. This incongruity was not discovered by the bible critics. Our sages of old were aware of it. However, the answer lies not in an alleged dual tradition but in dual man, not in an imaginary contradiction between two versions but in a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical." (p. 10)

Soloveitchik then develops in the article two typological categories of men: Adam the first and Adam the second. The exact contours of his presentation involving the different psychological and philosophical dichotomies between active and passive individuals are more relevant to modern Jewish thought than biblical interpretation. For our purposes here what is important are the facts that the rabbi embedded his discourse on a biblical matrix and that he chose to see the biblical account as having two separate men.

VI. Feminist-Traditional Approach

The Creation story also deals with what seems to be the creation of two women. In the first story the woman is created at same time as the man and seems to be equal to him, they are both created in Gods image, from which it can also be learned that God must also be male and female, and they are both commanded to subdue the earth and to be fruitful and to multiply. In the second story the woman seems to have been created after the man from what appears to have been a spare part, one of his ribs.

The two stories, however, could be integrated into one which radically alters conventional perceptions of the creation of woman, but which can be based on traditional commentators such as Rashi. The first story, it can be argued, describes the creation of a hermaphrodite, a being (almost always called ha-adam, which does not have to be translated man, the midrash (Ber. Rabba 8:1) uses the term golem, which could

almost be translated as blob, or thing) which contained both masculine and feminine qualities. Despite the attempt of some translations to hide this issue, the Hebrew is clear: “And God said let us make adam in our image in our likeness (1:26) and God created ha-adam in its image in the image of God he created it, male and female, he created them (1:27). Rashi comments in the spirit of this translation, “At first creation He created it with two faces and afterwards divided it.”

Chapter two then describes how this hermaphrodite was separated into two sexes. After ha-adam is asleep, the key to understanding what transpires is the meaning of the Hebrew word *tzela*, usually translated rib. However, the word can also mean side. Thus, “The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon ha-adam and it slept. And He took one of his sides and he closed the flesh where it had been.” (2:21) So the Lord God took this dual sexed blob and cut it in half. The next verse then tells that the Lord God build a woman from one of the sides that he took from this blob. Thus, no matter what conventional wisdom may say, the first sex actually created by God would have to be the woman. Man was what was left over on the floor after woman was created. Again, despite the great deal of opposition I have received in every Israeli college class in which I have presented it to mostly secular women who have accused me of desecrating Judaism, Rashi comes to the aid of this traditionally based feminist reading. He notes that the word *tzela* means side and gives as proof Exodus 26:20, 26, 27 which use the same word when speaking about the two sides of the tabernacle.

As a further elaboration of this view, if we turn back to the story of the forbidden fruit at chapter 2, verse 15, we see that it was ha-adam, that was placed in the Garden, before the woman was created several verses later. After being placed in the garden, ha-adam is commanded, with singular verbs, not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In chapter 3, now that the man and woman have been separated, the snake appears and mentions, now using a plural verb that she had been prohibited from eating of a certain tree (the tree has changed, but that is not our concern now). She responds to him also using plural verbs about what she was allowed to eat and not to eat. Following this thread it appears that she must have been present when God spoke to ha-adam about the dietary regulations of the garden, showing that God had been speaking to a dual sexed being prior to the act of separation between man and woman.

It is also important to point out that she never seduced, tempted, beguiled or anythinged the man. Since it seems that he had been present with her throughout all the discussions with God and perhaps the snake as well, according to 3:6 she gave it to her husband and he ate, no questions, no comments. If the tree were one of knowledge of good and

evil, then the first human being to seek knowledge, to make a conscious decision was the woman. The man simply stood by passively throughout the entire proceedings. Thus, like Soloveitchik's reading, this reading ultimately returns to questions about the nature of men. Unlike his reading, however, but drawing on equally traditional texts, we see that Jewish tradition can be as open to separating out the two creation stories as it is to linking them together and that a feminist reading is not necessarily contradictory to a traditional reading.

Conclusion

Jews cannot simply read the Bible as it is. The biblical text contains too many levels of meanings for Jews ever to be able to enjoy unmediated access to it. Each level of meaning however enriches the reading of the Bible. Part of the process of reading the Bible from the vantage point of several different levels of meaning is that it highlights for us that fact that most levels are informed by meaning from other culture, whether Babylonian or Christian.

Week 2.

Masada as a Cultural Experience

First, I would like to thank all those who have responded to the first lecture. Most criticism was directed at the fact that many of the points I made did not harmonize well with modern Bible scholarship. Perhaps I could restate the point of the lecture as an aphorism: Jewish culture begins where Bible study ends. In other words, the gap between the plain meaning or the scholarly meaning of the text and what is found in Jewish commentaries constitutes Jewish culture. When I identified the J of the documentary hypothesis as standing for Jehovah, I was not indicating that is how modern Bible scholarship identifies as God's name, but rather that is what those who used the letter J in the nineteenth century thought. It may have been simpler to say that J was short for the usual way that German scholars identified God's name as Jahwe. I introduced two typos in my identification of Rashi, errors that the astute course director usually picks up I should have said: Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040-1105. I am grateful to Sid Slivko for saving me another major embarrassment, however, but not before I had already uttered many times in class.)

Second, as far as a syllabus goes for this course, originally I had planned to follow the order of a course I had been giving for years following the development of the basic genres of Jewish literature throughout the generations (see <http://research.haifa.ac.il/~weboseas/courses/reli/reli1.html>). However, on further consideration, given the nature of this electronic version of the course, I thought it better to develop one theme in each lesson and trace it through several major genres. This way I can cite the relevant passages and not base the presentation on as much wide-ranging reading.

So, in subsequent lessons I will cover the development of the following topics from the Bible to post-biblical Jewish literature up to the present, subject to adjustments along the way: 1) Creation, 2) Masada, 3) The Sacrifice of Isaac and Child Sacrifice (the center of a controversy on the front page of today's Haaretz and on the radio news in Israel, 10.3.99), 4) Passover and Sacrifice, 5) Moses as Jesus, 6) Messianism, Travel Literature, and Statehood, 7) Genocide of Foreign Nations, 8) Summary Execution, 9) Jewish Ethics 10) Worship as Culture, 11) the Kulturkampf: changing attitudes towards authority and persecution, 12) Awareness of Self.

Background: The Intertestamental Period

When did the biblical period end? Technical, scholarly definitions could locate such a transition at any number of events: the destruction of the First Temple in the year 586 BCE, the building of the Second Temple in around the year 515 BCE, the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE are all contenders as transitional events. Other markers could be based on literary and cultural markers such as canonization of the Biblical text, which, unfortunately cannot be pin-pointed with total accuracy, the beginning of rabbinic literature, which either dates with the earliest known rabbis sometime around the first century BCE or the first known works around the beginning of the third century CE.

This entire period, including all the various suggested dates is often called the Intertestamental period and the literature produced during it, Intertestamental Literature. Although the designation is basically a Christian one, signifying the transition from what they refer to as the Old Testament to their New Testament, the designation works as well for Jewish culture, marking the transition from biblical to rabbinic texts. During this period, also called The Second Temple Period by Jews, or Bayit Sheni, a large corpus of literature was produced by the Jews in Greek, Aramaic, and other languages, in both the land of Israel and in the Diaspora.

This literature, which includes the Apocrypha (hidden literature), Pseudepigrapha (writings attributed to biblical characters who did not write it), the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Bible), the Elephantine Papyri (a Jewish archive from Egypt), the writings of Philo of Alexandria, a first century Jewish philosopher, and Josephus Flavius, a first century Jewish historian, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, a hoard of manuscripts dating from this period.. This literature would constitute a separate course. Suffice it to say for now that through this literature we are able to learn about aspects of Jewish history during this period, developments in Jewish thought, and how Jews read the Bible.

To give but a few quick examples (the complete texts of most of this literature is available on line at <http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon.htm> or <http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/apocrypha.htm> or <http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/pseudepigrapha.htm>): the Books of Maccabees describe the events between the Jews of the land of Israel and the Seleucid rulers of Syria from around 168-165 BCE that culminated in the holiday of Hanukkah (however it is spelled!). One of the paradoxes of Jewish historical memory is that the books of Maccabees are preserved in the Apocrypha which was accepted only into the canon of the Christian Bible, but not the Jewish Bible, so that if Jews want to learn the events of a major holiday they must turn to Christian sources. There are also embellishments on biblical stories such as the Story of Susanna and the Song of the three Children associated with the book of Daniel. The Pseudepigrapha contains the fascinating Testament of the Twelve Sons, the purported ethical wills and last testaments of each of the sons of Jacob. Written sometime during the second century BCE, these texts contain elaborations of the events of the biblical narrative that adumbrate aspects of both subsequent rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. For example, the idea that Joseph's brothers bought shoes with the money they received from selling him, an idea that appears in the

high holiday liturgy (The Ten Martyrs-Asarah Harugei Melukha), is first found here. In both the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating as far back as 350 BCE, are passages that are different from the Massoretic text of the Bible, dating from around the sixth century CE, relied upon by most Jews today. Some of the passages refer explicitly to “sons of God.” Philo read the Bible according to Platonic philosophy, also positing forces mediating between the divine and the human realm from which the church would derive much influence. At the temple the Jews built in Elephantine God, called Yahu, has a female consort, and women can initiate divorce from their husbands.

In short all these texts raise the question, What was Jewish? From these texts it is clear that the spiritual and cultural world of the Jews was much broader than that circumscribed by biblical texts. Moreover, what now is often glibly characterized as Christian has deep roots in intertestamental Jewish culture. Jesus, as well as his rabbinic contemporaries, therefore, must be measured not by biblical standards but by the Jewish culture of their generation. This culture reflects a range of values and practices and identifies nothing as normative, mainline, traditional, or orthodox.

Josephus Flavius or Yosef ben Matityahu

Josephus (38-100 CE) was born in the turbulent period when the Romans ruled Palestine, Jewish sects proliferated—he describes at least four of them—Christianity began, Jewish communities became established throughout the Roman world, and the tensions increased between the Jews of Palestine and the Roman rulers. In the year 66 CE the Jews began a major rebellion which culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple and the sack of Jerusalem in the year 70 by the Romans.

Josephus was the commander of the Jewish forces fighting the Romans in the Galilee, the northern district of Palestine, between the sea of the same name and the Mediterranean. In the year 66 in the town of Yotapata, surrounded by the Romans (Wars III. VI-VIII, <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/j/josephus/war-3.htm>), Josephus and his troops, after an extended battle, entered into a suicide pact rather than surrender to their enemies. However, after the rest of his troops took their lives, instead completing the pact by taking his own life, Josephus surrendered to the Romans, in whose employ he spent the remainder of the war. After the war, Josephus retired to Rome living on an imperial pension and writing in Greek the history and reporting the accumulated traditions about the biblical text of the Jews from antiquity, The Antiquities, to the recent wars against the Romans, The Wars, as well as his own Autobiography, the last Jewish autobiography for the next 1500 years (<http://ccel.wheaton.edu/j/josephus/JOSEPHUS.html>, or <http://wesley.nnc.edu/josephus/>).

Massada

One of the events described by Josephus (Wars Book IV, Chapter VII and Book VII, Chapter VIII, <http://ccel.wheaton.edu/j/josephus/war-7.htm> or wgbh/pages/fronline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephusmasada.html) was the Roman siege against and the mass suicide of the Jews on Masada, a desert mountain fortress, in the year 72. For the remainder of this lecture, I will examine Josephus’ account for what it tells, compare it with the archeology of the site, then examine different versions of the Masada story which developed among the Jews throughout history, and finally present aspects of the changing myth of Masada in modern Jewish and Israeli culture.

Masada was the last remaining Jewish stronghold after the Romans had subdued the rest of Palestine. Key to Josephus’ account is his vilification of the rebels, whom he called Sicarii, dagger wielding bandits, or

Zealots, all of whom gradually assembled on Masada and numbered about a thousand. He accused them of avarice, barbarity, and tyrannizing other Jews, especially those they suspected of cooperating with the Romans, but also their innocent Jewish neighbors whose villages they raided for supplies, including a massacre of several hundred Jewish women and children at Ein Geddi. Josephus mentioned some of the leading figures among the rebels, including Eleazar ben Yair, John of Gischala, and Simon the son of Gioras. The narrative continues to move back and forth between descriptions of the preparation for the siege and flashbacks to descriptions of the site, its surroundings by the Dead Sea (lake Asphaltitis), the Serpent path going up the mountain, and the palaces that had been built on it, and its early history, prepared and stocked as a fortress by various Jewish kings, but his narrative contains few references to actual Jewish fighting there.

The description of the actual Roman siege of Masada includes their installing a wall to prevent Jews from escaping, a siege ramp to reach the top, catapults to hurl projectiles, and a battering ram to use against the walls of Masada. Josephus then turned to describe the Sicarii defense operations which included building another inside wall to hold back Roman advances. Josephus, after reporting that fires set by the Romans began to destroy the fortress, made it clear that God was fighting against the Sicarii on the side of the Romans. There is a pause in the action and at this juncture Josephus quoted verbatim the speeches of Eleazar convincing the Jewish to take their own lives, to die in a glorious manner with their companions rather than abused and murdered or enslaved at the hands of the Romans. These speeches become more emotional and philosophical as he discusses the need to free the soul from the prison of the body, basing himself on the example of Indian philosophers and later invoking it as a principle of Jewish law as well. He then described the great zeal with which Jewish men killed their wives and children, culminating in ten men being chosen by lottery to kill the rest of the men. Josephus concludes his account by noting that, when the siege ended on May 2, 72, one woman and five children survived the siege hiding in the water system and 960 men, women, and children were killed. From these few survivors the Romans, and presumably from them, Josephus, learned what had happened.

Did Josephus, however, learn what really happened at Masada from them? Could these few survivors, cowering underground, have heard and recalled the long, elaborate, and eloquent speeches and remembered them exactly as they were delivered? While there are no other contemporary versions of the events of Masada extant, the site (mentioned in some ancient works) itself has been preserved. A cursory glance at the material remains does confirm most of Josephus' observations: location, snake path, palaces, siege ramp., and even potshards with names written on them, perhaps from the final fatal lottery. The details that indicate his text was based on observations made from a distance or prior to the siege are that he mentions only the northern and not the western palace, that the defenders burned their possessions in one pile rather than many, and that the columns of the palace were made from single pieces of stone, but now that they are lying broken on the ground, actually appear to have been crafted from smaller stones with each matching end coded with a matching Hebrew letter, still visible.

The most challenging aspect of Josephus' narrative is his report of the mass suicide. Regularly students read this passage in light of later developments in Jewish thought which opposed suicide and homicide. Later Jewish views against suicide are just that, later, and rather than representing an essential, eternal aspect of Judaism, represent a post-talmudic view, with radically different attitudes found in the Bible and early rabbinic literature. In addition, this text does not deal really with suicide and murder, but martyrdom (and human sacrifice). The phenomena, however, are identical, in either case one or more dead bodies remain and the observer must determine motives in order to attach value judgments, meaning that the difference between suicide and martyrdom is a matter of a cultural constructed definition and not based on absolutes. Moreover, in some instances Josephus or one of his characters claims or the people demonstrate that taking one's life and the life of

others under certain circumstances was considered praiseworthy not only at Masada, but in Gamala, a city in the Golan in which in 67, according to Josephus, under siege from the Romans at least five thousand Jews hurled themselves to their deaths rather than be killed by the Romans, a fate that befell another four thousand Jews (VI, I, 9). In other places, however, such as at Yotapata Josephus speaks forcefully against suicide: “. . . It may also be said that it is a manly act for one to kill himself. No. Certainly, but a most unmanly one: as I should esteem that pilot to be an arrant coward who, out of fear of a storm, should sink his ship of his own accord.” (III, VIII, 5) adding that according to the law the bodies of those who kill themselves are not to be buried until sun set. He nevertheless participated in the lottery to determine the order of death.

As in last week's lecture about biblical texts, so too now, we reach a point where it seems that the values of Jewish culture as found in Josephus are contradictory. These contradictions, however, are very illuminating. What emerges from Josephus, therefore, is not a unified picture of Jewish life, but literary tropes. In at least three instances, Jotapata in 66, Gamala in 67, and Masada in 72, the events follow a pattern: the Jews are holding out in a high place on a precipice, they continue to add walls, the Romans below, led by Vespasian and Titus, are attacking their position using conventional weapons, siege engines and battering rams, and massive construction to build ramps. The Jews rain down upon their attackers all the appurtenances of ancient warfare such as boiling oil—less so, if at all, at Masada despite such pictures in subsequent literature. Amid the battle Jews leave for provisions. At various junctures individuals and groups of Jews jump on to the Romans—again, missing from the Masada narrative—or simply to their death, the sole survivors are usually a few isolated women (Just as he discusses suicide in terms of manliness, he discusses surviving in terms of womanliness, perhaps also evidence that at least some women did not agree with their husbands' enthusiasm to slit their throats.)

Josephus' account of Masada draws on some fixed stock images that he used in these instances and others. The variable in each case was Josephus himself, which in turn affected his discourse. At Jotapata he realized all was lost and wanted to save his life, both arguing against suicide and forming a suicide pact with the Jews who had trapped him. At Gamala, which he himself had originally fortified, he reported the events as a Roman observer. Concerning Masada, circumstances that were much more circumscribed according to his measures, only 900 dead as opposed to the 9,000 at Gamala and the 40,000 at Jotapata, Josephus expended much more moral and rhetorical energy condemning the victims but not their manner of death.

In particular Josephus directs a great deal of invective against those on Masada as having acted against the wishes of the Jewish people, a statement which attempts to diminish the popular support that this group of a thousand must have had to have been able to hold out against a vast number of Romans for more than two years. Thus, although Josephus was a traitor to the Romans, these passages are actually profoundly pro-Jewish. Josephus attempted, writing in Greek for an upper class Roman audience, borrowing forms from Greek literature, to isolate in the mind of his readers the disruptive element among the Jews and then to literarily excise it forever. This way he could tacitly offer the Romans a de-zealotized picture of the remaining Jewish population of Palestine, which had been presumably led astray by these tyrants and now was willing to live with the Romans in peace. As evidence of this view and proof of Josephus' falsification of the situation is the fact that the Jews of Palestine did continue to rebel against the Romans in 119, 135, and later. Thus Josephus' Masada narrative was not an objective, factual narrative, but a carefully constructed polemic aimed at creating future peaceful relations with the Romans, a situation that failed to materialize.

Other competing, but less well received interpretations of the suicide story include the possibility that Josephus invented it either to clear his own conscience for betraying the Jews or to cover up a Roman massacre of the

survivors, less likely since he reported other more major Roman massacres (Trude Weiss-Rosmarin and Mary Smallwood).

The Masada Story in Sefer Yossippon

Sefer Yossippon was a tenth century Hebrew translation of a fourth century Christian, Latin version of Josephus. Although it was made in southern Italy, it was considered by Jews to have been the original Hebrew of Josephus and studied carefully by the leading rabbis of the middle ages such as Rashi and Meir of Rothenburg. Yossippon was soon translated into many other languages including Arabic, Ethiopian, as well as the languages of Europe. This popular version, regularly republished and more accessible than Josephus's Greek, contains some major departures from its source. In particular, the mass suicide is missing and in its place, the Jewish men kill their families, describing them as ritual sacrifices pleasing to the Lord (Iekorban oleh leratzon lifnei hashem) which they then cast into pits and covered with earth, again reflecting the language of biblical sacrifice. After a brief, but not peaceful nap, they girded their loins and went down and fought the Romans, and despite the losses they inflicted on the Romans, they were all killed.

As the memory of the actual site faded, so too did the accounts of Josephus and Yossippon, only recently published in a modern Hebrew version and not yet translated in English. At least one early modern Jewish writer, Samuel Usque, recorded reference to the events of Masada based on Yossippon. Writing, however, in Portuguese in 1552, Usque did not do much to rekindle interest in the events of Masada. It was only in the nineteenth century with the rediscovery of both the place and the account of Josephus that interest was renewed in the story. In the past century, the story has attracted a wide range of interpretations. As with biblical interpretations, I must emphasize that these understandings of the events of Masada are not based upon primary research but upon popular, often politicized and romanticized notions that are rooted deeply in the culture and affect greatly attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, because of the tendentious and polemical quality of the basic text about the events, there is no yardstick to measure the various interpretations against. The purpose, therefore, of this presentation is not to de-mythologize the various versions of the Masada story but to show how an ancient text regularly acquires new levels of meaning as changing circumstances require. Hence, these understandings of Masada tell more about the tellers than the event itself.

The Masada Myths During the 19th and 20th Centuries

Masada returned to Jewish consciousness in the nineteenth century because of a confluence of factors. It was during the early part of the century that the movement for the scientific study for Judaism (Wissenschaft des Judentums) emerged, ultimately leading to the massive histories of Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow, as well as two translations of Josephus into Hebrew at the end of the century and another one published in Palestine during the 1920s. It was also at this time that European colonialism, Christian pilgrims and missionaries, and geographical and archeological explorations beginning with Napoleon's abortive invasions, brought a new consciousness of the land of Israel, which culminated in the Zionist movement and renewed settlement and Hebrew intellectual activity in the land of Israel.

Masada bathed in new attention beginning with the identification of the site and visits to it by European and American Christians beginning in 1838. Starting in 1912 and increasing during the 1920s, Jewish groups from Palestine (the Yishuv) fastened their attention to the site, a difficult and dangerous place to reach. During the 1920s, two of the giants of modern Hebrew literature who had recently settled in Palestine, the Nietzschean Micha Yosef Berdichevski (Bin Gurion) and his critic, editor, and friend, Ahad Haam debated the issue of

Jewish heroism in which Masada was invoked. Masada inspired the 1923-1924 Hebrew poem by Isaac Lamdan (1899-1954), "Masada," published in 1926. This passionate Zionist poem, placing Masada in the context of previous tragedies of the Jewish people, saw Masada as a metaphor for Zion and the Jewish people, giving birth to the famous slogan: "Masada shall not fall again! (shenit masada lo tipol) Stumble? Surely we will go up! Ben Yair again will be revealed, he is not dead, not dead!.. ." The poem is filled with both courageous, militant optimism as well as depressed thoughts, especially given the state of affairs in Palestine at that time, a time of suicides (a phenomenon, once hidden, that is now getting more attention among researchers) and Lamden's own despair. Interestingly, although his poem inspired thousands to visit Masada, he never visited the site, ending his life in suicide.

Serious investigations of the site, not in Jewish hands nor intended to be according to British plans, began only in the 1930s, conducted by German Christians. Jewish schools and youth movements made arduous trips to the site during the 1930s and 1940s, where passages from Josephus or Lamden were read or kindled in flame as part of a bonfire. Jews gave the site scientific attention only in the 1950s, despite-or perhaps because of--- the initial lack of interest from leaders such as the Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, the President Zalman Shazar, and Yigael Yadin, the former chief of staff of the Israeli military and a professor of archeology. Popular and scholarly interest reached a frenzy during the archeological digs there from 1963 to 1965 led by Yigael Yadin himself. Among the finds were three skeletons, a man, woman, and child, on the top of the mountain and twenty-five others buried in a cave. These were immediately identified as one of the last fighters of Masada , his wife and child and, after several years of debate, given a state burial as defenders of freedom-that they could have been Christian monks who established a presence there during the Byzantine period was not considered.

The key to the growing attraction of Masada was the understanding that there a small number of Jewish patriots fought the last battle for freedom and independence to the bitter end against the massive forces of the Romans, despite the lack of any extensive descriptions of battles in Josephus (Most current writers say that there was no battle between the Jews and the Romans, but Josephus does say that after the Romans completed their attack tower and began to hurl darts and stones, it "soon made those that fought from the walls of he place to retire," which seems to me to imply some fighting.) This heroic view, described as the Masada Myth, heightened the Jewish religious aspects of the Zealots (trying to show that the bathtubs on Masada matched subsequent rabbinic specifications for ritual baths) and was accompanied by the downplaying of the mass suicide and the violent and tyrannical behavior of the Sicarii (a term rarely mentioned). This myth provided the Jews of Palestine and Israel with a local response to the Holocaust and the passivity associated with the victims by the Jews of Palestine who adopted what they saw as an alternative model of militant resistance in the face of absolute evil.

Masada became during the 1960s a site for Bar Mitzvah ceremonies and for swearing in ceremonies for the Israeli armored corps, ceremonies which tapered off almost as soon as they began, partly because of competition offered by the Western Wall and the monument to the armored brigades established at Latrun, both sites conquered in 1967, and partly because of a growing unease with what Masada stood for. During the 90s it has become a place for early morning rock concerts and drug parties, something that once would have been impossible given the almost sacred quality of the site. There also seems to be a ritual that on finishing the major part of the descent each hiker tosses the empty water bottles over the side where they accumulate in vast quantities.

The Masada Complex

In about 1963 the expressions “Masada Complex” and “Masada Syndrome” began to be used to describe the attitude that Israel must face on its own insurmountable odds. Discussion about the Masada Complex reached a fever pitch during the early 1970s when the American government tried to convince the intransigent Golda Meir to cooperate with the Egyptians (After almost two years in Israel, unlike when I was growing up in the US, I have never heard a kind word said by any Israeli about her, only the most vicious imitations of her by those on both the right and the left.) Secretary of State Rogers used the expression and it appeared at least twice in Newsweek, once by the columnist Stewart Alsop, to whom Meir responded: “You say that we have a Masada complex. . . It is true we do have a Masada complex. We have a pogrom complex. We have a Hitler complex.”

To this the Hebrew literary critic Robert Alter responded, “Torchlit military ceremonies on top of Masada are, I fear, a literal and dubious translation into public life of a literary metaphor and a Prime Minister’s subsuming Holocaust, pogroms, and Israel’s present state of siege under the rubric of Masada might be the kind of hangover from poetry that could befuddle thinking on urgent political issues.” And the Israeli Historian Benjamin Kedar, wrote in a similar vein: “But this is a false analogy for two reasons. The bitterest fate that the people of Masada could have expected was far better than that awaiting the Ghetto rebels. Vespasian, Titus and Silva, after all, were not attempting to exterminate a people but to crush a revolt . . . There can be no doubt that the writer of the Book of Josippon is closer to Mordechai Anielewicz of the Warsaw Ghetto and to Danny Masss of the thirty-five who fell in 1948 on their way to Gush Etzion, rather than to Eleazar ben Yair . . . The rock on the shore of the Dead Sea is a dead end, a cul-de-sac, a dramatic curtain-fall. He who tells his soldiers of the armored corps at the swearing-in ceremony on the heights of Masada that it is owing to the heroism of the fighters of Masada that we are here today, is both deluding himself and deluding others.”

Conclusion

Masada, the mountain, the narrative, the translation, the poem, and the myth, reflect the cultural transformation of our understanding of events, events for which we have no direct historical access but much emotional interest. Below are listed some books and articles representing magnificent research and analysis of the Masada Myth, but present in almost all of them, is the idea that lurking behind the cultural discourse stands a Jewish values that can be called mainstream or normative. I offer instead this discussion of Masada as a way of understanding the development of Judaism and the competition among values for acceptance by Jews without any interpretation holding a monopoly on originality, authenticity, or truth.

Recommendations for Further Reading

Books (with extensive bibliographies)

Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995)

Nachum Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel* (1995)

Articles

Shaye Cohen, “Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains, and the Credibility of Josephus,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982).

Raymond Newell, "Suicide Accounts in Josephus: A Form Critical Study," *Society of Biblical Literature* 1982 Seminar Papers

Robert Paine, "Masada: A History of A Memory," *History and Anthropology* 6 (1994)

Baila Shargel, "The Evolution of the Masada Myth," *Judaism* 28 (1979)

Week 3

The Akedah and History: Child Sacrifice and Redemption

In addition to all the virtual students with whom I have corresponded, the number of real students I have met in Jerusalem continues to grow; I hope to continue to be able to meet students when they are in Israel. This past week, unlike the previous week, there were virtually no comments, I suspect that the reason in part was due to the fact that, in addition to delays in transmission and reading, Masada does not hold the emotional charge it once did and that matters connected with the Bible tend to more provocative in general, which may be the case again this week, though not only is the phone company on strike but all of the phone lines are becoming disabled which may slow down communication.

This week I will take the biblical story of the Akedah, in which, as reported in Genesis 22, after being commanded to do so by God, Abraham bound his son Isaac and attempted to slaughter him, and I will trace how subsequent generations of Jews understood that story, embedded it into their culture, acted upon it.

The Biblical Account

(for a Bible see <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/diobiblical.html#bibles> or <http://bible.ort.org/bible/index/inx-pent.htm>)

This biblical story, perhaps the most challenging of all, has produced much commentary and explanation, most of it aimed at rationalizing what appears to be both an extreme request on the part of God, excessive diligence to fulfill it on the part of Abraham, an incredibly passive response on the part of Isaac—who is no mere babe, and total silence on the part of the other spectators.

Most explanations focus on the fact that God's request for Abraham to offer his son up as a burnt offering is prefaced by the expression that this was a test. Conventional wisdom, therefore, quietly adds the sense of the word "only" before the word "test" because most are unwilling to see God as really testing somebody by expecting the slaughter of a son, but only seeing how far he would go. Such discussions then usually trot out all sorts of notions about Judaism being a religion of life, that such behavior is un-Jewish, and that child-sacrifice is abhorrent in the Bible (For a classic presentation of the apologetic position connected with any aspect of the Bible and subsequent Jewish life, see the comments in the J. Hertz's Soncino edition of the Humash, especially his Additional Notes at the end of each of the five books of the Torah, on the Akedah, see p. 201).

This course, however, is premised on the idea that Jewish experience cannot be characterized by any one simple notion, and Judaism with its myriads of levels of textual and interpretative development as well as conflicting social and cultural patterns can never be glibly characterized as being for or against anything, whether we like it or not. Thus an honest reading of the Bible and Jewish culture requires reading them against our own preferences.

In the matter of biblical child sacrifice, several authors have recently explored the phenomenon in depth, especially Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*; but see also James Williams, *The Bible, Violence and the Sacred*; and Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred and the Scapegoat*, who, while creating interesting categories of analysis, is unwilling to apply them consistently to Christianity as well as Judaism.

According to Levenson, in Exodus 22:28-29 God simply states: ". . . The first born among your sons you shall give to me. You shall do the same with your cattle and your flocks. . ." Whatever the word "give" means, it is done for both human and animals and no mention is made of any form of substitution, an idea that only appears in Exodus 34:20 where the firstling of an ass and humans are redeemed with animals. A similar request for the first born is made in Exodus 13:1-2, which is also followed by the opportunity for an animal substitution in verses 12-15. In the book of Numbers, however, instead of animal substitutes for the human firstborn, God asks for the Levites to be His (Numbers 3:11-13; 8:14-19; 18:15).

While in other places, there are strong condemnations of child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 18:10), fulminations that would be unnecessary were such a practice not prevalent, there are instances where child sacrifice was reported, often in a matter-of-fact manner, sometimes even with approval. For example, 2 Kings 3:27 reports that Mesha, the king of Moab, offered his heir as a burnt offering to avert the danger of an Israelite invasion. In other words, the biblical author of the account accepts the efficacy of the deed, noting that the sacrifice produced a great wrath, *ketzef*, which seems to have been external to the actors in the story, giving the impression that the sacrifice influenced a divine force to act on behalf of Moab.

Hebrews and Hebrew kings also practiced child sacrifice. In 2 Kings 16:3, the king of Judah, Ahaz, made his son pass through fire, a practice elsewhere associated with "molech" (2 Kings 23:10), but often not. This practice was regularly condemned by the prophet Jeremiah, "which I commanded not, nor spoke it, neither came it into my mind" (Jeremiah 19:5-6); ". . . with fire that I did not command and which did not even enter my mind," (Jeremiah 7:31-32 and also 32:35). A condemnation so excessive and so defensive-God has to disassociate himself personally from such sacrifices-- that, according to Levenson, "The prophet does protest too much." This discussion raises the question whether, contrary to conventional wisdom and most translations, Molech was the name of a pagan deity, as most would like to believe, or the name of a sacrifice offered to God by the Hebrews as members of any other people would do in the ancient near east, a phenomenon illustrated in several other prophetic passages:

1) The Hebrew of Isaiah 30:33 directly associates molech/melech (the same consonants in both words-the vowels were added much later) with God himself, but translations often dodge this fact by rendering the term as king instead: "For a fire (tofteh, usually tofet, translated in Jeremiah as a proper noun of the place where the burning takes place), has been arranged, also it is for molech (often read as melech and translated as king) is prepared; a deep bonfire of fire with much wood, the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, burns it." Thus here the Lord is directly associated with stoking the fire which will consume the Assyrian enemies of Israel.

2) In Ezekiel 20: 25-26 seems to acknowledge that God ordained human sacrifice, unaccompanied by any reference to the option of substitution, a fact that He comes to regret: "And I also gave them laws that were not good and rules by which they could not live. I defiled them with their very gifts when they set aside every first issue of the womb, in order to destroy them so that they might know that I am the Lord." Thus, here destruction of human life is associated with God's desire for recognition.

3) In Micah 6:6-8 similarly raises the possibility of child sacrifice: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow down before God on high. Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Does the Lord want a thousand rams, with myriads of rivers of fat? Should I give by oldest son as a sin offering, the fruit of my belly as a sin offering for my soul?"

The questions thus become not whether in the Bible child sacrifice was not acceptable, but under what circumstances? If it was to the Lord God was it acceptable, as long as it was not to other gods? Was child sacrifice part of a popular religion but shunned by the official religion? Where the laws of the Bible against this as in other matters actually followed? Three stories bear out these questions:

1) In the book of Judges chapter 11: 29-40, after the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, he made a vow to the Lord, fighting wars to consolidate Israelite territory, that if the Lord allowed him to prevail over the Ammonites, that: "the one who goes out that will go out from the door of my house to welcome me on my peaceful return from the Ammonites shall be for the Lord and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." After he won and returned home it was his only child, an unnamed daughter, who greeted him first with drums and dances. When he saw her he tore his garments as a sign of mourning and expressed his great consternation that his vow was irreversible. She seems to recognize his position and asks for two months in the mountains with her female companions to bewail her virginity. At the end of the agreed upon period, the Bible reports that "she returned to her father and he did to her according to the vow that he vowed and she never knew a man." Depending how this is punctuated (punctuation was added much later), it could be read to indicate that he either offered her up as a sacrifice or he fulfilled his vow by depriving her of a sex life, committing her to some sort of biblical Jewish nunnery in the mountains, a prospect that is heightened by the last sentence fragments of the story which tell that it became a law in Israel that for four days every year young women went to bewail Jephthah's daughter. What is not clear is whether they all went at the same time or separately and whether she was among them or not. In other words, whether sacrificing her sex life served as a substitute for burning her as an offering.

2) In Exodus 4:24-25, a story that is not part of most religious school curriculums, God tries to kill either Moses or his son. Tziporah, Moses Midianite wife, therefore picked up a piece of flint, circumcised her son, and threw the bloody foreskin of her son at "his feet," meaning either Moses or her son, an act which saved the endangered person whom she called "a bridegroom of blood." This story shows in an important way that God does seek the death of people and that the blood of children has a redemptive quality.

3) In Genesis 21: 9-19 Abraham, this whole discussion about child sacrifice started with him, was prepared to sacrifice his oldest son, Ishmael, the son of his concubine Hagar. Because the presence of the child, born to Abraham and Sarah as part of a surrogate arrangement, now offended Sarah after her own son, Isaac, was born, she wanted the child and its mother expelled, a request that bothered Abraham until God told him to listen to the voice of his wife and that he would make a great nation of this son as well. So Abraham got up early in the morning, gave Hagar and Ishmael some bread and water and sent them into the wilderness of Beersheva, in the

days before there were any gas stations and convenience stores along the route. Soon the water ran out, which Abraham must have expected, and Hagar prepared for the death of the boy, until God intervened.

These stories bring us back to the Akedah, a story which can be seen as affirming the necessary quality of sacrifice for receiving God's promises. In this story there seems to be nothing in the text that argues against child sacrifice, that questions how God could make such a request, or that shows that the biblical writers disapproved of it. In fact, it could be argued that the text represents Abraham as quite enthusiastic about sacrificing his son. Abraham got up early in the morning, as he did with his expulsion of Ishmael; for more than three days he traveled with Isaac to the appointed place, certainly having plenty of time to mull over what he had been asked to do; asked the other servant boys not to go up with them, leaving no room for any sort of human intervention; and required the angelic messenger to call him twice to stop the sacrifice, showing how involved he was in starting the sacrifice. Twice God noted that Abraham had not withheld his son from him. Finally, raising the possibility that Abraham may have actually sacrificed his son, at the end of the story Abraham returns to Beersheva without Isaac.

The Akedah in the Midrash

The midrash reflects subsequent Jewish views of the Bible. Aspects of the midrash on the Akedah have been collected in two very famous, elegant, and insightful works by Shalom Spiegel, first in his Hebrew article, "Me-aggadot ha-akedah," which appeared in the Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume and then in his *The Last Trial*, an English book in which the Hebrew article was translated.

Spiegel demonstrates that already in the earliest generations of rabbinic development the understanding emerged that Abraham had actually killed Isaac, or at least drew his blood, burned him until his ashes remained on the alter, and then Isaac was revived from the dead. Isaac's sacrifice served as atonement for the sins of the Jewish people, aspects of Hebrew ritual which Spiegel saw as rooted in the ancient biblical commandments to sacrifice the first born.

This rabbinic understanding of the Akedah met two needs of the Jews during the early rabbinic period. On the one hand, this was a period of persecution by the Romans in which many Jews died. The story of the Akedah gave their deaths meaning. On the other hand, this was the period in which Christianity rose. The Akedah provided a biblical, Jewish, myth to match that of Jesus who died and was resurrected as atonement for sin, although Spiegel tried to argue that all these views can be dated to Jewish texts prior to the advent of Christianity, a view that I am not sure that can be supported. The image of Isaac carrying the wood up the mountain like one carries his own cross strikes me as influenced by Christian imagery (*Genesis Rabbah* 59). Furthermore, that the Akedah was chosen to be read on Rosh Hashanah, the second day of the New Year, confirms that it had an overwhelming message for the Jews, a fact no less startling than the reading of the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. Thus in the course of the Holiday Abraham tries to kill off both his sons.

The Akedah in the Piyyut

One of the purposes of this course is to introduce various aspects of Jewish cultural creativity. One of the richest, although not without controversy, has been piyyut. The Hebrew word piyyut is based on the Greek word for poetry. Piyyut, which began to appear in the land of Israel in around the fourth century CE, constituted poetic reactions, often based on midrash, to biblical stories, especially the sacrifices, various prayers in the

prayerbook, and subsequent events in Jewish history. Piyyut uses rich, imaginative language that is so creative it is almost enigmatic. One view of the development of piyyut understands it as a form of biblical exegesis when study of the Torah was banned by the Romans. Most piyyut was only preserved by accident in the Cairo Geniza, a medieval storehouse for worn out manuscripts, some was included in the text of the prayerbook. During the medieval period Jews around the world continued to write more restrained Piyyut, usually reflecting the poetic styles of the country in which they lived. In Spain, under Islamic influence the Hebrew poets there made a major break from the tradition of piyyut to produce rhymed and metered poetry that drew almost exclusively on the vocabulary of the Bible, a trend that was continued in other Islamic countries and then in Italy, especially under the influence of Renaissance poetic genres. During the nineteenth and twentieth century enlightened Jews, maskilim, made fun of the arcane language of piyyut and modern Jews, both Reform and Orthodox, began to eliminate much of this cultural treasure from the prayerbook, although some is still found in the High Holiday prayerbook of every movement and makes great fun to decode when the services tend to drag.

The three main ancient payytanim, those who wrote piyyutim, known by name were Yose ben Yose, Yannai, and Eliezer Kalir, although very little is known about them. Many other anonymous payytanim wrote as well, among them the author of a piyyut on the Akedah (T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, pp. 201-202). This piyyut stresses the religious quality of the commandment to sacrifice Isaac, the haste with which Abraham followed the commandment, and the salvific quality of the act, even though it ended with the sacrifice of a ram instead of the boy: ". . . your boy as a fragrant offering I desired - - how he observed the commandment, not delaying at all! He quickly split the wood. . . offering up a lamb, taking in his hand a sword, he showed no mercy. . . Accept, God, these ashes, remember us with his covenant, consider us his Akedah, answer the affliction of our soul."

The Akedah and The First Crusade

The First Crusade, called for in 1095 by the pope as a way for European Christians to liberate the Holy Land from the Muslims who had conquered it, produced the immediate, unintended result of a series of violent, unprecedented, popular attacks on Jewish communities, particularly in the Rhineland. In the course of May 1096 Jews in Worms, Speyer, and Mainz (Mayence) were slaughtered or forcibly converted and in some cases they chose to take the lives of their loved ones and then their own, often in the form of ritual human sacrifice. Narratives and poetry from the period graphically reflect the influence of the Akedah on Jewish reactions to the Crusades.

In an anonymous dirge on the Martyrs of Mainz (Carmi, p. 372-373), the language of the biblical story of the Akedah is mixed with the descriptions of martyrdom (kiddush ha-shem, sanctifying the divine name), and ritual sacrifice: "Young men went forth, each from his room, to sanctify the great name, because today he tests his chosen ones." Rabbis extended their necks to be slaughtered and a mother bound (not, however, using the same root as Akedah) her child and the father said a blessing on the slaughter. Mothers strangled their children and brides kissed their new husbands and ran off to be slaughtered. The analogy to the Akedah is made explicit when the poet asks why, with so many being bound and destroyed, the angels are not interrupting it this time.

David bar Meshullam of Speyer (twelfth century) wrote an even more graphic dirge on the massacres, chosen death, and ritual slaughter, mixed with a call for vengeance, with even more explicit references to the Akedah (Carmi, pp. 374-375). The central theme of his poem is the ritual quality of the bloody acts of self immolation, regularly drawing on the same root as the word Akedah, performed by the Jews. The poet noted that the original Akedah has a power to protect the Jews, but now the number of sacrifices multiplies. It is important to note that

writing in Germany he used Hebrew metrical forms from Spain, a sign of expanding cultural influences on the Jews of Germany. He also wrote his rhyming poem using a double acrostic, every two lines begin with the same Hebrew letter moving through the alphabet in order, then an acrostic that spells out his name, more or less-probably altered because various editors did not realize what he was doing. Thus, this was a cultural artifact based on a variety of aesthetic criteria. Even writing about self-immolation, the poet was very careful about the form his work took and imposed challenges on his writing that heightened his display of artistic virtuosity.

The major poem about subsequent ritual sacrifices in the Rhineland was written by Ephraim of Bonn (1132-1200), chronicler of the Second Crusade of 1145-1149, and featured in Spiegel's work (Carmi, pp. 379-384, for those following the Hebrew and the English in Carmi, in this poem (only) the columns of Hebrew do not line up accurately with those of the English.) Stylistically, this poem was written as an Atbash acrostic, in other words, each line (every two lines in this printed version), begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order going both forwards from Aleph and backwards from Tav, hence the expression Atbash (Aleph, Tav, Bet, Shin). Each hemistich, half line, also rhymes with the next. This poem retells the story of the Akedah in great detail emphasizing Abraham's enthusiasm to fulfill the divine commandment to sacrifice his son. Adding a dash of local color to the story, it identifies Mt. Scopus as the place from which Abraham at the end of the three days of travel had seen where he was to perform the sacrifice-Mt. Moriah, presumably the Temple Mount-now the Dome of the Rock, which still can be seen very well from Mt. Scopus. The key to this poem is the fact that it explicitly states that Isaac was aware of what was going to happen to him, blessed the Lord, and asked that his ashes be taken to his mother. Abraham then, after pinning him down, ritually slaughtered Isaac. Then, not only is Isaac resurrected by God, but his zealous father tries to slaughter him again, causing the Lord to have to call out to him a second time. Once his son had been accepted as a sacrifice by God and transported to the Garden of Eden, he then offered up the ram. Afterwards, the father and son met again and prayed together that their deed would atone for the sins of future generations of Jews.

In the course half-century after the First Crusade, three different Hebrew prose chronicles were written. This is in and of itself an interesting cultural phenomenon for two reasons: 1) these were the earliest Hebrew chronicles produced in western Europe and 2) it took several generations until a chronicle of a tragedy of such a scope could be written-a phenomenon paralleled by the appearance of Holocaust studies after a similar amount of time (These texts have been translated into English in books by Shlomo Eidelberg and Robert Chazan). These chronicles described the events of the First Crusade using the term Akedah when parents sacrificed their children, "as Abraham bound Isaac his son" as well as the death of any Jew, "Has there ever been 1100 akedot in one day, all of them like the akedah of Isaac the son of Abraham."

One of the most touching stories of the period is found in the Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson, (Eidelberg, pp. 39-41). The story is about a Jew who accepted baptism and, unlike his wife and father, survived the massacre of the Jews of Mainz, Isaac the son of David, who then carefully planned his own death as atonement for his behavior during the massacre. After recovering lost treasure, he hired workers to repair his father's house, especially the doors that had been smashed in. He then gathered his family together, locked the doors and asked his children if they wanted to be sacrificed to God, to which they consented. Then, in the synagogue, at midnight, he slaughtered them to sanctify the divine name and sprinkled their blood on the pillars of the ark where the Torah scrolls were kept, asking that their blood atone for his sins. He then burned the house with his mother in it to sanctify God's name. Throughout this narrative he is referred to as either a saint or as a pious person. He then set fire to the synagogue and, despite pleas from Christians to save his life, he died in the flames, as the narrator assures us that he has ascended with the righteous to the Garden of Eden.

The Akekah in Modern Hebrew Literature

The chronicles of the First Crusade were fully published only during the 1890s, as the 800th anniversary of the events approached. At this time a young, rebellious Hebrew poet named Saul Tchernichowski (1875-1943) had moved from a Russian village to the cosmopolitan setting of Odessa on the Black Sea where he attained a broad secondary education with particular strengths in languages and literature as well as science. Influenced by socialism and Zionism, he turned to a critique of traditional Jewish culture. One of the vehicles he used to convey his emerging views was his poetic retelling of the Crusade chronicle tale of Isaac ben David of Mainz, renaming him Barukh of Mainz. This Hebrew epic was finally published in 1902 and made a momentous impression, becoming a central piece of the canon of modern Hebrew poetry and an anthem for the new emerging Zionist critique of Jewish life (See the translation in Eisig Silberschlaag's book on Tchernichowski and Alan Mintz's discussion in his book *Hurban*.) What is important for our understanding of the development of Jewish culture around the theme of the Akedah is that Tchernichowski changed radically the emphases that he placed on the version found in the sources. In the Crusade chronicles, children are killed to sanctify the divine name. For Tchernichowski, they are killed as part of an overwhelming desire for revenge against Christians.

This poem starts out with Barukh addressing his dead wife to complain that the Jews have been abandoned by God, to describe his conversion, and to tell how he slaughtered his two daughters, who, unlike Isaac, not mentioned explicitly, did try to fight back against him. He then devotes much of the poem to cursing the Christians and calling for revenge against them, which caused the work to be censored in Russia. The poem is filled with descriptions of blood, but for Tchernichowski, unlike his medieval predecessors, the blood is not of sacrifice but of revenge. He then describes his burning the city down and his great glee, ending with his allowing a nest of swallows to burn in the conflagration rather than trying to save them—a repudiation of a value often stressed in Jewish texts concerning showing kindness to animals.

Tchernichowski was a leader in a movement among the Jews of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century called the *Kulturkampf*, inspired by the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), who rejected western civilization as a decadent slave mentality of humility, weakness, and unnatural morality. He looked to the superman who would affirm life, passion, creativity and called for a transvaluation of values from those of the herd to the will to power. During the 1870s the German Chancellor Bismark launched a *Kulturkampf* against the Catholic church whose power he felt threatened the state and German unity. The Russian Hebrew poet Judah Leib Gordon (Yalag, 1830-1892) was one of the first to apply Nietzschean values to Jewish culture, attacking the rabbis and prophets for causing the ruin of Jewish political strength. Saul Tchernichowski continued this tradition in Russia, Germany, Switzerland, and finally in Palestine. Because he had a child out of wedlock with a Russian princess in Germany, the rabbis of Palestine did not want to allow any streets to be named after him, something which the casual observer to any Israeli city will notice that they failed to do.

The Akedah in Modern Jewish Culture

In Israel, with so much of the culture based upon both regular and almost universal military experience imposed upon the youth as well as wars serving as decisive markers in cultural developments, the Akedah continues to be a powerful theme in contemporary discourse. Much, but not even all of the literary references were presented in a 1988 *Prooftexts* article by Ruth Karten-Blum in which she made references to further extensive symposia on the subject. To tie this week's lecture with last week's, the poetry of Isaac Lamdan, most remembered for his

monumental work on Masada, describes what will become a major theme in Israeli secular consciousness, "We are all bound here, and with our own hands we brought wood here . And don't ask if the sacrifice will be accepted!" This theme is continued in the poem by Haim Gouri, "Yerushah" (Inheritance, Carmi, p. 565). He was born in Palestine and was one of the leaders of the Palmach generation of poets, those raised in secular Hebrew culture who fought in the 1948 War of Independence. Gouri wrote, "But that moment he (Isaac) bequeathed to his descendants. They were born with the knife in their heart." Similarly, in the famous soldiers' discussion produced during the Six Day War of 1967, The Seventh Day, Siah Lohamim, (though recent studies have shown that the work has been altered in the translation), reference is made to the role of the Akedah and the sacrifice of children in the wars: "These are moments when a man is given a greater insight into Isaac's sacrifice. Kierkegaard asked what Abraham did that night. What did he think about? God didn't tell him to take Isaac out and sacrifice him right away. He was told to take him the next morning. He had a whole night to think. And Kierkegaard asks what he thought about during the night. It's a question that touches on the very meaning of human existence. The Bible says nothing about it. . . . For us, that night lasted six days. We thought: now we've sent our boys away and tomorrow we'll get the awful news" (p. 262).

By contrast, published about the same time, Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, touches on similar motifs of child sacrifice, with some fascinating role reversals, without actually mentioning the biblical text:

"So my mother sits down in a chair beside me with a long bread knife in her hand. It is made of stainless steel, and has little sawlike teeth. Which do I want to be, weak or strong, a man or a mouse?

"Doctor, why, why oh why oh why oh why does a mother pull a knife on her own son? I am six, seven years old, how do I know she really wouldn't use it? What am I supposed to do . . . for Christ's sake . . . I believe there is an intention lurking somewhere to draw my blood! Only why? What can she possibly be thinking in her brain? . . . because I will not eat some string beans and a baked potato, point a bread knife at my heart?

"And why doesn't my father stop her?"

In Israel, at least according to literature up to the present, the threat of death comes from an external enemy. In the United States, the threats to Jews are only internal because they have no outside enemies. This may be why the introspective, psychological element looms larger in the Diasporan culture than in the Jewish country and why much of Israeli culture is based on adversarial relationships, which seem to become more vicious as external threats subside.

Conclusion

These texts, not marginal, but produced by the leading representatives of Jewish thought from Tanakh to Palmakh, show the power of blood and sacrifice lurking at the center of the Jewish experience. Jewish culture continued to be vibrant—each of these texts was a literary masterpiece in its day—not despite the violence expressed, but precisely because of it. Understanding the charge that these texts carry requires suspending some of the values that we may have adopted from western culture. One of the challenges facing Jewish culture today is how to, on the one hand, enliven it in the Diaspora where it is no longer imbued with a sense of blood and sacrifice, and, on the other hand, how to tame Israeli culture which still responds viscerally to every minor matter in these momentous categories, leaving themselves both emotionally exhausted and out of step with the emotional pace of Jewish life abroad.

Week 4

The Passover Seder as Cultural History

Reactions to Previous Lectures

Concerning the first lecture in this series, I am still getting messages about the meaning of eidetic- noetic, noting the basic Greek meanings of having to do with the perception of images and relating to the mind, terms going back to Aristotle and Plato. Soloveitchik's use of these terms draws on their use in Phenomenology, a school of thought developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), based on the presentation of structures of experienced reality. Husserl, a Jewish convert to Protestantism, attracted a wide following among German Jewish students in the early twentieth century including Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), whose 1931 University of Berlin dissertation studied the prophets from a phenomenological point of view, and Edith Stein, who is about to become a saint.

Soloveitchik, who also earned a degree in philosophy from the University of Berlin, in his use of these terms seems to be saying , which I gathered with help from Professor Leonard Ehrlich of the Departments of Philosophy and Jewish Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Dr. Edith Ehrlich, my former colleagues from western Massachusetts and current in-laws, that the biblical story offers immediate imagery that carries with it meaning for its readers. Thus Soloveitchik is using modern philosophical terminology to support a traditional understanding the Bible against modern critical understandings of it. His use of these terms gives us a window on aspects of Jewish culture in Berlin during the 1920s and 1930s. These terms are now used, especially on the web to refer to all sorts of pop psychology and computer graphics.

In other communications the Akedah raised questions about Judaism as ethical monotheism. As I mentioned in an earlier course, this nineteenth century construct does not do justice to richness of Jewish culture. In future lectures, I will examine further aspects of Jewish ethics in several contexts. As we saw last week when people reacted to the verdict against Rabbi Aryeh Deri in Israel, ethics was rarely a main consideration. When talking about the secularization of the Akedah in American Jewish literature, I should have also mentioned Bob Dylans's "Highway 61 Revisited," "God said to Abraham I want you to kill me a son. Abe said to God where do you want that killing done. On Highway 61." Other students noted my omission of one quotation that ties together the notions of blood, sacrifice, and national revival in

Israel, an inscription in the cemetery at Tel Hai of the Shomerim, the early watch society: "In blood and fire Judah fell and in blood and fire Judah will rise."

Today's Lecture

Today, in anticipation of Passover, I will explore the Passover Seder, the ritual meal on the first night or two of Passover, and the Haggadah, the collection of literary materials for the Seder that grew from the first century till the twentieth, in light of these themes of blood and sacrifice and show how in general the Seder, uses midrash, piyyut, and extra-textual gestures to resolve biblical contradictions in the ceremonies as well as texts.

For today's lecture, in addition to having a Bible available at your side or on line, I would recommend a Haggadah. At this time of year it is easy to get free copies of a traditional Haggadah text at many supermarkets. There are a fantastic number of Haggadot on the market, ranging from ones with commentaries, to those with illuminations, to those with new rituals and liturgies (Reform, vegetarian, feminist, current events, etc.) Perhaps the most useful, reasonably priced edition with introduction, text, explanations, and bibliography is Nahum Glatzer's edition published by Schocken based on the work of E. D. Goldschmidt which is considered the authoritative historical analysis of the Haggadah. An intriguing version of the Haggadah, *The Polychrome Historical Haggadah* by Jacob Freedman, shows each historical stratum of the Hebrew text printed in a different color, while the English translation appears only in one color.

The Biblical Background

The many different biblical versions of Passover begin in Exodus 12, what is referred to as the Egyptian Passover because it was the one celebrated before the Exodus. The biblical narrative is repetitious not only in God's instructions, but in Moses' retelling of God's instructions, and then in the narrator's report of what actually happened (at midnight), where many of the details of the narrative are first introduced (verses 21-28). The centerpiece of the first Passover was the lamb that was sacrificed, its blood collected in a basin and then smeared on to the lintels of the Israelite houses with a bunch of hyssop leaves (21), and its flesh eaten with matzah and bitter herbs (8). The event had a three-fold salvific quality: the sacrifice itself (for the Lord), the blood that protected the Hebrews from the death of the first born during the final plague, and the eating of the sacrifice with girded loins, sandaled feet, and staff in hand, that served as a prelude for redemption to freedom. It is therefore important to notice

that the matzah and the bitter herbs were an original part of the sacrifice and the eating of the lamb before the Hebrews left Egypt. Matzah is then introduced again as an intrinsic part of the holiday, as if we had never heard of it, although the Israelites had not yet left Egypt, which according to later verses is when their dough did not have a chance to rise (vss. 34, 39). Now, if they had already been commanded to eat matzah, not to eat leavened bread or even to possess it (the reason that today there is Kosher for Passover dog food) (vss, 17, 19, 20) it is not quite clear why they would have prepared bread or why their bread not having risen would have been of any concern.

In subsequent books of the Bible, the holiday develops further. A year later, in Numbers 9:1-14, the Passover is celebrated in the desert, but those who are unclean must wait another month for a second seating. In Numbers 28:16-25 the holiday involves many more kinds of sacrifices, also with bitter herbs, explicitly offering atonement for sins, in addition to being accompanied by the requirement to eat matzot for seven days. In the book of Deuteronomy 16: 1-8 and 26: 6-8 the story is retold and the sacrifice is now required to take place at the place which the Lord will designate, moving the holiday from the family unit to a central shrine. In Second Kings 23: 22-23 it seems that the holiday had not been observed for a while until it was revived by King Josiah as part of his reforms and cleansing of the Temple in Jerusalem, where the holiday continued to be celebrated with sacrifices.

With the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70 CE, the central problem of Passover is how to keep the Passover sacrifices in the Jewish consciousness, without repudiating them, but not as an actual part of religious life. The Haggadah thus preserves the memory of the cult while changing it to a symbolic level. In doing so, the Haggadah asserts the validity of the biblical text and the power of the divine word found in it while at the same time developing an alternate method of expression and belief.

Jews, nevertheless, continued tacitly to assert the efficacy of the biblical sacrificial cult while at the same time they seemed to have ceased to seek the fulfillment of the cultic sacrificial needs in their life. It may be argued that the need for cultic fulfillment and forgiveness is not so easy to repudiate and that one of the gnawing desiderata of Judaism has been for sacrifice and cult, including the efficient use of blood. As I mentioned in an earlier course, there is evidence that after the destruction of the Second Temple Jews continued to offer sacrifices on its ruins, and to this day some Jews continue to prepare for the establishment of the Third Temple, while many actively pray for such an event. During the middle ages, as I argued in the past two lectures, such a need was filled, in part, by martyrdom and child

sacrifice. If we read the Haggadah carefully and especially if we examine the rituals of the Seder, we can still see how it preserved both the repudiation of sacrifices as well as traces of sacrifice during the centuries.

The Seder Setting

Before even turning to the text of the Haggadah there are a number of items that appear on the Seder table, some of which are not even mentioned in the Haggadah text, which are reminders, direct or indirect, of sacrifice. The shankbone (zroah), as we shall see is explicitly connected with Temple sacrifice. The egg (beyztah), which is never mentioned, is often scorched, also indicating a connection with sacrifice, a connection that is heightened with the association through the talmudic tractate associated with Yom Kippur called Beytzah, and further heightened when dipped in salt water, associated in Leviticus 2:13. The bitter herbs were explicitly mentioned as connected with the Passover sacrifice in Exodus, and the parsley (karpas), with all the dipping it is put through, stands in for the hyssop leaves with which the lamb's blood was spread on the doorposts in Exodus (12:22).

Jumping ahead to the middle of the Seder where some of these items are explained, we see a careful interplay of acceptance of the sacrificial significance of them and a studied avoidance. At the section that begins, "Rabban Gamliel used to say," (without specifying which one) there is a ritual discussion of the Passover sacrifice, Matzah, and Bitter Herbs. The text only identifies the sacrifice with the Temple and not with Egypt or the period of the desert. But rather than talking about the actual Passover sacrifice, the paragraph moves to discuss the fact that God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and saved them. In the discussion on matzah, the paragraph goes directly to the later explanation which involves the hasty departure from Egypt without any mention of the matzot having been associated with the original sacrifice, or subsequent sacrifices as depicted in Leviticus 2:4-5. Similarly when discussing the bitter herbs, all meanings associated with sacrifice are displaced in favor of a figurative explanation that the lives of the Hebrews were embittered by hard work in Egypt based on Exodus 1:14, nothing much to do with the actual Passover story, and about as close as the whole Haggadah ever gets to the Moses story. When the bitter herbs are blessed and eaten (Korekh), they are, however, mentioned, in the name of Hillel as a remembrance of the Temple, but not the actual Temple sacrifices since the text limits the meaning to the fact that when the Temple stood Hillel would make a sandwich of matzah and bitter herbs, making explicit reference to fulfill what is written in Numbers 9:11 about the Passover sacrifice,

but avoiding, even purportedly in the time of the Temple, explicit reference to sacrifice.

Thus the symbols on the table, especially in light of the biblical texts known to all, point to aspects of the bloody sacrifice of animals, but the text on the page removes from the surface almost all mention of these rites and rationalizes the presence of some symbols and ignores others. For example, according to some customs, unsupported by any explicit instructions in the Haggadah, Jews eat hardboiled eggs soaked in salt water, but others pass the Seder night without partaking in any egg at all. (As one professor of mine once said when asked where the egg came from on the Seder plate, "The Easter bunny dropped it on its way by.") and certainly there are no Jews who eat the shankbone.

The sacrificial aspect of the Seder reaches an unstated but visually profound presentation with the recitation of the Ten Plagues. Then, in a tradition that can be dated back only to Safed in the sixteenth century, Jews dip their finger in their wine and then drop the wine on their plate (or a napkin for the more refined). Modern apologetics say that this is done to diminish the joy of the wine because of the great Egyptian losses. Although this explanation is rooted in a midrash protesting the song that the Israelites sang after the Egyptians drowned in the sea, in the context of the Seder such an it is both unlikely and relatively recent. A more probable explanation dipping the finger in the wine is the convergence of two facts about this ritual. 1) It directly imitates the actions of the priests offering sacrifices as described in the book of Leviticus (4:6) where they dipped their finger in the blood of the sacrifice and sprayed it seven times towards the Lord at the holy curtain of the ark. 2) One of the features of the Safed community was their strong desire to reestablish the ancient aspects of Judaism including the Sanhedrin, ordination of rabbis, and Temple sacrifice, as well as the desire of some of them to die a martyr's death (all these trends were embodied in the life of Joseph Caro the editor of the Shulhan Arukh). Thus it seems that this ceremony both consciously as well as subliminally reenacts the sacrificial behavior of the priests.

Blood, Vengeance, and the Seder

Despite the vehemence of Saul Tchernichowski's poetic call for Jewish vengeance against the nations of the world which we mentioned last week, it was not a new call. Such a call appears in the Haggadah in at least two places. 1) In the section on the plagues the Haggadah moves from the usually accepted number of ten plagues to show that there were really 250 of them. The basic textual reason for such an expansion is that in the narratives of Exodus and Deuteronomy no number of plagues is

explicitly given and in Psalm 78 other numbers and different orders for the plagues appear. This section of the Haggadah, therefore, takes on the quality of a brutality auction where the rabbis outbid each other in describing the number and ferocity of the plagues that afflicted Egypt. 2) After the third cup is drunk, a quaint medieval custom has it that the door is opened for Elijah the Prophet to visit. (Just as Santa Claus can go down all the Christian chimneys in such a short time on Christmas Eve, so too Elijah the Prophet can make it to all the Jewish Seders on one night of the year. While there aren't as many Seders as Chimneys, Jews provide both an incentive for Elijah to get around, by offering him wine instead of milk and cookies, which ultimately may slow him down as he imbibes along his route-- I am looking forward to your mail . . .)

The historical reason for opening the door and setting the cup for Elijah has to do with the fact that during the middle ages the Jews were accused of kidnapping Christian children at Passover time and using their blood to bake matzah. Such an accusation, fanned in the wake of the Crusades when Jews, as I mentioned last week, sacrificed their own children, was therefore not difficult for Christians to imagine. (A fascinating controversy on this subject was launched in the journal *Zion* with an article by Israel Yuval in 1993; the articles are in Hebrew with English summaries). Thus the Jews felt it necessary to open the doors of the Seder to show that there were no Christian corpses strewn about. Because of this libel Jews also switched from red to white wine to allay further suspicions against their use of blood. The focal point of the opening of the door is the glass of wine. However, while going through this gesture of openness and candor, Jews recite a string of curses against the gentiles of the earth: Listen to the sound in Hebrew: "Shfokh hamat-khah al hagoyim, asher lo yeda-uha ve-al mamlakhot asher beshimkhah lo kara-u." "Spill out your wrath on the goyim who have not known you and on the kingdoms who have not called in your name."

The themes of sacrifice and vengeance are two themes that run through almost all the piyyutim that are sung at the end of the Seder, except for *America the Beautiful*, *O Canada*, *God Save the Queen*, and *Hatikva*, which seemed to be added to most Haggadot to soften some of the desires for a return to the sacrificial cult and the calls for vengeance against gentile neighbors. "And it came to pass at midnight," an acrostic piyyut by Yannai, describes the carnage wreaked upon Israel's enemies. Similar sentiments are found in Kalir's "And so you shall say: 'It is the sacrifice of the Passover,'" and "Mighty is He," or "Adir Hu," ask for the Temple to be rebuilt. And "The Only Kid," "Had Gadya," deals with an allegorical food chain of revenge.

The themes of blood and sacrifice are also brought together in the various illustrated Haggadot from the middle-ages to the present, many

of which are regularly offered in reproduction editions, especially at this time of year. The classic work on Haggadah illustration is Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Haggadah and History* which has recently been reissued by the Jewish Publication Society of America. In a recent article "Infanticide in Passover Iconography," in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 56 (1993): 85-99 (if you plan on reading or copying this article, be sure to go to the back of the journal for the art reproduction plates which are not in the article itself), David Malkiel asserts that an ancient Jewish legend, which left traces in *Midrash Rabbah*, *Rashi*, *Midrash Hagadol*, and other classical sources, tells how Pharaoh developed a case of leprosy which could only be cured by bathing in the blood of Jewish children. Such a legend, which parallel to Christian claims against Jewish use of blood, shows that Jews also accepted, despite any possible negative polemical implications, the efficacy of the use of blood for medicinal purposes. Thus, while not part of the Seder ceremony, the Haggadah illustrations presented their readers with the image of Pharaoh bathing in Jewish blood, with graphic depictions of the babies being slaughtered, their blood being drained, and their corpses strewn about. Indeed these pictures are found in the section of the Haggadah involving the plagues (their exact significance is connected with the reading "Vanitzhak," see below) heightening the non-verbal significance of this section. Malkiel takes this point one step further by showing that the slaughter of the children was depicted in the form of human sacrifice, which he then connects back to the theme of the Akedah, martyrdom, and child sacrifice, themes also depicted in Haggadah illustrations of the Akedah and Solomon's decision to cut the baby in half (in Yerushalmi, see plates 10, 45, and 92).

Some Haggadahs also have pictures of men wearing armor, carrying a sword, riding horses, joined by dogs, sounding trumpets, hunting rabbits through the woods. Rabbits, explicitly commanded in *Leviticus*, are not kosher and weapons were also not always allowed to medieval Jews. Clearly, this is not a typical scene from Jewish life from which we can derive some sort of positivistic information. The reason for such a picture is found in the text of the Haggadah. As in several junctures both in the Haggadah and in the Talmud, the procedure is reduced to an abbreviation as a mnemonic. Located near the picture of the rabbit hunt, at the beginning of the Haggadah, intended to clarify the order of the Seder when it falls on a Saturday night: Wine (Yayin), Sanctification (Kiddush), candle (Ner), End of Sabbath (Havdalah), Reaching the Holiday Time (Zeman), is the abbreviation Y.K.N.H.Z., which can be pronounced Yaken Has, which in German means rabbit hunt. A mundane arrangement of basic prayers turns to be an exciting, somewhat bloody, hunt scene, a scene in which Jews could not participate in real time, but in the virtual reality of the Seder they could. This new

dimension mixed the highly charged combinations of forbidden foods with rituals, Sabbath blessings with activities (blowing, carrying, and riding) that were clearly forbidden on the Sabbath.

Both the depictions of child sacrifice and the rabbit hunt reflect Christian European cultural influences and are not found in Haggadot from Islamic countries, showing the rootedness of the Jews in their surrounding culture.

The Haggadah as Midrash

Most Jews tend to lose interest with the section of the Haggadah called the "Maggid," from the same root as Haggadah, meaning the narration in which the Passover story seems to be told in a myriad of details. What I would like to do for the remainder of this talk is to show some of the often overlooked, but fascinating ways in which the Haggadah builds its own narrative by integrating contradictions and discrepancies in the biblical text.

One of the most well-known examples is this section of the Haggadah is the Four Children. In reality, what is usually depicted as a morality tale involving the various states of moral development of four prototypical children, is in fact a simple exegetical exercise with little ethical base at all. There are four places in the Torah narrative, connected in one way or another with the Passover story, where the biblical narratives proposes how to formulate the story in case a child asks about it. 1) Deuteronomy 6:20, "If your child asks you tomorrow, 'What are the rules, laws, and statutes which the Lord God commanded to you?'" 2) Exodus 12:26: "If it should come to pass that your children say to you, 'What is this service for you?'" 3) Exodus 13:14: "If it should come to pass that your child asks you tomorrow, 'What is this?'" 4) In the final instance no hypothetical question is mentioned, but an answer is given concerning the Exodus. The Haggadah thus took each of these questions and associated it with certain qualities of different types of children. 1) The first question is associated with a wise child. I suspect that the reason is because it mentions the sophisticated aspects of rules, laws, and statutes. The answer proposed is based not on the biblical text but on rabbinic law. The actual response suggested in the Bible, "We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord God . . ." is removed from the context of this exchange and placed at the head of the entire section as the rubric for the response to the Four Questions. 2) The second question is associated with a wicked child. I suspect the reason is the terseness of the question. The answer proposed by the Haggadah, however, which notes that he excluded himself from the group by asking what the laws meant "to you," is problematic because the wise child used similar phrasing. The actual

answer proposed in the Bible, has been moved, as we saw above, to be the centerpiece of the explanation of the shankbone as suggested by Rabban Gamliel. 3) The third question is associated with a simple child. I suspect that the reason is because the question is so short. The answer proposed in the Bible is offered here as well. 4) Because the fourth question was not actually asked in the Bible, it is associated with a child too young to ask a question. The answer given is the one proposed in the Bible, "You shall tell your child on this day, saying, "Because of this the Lord God did for me when I left Egypt."

The abovementioned Elijah's cup also represents a similar exegetical compromise around the table. In addition to its connection with the blood libel (and I am not yet sure which came first) it represents a resolve of a problem with biblical interpretation. The four cups of wine that are blessed and consumed throughout the Seder are connected with four verbs in Exodus 6:6-8: "I took you out from the burden's of Egypt and saved you from their slavery and I redeemed you with an outstretched arm and with mighty judgments." A fifth verb in the passage, however, has yet to be fulfilled, "and I brought you to the Land," so the compromise that commentators see is that the cup is poured but not drunk. In shopping today in Jerusalem I picked up a couple of commentaries that may help unravel whether the cup preceded or followed the exegetical tradition and at what stage the door opening and cursing were added. I also found in many book stores in both Hebrew and English a Haggadah depicting how Passover was celebrated in the Temple with elaborate references to the sacrificial cult, showing that such interest is still alive and well.

The redundancies of the biblical text are thus neatly packaged into a collection of prototypes that add much to the drama of the Seder and ultimately return value-added meaning to the biblical text itself.

One intellectual tour de force of the Haggadah is the midrash passage developed shortly after the Four Children, immediately after the cup of wine is lifted and then lowered. The premise of this section is that two different versions of the retelling of the Passover story can be coordinated. The two versions are then integrated sort of like Dueling Banjos in the film *Deliverance*. First a few words from Deuteronomy 26:5-8 are strummed: "A wandering Aramean was my father. . . few in number." After the interjection of a few other passages these verses are linked with passages from Exodus 12. To amplify but a few passages here and to return to the example mentioned above concerning Pharaoh's bathing in the blood of Jewish children, Deuteronomy 26:7 says: "We cried to the Lord the God of our ancestors, the Lord heard our voices, and saw our distress, and our burden, and our oppression," which is linked to the death of Pharaoh, the connection is made to Exodus 2:23,

"It came to pass in the course of all those days that Pharaoh the King of Egypt died and the children of Israel groaned from the servitude and cried out." Thus the vagueness of Deuteronomy, as integrated here, seems naturally to refer to the events of Exodus where Pharaoh died and the Israelites complained. Yet the sequence raises the problem of why the Hebrews would cry out if their oppressive king had just died, a problem that is resolved with the illustration showing that Pharaoh did not actually die, but became infected with leprosy, considered a form of death in the Bible (Numbers 12:12).

Conclusion

A current joke that reflects the banality with which the Seder can be treated summarizes all Jewish holidays: They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat. Unfortunately, the Jewish education establishment both in Israel and abroad, which still depicts the Hebrews as building pyramids, for which there is no evidence whatsoever, have reduced the Seder to a "model seder" of sponge cake, grape juice, four questions, and matzah crumbs. Even more theologically sophisticated contemporary Jews use the seder as a telescope to observe the distant historical event of the Exodus from Egypt and the attendant notions of salvation and redemption. The Haggadah, despite these trivializations and abstractions, nevertheless remains a force in Jewish culture because it carries a powerful charge. The Haggadah deals with matters of life and death, blood and sacrifice, at many different textual and sensual levels so that each year, and for much of the year for serious aficionados, it shapes in a profound way a visceral feeling of connectedness with the proceedings. Aware of the fact or not, Jews connect with the Passover Haggadah because it not only preserves memories, but creates them. Each generation has added to it and it has played a major part in the formation of evolving Jewish consciousness.

Week 5

Jesus Saves, Moses Invests: Changing Images of Moses in Jewish Culture

Moses: Introduction

As many commentators have noticed over the centuries, despite various modern emendations and loose translations of the Haggadah, Moses' name does not appear in the Passover Haggadah at all. A fascinating omission

of the name of the man who in the biblical account was the star of the show. Reasons galore have been put forth for this omission in the Haggadah, but rather than dwelling on them now, I would like to look at the development of Moses in Jewish culture. This lecture is meant to coordinate with the period of Passover and Easter, not to mention the appearance of the film, Prince of Egypt, which I have yet to see, a time when discussions of both Moses and Jesus is common in the air.

Before beginning with the biblical account I must state emphatically that the purpose of this lecture is not to discover the historic Moses, whether he existed or not is not the point of the presentation. What is important is the way in which later generations of Jews saw him. Therefore, when comparisons to other cultural developments are made, particularly Christianity, while I am well aware that the biblical (Old Testament) text preceded developments in Christianity and western culture, the point of the lecture is to show how later Jewish developments may have been influenced by the surrounding culture.

Moses in the Bible

Four of the five books of the Torah, which is also called the Five Books of Moses, deal almost single mindedly with the on going communications between God and Moses. These appear in the form of narratives-in which Moses often plays the leading role, laws, poetry, religious experiences, and what the text explicitly identifies as prophecy. While Moses does not appear at all in the book of Genesis, at the beginning of chapter two of the book of Exodus we meet the story of his birth, youth, early adulthood, and summons by God.

The biblical narrative in chapter two of Exodus raises several problems:

1) Who were the unnamed parents and sister of the boy who is born here-could a daughter of Levi, Jacob's son, have lived so long? 2) Where did that sister come from, and later a brother? It seems that the parents had just got married and conceived their first child when his older sister shows up? 3) How did Pharaoh's daughter, also unnamed, know she had found a Hebrew baby in the river-chapter one seems to have ended with Pharaoh having declared that his people should throw every boy born to them into the river (vs. 22.)? 4) Was not Pharaoh as wise as his daughter to detect a Hebrew baby (or serious promiscuity on the part of his daughter who shows up with a young baby?) 5) Doesn't the baby seem to grow up pretty quickly here, going from sucking at his mother's breast to killing a man?

At the biblical level of the narrative, such details don't seem to matter. The purpose of the story appears to get the story moving. Not only is the life of Moses telescoped, but the entire period of history

of several hundred years is reduced to a few verses. The narrative is skeletal, yet compelling.

The narrative continues: In chapter 3 Moses experiences divine revelation at the burning bush. In chapter 4:24-26, in the story of the bridegroom of blood, it seems that God tried to kill Moses, but he is saved from this by the blood of the circumcision of his son performed by his wife, Tzipporah, and thrown at his feet, one of the last things they would do together, since she does not appear regularly at his side (Tzipporah was no Sarah Netanyahu who has been surgically attached to her husband's side), perhaps raising the possibility, that they actually separated, see Exodus 18:1-4. As Moses worked to liberate his people he also received commandments (Exodus 19-20), visions of the divine (Exodus 24:10), advocated a cleaving to the divine (Deuteronomy 4:4), wrote some or all of the Torah (Deuteronomy 32:46), and died "by the mouth of the Lord," before reaching the promised land (Deuteronomy 34:5).

Moses in the Midrash

Subsequent readers of the Bible were not willing to accept the biblical author at his brief, somewhat cryptic word, especially regarding the leading law maker, prophet, and mystic. To see how rabbis answered the questions raised by the biblical text, we'll look at some passages in Midrash Rabba, part of a collection of rabbinic teachings on the Torah and Megillot, that is the Torah readings for shabbat and the scrolls read on the major holidays. Edited somewhere between the seventh and twelfth centuries, Shemot Rabba, on the book of Exodus, in the land of Israel in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, gives us an ideal window on to the development of Jewish culture. (Following the practices of this course, I will stick as close to possible to the readings in Leviant's Masterpieces of Jewish Literature, occasionally translating on my own slightly. Leviant is borrowing from the full English edition of Midrash Rabbah, still available in hard copy and on CD-ROM, first published by the Soncino press during the 1930s. In this work the chapters and verses are those of Midrash Rabbah. Biblical verses are written in all capital letters with the biblical citation following in square brackets. We begin on page 120 of Leviant, Chapter 1, section 18 of Rabbah, referring to Exodus 1:22).

Here we are told that Pharaoh indeed tried to kill not only the Hebrew babies but Egyptian ones as well (question 3 above). A reason is given in the form of a story: His astrologers told him that soon a savior of the Hebrews would be born and they were not sure if he would be Hebrew or Egyptian. This story explains why the biblical text seems to indicate that Pharaoh wanted to have all the babies who were born thrown into the Nile. The parents of the Egyptian babies as would be expected

objected to such a request because it seemed to defy logic-why would an Egyptian save the Hebrews?

At section 19 the midrash deals with the first and second questions above by suggesting that in chapter 2 of Exodus the boy's parents were not married for the first time, but for the second time. The passage here does not mention the full version of the story that the parents, here named as Amram and Yocheved, had been married but felt obligated during the period of Pharaoh's persecution to separate so as not to endanger any children. According to the full version it was their daughter Miriam who convinced them that by doing so they may be saving endangered males, but preventing daughters to be born. So, as we are told here, they followed her advice, reunited and conceived another child, bringing us from the rabbinic imagination back to the biblical text. Amram and Yocheved's older two children are also mentioned by name here: Miriam and Aaron. Their dancing at their parents' second wedding is linked to a verse in Psalms 113:9, "As a joyful mother of children," always a cultural tour de force when the rabbis can link an apparently unrelated verse, usually in the Writings, often in Psalms, to an event in the Torah. Such a textual play both shows off their mastery of the texts and enhances the interrelatedness of the entire biblical corpus.

The midrash does not want to slide past the biblical fact that this woman may have been an actual daughter of Levi one of Jacob's sons. It thus posits that she was 130 years old, and refers us to Numbers 26:59 which says explicitly twice that she was Levi's daughter, born to him in Egypt, married to Amram, and the mother of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. Rather than following a harmonizing route such as explaining that the Hebrew bat-levi could mean that she was a woman of the tribe of Levi, the Midrash works towards a miraculous route. Not only was Yocheved very old, but, they explain the word "daughter" as meaning that she became young again.

The midrash continues in this miraculous vein. In explaining Exodus 2:2, "the woman conceived and bore a son," as meaning that both her pregnancy and birth were painless, emphatically stating that she as a righteous woman she was exempt from the punishment of painful childbirth imposed on Eve by the Bible in Genesis 3:18.

The miraculous characteristics attributed to Yocheved almost match those attributed by Christian tradition to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, who through her merit was able to overcome sin of Eve, and who, according to Catholic tradition, conceived and delivered Jesus in a state of virginal purity, a feat that the rabbis now attribute to Yocheved, the mother of Moses.

Lest the subtlety of the midrash is lost on its readers or my reading appears too forced, the next sentences heightens the comparison. When the biblical text at 2;2 describes the baby born as good, the rabbis offer a number of interpretations for that word. Rabbi Judah's comment that Moses was fit for prophecy elevates him to a level of pre-natal spirituality not found in the biblical narrative itself about Moses or any other prophet. The comment passed on in the name of other rabbis indicating that Moses had been born circumcised nicely explains not only how Pharaoh's daughter may have identified him as a Hebrew baby but brings to the narrative a degree of androcentric, theological polemic as well. Such a comment indicates that the preferred status, "good," is circumcised, circumcised is male, and male is the gender of God, reflecting one tradition (of many, see my first lecture) that the male was born in God's image. All together these comments add to Moses a closer relationship with God than the average human enjoyed. The superhuman, spiritual qualities of Moses are heightened in the next comment in the midrash that says that when Moses was born the whole house became flooded with light, a phenomenon enhanced when the text connects the word good, tov, with Genesis 1:4, "God saw the light and it was good."

This line of argument reminds me of many walks through the medieval sections of art museums all over the world where the birth of Jesus is marked with great light and many halos. I think that what is happening here is that the Jews, writing substantially later than the early Christians, are working to elevate Moses to a Jesus like figure. This line of development continues at section 24 (page 122 in Leviant) commenting on "and she opened and she saw it the boy." The midrash tries to say that the apparent duplication of pronouns here means that in opening the ark Pharaoh's daughter saw two things, the boy accompanied by the divine presence, overlooking the fact that the word for divine presence, shekhinah, is feminine and the extra pronoun here is masculine. In this manner the midrash links the infant Moses with the divine presence, a presence that is not readily apparent in stories about him in the Old Testament but is part of the New Testament accounts of the conception and birth of Jesus.

By the way, in the New Testament when Joseph, Mary's husband found out that her wife was with child of the Holy Spirit, he considered divorcing her, a further parallel between with the midrashic account of the life of Moses.

At this point in the development of the midrashic biography of Moses appears one of the most well known stories about Moses, so well known that many kids who have learned it, like the story of Abraham breaking his father's idols, think it is in the biblical text itself. At section

26, p. 123, is the famous story of the burning coal. In short, after the baby is weaned, Pharaoh's daughter brings him home and he delights everybody there, including Pharaoh. When the kid starts taking off Pharaoh's crown and putting it on his own head, his magicians became suspicious of the aspirations of the child. Some wanted to kill it and others felt the baby had no sense yet. Fortunately, Jethro, Moses' future father in law, happened to be on the scene (see Exodus 18 for an amazing scene between Moses and Jethro) and he proposed a test of the boy. The boy would be given the choice of gold or a burning coal, choosing the gold would indicate he had sense and could be killed. The child reached for the gold, but angelic interference pushed his hand towards the coal which he put in his mouth and burned.

This story, in addition to highlighting Moses' angelic support at a time of temptation (see for example some of the stories of the tests Jesus endured in chapter 4 of Luke), wonderfully solves two problems in the biblical narrative: 1) As we saw above, how could Pharaoh have accepted his daughter's bringing home a baby? 2) How could the greatest prophet according to the text of the Torah itself (Deuteronomy 34:10) also be heavy of tongue and slow of speech (Exodus 4:10 and 6:12). Now we know.

The point of reading midrash is not to see it as supplementary facts or wild inventions, often decried by students driven by a sense of non-religious fundamental loyalty to the pristine preservation of the text, usually one they have never read. Midrash constitutes answers to unstated questions. Generations of traditional students, when reading Rashi's precise of the midrash in his medieval Bible commentary, were trained to ask, "What is bothering Rashi?" In other words, what is the problem in the biblical text?

The story of the burning coal, by the way, also appears in Josephus' retelling of the Moses story in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (2:201-237). Because of the early appearance of this story, like the idol smashing story, which appears in the intertestamental book of Jubilees (chapter 12), several observations can be made: 1) The no matter when the midrash was edited, some of the stories at least in it have ancient roots. 2) Despite the convincing case I may have made about these midrashim representing a Christian polemic, if they are older than Christianity, then it raises the possibility that these stories do represent a Jewish influence on Christianity.

Moses in the Piyut

As we have seen in several previous lectures, the map of Jewish cultural development includes the complex creations of the earlier Hebrew poets

from Palestine, often dated from between the fourth and seventh centuries of the common era. Just prior to that period, from around the third to the fourth centuries arose a form of poetry known as Hekhalot Hymns. This very early form of Hebrew poetry was connected with the larger phenomenon known as Hekhal literature, from the Hebrew word for palace, in this case referring to the heavenly palace. This literature describes in depth the structure of the seven heavens and the ways to address the heavenly beings in order to attain the spiritual and material blessings over which they presided. Some of the most famous works of this genre included Sefer Harazim, a second or third century Hebrew magic book, written in Hebrew that closely approximates that of the Mishnah, and Sefer Enoch, which represents a milestone in the development of Jewish mysticism.

Moses, because the intimate connections he had with the deity in the biblical text, is singled out in several Hekhalot hymns for similar supernatural skills. In *Moses the Messenger* by Yannai (T. Carmi, *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, pp. 219-220), with a Hebrew title that cites an expression explicitly from chapter 3 of Exodus, Moses is miraculously transported with his flock to the site of the burning bush, with the desert turning green as he passed (making him an early Zionist as well). He is turned into an angel and he is taught magic secrets of fiery visions by God, moving the events of the divine relation at the burning bush from the ground to the heavens. In addition to the theological level where Moses is presented in many terms very similar to those in which Jesus appears, there is a cultural level to this piyut. It is an alphabetical acrostic with each line beginning with the next letter of the alphabet and the end of each hemistich rhyming. Kallir took the theme of fire further in his poetic adaptation of Exodus 3:2 in which an angel of the Lord appeared before Moses in a burning fire. In this work, on p. 221, in which every line starts with the word fire, the next word begins an alphabetical acrostic covering the entire alphabet in Hebrew (For further piyutim on Moses, see pp. 238-239, 241-244, 246-247, 266-274).

Moses in the Middle Ages

During the middle ages, as Jewish literature became more expansive, so too did the role of Moses. He, like Jesus and Mohammed, became widely associated with magic. One Jewish magic text, which may have roots as early as the fourth century, that circulated was known as the *Sword of Moses*, based on his last words in Deuteronomy 33:29 (the text and translation is available in *Moses Gaster's Texts and Studies*).

In Kabbalah, medieval Jewish mysticism based on the Zohar, a thirteenth century commentary on the Torah that ultimately roots Kabbalah in the

teachings of Moses, Moses is depicted as having married the divine presence, the Shekhinah. Thus, like Jesus, Moses is portrayed as a man of God on intimate terms with the deity, seen as being consummated by their speaking together, face to face, Exodus 33:11. Moses, however, was not adulterous in this union with the Shekhinah since he had ceased to have relations with his wife. For further discussion see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 199f, and 226f.

Moses remained the measure of all things Jewish. In assessing the contributions of twelfth century the philosopher and legal writer Moses Maimonides to the eighteenth century Moses Mendelssohn, each generation noted that "From Moses to Moses there was none like Moses."

Moses in the Modern Period

Two of the classic creations of twentieth century Jewish culture, written by two well identified by non-believing Jews focussed on Moses in terms of the discourse of changes in values in modern Jewish life not necessarily connected with religion.

The first was by Ahad Haam, (One of the People) the pen name of the Hebrew writer, cultural Zionist, Asher Ginsberg (1856-1927). Often identified as the "agnostic rabbi," Ahad Haam's essays and editorial guidance shaped a generation of Jews seeking enlightenment, modernization, and national identity. Throughout his career, for which he was professionally employed by the Wissotzky Tea Company, Ahad Haam served as a cultural, spiritual critic of both Theodor Herzl's political Zionism and Mica Yosef Berdycewski's call for a Nietzschean transvaluation of Jewish values. One of the joys of learning to read modern Hebrew is the ability to read Ahad Haam's lucid essays and to help Hebrew students along many versions of his works have been prepared with vowels, vocabulary lists, and explanations. But since much of his work has been translated, the novice can easily find a pony for many of his essays. His essay *Moses*, written in 1904, appears in Leon Simon translation of *Selected Essays*, published many times by the Jewish Publication Society, and in *Al Parashat Haderakhim* 211ff, in *Kol Kitvei* 342ff.

As we have mentioned on several occasions the current theme of the relationship between history and memory, a reading of Ahad Ha-am's can contribute much to this discussion. He begins with a condemnation of the attempt of historical writers to locate the concrete historical reality behind what he calls historical images of national heroes, what we may now call memories. His example is a compelling one, the imaginary Young Werther of Goethe's literary imagination had a much greater impact on the course of many generations of readers, some of whose literary excursions ended with suicide, than an actual German who

lived during the same period. In this sense Werther was real and the actual German was as if he had never lived. He thus dismisses any attempt to locate the historic Moses as simply of antiquarian interest which pales before the image (the memory) of Moses which comes to his mind each time he reads the Passover Haggadah. Moses not only led us for forty years in the desert but for thousands of years in the deserts, forming the deepest aspirations of the people.

He then turns to analyze what are the actual qualities of Moses and asks who is he an ideal for the Jewish people. Ahad Ha-am then rules out-perhaps somewhat tendentiously and dismissively-- Moses as a warrior, statesman, and lawgiver, settling on identifying Moses as a prophet. A prophet is defined as one who can only tell the truth, an extremist, committed to absolute justice.

Ahad Ha-am then singles out for attention Moses' intervening on behalf of the oppressed: the Hebrew slave being beaten by the Egyptian, the two Hebrew slaves fighting, and Jethro's daughters being bullied at the well, the only three events that the Torah mentions from Moses' adult life until he was 80 and stood before Pharaoh. He moves quickly past the events of Sinai and Exodus and focuses on the task before Moses to reeducate the Hebrews from their slave mentality during their long trek. Here is classic Ahad Ha-am. Slowly he moves from a general consideration, the relationship between history and memory, to a specific topic in Jewish history which he explores with some originality infusing in with the new categories of Jewish nationalism, Moses as a prophet, and then he gradually shifts to address the issues of his time, which we can sense will have to do with the transition of Jews from their slave mentality. Just as one of the beauties of an ancient piyut is how the poet will fit original readings of biblical texts into the prescribed format of acrostic and rhyme, the beauty of an Ahad Ha-am essay is how he will move the discussion through the standard categories of general, Jewish, and reach a critique of contemporary Jewish life at the end of the essay.

Here Ahad Ha-am quotes the Kabbalists who said that Moses was reincarnated in every generation. The spark of prophecy motivated the Jews, a people who never lived in the present, towards a vision of a better future. A pessimist he defines as someone who thinks about the present, an optimist, the future. In this essay he refers obliquely to an unspecified time in the modern period when the Jews lost all, even their past, by devoting their attention to the present instead of the future.

The second important contemporary reading of Moses is Moses and Monotheism by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), an essay written in Austria,

after the rise of the Nazis in Germany, published the year he died, translated into English in 1955. As is well known Freud represents not only an isolated Jewish genius, whose face yet again graced the cover of Time magazine, but a generation of alienated Jews functioning, as both individuals, as well as a social group, such as in fin de siècle Vienna. His particular contribution was in the area of psychoanalysis, which like many Jews who were both marginal to their own community as well as to the general community, developed a new field of investigation.

Our interest is not on the historical truth of Freud's work but the processes which went into producing it and the impact which it had. The second question, which is dedicated to answering first, is easier to answer. For sixty years now Moses and Monotheism has attracted a great deal of attention. One of the richest recent studies on the subject was produced by the Jewish historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, first in the International Journal of Psycho-Analysis in 1989 and then in a book length study.

In short Freud argues that Moses was an Egyptian, compares the trials of Moses to other heroes, including Jesus, and he gave the Egyptian religion, including circumcision, to the Jews, a people that Freud does not speak kindly of, especially rabbinic Judaism. He then asserts, based on clues found in the Prophets, that the Jewish people murdered Moses, a foreign tyrant. He both casts aspersions on the Church for its violence and presents Christianity as progress of Judaism, referring to the latter as a "fossil."

One of the most profound contributions of this essay, I think, is Freud's notion that antisemitism is based on small differences rather than on fundamental ones (p. 116), what he calls elsewhere, the narcissism of small differences, that antisemitism has been based on jealousy which the Jews evoked by asserting their chosen status, and that antisemitism involves anti-Christian sentiments as well.

Like Ahad Ha-am, Freud also spoke of memory in his essay on Moses, but he spoke of memory as an inherited quality, in almost a Lamarckian sense of the transmission of acquired characteristics (as we all learned in high school this is the view that giraffes have long necks from reaching for tall trees, 127-128).

Freud accomplishes several important things here. He both undermines Judaism as a religion but explains his own continued feelings, and those of many others, towards it.

In a word, which is all the time I have left, Yerushalmi's essays serve to highlight the Jewish aspects of Freud, including a newly discovered title page of Moses and Monotheism on which the work is called a historical novel and a Hebrew inscription on a book given to Freud by his father which Yerushalmi carefully parses.

Conclusion

Moses is very much a creation of Jewish collective memory in every generation. The biblical text may be the wine skin but each generation fills it with new wine made from grapes in its own local vineyard. Finding the historical Moses would be meaningless to so many millennia of history. Seeing how each generation created its image of Moses shows us how Jews created Jewish culture.

Week 6.

Jewish Travelers Accounts: Community, Self, and Other

At first glance the thought of reading travelers accounts may, for some, have the appeal of turning on the National Geographic Channel, which is doubly burdensome here after it replaced NBC. But just as a passing glance or an excess of alcohol can compel us to linger in front of a travel channel, there is a captivating quality to the accounts written by Jewish travelers during the centuries. For many periods of history, especially in absence of other sources, we must rely on them, however when more than one exists they are usually contradictory.

Travel accounts, like so many historical and autobiographical accounts, beg the question of their reliability. Usually, historians have read these variegated accounts and tried to separate the factual aspects from the fictional, imaginary ones. This form of reading, often characterized as positivism, misses what is actually going on in these fascinating texts from a cultural point of view. The question, therefore, is not what is true and what is not, but why did the author mix them together so freely. The answer to this question will lead us to an understanding of the cultural considerations in the author's construct of his community, his self, and others.

In short, before presenting the Jewish People's Greatest Travel Accounts, Volume I, I would like to offer three guiding principles for reading them:

- 1) Each writer is not necessarily traveling in real time and space but in the biblical text. In other words, the travel account functions as sort of a midrash which connects the biblical text with the living reality of the world. In describing the author's alleged peregrinations through the world, we often see that the stopping off places were places mentioned in the Bible or the scenes of continued biblical adventures, including the appearance of the ten lost tribes and the River Sambation, which usually behaves differently on the Sabbath, offering natural legitimization of the laws of the Sabbath.

2) Travel accounts, as simple as they seem, like television travelogues today, where the commentators are usually either overly serious or overly perky, are actually strident polemics, usually directed against Christianity. The often unstated fundamental premise of these works is Genesis 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor a lawmaker from between his legs until Shiloh comes." This may be the most important verse in all of history. S. Posnanski, a leading Jewish scholar at the turn of the century, compiled at least a whole book in German devoted to this verse. As I have said in previous lectures, and I think that Ahad Ha-am said it best in his essay on Moses, that the what the Bible really meant is irrelevant to what it meant during the centuries, in other words, the difference between the historical Bible and the cultural Bible. It does not matter, therefore, what Shiloh really meant in the Bible what is important is what it meant to people who read the Bible.

Christians, as well as many Jews, understood Shilo to be the messiah, the anointed king of the Jews who would reestablish the lost kingdom of David. The messiah here had nothing to do with being the son of God or a spiritual redeemer, only a political figure. In particular, Christians saw Jesus as Shilo (remember he was crucified as King of the Jews.). What this meant was that because Shilo had come, Jesus in about the year 30, and then Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans in 70, meaning that the political authority, the scepter and lawmaker had departed from the Jews, that is Judah, the Christians had divine proof of the Shilo had come. Were, however, the scepter ever to return to Judah or a lawmaker to again regain his place among the Jews, then this could be evidence that Shilo had not come, in other words, that Jesus was not the messiah. Thus there was a strategic biblically based balance between the Jews and the Christians during the middle ages. It was to the Christians' advantage to make sure that the Jews lived a degraded existence, not necessarily out of contempt for them, but out of fear of their symbolic power over any Christian which would undermine the Christian understanding of this equation. On the other hand, it was to the Jews' theological advantage to demonstrate instances where the scepter was in the hands of Judah or the Jews had a lawmaker. Now it was obvious to all that this was not the case in Europe, but this did not prevent the travelers from going around the world, often to Africa and beyond, to find such instances, usually involving the ten lost tribes, and to report them, at least in Hebrew, to their kinsmen to renew their weary souls with reports detrimental to Christian wellbeing.

By the way, this was the basic reason for longstanding Christian opposition to the establishment of a Jewish state. In particular, the Vatican had a great deal of trouble seeing the scepter return to Judah and a lawmaker between his legs. Until very recently the Vatican made visiting Church dignitaries meet with Israeli officials outside of their official government offices. Such a symbolic demand was made explicitly of New York's Cardinal O'Connor a few years ago when he came on a visit to Israel. The Vatican was always coming up with excuses why it could not recognize Israel. One of the lamest was that its borders had not been fixed, a feature of many other countries long recognized by the Vatican.

3) There is an antiquarian quality to this literature like so much other Jewish literature. One of the features of Jewish literary creativity is the enthusiasm with which the editors or authors would add diverse and conflicting materials to their collections. Whether it was because they saw every scrap of description as holy or as culturally significant, the way many of us browse through bookstores or websites and build our collections, it was often not the message but the medium. Thus, as I have shown, the Bible contains varying versions of the same story. The Mishnah, the third century code of Jewish law constitutes a flourishing collection of opinions and their opposites, a feature which continues in talmudic discourse and Jewish legal compendia as well. Similarly, the Midrash is based on each fragment of the biblical verse being explained in a series of mutually conflicting ways, each often prefaced with, "another matter," *davar aher*. So that these collections were made

not as part of a search for unified truth, but a search for texts, making Jewish literature more of an open web than a tightly controlled canon.

As usual, I will follow the basic text as given in Leviant's Masterpieces because of the convenience of the work, though it often omits material without having indicated such. For this reason I will give references to other versions of these works. Nevertheless, my remarks will provide a free standing narrative as well for those who don't have the texts.

1. Eldad the Danite (Leviant, pp. 148-153; Adler, Jewish Travelers, pp. 4-21; Jellinek, Beit Ha-Midrash, III: 6-11 and also V:17-21, II: 102-113)

The account of the travels of Eldad the Danite, dated about the year 880, in which he traces his ancestry back to the long lost tribe of Dan, weaves biblical narrative with a contemporary account. He asserts that when Israel follows the law of God, no nation can rule over it, thus advancing beyond the usual formula that assures prosperity as a reward for observance to a new dimension that offers political sovereignty. The author then brings the readers to a far away place, somewhere in the area of Persia, where the Jews live independently according to their own law, specifically Midrash, Mishnah, and Talmud, which included the power to implement the traditional modes of capital punishment--the pinnacle of independence, the skills to go off to war, demand tribute from other peoples, and take booty, and the ability to speak Hebrew. The story also takes the reader to Africa, past Ethiopia, long associated with a Jewish presence. Here, too, there are independent, religiously observant (the account denies their knowledge of the rabbis, but then goes on to explain rabbinic practices), Hebrew speaking Jews with armies. The Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear of Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," which would later in Jewish history become the last words of dying Jews, many of whom took their own lives, is here the battle cry of the Jewish army in Africa. The account draws on stereotypes of cannibalism, often invoked, according to recent anthropological studies, to create a sense of self against a less than human other. The Sambation River runs for six days but is quiet on the seventh, when a fire begins to rage, isolating some of the tribes forever. Eldad left a lasting mark in Jewish History for a collection of laws he brought back from his journeys, cited by later legal authorities and extant in manuscript fragments in the Cairo Geniza, although the provenance of this collection is still under dispute. The grave of Dan himself, whose name is already graces the Tel Aviv area and its local bus company, has been recently "discovered" outside of Jerusalem and serves as the basis of a new housing development, so that the discovery of ancient landmarks is not confined to medieval Jews.

2. Nathan Ha-Bavli (Leviant, 154-157; a better version is in N. Stillman, History of the Jews of Islam, 170-177; B. Halper, Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature has the Hebrew, 23ff and English, 64ff) (The Hebrew is in Neubauer's Medieval Jewish Chronicles, II, 83ff)

This tenth century account from Seder Olam Zuta could be noted for the fascinating positivistic data that could be extracted from it about the powerful Jewish banking families of Baghdad, the young men's choir in the synagogue, the order of the worship service, the hierarchical relations between the Jewish elite of Babylonia. What is of major interest to our theme is the fact that the new Exilarch, the leader of the Jewish community of

Babylonia (and the entire Jewish world according to his own estimations), was crowned with linen and purple, the color of royalty. This fact, in addition to the blowing of shofars, the laying of hands, and claim of the Exilarchs to be descended from the house of David, shows the attempt of the narrative to show the independent political sovereignty of the Jews, a situation that was not very likely in the capital of the Babylonian empire.

Notice that during the installation the Jews of Baghdad held what might have been the first "dinnair" in Jewish history. At the meal they did what is now referred to as "calling the cards," which is the mirror image of the famous eight rungs of charitable contributions proposed by Maimonides in which giving anonymously is placed at the top. Here, at this meal a representative of each community stood up and announced how much they would contribute to the academies of Babylonia, no doubt prompting other communities to adjust their contributions accordingly. It is difficult to reconcile the great wealth displayed in the Exilarch's court in this reading and the need of the Jews to have toshnorr.

3. The Correspondence between Hasdai ibn Shaprut and the King of the Khazars (Leviant, 158-169, J. R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World*, 227-232 cf.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jewishbook.html>

(Hebrew versions of the correspondence can be found in the back of various translations of Judah Halevi's *Kurzari*)

To the extent that there was a Golden Age for the Jews of Cordova, it can be attributed to Hasdai ibn Shaprut (910-970 or 905-975), the court physician to Abdurahman III (912-961), the powerful caliph of Umayyid Spain. Hasdai gradually also became involved in politics, foreign affairs, and finances, wielding a great deal of influence among Christians and Muslims. It was he who, as patron of Jewish culture in Cordova, in competition with the hegemonic desires of the Exilarchs of Babylonia, transferred Jewish culture and religious authority to Spain. It was under his sponsorship of the position of court Hebrew poet that Hebrew poetry flourished and blossomed in Spain, adopting many of the features of Arabic rhyme and meter.

In 960 Hasdai learned from a Persian diplomat about the Khazars, an independent kingdom near the Black Sea whose ruling house had converted to Judaism in about 740. He used much influence to transmit these letters across Europe. Since the discovery of these letters there have been many questions raised about the authenticity, but 150 years after the date of this correspondence, Judah Halevi, one of the major Jewish poets and philosophers of Islamic Spain, until he left for the land of Israel, knew about the conversion of the Khazars and used it as the setting for his philosophical work which purported to be a dialogue among spokesmen for the world's religions before the king of the Khazars, an aspect of the conversion of the Khazars mentioned in the letters.. In his letter Hasdai makes clear his power for two reasons: he wants to show that as a Jew he possesses great power (scepter) and to highlight the significance of the offers he will make. As he says, making clear the spirit of this genre of literature: ". . . but only to know the truth, whether the Israelitish exiles, anywhere form an independent kingdom and are not subject to any foreign ruler. If, indeed I could learn that this was the case, then, despising all my glory, abandoning my high estate, leaving my family [so much for the Jewish family. . . Judah Halevi also left his wife and family to go to the land of Israel] . . . that I might see not only his glory and magnificence, and that of his servants and ministers, but also the tranquility of the Israelites." Later in the letter Hasdai asks the king of the Khazars questions such as whether his subjects are Jewish, how he judges his people

(lawmaker between his legs), against whom he goes to war, and whether he fights on the Sabbath, expressing therefore concern about power and observance. The concerns culminate with Hasdai's questions to the king about his knowledge of the coming of the messiah, an event he associates with the ascension of Jews to power. In this spirit he ends his letter, stating emphatically his polemical concerns about Jewish power: "We have been cast down from our glory, so that we have nothing to reply when they say daily unto us, 'Every other people has its kingdom, but of yours there is no memorial on earth.' Hearing therefore, the fame of my Lord the King, as well as the power of his dominions, and the multitude of his forces, we were amazed, we lifted up our head, our spirit revived, and our hands were strengthened, and the kingdom of my Lord furnished us with an argument in answer to this taunt. May this report be substantiated for that would add to our greatness. Blessed be the Lord of Israel who has not . . . suffered the tribes of Israel to be without an independent kingdom . . ."

Before closing his letter, Hasdai made specific references to the account of Eldad the Danite, whom he remembered as having used only Hebrew and for reporting Jewish laws, thus establishing a clear line between the report of Eldad the Danite and Hasdai's attempt to join the Khazars. In his response, the king of the Khazars (or his literary representative) repeats Hasdai's political concerns and notes the kingdom's biblical antecedents based on current genealogical records. He makes it clear that not all the subjects have converted, a premise that enhances the notion of Jews holding political power over others. The letter notes that both Christian and Muslim sovereigns sent him envoys with presents and he then described the disputation among the representatives of the various religions that ended up in the conversion of the royal household. He ends his letter offering Hasdai his hope that God will soon send a messiah to redeem the Jewish people.

4. The Chronicle of Ahimaatz (Leviant, 241-265; the full Hebrew and English texts were published with a long introduction by Marcus Saltzman)

This eleventh century Hebrew chronicle from Italy (1054) reflects both Christian, especially from the Eastern Roman Empire, Greek Byzantium, and Islamic influences, from Spain, North Africa, and the East, on both its substance and the content. As was the case during the time of Hasdai, also at this time Jewish culture was being transplanted out of Babylonia, here the destination was southern Italy.

As a cultural artifact, it is important to note that this account was written in rhymed Hebrew prose with various poetic components that reflected further developments of the piyyut genre. As a chronicle, it is significant that it contains a mixture of what previous historians writing about it have called historical facts concerning reality and fantastic legends or flights of the imagination. Rather than following the positivistic route of trying to separate references to historical events and personalities from tales of magic, "superstition," and fantasy (see either Saltzman's or Leviant's introductions), current trends try to explain why the two were mixed so freely together. What emerges is the sense, also expressed but not seized upon by earlier writers, that Ahimaaz was writing relying not upon documents but upon memory, that Ahimaaz was writing a chronicle of his family that covered a period of two hundred years, and that he was engaging in a process of midrash rather than historical documentation. In other words, in this document emerges a sense of self as expressed in the adventures of one family seen through the matrix of biblical events and contemporary polemics. Thus the author feels the need to trace his roots back to the destruction of Jerusalem, stress the amount of political and military power held by his ancestors, such as R. Shephatiah and R. Paltiel, the latter who served as vizier to al-Muizz the first Fatimid caliph of Egypt, in terms evocative of the biblical description of Joseph in Pharaoh's court. This power included the authority of Jews to control access of Christians before the Muslim rulers, to excommunicate and to

administer capital punishment for Sabbath violations , and to rule over Jerusalem, the scepter had returned to Judah (Leviant, 260). Even the king (the Caliph) identified one of Ahimaaz's ancestors, R. Paltiel, as a king, despite Ahimaaz's protests, (Leviant, 261).

Although not in Ahimaaz's version, another medieval German Hebrew text, *Sefer Hasidim*, *The Book of the Pious*, compiled by Judah the Pious of Regensburg in the late the twelfth century, contains an account of Paltiel in which he and a group of men in the course of a morning cleared the rubble of the Temple which had remained since the time of Titus, rebuilt the Temple, and then continued to pray in it. Afterwards he crowned his son king in Alexandria. Here in the version of the story preserved in the Christian environment of medieval Germany, both the Temple and the scepter return to the Jews for a short while, almost magically in light of the massive proportions of the stones involved at the site as opposed to accounts in the Mishnah of the city having simply been ploughed (Taanit 4:6).

In a very insightful article about the chronicle of Ahimaaz in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History*, edited by Michael Fishbane, Robert Bonfil connects such Jewish mythologizations with reports in Arab chronicles about Jewish attempts to rebuild the Temple. This mythical-political-polemical aspect of chronicle is but one aspect of it. Another important aspect of it is precisely what historians have tried to minimize, trivialize or negate, that is the superstitious, magical, supernatural aspects of this work and others like it. Rather than dismissing these aspects, such as the changing of a boy into a mule, exorcism of demons, use of the divine name for travelling by horse or boat at supersonic speeds, fending off enemy ships, and reviving the dead, because they are so integrated into the fabric of the account and must have resonated with the readers, that, as historians of Jewish magic and mysticism have demonstrated, we must recognize them as a vital aspect of Jewish life. In other words, attempts separate out certain aspects of an integrated account reflect not the values of the author but our values. Their world, unlike so many elementary school libraries, cannot be easily divided into fact and fiction.

5. The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela (Leviant, 336-357; Adler, 38-63; and in a 1983 edition by Michael Signer; the Hebrew and English were published in volume 16 of the Jewish Quarterly Review in 1904; Halper provides a brief excerpt in Halper)

This mid twelfth century travel account (c. 1159 or 1167-1173), covers much of the world from Spain to China, including the major sites for pilgrimages in the Holy Land then under control of the Crusaders. Some of the highlights include an early depiction of the Druze, a religion which had recently emerged, the rabbinic academies of Babylonia in their final days, and the Exilach. Historians have used this book for economic, demographic, intellectual, and political history, while at the same time noting that it does contain legendary materials as well. As a cultural document, therefore, Benjamin's account like the others we have examined tells an important story to its readers rather than simply constituting a collection of positivistic facts. As a writer he extends the reach of the biblical period to his own time and as a pilgrim he enters into its physical space through his travels. As a Jew, like other travelers and chroniclers before him, his travels were dedicated to showing that the scepter had indeed returned to Judah. Lest I be accused of overstating this theme, Benjamin himself referred explicitly to Genesis 49:10..

Thus Benjamin shows the Jews serving as officials to the pope. Not only, along with all the captured vessels from the Second Temple in Rome, are the pillars from the ancient First Temple of King Solomon in Jerusalem still preserved in Rome, but every year on the Ninth of Av, the day the Temples were destroyed, the pillars exude moisture like tears. He also reifies post biblical Jewish events, such as the death of the Ten Martyrs, as preserved in the liturgy, by finding their graves in Rome (though they were killed in Palestine.) In the Holy Land, he participates in the collective memory of the place and the texts associated with it by visiting graves and other historical sites, often of minor events.

In addition to his classic work *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs, who actually visited Palestine during the thirties before he was killed by the Nazi protesting the arrest of his Jewish in-laws, wrote a work on pilgrimages called, *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land*. In this work Halbwachs explores the way in which pilgrims locate and change the scenes of events which often were not explicitly recorded in the sacred texts, adding sacred space to the sacred text as an object of veneration, even after the geography of the region as well as people's memory of it has been altered in a major way.

An example that illustrates such a phenomenon in the account of Benjamin is, after he identifies Mosque of Omar as being on the site of the ancient Temple, his identification of the western wall as one of the walls of the Holy of Holys, which is not true or physically feasible. He connects many other sites with Solomon and the Temple: his stables, a priestly pool, King Uzziah's grave, and the Pillar of Salt which had once been Lot's wife- even though the sheep lick it, it continually returns to its original shape.

Benjamin reports that the scepter and crown of King David were discovered in his burial cave. As in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, when two men tried to enter the burial chamber of Kings David and Solomon, fierce winds rendered it impossible for them to function. Subsequently, the location of the grave was hidden.

In discussing Hebron Benjamin demonstrates some of the polemical importance of his interest in biblical graves. He notes the Christian name of Hebron, the presence of a church, and the creation of six tombs there by the Christians since they occupied the territory, for which Christian tourists pay to visit. However, like the famous scene in the Israeli movie *Salah* where each group of tourists gets to see the same trees with their own name on them, when Jewish tourists come to Hebron and properly reward the custodian, he takes them inside through a series of three caves where the real tombs of the patriarchs and the matriarchs are located as well as the bones of many other deceased Jews. He also notes that out of respect for the biblical Abraham, whose house still stands, no one is allowed to build in the neighborhood, a custom no longer followed today.

As Benjamin continues his travels he marks his territory by presenting the graves of many illustrious post-biblical Jews. In Tiberias he points out the graves of R. Johanan ben Zakkai, who fled the Zealots in Jerusalem during the revolt against Rome, and the grave of the recently deceased poet and philosopher Judah Halevi. Halevi was reported to have left Spain for Jerusalem, though the documentary record in the Cairo Geniza as well as his own literary creations, including a recently discovered letter reported in last week's papers, only show his trail reaching as far as Egypt where he died. A legend emerged therefore that Judah Halevi reached Jerusalem, bent down to kiss the ground, recited, his "Zion will not you ask for your captives," (*Tzion halo tishali . . .*), and was trampled by an Arab on horseback. This legend reported in some later Jewish chronicles and popularized in Heinrich Heine's nineteenth century German "*Hebrew Melodies*." In 1993 in the Hebrew Journal *Paamim*, an extensive discussion was carried on through many articles on the question of whether Judah Halevi made it to the land of Israel or not, perhaps walking across the Sinai to follow in the footsteps of Moses as he had envisioned doing in one of his poems. This was a debate not only about nationalist aspirations (all

history is contemporary) but also about whether poetry constitutes documentary evidence of events in the life of the poet.

Benjamin devotes his most extensive discussions to Baghdad, long a center of Jewish life. In this account he devotes much attention to the power held by the Jews. The Exilarch wields an official seal and every Jew and Muslim must stand and salute him or receive a punishment of 100 lashes. The Exilarch sits opposite the throne of the Caliph in a throne ordered by Mohammed himself. For Benjamin such a relationship is in compliance with Genesis 49:10. Benjamin then describes in great detail the lands over which the Exilarch has control, including Persia to India. He appoints rabbis and ministers to rule over these areas, who in exchange bring him gifts. The Exilarch is both wealthy, knowledgeable, and powerful. Like Nathan Ha-bavli, Benjamin also offers a description of the installation of the Exilarch and his investiture of those responsible to him.

Benjamin's trip continues to reify biblical personalities and events in tombs and sacred spaces such as the Tower of Babel, Ezekiel's synagogue, sepulchre, and Torah scroll, Joseph's storehouses in Egypt, the ruined city of Ramses which the Hebrews built (they didn't build pyramids!) He too reports the location of the ten lost tribes in Persia where they are ruled by their own prince and field their own army. He also reported stereotypical findings of primitive savages in Africa. He devotes attention to the messianic figure David Alroi.

6. The Travels of Petachia of Ratisbon/Regensburg (Leviant, 358-366, Adler, 64-91; a Hebrew critical edition with introduction was published by Abraham David in Kovetz al Yad 13 (1996).

In what constitutes more than a coincidence, as part of the story of Ahimaaz's relative Paltiel was recorded in Judah the Pious' Sefer Hasidim, Judah was also the amanuensis of the travel account of Petachia of Regensburg, whose trip covers a ten year period in the late twelfth century (1170-1180) shortly after the trip of Benjamin of Tudela even though there is no evidence that he knew of the trips taken by the others. He too seeks out places of Jewish interest. In Baghdad, where Benjamin found 40,000 Jews, he found only 1,000, raising serious questions about these works as sources for positivistic information. Moreover, at Jerusalem he found only one Jew (not very helpful for propaganda today!), whereas Benjamin found 200, though according to some manuscripts he found only four (who could have constituted at least four political parties). More importantly, he dwells on a description of the power of the Exilarch, confirming the symbolic meaning that this position held for both European Jewish travelers. Like Benjamin, in his travels he found biblical artifacts not only preserved but evoking ongoing commentary on the biblical story. So that the houses of Nebuchadnezzar, was desolate, but that of Daniel, was like new, implicitly reifying history's verdict on the two personalities. Other artifacts included a book in which Daniel had written as well as reports of the Temple vessels from Jerusalem; when, however, he reached Ararat he conceded that Noah's ark which once rested there had decayed, the pillar of salt that was once Lot's wife vanished, and the stones that Joshua installed were gone, a concession he was not willing to make about the continued appearance of manna, the continued presence of a synagogue built in Tiberias by Joshua as well as one built by Elisha in Damascus, and the continuous pleasant odor from the grave of Judah ha-Nasi, noticeable up to a mile away. He describes a special river that dries up on the Sabbath in Yavneh in Palestine rather than in Babylonia as did Eldan the Danite. Just as according to Benjamin Jews got preferential treatment at the grave of the patriarchs and matriarchs in Hebron, a story also found in Petachia, according to Petachia, Jews got similar treatment at the grave of Jonah the prophet .

A key feature of his discussion of the Exilarch is his power to flog And a very important aspect of his discussion of Jerusalem involves a description of a Temple the Muslims built where the Temple had stood. The Christians came and tried, even in the Holy of Holys, to install images but they were not able to. This story illustrates the fantasy for a rebuilt Temple and the power of the Jewish shrine over Christian objects of worship that are rendered worthless. Like his predecessors, Petachia inquired after news of the messiah.

7. The Letters of Obadia da Bertinoro (Leviant, 477-502; a Hebrew critical edition and introduction was published recently by Menahem Hartom and Abraham David under the title From Italy to Jerusalem)

Obadia's letters to his father on his way to the Holy Land raise many of the same issues and concerns. He too presents the Jews employing capital punishment and carrying out the death sentence, reference to the dudaim, the mandrakes, the aphrodisiac that Reueven gave to his mother Leah who gave them to Rachel in exchange for the opportunity to sleep with Jacob for the night (Genesis 30), passing reference to a sighting of Elijah the prophet, remnants in Egypt of the plague of the frogs from the time of Moses, the storehouses that Joseph built, the spot in the sea where it divided for the Hebrews to cross, the place Moses prayed, the ruins of the building Samson pulled down, a further repetition of the fact that there is a real burial cave in Hebron, the grave of Jesse. He too inquired about the Sambation River, learned about the various military campaigns of the lost tribes in Africa, and explored under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In his letter to his brother however, he mentions miracles on the Temple mount and at the graves of pious, such as lights on the site of the Temple which spontaneously go out on the Ninth of Av, but cautions against accepting them as true.

Ovadia explains life in Jerusalem by first explaining how well the Arabs treat the Jews and how kind they are and then comments about the Jews: "In my opinion, an intelligent man versed in political science might easily rise himself to be chief of the Jews as well as of the Arabs; for among all the inhabitants there is not a wise and sensible man who knows how to deal affably with his fellowmen; all are ignorant misanthrops intent only on gain . . ."

8. The Travel Diary of David Rueveni (Leviant, 503-520; the Hebrew text with an extensive introduction was published by A. Z. Aescoly; the Hebrew text was also published in Neubauer's collection.)

David Reuveni, as his name indicates, purportedly from the tribe of Reuven, made a dramatic appearance in Europe during the 1520s, suggesting that he was the messiah and that his brother was King of the lost Jewish tribes now located in Africa. Reuveni gained an audience with the pope, proposed a military alliance between his forces and the popes, and acquired letters of recommendation to meet the King of Portugal. There, after the forcible conversion of the Jews and the inauguration of the Inquisition, Reuveni was a major sensation, attracting people who wanted to revert to Judaism.

The sheer volume of his account and the repetition of all the themes mentioned so far makes for both fascinating reading and more than I can contain in the assigned amount of space. So for those interested, I highly recommend a reading of this work.

9. The Autobiography of Leon Modena (partially in Leviant, 543-550; fully translated by Mark Cohen, with several introductions; in a Hebrew edition published by Daniele Carpi)

Modena's work, often viewed as the first Jewish autobiography, though Abraham Yagel's Valley of Vision (edited in both Hebrew and English versions by David Ruderman) may hold that distinction. Nevertheless, both of these late sixteenth, early seventeenth century autobiographical works, although they provide much more personal detail and discussions of significant verifiable life events, raise many of the same issues as the travelers accounts. Both works mix fantasy with fiction. Both works, however, change the focus to autobiography because the structured focus of each work is on the development of the individual. In particular, like all other autobiographies these two works involve individuals who underwent a conversion experience, in both cases it was the death of a loved one, and devoted much of their works to confession of sin. The traveler accounts dealt with a collective national identity in terms of reifying biblical reality and polemicizing against Christian authority by demonstrating Jewish power, whereas these autobiographies presented personal issues of professional frustration, financial loss, and intellectual aspirations. Such a combination of factors produced works filled with omissions, embellishments, and understatements. Each writer created a true sense of self by mixing fiction with factfreely. Ultimately when reading these accounts we would like to be able to come away with some sense of reality. I think, despite my strong reservations that I have a method. In Hebrew it is called mesiah lefi tumo. This is a rabbinic concept usually involving cases where a woman's husband has disappeared and in order to remarry she needs confirmation of his death. Despite great enthusiasm to liberate a woman in such a situation, there is fear among rabbinic authorities that testimony brought in such circumstances may be tendentious. However, when individuals make incidental comments where the implications of their remarks are unknown to them, then there are no qualms about accepting the implications of their comments. For example, a man with a certain birthmark has disappeared. One day two dock workers hear two drunken sailors telling about a corpse that washed up with such a birthmark or, worse, they bragged about killing such a person. On the basis of such evidence the woman can now remarry. So too, I think, when these chronicles give information innocently that does not seem to fit any tendentious or polemical purpose, it is more likely to be usual historical data, true, as it were. Thus most reports of Jewish self government, lost tribes, and biblical relics can be dismissed, but a reference to Jewish dyers doesn't seem to be anything other than an incidental "fact."

This of course raises the larger question of whether we can determine the intention of the writers of any work. While I am not sure we can, I am sure that we should keep on trying. Most people who wrote, did so for a purpose.

I would like to conclude with one final observation based on the use of gender as a category of analysis. Most of the works discussed today do not have many references to women nor do they seem to have an agenda that touched upon such matters. It is therefore, I think, safe to consider the data these works provide on matters of women. The earlier works in fact do not mention women very often, they gradually appear more frequently towards the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries-the first autobiography written by a Jewish woman was the Memoirs of Gluckel of Hameln which she began after the death of her first husband and in which she explained mostly family matters (While it is not in the anthologies we have been following two English translations have been made, the Bat-Abrahams is the better of the two and is out of print. Natalie Davis, a pioneer in social history, wrote, in addition to one of the opening essays in the Modena autobiography, an essay on Gluckel in her Women on the Margins.

In Bertinoro's letters he discusses a number of significant aspects of women's lives. He mentions, for example, that on Hoshana Rabba, the end of Sukkot, there is an all night vigil in the synagogue during which women come in family groups, kiss the scrolls of the law, and prostrate themselves before it. In complementary studies on Bertinoro and on the origin of all night vigils on Hoshanah Rabba and Shavuot, Elliot Horowitz notes that it was the introduction of coffee at this time in history that made such activity possible. Horowitz also notes that Bertinoro noted that on Simhat Torah they do things in Polermo that he would not describe. Horowitz also showed that a sentence in Bertinoro describing how in Polermo that women were lax in the observance of menstrual purity; that most brides were already pregnant, and the Jews were strict with laws of non-Jewish wine is omitted from most translations. (Elliott Horowitz in *Journal of Religious History* 17 1992 as well as in the Hebrew *Paamim* issue of 1988 devoted entirely to Bertinoro). Bertinoro also observed the high number of widows who came to live in Jerusalem, outnumbering the men seven to one. This may have been what Jewish widows did instead of joining a monastery. In Reuveni's travel account he notes the high education of Jewish women in Italy, including the fact that some of them earned the title *Rabbanit* for their accomplishments, a title that has meant more than just being the wife of a rabbi. He described their involvement in music and dance as well as their support of his messianic movement. Reuveni also described the fasting which occupied Jewish women at this time, including women living as Christians in Portugal. Other documents confirm fasting as a form of women's spirituality at this time, perhaps a form of anorexia.

Modena described the high intellectual accomplishments of several of his aunts in all branches of Jewish learning. These reports are confirmed by other writers during the period as well. One of these aunts, Fioreta or Batsheva, moved to the land of Israel when she became a widow, confirming the observation made by Bertinoro concerning the number of widows in Jerusalem.

In a paradoxical manner, because of their marginal role in society, factual information about women in these accounts may be more reliable than information about men. However, information about attitudes, values, and emotional needs why these texts were written and are still important.

Week 7

The Worship Service as a Cultural Experience

Introduction

The worship service is paradoxically both central to the Jewish experience as well as relatively peripheral. What that means is that Jews identify with prayer but rarely attend services (the same is true of Israel, many Jews identify but few visit), especially when compared with members of other religions (who not only pray, but do come to Israel). Hence the pundits have formulated this phenomenon as "non-practicing orthodoxy." Their motto was once "I want the synagogue I don't attend to be orthodox." This motto, however, has been challenged for a long time by serious non-participation at services offered by all denominations of Judaism and is being explicitly challenged today in Israel today by an influx of secular intellectuals to Reform and Masorti (Conservative Synagogues) who for political reasons no longer feel that the synagogue they do not attend must be orthodox (I'll try to use lower case when describing a general tendency and upper case when a specific movement is meant.).

The reasons for such a paradoxical approach to synagogue services is, I believe, prompted by the sense that the service constitutes a cultural artifact that should not be tampered with, similar to classical symphonic, operatic,

or artistic works. Similarly, though everybody may not have a yearly subscription or membership, when they do get dressed and go to a concert, the opera, or a museum, they want certain advanced expectations of what will happen to be fulfilled. This attitude towards worship, I would like to suggest is neither hypocritical nor pious but cultural.

In short, theology is not necessarily the main event at Jewish worship. I don't want to rule theology out entirely, and in my years in working with Jewish youth was always amazed at how strongly many were attracted to ideas of God. My purpose here is to offer an alternative level of discourse.

What most studies of worship, except perhaps for Samuel Heilman's fascinating book *Synagogue Life*, fail to discuss is that there is a very serious non-theological dimension to worship services. This is experienced at three distinct levels, so distinct they do not intersect and may even be contradictory:

1. The service is a text which integrates passages from Bible, Mishnah, Piyyut, and the middle ages.
2. This text has a performative quality, what J. L. Austin calls speech acts. In other words, there is a purpose, both personal and collective, to simply enunciate the words in the proper manner without even being aware of the historical textual levels. This is also seen in all the gesturing and moving that is not marked in the prayerbooks or explained in most studies.
3. Finally, there is a social dimension to the services, also usually totally missed. This involves aspects from dressing up, or not, having one's own seat and friends near by to talk with, to hanging out before, during, and after the service.

I will look at all of these aspects. As in past lectures, I will refer to the text in Leviant's *Masterpieces*, but since his version of the service is especially mangled, I will also refer to a prayerbook, *A Siddur*. One of the most useful versions of the prayerbook is *Hasiddur Hashalem*, edited by Philip Birnbaum. The English translation which appears on the opposite page as the Hebrew text is clear and accurate, the notes place the prayers into their historical and literary context, providing ample citations from biblical and rabbinic texts. The text is also amazingly complete, including extensive piyyutim, full texts of holiday rituals that are often unavailable elsewhere, such as Tashlich (casting of sins on Rosh Hashanah), Kapparot (waving fowl around the head prior to Yom Kippur), Ushpizin (welcoming ancient guests in the Sukkah), all the stanzas of *Maoz Tzur* for Hannukah, *The Scroll of the Hasmoneans*, and all major life-cycle rituals. Birnbaum therefore provides a rich, informative resource without the usual apologetics and groundless explanations that are found in so many books about prayer and ritual.

Variety in Worship

Before beginning, I would like to elaborate on the fact that there is, of course, no one prayerbook accepted by all Jews. There are ethnic rites: Ashkenazi and Sephardi, which have local versions in most countries, Italian, Oriental, which can be broken down also on a country by country basis, and there are the four major denominations which have localized versions in Europe, America, Israel, and to some extent Australia and South Africa. There are also sectarian groups such as Samaritans, Karaites, and even former crypto-Jewish sects.

The key aspect of the four denominations, which gradually emerged from about 1810 to 1950, is liturgical change, which is often accompanied by varying degrees of religious and legal practice as well. But I think that it is safe to say that many whose behavior is identical make decisions of what synagogue to attend, or not to attend, based on liturgical style and other social factors such as car-pool routes.

The Reform movement, which as I have described in an earlier course, was the first movement to emerge from pre-modern traditional Judaism. The Reformers, lay and rabbinic, were responding to the Jewish Question, the issue of the suitability of the Jews to receive full rights in Europe, by making liturgical adjustments. Thus, they added a sense of decorum which included shortening the service, wearing of clerical robes, translating parts of the service, including choirs and even instrumental accompaniment, and adding a sermon in the vernacular. They removed aspects of the service that seemed unpatriotic and unscientific such as expressions of hope for removal to Palestine, reestablishment of the sacrificial cult, the coming of the messiah, and revival of the dead, and they added patriotic hymns and prayers (By the way, contrary to conventional wisdom, the Reform movement in Europe did little to change to role or even to eliminate the separate seating of women, a feature that continues in German Reform synagogues to this day).

The Orthodox movement emerged in Germany in 1819 as a reaction against what they felt were the excesses of the Reform movement. Nevertheless, they adopted many of the innovations and attitudes towards the liturgy from the Reform (By the way, in America many Orthodox synagogues for a period eliminated separate seating for men and women.).

What would later be the Conservative movement broke with the Reform movement during the 1840s over the willingness of the Reformers to dispense the desirability of praying in Hebrew and they instead asserted that Hebrew was the language of the Jewish people (By the way, attempts to integrate women into the service began only in the 1950s and recently have been opposed by a breakaway movement called the Union for Traditional Judaism, UTJ, also the initials of an-ultra-orthodox party in Israel, United Torah Judaism.).

The Reconstructionist movement, embodying the thought of Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan, emerged in the middle of the twentieth century out of the three other movements, mainly Conservative and Reform, as an attempt to reaffirm the national and traditional quality of the Jews, but to diminish aspects of the liturgy such as their chosenness (By the way, the Bat-Mitzvah of his daughter Judith in 1922 marked the first in the US, but not in Europe.).

The impact of the Holocaust on Jewish life also affected Jewish liturgy for several different reasons:

1. At the most basic level the rise of the Nazis undermined, except for a small number of Jews, the driving assumption that by instituting liturgical and other reforms, the Jews could make themselves desirable to most Europeans. Thus as early as 1937 the Reform movement in its Columbus Platform undid many of its most radical reforms as embodied in its 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and turned towards accepting Zionism, positions which gradually were reflected in the liturgy, especially by the 1970s with the editing of the new Gates of Prayer. Reform Jews who were frustrated by these changes in policy towards Zionism and more traditional prayer often associated with the American Council for Judaism.
2. Although the process had begun earlier with the great migrations at the turn of the century, the events of the Holocaust accelerated contacts between eastern and western European Jews. Because the Jews in eastern Europe had not experienced the denominational divisions, for those who survived, traditional Judaism there remained much more intact than in the west. Thus in eastern Europe Jews opted out of religion entirely rather

than accepting any modifications, which was also the pattern among Jews of Mediterranean countries. The confluence of large numbers of members of these two communities in Israel did not produce fertile ground for the growth of the acceptance of the denominations, most of which had expressed little interest in Zionism or, until recently, in bringing their movements to Palestine/Israel.

A significant event in the development of modern Judaism was when on June 14, 1945, less than a month after the end of the war in Europe and the end of the Holocaust, a group of 200 orthodox rabbis gathered at the Hotel McAlpine in New York City to declare a ban of excommunication on Kaplan and to burn his new prayerbook recently published by the Reconstructionist Foundation. They claimed that he had changed the prayers and introduced secular and rational materials. These charges, however, put Kaplan not on the periphery of traditional Jewish prayer, but at the center.

The Service

One of the fundamental questions in researching Jewish liturgy is the question of origins of many of the prayers as well as the order of the liturgy. Although Jewish literature as well as many of the prayers originated in the Bible, the prayerbook only appeared as a cultural artifact in the ninth and tenth centuries with the appearance of the prayerbooks of Amram Gaon and Saadia Gaon in Babylonia, Nathan Habavli's description of the worship service at the installation of the Exilarch, as we saw in the last lecture, and extensive fragments of prayerbooks in the Cairo Geniza, raising all sorts of questions about its undocumented and undocumentable development. The questions of origins is a question that is of both academic as well as polemical interest. During the past century scholars have employed all sorts of methods to posit what the original core of the liturgy must have been. These attempts have been motivated either by the desire to show an early appearance of the service, with estimates of the dating ranging from the most traditional connection to the biblical patriarchs, to the Persian and Maccabean periods, and, at the other extreme, to the models of slow evolutionary development of prayers offered by Reform minded scholars who tried to justify their own innovations. (For a survey of these attempts, see Richard Sarason's "The Modern Study of Jewish Liturgy," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, ed. W. S. Green).

Rather than be detained by these speculations or get bogged down in the detail of the service, I would like to present some of the major aspects of the service as a cultural phenomenon which can be experienced by the participants (For those wishing the technical details, see *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*, by A. Z. Idelsohn, the scholar of Jewish prayer and music whose best known contribution to Jewish culture is his song, "Hava Nagillah.")

Preliminary Prayers

Each Jewish worship service follows very set contours although there are different texts for each of the three daily services, each of the four shabbat services, and for each holiday service. The service begins with preliminary materials, anthologized from Bible, Talmud, Piyyut, and prayers. Often the most complex philosophical discussion is found in the most simple piyyutim, which often appear as hymns. For example Adon Olam, (Leviant 133; Birnbaum, 11-12) usually associated on very slender grounds with the eleventh

century Spanish Hebrew poet Solomon ibn Gabirol, it only entered the prayerbook in the fifteenth century. Using a simple, but catchy, pattern of rhyme, this hymn summarizes basic but not always accepted aspects of medieval Jewish belief, such as creation ex nihilo, a vision of the end of time, belief in one God, who will save and protect. I have heard Adon Olam sung to such tunes as Turkey in the Straw, the Jeopardy Theme Song, Scarborough Fair, and many others.

Similarly Yigdal (Leviant 135; Birnbaum, 11-12), attributed to the fourteenth century, takes Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith as he articulated them in his commentary on the Mishnah to Sanhedrin chapter ten, and sets them to a catchy tune. Despite the charm of this tune, many Jews never accepted Maimonides' principles of faith, finding them too narrow and dogmatic, some preferring instead to abide by the notion that there are 613 commandments. Thus Yigdal is not found in the prayerbooks of some Hasidic groups, Sephardic communities (paradoxical since Maimonides represents the embodiment of Sephardic Jewry), and once many Reform congregations.

Moving forward in the service, but backwards in terms of historical development, the service then contains some passages from the Mishnah and Talmud. Peah 1:1 (Shabbat 127a). This passage integrates commandments directed towards helping other people such as leaving the corners of the field for the poor, doing deeds of loving kindness, visiting the sick, dowering poor brides, attending to the dead, making peace, with commandments of a religious nature such as making a pilgrimage, studying Torah, devotion in prayer, and ultimately concludes that studying Torah is equal to all of them.

The next passage from Berakoth 60 b (Leviant 135; Birnbaum, 16), asserting the purity of the soul, constitutes a polemic against Christianity which believes in original sin. Leviant's translation shows an example of the embarrassed apologetics or denominational dogmatics that can slip into the study of Jewish worship. He concludes his translation of the passage blessing God for restoring life to mortal creatures. The Hebrew text as seen in Birnbaum's translation reads, "restorest the souls to the dead."

The First Section: The Shema and Its Blessings

The first major unit of the service is called the Shema and its blessings. The service begins with the Call to Worship, "Barekhu," (Leviant 142, Birnbaum, 71-72) Prior to the Shema itself are several passages dealing with nature, different for the morning and evening services (Leviant 142, 136; Birnbaum, 72-74). These prayers show a balance between universalism, the association of God with the forces of nature and all the peoples of the earth and particularism, God's special interest in the Jewish people. Indeed, the tension between these two themes keeps not only Jewish worship in a state of a unified dialectic between them, but I would dare say the entire Jewish people as they struggle with universal values and their own particular needs. Thus the text associates God with both the evening twilight, the cycles of time, the seasons, as well as love of the people Israel and the desire to return to their ancestral homeland.

The Shema itself is a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:4 which in and of itself, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One," does not convey a liturgical setting. The Mishnah, the code of Jewish law promulgated in Palestine at the beginning of the third century of the common era, presents the Shema as a liturgical unit that must be recited on a daily basis. The basic verse of the Shema, often recited with hands covering the eyes based on a talmudic tradition (Berakhot 13b) and because of longstanding debates either standing or sitting depending

on the local custom. This line is then followed by a verse from the Mishnah, "Blessed be His glorious kingdom forever and ever," (Tamid 1:5, cf. Psalms 72:19), which according to talmudic tradition is said in a lower voice (Pesahim 56a). The Shema is followed by three other biblical passages:

1. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 about the obligation to love God and to teach his commandments.
2. Deuteronomy 11:13-21, a classic statement of theodicy from the Torah: if you obey God you will be rewarded with natural bounty and if not you will be punished. This almost mathematical formula for reward and punishment which attempts to explain human suffering is radically revised in subsequent books of the Bible such as Job and Ecclesiastics which assert that there are aspects of God's ways that humans cannot fathom or explain. Nevertheless, the formula for reward and punishment that some find comforting and others find simplistic, especially in the light of major human tragedy, remains in the prayerbook.
3. Numbers 15:37-41, the commandment to wear fringed garments. (Leviant omitted the last two of these paragraphs, as have Reform prayerbooks. The Reform movement developed an aversion to talitot and tephillin. Religious textbooks intended for sale in the Reform movement have references removed. I remember once telling a graduate of a Classical Reform Temple about these practices and she accused me of making it up. cf. Birnbaum, 76-80).

The Second Section: The Shemoneh Esreh/Amidah/Hatefillah

The next major section of the service is called either the Shemoneh Esreh, the eighteen benedictions, the Prayer, Hatefillah, or the Amidah, the Standing, or, as Leviant calls it and Reform services for many years displaced it, the Silent Devotion. This is the high point of the service and involves an intensive combination of biblical verses and rabbinic prayers with roots in the mishnaic tractate of Berakhot in addition to bowing, stepping, and rising on the toes. The text changes on Shabbat with the middle petitions being replaced, often attributed to the inappropriateness of petitioning for things on Shabbat, though other petitions remain in the Shabbat liturgy.

As a historical phenomenon, I would like to look at the twelfth blessing of the Amidah, the so called birkat ha-minim, the blessing against sectarians (Birnbaum, p. 88), "May the slanderers have no hope; may all wickedness perish instantly; may all they enemies be soon cut down . . ." There are several basic problems with this blessing:

1. When did it enter the liturgy?
2. What did it originally say?
3. Against whom was it directed?

The basic reference to it is in the Gemara, that is the subsequent commentary on the Mishnah by the rabbis until about the fifth century (Berakhot 28b-29a). There, following the Mishnah's discussion of the Eighteen Benedictions, the Gemara notes that there are indeed nineteen and not eighteen blessings and that the blessing against the minim was introduced at Yavneh, the center of Jewish life at the time of the destruction of the Temple till the Bar Kokhba revolt, or from probably prior to 70 till around 132, and now famous for its pickles.. The Gemara goes on to explain that Samuel the Small composed the birkat ha-minim at the request of Rabban Gamaliel, the leader there after Yohanan ben Zakkai. The blessing is usually dated at around the year 90. According to the Gemara text this blessing was sort of a litmus test that if the reader had trouble with it he was suspected of being a sectarian and removed from his position as a threat to the community.

The question is whether the prayer once contained more specific references to Christians and because of the demands of censorship the text was changed. Such an assertion plays a regular role in Jewish-Christian relations, providing Christians an opportunity to demonstrate the fundamental anti-social and anti-Christian aspects of Judaism. Such assertions are buttressed by the fact that Solomon Schechter found in the Cairo Geniza, the massive medieval repository of worn out manuscripts, versions of the prayer which did invoke God's wrath against apostates (meshumadim) and Christians (Notzrim).

Some scholars have accepted this formulation, although late, as reflecting the original version. These assertions are supported by the fact that in early Christian literature there are references to the Jews cursing the Christians, Nazarenes/Nazoraeanes, in synagogue (Justin Martyr writing in the second century in his Dialogue with Trypho), three times a day (Epiphanius writing in 375 in Haereses) and Jerome writing in 410 in his commentary on Isaiah as well as in a letter to Augustine), and expelling them (John). Many of the studies of this blessing are devoted to diminishing the likelihood that the blessing originally pertained to Christians either by asserting its creation prior to Christianity or the addition of the terms for Christians at a late stage (See R. Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in Jewish and Christian Self-Definition 2; S. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration, Journal of Biblical Literature 103 (1984).).

Instead, I would argue that in light of regular evidence for the continued presence of Christians at Jewish worship during these early centuries, while the birkat ha-minim did not serve to separate Jews and Christians it may even be further proof of continued social, cultural, and religious interactions between Jews and Christians the likes of which prompted further legislation to separate the two peoples.

The Alenu

The final section of the service, after the reading of the weekly Torah and Prophetic passages, divided over either over a one year cycle or a three year cycle, involves the Alenu prayer (Leviant 140; Birnbaum, 135-138). A study of the Alenu, a prayer with both universalistic and particularistic themes, provides an opportunity to see how Jewish history has influenced a Jewish prayer and how prayer has influenced history.

The Alenu is usually attributed to Rav, a third century Babylonian rabbi. There are references to the Alenu in the Talmud of the Land of Israel (Rosh Hashanah 1:3 57a, Avodah Zarah 1:2 39c). The Alenu began as a piyyut, with short lines of 4 words each, rhythm, and parallel structures, before the malkhuyot, the kingship readings, in the Amidah of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf, the late morning service dedicated to the theme of sacrifice. It was then added also to the Yom Hakippurim Musaf Amidah. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim Ashkenazim kneel and prostrate themselves during this prayer. By the twelfth century it was also used to conclude the daily morning service, then the other two daily services. It is first seen in this capacity in Mahzor Vitry, a French prayerbook edited sometime between the 12th to the 14th centuries.

In 1171 in Blois, France, according to the sixteenth century Hebrew chronicle Emek Habakha of Joseph Cohen, a Jewish trader was watering his horse by a river. One of the Christians who happened by thought he saw a child's body fall out of his goods and into the rapidly flowing river. No body was ever found, nor was one ever missing. A trial was held, including an examination by ordeal, which the witnesses passed, by not drowning. As

a result, after escaping the flames several times and even dragging a Christian into the flames with them, thirty-four Jews were burned alive chanting the Alenu.

Of particular concern to Christians has been the line "She-hem mishtahavim lahevel varik umitpalellim el el lo yoshia," "They bow down to vanity and emptiness and the pray to a god who will not save." This line, which appears after the line that ends with the word "multitude," "hamonam," is not found in either Leviant or Birnbaum, but is found in not only manuscripts but many prayerbooks that are used today.

Christians, with good reason, have felt that the Alenu prayer was said against them, a sense that the incident at Blois would not undermine nor the fact that some Jews also spit in the synagogue when they said this line. "Rik" means both "emptiness" and "spit." In Yiddish the expression, "Er kumt tsum oysshpayen," "He arrives at spitting time," means to be very late for services since the Alenu is at the end. Christians further tried to prove their suspicions about the Alenu by showing that the expression "varik" added up in Gematria, a system by which numerical values are assigned to each Hebrew letter, to 316, the same as "Yeshu," the Hebrew for Jesus; that "hevel varik" added up to the same as "Yeshu umohammed." By 1370, perhaps with the appearance of Alenu in the Mahzor Vitry, Christians began to protest against the Jews saying such a prayer. Sometimes they even tried to force Jews to abstain from saying the offensive line. For example, in 1702 the Prussian government began an investigation of the prayer which, concluding on August 28, 1703, banned the offending line as well as spitting. This ban was repeated in 1716 and 1750.

Jews offered a range of responses to such charges. They often eliminated the line and hence it is not found in many Ashkenazi prayerbooks. Some Jews changed the line to read, "She-hayu mishtahavim laelilim umitpallelim el ale lo yoshia," "They used to bow down to idols and pray to a god who does not save." This way they changed the meaning from the present, against Christians, to the past, against pagans. Jews also argued that many of the phrases were from the Bible (Daniel 2:37; Jeremiah 10:6-16; Isaiah 30:7; 45:20, 23; 51:13; Deuteronomy. 4:39.) and that this prayer was written by Joshua or the Men of the Great Assembly, showing that it was written before Christianity so could not be against Christians. In a similar vein, Moses Mendelssohn, a rabbi and the foremost Jewish thinker in Europe, tried to argue that because the Alenu contained no references to the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem, it must have been written before the destruction and hence had no connection with Christianity. Menasseh Ben Israel, a Dutch rabbi, writing in his *Vindiciae Judaerorum* in 1656, devoted a whole chapter to a defense of the Alenu, including praise of it by the Sultan of Turkey. In Sephardic communities, often in Muslim countries, where Christians were usually not in power, the full prayer is still said. In my own congregation in Jerusalem I noticed an interesting compromise had been worked out concerning this line, perhaps unwittingly since nobody can recall any discussion about it. The offending line appears in the prayerbook, *Rinat Yisrael*, reflecting a historical reality and some contemporary Jewish practices, but it is not recited, reflecting local custom based on either sensitivity or habit. In his commentary on the prayerbook, Joseph Hertz, once the Chief Rabbi of Britain and one of the greatest apologists for Judaism ever, whose biblical and prayerbook commentaries are mainly valuable as a repositories of apologetics, crowed that this prayer is "sublime," "noble," and "ancient" and "universalist" which "voices Israel's undying hope for the day when all idolatry shall have disappeared" and "the essential character" of Judaism (208-209).

One politically incorrect crack that has made the rounds that really cannot be translated well involves the administration of an imaginary "Alenu spanking" to one's incorrigible children based on the last words of the prayer, "mitahat ayn od." ("and on the earth beneath there is none else," rendered literally as from his bottom there is nothing left.)

Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel

One of the newest and still most controversial prayers in the prayerbook is the Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel (Leviant 145; Birnbaum, 789-790), a controversy that shows that Jews do not need non-Jews in order to squabble about matters of prayer and certainly not politics. Indeed, free from major external harassment, Jews even find more opportunities to turn against each other. As recently as today's paper (Ha-aretz, April 20, 1999), an article discussed the fact that many of the religious parties, including Shas, the Sephardic religious party, lead by the recently convicted Rabbi Aryeh Deri and his spiritual mentor, the former Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, include no prayer for the State of Israel, although they do have a prayer for the soldiers of the Israeli Army. One of the reasons given for eschewing this prayer, a serious matter in most Israeli synagogues, like flying a flag on Independence Day, is that they claim that the prayer, although attributed to the chief rabbis of the State at the time, Isaac Hertzog and Ben Zion Uziel, was actually written by the Israeli Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature S. Y. Agnon, moderately religious by most accounts, but not a recognized rabbinic authority. Although the account of Agnon having been commissioned to write the Prayer for the Peace of the State of Israel by the rabbis has been circulated widely, recent research has now produced evidence, including the original draft, that the prayer was written by Rabbi Uziel and touched up by Agnon, his friend.

Meanwhile, showing how one prayer can continue to reflect the many cultural trends among the Jews. Some diaspora prayerbooks, such as the Conservative Sim Shalom, presumably feeling that the prayer goes too far in asking for an ingathering of all the exiles, have excised major portions of the prayer which express such a hope. Other Jews, nationalist settlers on the West Bank, feel that the prayer does not go far enough in expressing their aspirations so they have added a request that God "strengthen the hands of the settlers in Gaza, Judah, Shomron, and the Golan and all reaches of our holy land." Not satisfied with the current government, they have also added the request that God cancel all bad advice given to the leaders of the nation (also examples of petitionary prayers offered on the Sabbath.)

The Non-Textual Aspects of the Service

In analyzing non-textual and often non-theological aspects of services, it must be kept in mind that throughout history Jewish communities tried to coerce synagogue attendance by means of fines and other sanctions. There has been a long history of not allowing other activities in the community when services are being held, which has caused more activities to be held at services. In the middle ages this included stores being open on weekdays and in the modern period even Reform Sabbath guides articulate this principle.

In discussing these aspects of the service, I offer a warning. I remember once making comments like these in a Jewish studies class at an American college and infuriated some of the students. Not that these students were avid synagogue goers or that I had not carried on in a light manner about biblical or rabbinic texts, but the students felt the worship is something serious, not to be taken lightly. These comments reflect two important opposing aspects of recent events in the development of Jewish culture. On the one hand, as an arena of Jewish culture, the service has become the center of many jokes that are funny precisely because people can identify with the behavior depicted in them. On the other hand, especially under the influence of Christian culture,

especially in colonial New England where I taught, Jewish popular culture can take on a very serious side which does not allow for joking, especially in matters of worship.

Standing

At any rate, one of the phenomena that highlights the performative quality of worship is when all of a sudden in the middle of a prayer people start standing up (we're not talking about decorous services, but will shortly). The reason of course is that coming up soon is a prayer that requires standing and nobody wants to be the last one up and indeed there seems to be a contest among many to see who can be the first one to stand.

Page Numbers

Associated with this are the tensions over calling out page numbers. In some places, especially egalitarian minyanim (traditional, modern, non-affiliated, lay-lead), calling out page numbers can be a taboo. Part of this is due to the same sort of hearty liturgical macho that demonstrates the ability to stand without being told. Part of this is connected with the dynamics of not making guests feel welcome at Jewish worship services, and not being able to find the place certainly helps.

Greetings

And speaking of not making guests feel comfortable or welcome, which is an important way of producing group solidarity, one of the most famous is when a guest, schule-hopping, as visiting a strange synagogue is sometimes called, will enter a sparsely filled auditorium with tens, maybe hundreds of empty seats, only to be informed that they have sat in somebody's seat. Part of feeling comfortable is not only have a regular seat with regular fellows near by, but making others feel uncomfortable.

Welcoming or not welcoming guests is also an important part of each service. When I lived in New England, there was a mandatory five year probationary period during which newcomers would not be acknowledged at synagogue. In other more mobile parts of the country one can expect a greeting and even an offer to participate in the service on arriving for the first time, so that knowing the Torah Blessings is a major social grace. Being able to chant Torah and Haftarah portions makes one an instant celebrity.

In terms of greetings there is also the dicey problem of what to say. The rule of thumb is say what is said to you. If somebody says "Good Shabbes," say "Good Shabbes" back, don't say "Shabbat Shalom," and vicaversa.

Rabbinic Leadership

All these rules change slightly at Reform Temples and some Conservative ones as well which tend to be much more professionally organized, usually under the executive leadership of the rabbi and a large responsive staff. The rabbi usually controls each aspect of the service. The rabbi can exhibit great formality, aided by a well trained voice, a microphone (often missing at more traditional services), and a clerical robe with flowing sleeves with which to signal sitting or standing and the attendant flopping noise of hundreds of spring-loaded seats that sounds like cows standing in line on a kibbutz. The rabbi can also control the service with studied informality where the entire proceedings are an extension of the rabbi talking the congregation through the service like a disk jockey conducting a program.

The Sermon/Devar Torah/Discussion

One of the major arenas for sorting out services is in the part where a weekly lecture is delivered, usually after the Torah is read. In Reform and Conservative Services as well as many Orthodox synagogues which imitate them, this is usually billed as a Sermon, a formal presentation by the rabbi based on a combination of the biblical portion, current events, and major issues of concern to the rabbi who is speaking from his or her pulpit. (Once when unable to understand a particular rabbi I was informed that the entire sermon was keyed to personal family events.) Indeed in some congregations nobody else is allowed to speak from the rabbi's Pulpit.

One grade lower in formality and usually slightly more traditional in style is the Devar Torah, an exegetical exercise where the speaker shows mastery of traditional texts and touches on contemporary issues. These are more often than not given by the rabbi but can be given by others as well. The exceptions are usually elitist groups that function either as part of the congregation, designated with epithets such as The Library Service, The Upstairs (or The Downstairs) Service, The 11:00 service, The Havurah, etc, usually meeting on Saturday morning but sometimes for Havdalah or Sunday morning services.. Such groups are usually constituted by regulars with intellectual or social interests which do not include being part of weekly Bar and Bat Mitzvah Services and the desire to be closer or farther away from the rabbi, depending on whether the rabbi attends or does not attend this group. Often in the same congregation the rabbi who will give a Sermon at the main service will give a Devar Torah for this appreciative group, many of whom can match or better such performances.

Finally, there is the Discussion or Talk, often presented by a member of the congregation, especially at unaffiliated, egalitarian minyanim or havurot (prayer group or fellowship), many of whose members may themselves be rabbis, but not functioning as such professionally. While such a title for the talk sounds low-keyed, these constitute highly competitive events where a circle of members vie with each other for the best jokes, most obscure literary references, and convincing overall theme. Another aspect of these talks, and always a risky one unless one knows fully the rules of engagement, is that some speakers encourage or otherwise receive questions and comments at the end of their talks or even in the middle, something that rarely happens with a Sermon, but sometimes with a Devar Torah.

As services leave the more formal realm of the professionalized model of the Reform, but found among all movements, more of the leading of the service, the chanting of the Torah and Haftarah, delivering of announcements, and preparing food, is done by members of the group.

Kissing

A feature of most services is some form of kissing, usually associated with the Torah, kissing it as it is marched by or before one blesses it. This is done through another medium such as touching a prayerbook or a hand to the Torah then kissing it. Some people also kiss prayerbooks after picking them up if they have fallen to the floor. In Israel kissing mezuzot, ritual containers with biblical verses on the doorposts of most rooms, has become a major form of popular spirituality, including many who are not at all religious.

Head Coverings and Prayer Shawls

Other non-textual aspects of Jewish worship included a carefully coded system of head-coverings and other ritual appurtenances such as prayer shawls (tallit/tallis). You can tell much about a person by the head-covering (kippah/yarmulka). A crocheted kippa held on with a hair clip means some connection with Israel and more and more, especially in Israel, means an identification with right-winged nationalist politics, especially if it is worn in a cocky manner to the side. If, however, you can see that it has been folded and kept in a pocket, kippah mekuppelet, then you have to move the wearer over to the left both politically and religiously. A Bukharian kippah (woven like a rug in bright colors), worn by a man, may mean some level of fringe-group affiliation, when worn by a woman, however, it indicates a commitment to both feminism and tradition, especially if accompanied by a tallit. These kippot are good for young children because they stay on the head and the ones with the dark background don't show dirt. A synagogue issued kippah, black cloth, or one for an event in a garish color, with white lining and gold stamping of the name of the celebrants, displays a studied nonchalance about these matters. Other variants not likely in diasporan synagogues include the small black felt kippah which has been identified as a sign of nominal identity on the part of once ultra-orthodox boys and broad knit white skull fitting kippot with pom-poms are a sign of the opposite, newly religious with strong commitments, though perhaps not permanent housing.

Conclusion

One of the paradoxes of Jewish worship as I have suggested throughout is that there is not a definite correlation between denomination and style. In fact there is a spectrum of styles that runs from informal- traditional-participatory to formal- professional-non-participatory and both extremes and everything in the middle can be found at all kinds of synagogues. The corollary of this phenomenon is that there is not a clear correlation between denominational affiliation and religious life-style. I have had Orthodox rabbis tell me that none of their congregants is Orthodox and I have been to Reform and Conservative services where I have found high levels of personal observance. (In fact current wits have defined a modern Orthodox Jew as one who takes his tallis and tephilin on a date-these ritual appurtenances are only used at the weekday morning service, implying that he may not be home from his date before it is time for worship.) Thus, much of what happens at a service is a matter of cultural taste rather than religious preference or even orientation.

I would like to close with a recent discovery which I have seen both described in the literature (I forget where) and witnessed in person. That is the well developed phenomenon in Israel on the High Holidays of people coming to the synagogue but not going in. The first year I lived in Israel I missed this because the Prime Minister was

then living temporarily in the neighborhood and made an appearance at the local official synagogue so that I took many of the people who normally would have been on the steps of the synagogue as part of the curious crowd examining the local pol, including my own son who shook his hand. The second year here, however, the PM and his entourage had left our neighborhood for his refurbished and highly fortified official residence and the crowds were still on the steps, riding bicycles (an important secular activity on Yom Kippur despite or perhaps because of the almost absolute avoidance of driving by all Jews on that day), hanging out, talking. I also noticed that, once I had got to know the community, also I could see that at our unofficial, barely known synagogue, a similar phenomenon was taking place. In other words, for many Jews going to synagogue does not even necessarily entail going inside. Many of the social and performative functions can be done on the steps outside-and even for these there is a hierarchical gradation-most people are around for Kol Nidre. On the other hand, the liturgical texts can be read and studied as literary texts without involvement in any sort of community. What makes going to services such an interesting cultural phenomenon therefore is that both aspects are going on at the same time.

For further reading on parallels between Jewish and Christian liturgy, see E. Werner, *The Sacred Bridge I and II*. I. Elbogen's classic work on Jewish Prayer has recently been translated into English and updated by R. Scheindlin; J. Heinemann's *Literature of the Synagogue* has also been translated and he has contributed several articles to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* on prayer. L. Hoffman has published several studies of Jewish liturgy.

Week 8

Jewish Ethics: Are They Ethical? Are They Jewish?

Introduction

A series of probably only too well known jokes will put this week's theme into some sort of perspective:

Two Jewish businessmen meet in the street. The first one says, "I'm sorry to hear about your fire." The second one responds, "It's not till next week."

Two Jewish business partners, are having lunch. The first one says, "Oh my, I left the safe open." The second one says, "I am here and you are here, so what do we have to worry about?"

A man comes to a priest, a minister and a rabbi and asks for their solemn support because when he dies he wants to take it with him and gave each of them \$100,000 in cash.. Shortly he died and at his funeral the priest, minister, and rabbi each put an envelope in his coffin. When the clergymen met at a luncheon, the priest began by confessing that the roof of the church leaked and felt that some of the man's cash would be better spend doing good works on earth. The minister agreed and told how he gave some of it to the needy of the town. The rabbi was shocked, "Gentlemen, I want you to know that my personal check for the full amount was in that envelope."

Many who see Judaism as an ethical system, for whom these kinds of jokes produce embarrassment and indignation, believe that ethics are the essential component of Jewish tradition. They often assert that Judaism provides not only ethical guidance for Jews, but for all peoples of the world.

There are three basic types of sources of Jewish ethics that we shall examine: I) The Bible; II) Rabbinic Literature, III) Ethical Works.

1. **The Bible**

Many Jews try to build an ethical system upon the Bible, especially the Ten Commandments.. We could engage in a discussion of what exactly are the ten, but a more important discussion would be on the question of where in the Bible are the Ten Commandments given any sort of precedence or even invoked in specific situations rather than being cited as a general list. Moreover, if they are the basis of all ethics, why are they not invoked equally? In other words, why are not the commandments about God and the Sabbath not seen as central as those involving stealing and murdering?

Much in the Bible contradicts the Ten Commandments: The stubborn and rebellious son can be put to death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), slavery is allowed, the despoilation and annihilation of other nations is commanded (Exodus 23:23-24; 27-33; Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 20:9-14), ritual is based on a caste system; capital punishment is allowed for ritual and sexual violations (Leviticus 20:27-divination; 24:16-blasphemy; Numbers 15:35-Sabbath desecration), idolatry (Deuteronomy 13:17, 17:5), harlotry (Deuteronomy 21:20-29). And several leaders attempt to kill their children with God's blessing (Judges 11:34ff, Genesis 21-22).

Others will point to biblical quotations that advocate universal values of justice, equality, family, and world peace, such as Micha 4:3: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation and they shall study war no more." However, looking more carefully in the Bible, we can find Joel 3:10 declaring, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears: Let the weak say, 'I am a warrior.' In fact, if we examine the entire Bible rather than selective quotations that make us feel comfortable, we find that the Bible may not represent an ideal ethical treatise, or even a systematic unified world view.

And, if the Ten Commandments or even the Bible are the basis of all ethics, how then are Jewish ethics different from Christian ethics which also contain the Ten Commandments or different from secular law or perhaps even a sense of natural law which basically makes the same human demands on us?

Some Jews invoke the rabbinic attempts to diminish the apparent harshness of some of these biblical texts or to harmonize the contradictions between them. No doubt, these rabbinic texts certainly reflect a development in Jewish ethics, though not a consistent one because usually citations of rabbinic texts are equally selective. Thus, to the well known bon mot, "The Devil can quote scripture," Louis Ginsberg added, "and were he more knowledgeable he would quote Talmud as well." What the citation of rabbinic texts nevertheless does demonstrate, is that the Bible does not stand alone at the center of Jewish ethics.

2. **Rabbinic Literature-613 Commandments**

For Jews the source of practice and belief is not the Ten Commandments, but 613 commandments, rabbinic law, called halakhah, as embodied in various codes and commentaries such as the Mishnah, the Talmud, Maimonides, the Shulhan Arukh, and She'elot Uteshuvot, Responsa. The fundamental assumption of rabbinic Judaism is that the entire Bible is divine, which means not only the Ten Commandments, but the book of Leviticus as well, and that the true source of its interpretation is found in the teachings of the rabbis. It is,

therefore, the rabbinic heritage that has made Judaism distinctive and provides the grounds for any understanding of Jewish ethics.

Hence a study of Jewish ethics really involves an analysis of rabbinic ethics. Recently, a great deal of serious attention has been given to this subject, usually by individuals with both rabbinic and philosophical training. Their research revolves around the question "Does Jewish tradition recognize an ethic independent of halakhah?" This question thus raises the questions of whether halakhic thinking is ethical and whether those who follow the system recognize any values outside of it?

This brings us back to the question of natural law. If the rabbis are relying on values outside of halakhah, then why follow halakhah? Similarly, if halakhah makes demands beyond what most people would consider basic natural law, then should it be followed?

In a fascinating article Gerald Bildstein (S'vara 2) pointed out that in rabbinic literature there are many general ethical principles, but they are rarely invoked in specific cases. One of the most fascinating involves the principle, "lifnim mishurat hadin," which can be understood as both going beyond the letter of the law or staying within the law. Such a concept again points to the question of whether halakhah in and of itself is an ethical system.

Another concept discussed concerning halachah is the term meta-halakhah, a blend of Greek and Hebrew indicating also the presence of values in rabbinic discourse beyond that that are found in halakhah. Both of these lines of thinking therefore raise the question of what exactly is halakhah, and what exactly are ethics. In other words, at what point do rabbis invoke principles other than halakhah, and if they do, do they become part of the halakhah or do they remain separate from it?

Are there circumstances where if a Jew simply followed the guidance of rabbinic law, he or she would be at a loss of what to do? What should Jews do when Jewish law does not produce an answer of what to do in a given situation?

For example, according to the Talmud, if a person loses an object and gives up all hope of recovering it, then whoever finds it can keep it. However, there are some rabbis who would compel the finder to return the object because of "lifnim mishurat hadin." Some rabbis suggested that such a case should be determined on the basis of the economic status of the finder and the loser, contrary to the biblical principle of not giving the poor person any benefits in a legal case (Exodus 23:3; BM 24b).

Another example involves the fact that according to the Talmud a Jew must die rather than commit idolatry, incest, or murder. However, rabbis have asked whether a Jewish woman can use her sexuality to save her people. Although there are precedents in the Bible such as Yael and Esther, rabbis have developed no binding instructions in such matters. Without such guidance, does that mean that a woman must use her own conscience and that in this matter the halakhah is deficient?

A famous test of rabbinic ethics, involves the following story taken from the Talmud and the Midrash (Sifra Behar 6:3 and Talmud Bavli, Baba Metzia 62b): Two men are travelling in the desert. One of them has a canteen of water. If one of them drinks the water he alone will make it back to civilization. If both of them drink, both will die, neither making it back. There are three possible courses of action here. 1) The owner of the canteen should drink and let the other person die. This is the view of Rabbi Akiva. 2) Share it and both should

die. This is the view of Ben Petura. 3) The owner of the canteen should give up his water and die so that the other person may live. This view is not found in rabbinic literature.

3. The Golden Rule in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity

In his famous essay comparing Judaism with Christianity, "Al Shetei Seifim," translated as "Judaism and the Gospels," Ahad Ha-am, the cultural Zionist Hebrew essayist whom I introduced when speaking about Moses, tried to show that the third opinion, not mentioned by the rabbis, would be the Christian opinion. This third opinion, according to Ahad Ha-am, would exemplify the teaching of Jesus, who said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)." Ahad Ha-am connected this passage with the differences in the way in which Jews and Christians usually state the Golden Rule.

Usually Christian apologists proudly point to the fact that in the New Testament the rule is stated positively, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). In the Talmud, however, the rule as attributed to Hillel is stated in the negative, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor" (Bavli, Shabbat 30b-31a).

Ahad Ha-am points out that this difference has been a source of embarrassment to the Jews. He, however, tries to show that neither formulation is better than the other, but that each expresses certain basic truths about the nature of the religion of the speaker. He argues that the negative formulation is essential to Judaism and that a Jew need not give up his life for another. Judaism, he felt, has certain objective limitations imposed by its adherence to standards of basic justice beyond which an individual need not sacrifice himself or herself.

Christianity, however, according to Ahad Ha-am places a great emphasis on converting the egoism of the individual to altruism, which he considers only inverted egoism. Christianity, he felt, places a never-ending burden on the individual to self-sacrifice.

Three findings raise some doubts about these approaches to the Golden Rule:

- As I mentioned in an earlier lecture, following a line of thought introduced by Jacob Neusner, although according to rabbinic tradition Hillel lived from about 50 BCE to 10 CE, most of the sayings attributed to him were not quoted, referred to, or attributed to him in rabbinic literature prior to the end of the second century. Since no sage of Hillel's day quoted him or even knew about him, Neusner suggests that attribution of sayings and decisions to Hillel was part of an attempt by rabbinic leaders intent on "discovering for itself more agreeable ancestors . . ." Thus, while the New Testament was being preserved, the rabbis were developing traditions about Hillel. What Neusner implies but does not state is that some of the ethical teachings of Jesus could have been attributed to Hillel by the rabbis who knew of the emerging Gospel traditions. Thus it is just as likely that Jesus influenced Hillel's ethics as Hillel could have influenced Jesus' ethics.

- In a fascinating appendix to a study of the intertestamental book of Tobit, Frank Zimmerman showed that there are two patterns to the statement of the Golden Rule, the negative formulation of the east, used by Confucius, Tobit 4:5, Hillel, and the Targum Leviticus 19:18, and the positive formulation of the west, used by Aristotle, and Publilius Syrus. The two exceptions to this pattern are Epictetus who used the negative pattern in the west (though he was born in the east) and Jesus who used the positive pattern in the east. Moreover, he noted at least one Christian writer, St. Aristides who used the negative formulation. Thus, contrary to Ahad Ha-am's paradigm, there is no one essential formula that represents either Judaism or Christianity and the Golden Rule is embedded deeper in world culture.

- Saul Liberman has pointed out that the story of the two men on one plank was cited by Cicero and the story of two men and one canteen was cited by Al-Razi. In each of these versions the person who is more worthy, either for his own sake or for that of his country, should be saved. Here also the story did not originate with Judaism, so that it may reflect cultural borrowings rather than a predetermined value system.

Jewish and Christian Ethics

This discussion raises the fundamental question, Why do Jews have to compare their ethics regularly to those of Christianity? The answer to this question is four fold:

1. Christian writers have been quick to condemn Jewish ethics. Christian polemics against Judaism have regularly used texts from the Bible, Midrash, and Talmud in tendentious and contradictory ways. On the one hand, Christian critics of Judaism have tried to show that Christian ethics of love are an improvement over Jewish ethics based on strict justice. While on the other hand they have tried to use other quotations to show that not only is Christianity based on the foundations of Judaism, but that the truths of Christianity can be demonstrated from rabbinic literature. As Jews were massacred, isolated, expelled, and castigated, Christian theoreticians could show that it was Jewish ethics that left something to be desired.
2. There are indeed teachings in rabbinic literature that are indeed perfect fodder for such arguments. For example, the Torah commands the extermination of various peoples (Deuteronomy 7:1-5) in the Mechilta it says, "tov shebagoyim harog," "kill the best among the gentiles" (14:7; cf. Soferim ch. 15:10). There is another discussion about who has priority for drawing water at a well in which some rabbis argued that the needs of the local Jews to water their cattle or to do their laundry took precedence over the lives of strangers (Tosefta Baba Metzia 11:33-36). These and other similar statements were collected over the years by Christians such as Raymond Martini, Sixtus of Sienna, and Johann Eisenmenger. At times they would add to the collection or quote the material out of context. However, because Christians felt the simultaneous need to enforce censorship on such statements in rabbinic literature, it is difficult to know what is authentic, a situation which put Christian polemicists in the awkward position of basing their charges on passages that Christian censors had removed.

By the time of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, even the strongest defenders of the Jews both among the Christians and among the Jews conceded that the Jews were deficient in their ethical behavior. For example, as I mentioned in a previous lecture, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm who wrote at the request of Moses Mendelssohn a plea for the amelioration of the civil status of the Jews in 1783, one of the strongest statements in favor of the Jews, stated: "Let us concede that the Jews may be more morally corrupt than other nations; that they are guilty of a proportionately greater number of crimes than Christians; that their character in general inclines more toward usury and fraud in commerce, that their religious prejudice is more antisocial and clannish. . ." The issue of Jewish criminality was elaborated upon by Johann David Michaelis, a German Bible scholar, who noted the high rate of Jewish criminal convictions and membership in gangs. In his response, Mendelssohn noted that these figures were skewed, but nevertheless accepted the fact that Jewish circumstances, as opposed to religious or biological predispositions as suggested by others, led them to deal in stolen goods and pointed out that such behavior was often rewarded by the government which allowed those who had accumulated such wealth to acquire additional citizenship rights.

3. As other aspects of Jewish practice and belief are abandoned by large numbers of Jews, they are still driven by the desire to prove that Judaism still has something to offer its adherents and the world at large. For

these reasons, Jewish Reformers in the nineteenth century began to present Judaism in terms of its "Mission" which was to bring to the world the idea of "ethical monotheism." Such a construction served not only as a response to Christian attacks, but as a way to fill the void for Jews who were dissatisfied with Jewish ritual, communal life, but yearned for a reason to hold on to being Jewish.

4. Many Jews, especially religious Jews today in Israel and their supporters abroad continue to adhere to traditional Jewish ethics that other Jews would like to ignore or explain away. For example, Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg of Joseph's Tomb in Nablus/Shechem, after several of his students were remanded on suspicion of murdering a teenage Arab girl: "Jewish blood is not the same as the blood of a goy." Rabbi Ido Elba: "According to the Torah, we are in a situation of pikuah nefesh (saving a life) in time of war, and in such a situation one may kill any Gentile." Rabbi Yisrael Ariel write in 1982 that "Beirut is part of the Land of Israel. . . our leaders should have entered Lebanon and Beirut without hesitation, and killed every single one of them. Not a memory should have remained." It is usually yeshiva students who chant "Death to the Arabs" on CNN. The stealing and corruption by religious leaders that has recently been documented in trials in Israel and abroad continues to raise the question of the relationship between Judaism and ethics.

Thus literature on Jewish ethics is produced because Jews feel a need for it. Jews still feel a tension between universalistic commitments and the specific obligations of Jewish survival. This position is particularly painful when Jews realize that most other people in the world do not include the suffering of the Jews in their universalistic agenda. The modern Jew, therefore, faces a problem.

There are at least two routes to study Jewish ethics:

1. Particular problems can be examined both synchronically and diachronically, in the context of Jewish culture and developmentally over time to see how various levels of rabbinic and other traditions developed. In the future installments of this course, both this semester and next I will examine some of these topics in depth, meaning from all points for view, rather than simply citing what I find appealing or offensive. In addition to a lecture introducing the complex structure of the development of Jewish law, I will present topics which will include the extermination of non-Jewish nations, wife-beating, summary execution of the informer.

2. An examination of previous works of Jewish ethics as both attempts to formulate a sense of ethics as well as cultural artifacts that reflect both internal and external influences, often invoking secular wisdom and justifying it with biblical and rabbinic quotations. The key feature of these works is their aesthetic and motivational quality, often adding a spiritual if not mystical dimension to ethical matters. To this task now I would like to turn. As always, I will resort to the excerpts in Leviant because of their availability, noting that works that are available in Leviant are available independently and in other anthologies.

Jewish Ethical Treatises

- **Pirkei Avot**

There is a traditional Jewish ethical treatises that goes back, most of it, to the Mishnah, if not earlier. Pirkei Avot (Leviant 72-90, and available in any prayerbook), is no more or less ethical than the other tractates of the Mishnah, it simply concentrates together many pithy statements that can, because of their loftiness, enhance clarity in thinking about ethics, and because of their beauty enhance felicity of expression. The fact remains, however, that this tractate is neither systematic nor consistent and it contains many statements that many would

be inclined to ignore rather than base an ethical system upon them. A few examples must suffice for now. 1:2, about slaves who should not serve their master for the sake of receiving a reward, which is regularly cited in Jewish discourse, makes no sense. Who works without the hope of remuneration? 1:5 counsels men not to talk too much to women in order to prevent evil and 2:7 associates women with witchcraft. Does this represent a legal view towards women or a meta-halakhic prejudice of the time period? The fact is, I think, that Pirkei Avot is not a system but an ornament. In reading it through I am amazed at how many of the maxims, especially fragments of them, have entered into contemporary Hebrew speech: let thy house be opened wide 1:5, provide thyself with a teacher and get thee a fellow disciple 1:6, loving peace and pursuing peace 1:12, If I am not for myself, who is for me? And being for myself alone, what am I? And if not know when 1:14. One of the links in this transmission of Jewish teaching from Moses to future generations includes one Antigonos of Soko (1:3), indicating a level of Greek influence on the leading figures of rabbinic Judaism.

- **Duties of the Heart**

Bahya ibn Pakuda (Leviant 210-224) an eleventh century Spanish rabbi, philosopher, and judge, originally wrote his Duties of the Heart in Arabic, but it was soon translated into a Hebrew version which became an important text. Epitomizing the development of Jewish ethics the work contains quotations not only from the bible, Talmud, Midrash, and Saadia Gaon, but also from Aristotle, Mohammed, and the New Testament. Although Bahya attempts to place the Torah at the center of an ethical system, attributing to the Torah the ability to guide both physical and intellectual matters, he also introduced the new idea of kavvanah, that a ritual act must be fulfilled with proper intention.

- **The Book of the Pious**

A work that has received attention from some of the leading scholars of this century is Sefer Hasidim, the Book of the Pious of Judah ben Samuel the Pious (1140-1217) of Regensburg. Although only limited portions of this vast work are available in English (Leviant 378-388, Medieval Jewish Mysticism, S. A. Singer), important studies in English include the work of Ivan Marcus, Peter Schaefer, Yitzhak Baer, Robert Chazan, Haym Soloveitchik, and Judith Baskin. Key to our subject is the fact that the Book of the Pious is an ethical book, deriving from a Jewish pietistic movement, covering all aspects of life. It places especial emphasis on asceticism, altruism, love of God-including attention to erotic passion for God, magic-including the creation of a golem, use of secret names, and the magical use of the alphabet, penitence-including immersion in snow, ice, ant-hills, and bees. It is clear that the ethics of the Book of the Pious go beyond those of traditional rabbinic Judaism, perhaps even repudiating them. Accordingly, one can be innocent according to the law of the Torah but guilty according to the law of heaven. In particular scholars as early as Yitzhak Baer, writing in Hebrew in 1938, (the article that has recently been translated in Bina, a collection that translates important Hebrew scholarly articles into English) asserted that the Book of the Pious reflects the Christian atmosphere of medieval Germany, parallels with Cluny monasticism, and the thought of St. Francis of Assisi. Thus according to Baer the Book of the Pious represents the penetration of Latin Christian ideas into Judaism.

As usual, this view is not accepted by everybody, especially Gershom Scholem, the pioneering scholar of Jewish mysticism. He connected the work with earlier developments in Jewish mysticism which had pre-Christian roots or which represented the spontaneous expression of the Jewish people. In fact, this view is not a particular reaction to the circumstances under which the Book of the Pious were produced but part of a general reluctance on the part of Scholem to accept external influence on Jewish and Judaism. In general he tends to see developments as part of longstanding, often underground, Jewish developments. This tendency is also seen in

the studies of Moshe Idel, a major contemporary scholar of Kabbalah who made his reputation by challenging many aspects of Scholem's work. One of the paradoxes of Jewish scholarship in Israel is the often fierce resistance against seeing external influence on Jewish cultural developments. Political independence produced a desire for cultural independence as well, a desire which negates the Zionist dream of again becoming a normal people again. Normal people's culture develops as the result of interactions with other cultures and not in a vacuum.

Reading through the text of the Book of the Pious it is difficult to escape the incredible amount of attention which Christians and Christian practices received. Jews are encouraged, perhaps as a result of excessive Christian influence not to fast too much and to not cheat Christians or Jews, apparently Jews must have been both fasting and cheating. The Book of the Pious constitutes a serious indictment of the ethical behavior of the Jews, condemning false humility, pernicious charity, and false piety.

- **Fox Fables**

Writing around 1300 Berechiah Ha-Nakdan (called so because he was a scribe who punctuated the biblical text), prepared an elegant Hebrew version of fables he culled from rabbinic and Christian sources. In his introduction Leviant rightly notes that it is not the content of these fables that is marked by any Jewish qualities but the Hebrew style in which the various animals, what ever the source of the fable, are found quoting biblical and rabbinic expressions.

- **Ethical Wills**

One of the most striking ethical genres was the ethical will, repositories of wisdom and Hebrew style from Jews around the world reflecting not only a sense of ethical vision but the current reality of Jewish behavior. One of the most important aspects of these ethical wills from the vantage point of the development of Jewish culture is the sense of self that emerges in them. Not only are they written in the first person singular, but reflect events in the life of the writer and his family, which clearly had been circulated. These too include quotations from non-Jewish sources and references to frequent contact between Jews and non-Jews whom the Jews are warned to treat nicely. As we have seen elsewhere, there are limits to the ethical behaviors suggesting-Eleazar of Mainz warns his children not to take in strangers and cautions marital respect, probably because it was not always there. (Notice that he refers to patrilineality in the Jewish family, p. 444). Judah Asheri writes from the standpoint of a longstanding tradition of ethical works from Pirkei Avot which he cites regularly to Bahya and other tractates. These works are not simply positivistic retelling of facts, but include also reports of events such as visits from the dead, a regular feature of autobiographical writing as we have mentioned in the past.

- **On Gambling**

Leon Modena, a leading rabbi from Venice in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century produced what might be called an anti-ethical text. His On Gambling (Sur Me-ra, Leviant, pp. 537-539), constitutes a dialogue on the subject of gambling which drawing upon all sorts of biblical and rabbinic quotations ultimately seems to tip the balance in favor of gambling. Modena's pro-gambling arguments include the comparison between gambling and investing in agricultural products.

- **Path of the Upright**

Finally Moses Hayim Luzzatto's eighteenth century Path of the Upright constitutes a classic in the ongoing development of beautiful Hebrew style. Of particular interest is his emphasis also on curbing dishonest commercial practices among the Jews. In addition, he stresses the theme of saintliness.

Conclusions

The development of Jewish ethics reflect concern for both the community and the individual. The fundamental aspect has been the survival of the Jewish people. In each of these works it seems that the idea is not to treat non-Jews fairly because they have intrinsic merit but to prevent them from turning against the Jews. It is for this reason that what most ethical theories consider to be essential-not stealing, not murdering-could be put aside under certain conditions for the higher goal of Jewish survival. Similarly, commandments which may modern Jews would consider secondary, such as Sabbath observance, are often of primary importance because they are viewed as essential for Jewish survival. Thus there are Jews both in the diaspora and in the State of Israel who feel that the survival of the Jews is the highest value and there are others who feel that the ethical dimension to life is more important than survival itself.

As an example, which could be repeated in every daily paper in Israel, is a story that ran in the New York Times (2/28/86): "Money Laundering at City's Oldest Yeshiva." The article reported that in one eighteen month period, over 24 million dollars had passed through the books of the Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem on East Broadway. According to the prosecutors involved, personal profit was not the motive of the rabbi and the bookkeeper who were involved (unlike in some, but not all recent cases.) They took no money for themselves and were not aware that organized crime was involved. A spokesman for the school told the Times that whatever was done by the men was so that the school would not die. "The school had to survive. We're a non-profit organization. We live from hand to mouth. We live on donations. If you have no other way, that's what you do."

On the other hand, are many Jews, devoted to Israel and Jewish philanthropy who have no doubt about their loyalties to Judaism. Yet rebelling against what they have viewed as old-world provincialism, ritualism, and obscurantism, they provide their children with cosmopolitan education, rejecting Jewish education but hoping to maintain ethical behavior as a commitment to Judaism. Many of their grandchildren are now being raised Christian and they cannot understand why.

To conclude, the study of Jewish ethics serves as a valuable analytical tool to explore Jewish thought, history, and literature throughout the generations and to better understand the relationship between Jewish and other cultures. These questions are not simply academic, but are at the heart of many problems in determining the priorities of contemporary Jewish life, education, and identity. The lack of clearly thought out approaches to Jewish ethics can drive Jews to the extremes of self-effacing apathy or destructive violence.

What may be most Jewish about Jewish ethics are not an agreed upon set of values but a common language and a shared textual basis for discourse. What is changing of course is that Jews no longer enter ethical discourse with these shared assumptions based on the use of Hebrew language or rabbinic texts. The texts of rabbinic Judaism, upon which ethical discourse is based, are not easy, systematic, or immediately relevant to the voluntaristic life of the twentieth century. These texts were meant, if anything, to be read by a community under the leadership of an intellectual elite. For some Jews there is a desire to create community and reestablish

traditional authority patterns. For others, probably most, there is a desire to flee even the most humble of communities and the least demanding of rabbis.

Nevertheless, to speak of ethics divorced from texts, communities, leaders, coercion, ritual, and theology is a new challenge for the Jews, especially secular Jews. One of the features of the Kulturkampf being fought out today is the need for secular and liberal Jews to reclaim traditional texts. To relinquish their study and their meaning to others entails not only an abandonment of a precious cultural legacy, but also control over the meaning and destiny of Jewish life.

For Further Reading see, Marvin Fox, Modern Jewish Ethics

Week 9

Halakhic Texts and Cultural History

Introduction

A joke to put this week's subject into perspective:

A Jew wanted to build a sukkah so he went to the rabbi to ask how. The rabbi said to read the relevant portions of the Torah, Rashi, the Mishnah, and the Gemarah. So the Jew followed these instructions but the Sukkah fell down. When confronted with the problem, the rabbi responded, "Tosafot had the same problem."

In following up on last week's presentation in which I tried to show that the Jewish experience, including halakhic discourse, cannot be reduced to a common ethic, this week I would like to provide a more systematic introduction to the dynamics of halakhic development, meaning Jewish law. In this lecture I would like to accentuate the view that there is no "Ha-halakhah," The Halakhah, and that the tradition cannot be reduced to "Jewish law says," but rather it consists of a multiplicity of voices that reflect varying trends among the Jews over the ages.

In other words, halakhah is a valuable source of Jewish social history that reflects the development of Jewish culture. Halakhic literature, therefore, should be seen as a branch of Jewish literature, part of the cultural heritage of the Jewish people and not the preserve of any self-appointed arbiters of Jewish law.

In fact, I believe that one of the goals of non-religious, secular, or liberal Jews as well as members of other religions seriously interested in Judaism should be the development of the skills to read halakhic texts. Such skills are important for several reasons: 1) They are necessary to have access to the primary documents of Jewish development throughout the ages. 2) They provide a key to understanding and contributing to contemporary issues such as the agunah, moser, and rodef, (the chained wife, the informer, and the deadly pursuer) concepts which still determine the course of Jewish history. 3) They offer a common language for all Jews and others to enter such discussions as full knowledgeable participants, rather than abdicating their participation to those with traditional rabbinic training and the often accompanying political preferences.

These texts are not easy even for those who know Hebrew : 1) They are written in a complex style which includes elliptical snippets of Hebrew and Aramaic quotations from a vast array of unidentified texts with a heavy admixture of abbreviations. 2) These texts are often published in what is called Rashi script, a rabbinic

type font actually designed by Christian typesetters. 3) They assume that the meaning of concepts are fixed and that all agree upon such usage.

Nevertheless, there are ways to get around these obstacles: 1) There are translations and commentaries available for some texts. 2) There are articles and books which have surveyed various topics with analytical precision and varying degrees of critical distance. 3) There are computer programs for scanning the literature, some of it in translation.

Thus I am proposing a course for examining halakhic literature that is not aimed at study of it for its own sake or to practice an observant Jewish life-style, but to understand a literary genre as a cultural process. I do think, however, that some of the methods proposed here may be of interest to those in these other categories as well but they are not the intended recipients.

In short, following the thought of the late Isadore Twersky of Harvard and the Talne Hasidim, there are two forces at work in halakhic literature: commentary and codification. What this means is that as rabbis gather halakhic materials both in the act of gathering itself as well as the fixed text that is created immediately produces the object for further discussion and elaboration. Thus it is safe to say that no view enters halakhic literature without being subjected to a vast amount of scrutiny. Anybody, therefore, who presents a view isolating it from this dynamic context is misrepresenting the system. Ultimately, however, in order to practice Judaism one has to do just that, remove pieces to create a meaningful construct. However, as scholars of the system our purpose is not to take these constructs as representing the entire system.

Indeed, both to confuse matters but also to highlight the basic dynamic there are two simultaneous systems of codification and commentary at work in Jewish literature which occasionally intersect, but often do not. These are the systems built around the Bible and around the Mishnah.

The Bible

The biblical system has its roots in the codification, or canonization, of the Torah. The subsequent books of the Bible, collected, according to the Jewish canon, in the prophetic and hagiographic sections (the Writings), represent in part commentaries on the Torah. In them the basic literary and legal themes are further developed, whether it is Moses' role as a prophet serving as a template for the life and teaching of later prophets or further developments of the laws of the Sabbath or Passover. These works went through a process of codification and the entire Bible then was subjected to the ongoing commentary of the rabbis in the various midrashic works during the first few centuries of the common era. Midrash, often divided into halakhic and aggadic, legal and legendary, develops around both legal and narrative aspects of the biblical text. The various collections of midrash eventually were codified as the text stabilized in the early middle ages, but then these texts were subjected to commentary in the form of medieval Bible commentary, which is as much an analysis of the biblical text itself as it is a reexamination of the midrashim. Thus Rashi, whom we have met several times in this course, provides us with what appears to be a running commentary on the Bible, but is really editing and translating the Targumim, the ancient Aramaic translations and commentaries of the Bible, and the midrash, especially Midrash Rabbah. Similarly, Ramban, Rabbi Moses ben Nachman of Spain provides an extensive commentary of the Bible but also offers a running critique of both Rashi and Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra of Spain. Thus a page of Bible in the Jewish tradition contains all these commentators and more, constituting a conversation across the generations. At any point subsequent readers can join in and both select and amplify

comments that are of interest to them, continuing the process of commentary and codification, often found in sermons or *divrei torah*.

The Mishnah

Halakhic literature, which often has a biblical base, ultimately is grounded in the Talmud, which is a complex collection of texts. At its basic level the Talmud contains the Mishnah. The Mishnah, one of the codifications of the earliest strata of rabbinic legal teachings, those of the Tanaim, the authorities from the first few centuries of the common era in Palestine, was edited there in the third century by Judah Ha-Nasi. The Mishnah is important not only for serving as the bedrock of the entire halakhic system, but for setting the tone of its discourse. The Mishnah contains conflicting traditions on most matters, attributed to the authority of various sages by name or simply as the collective, "the sages teach." Most of the Mishnah is not attributed to the authority of biblical proof texts but to rabbinic sages. Hardly systematic, in its six orders concepts are introduced with out being explained, and much has to do with the cultic ritual of temple sacrifice, long since destroyed or not yet reestablished.

***To illustrate many of the genres described here, in keeping with our past practice, I will use examples from Leviant's Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature because it constitutes a readily accessible collection of translations.

Mishnah Rosh Hashana, chapters 1-4 (pp. 90-96):

The tractate begins with the concept that there is not one new year's day but four, offering no biblical proof texts, and the rabbis cannot agree exactly when they fall. The second mishnah deals not with the common matters of practice, but with reward and punishment and includes a rare, explicit biblical quotation. The Mishnah then describes the process by which the new month is determined, mixing current practice with memories of what was done while the Temple stood. The structure of the Mishnah here then shifts by association to a discussion of who is qualified to serve as a witness. At 1:7 there are blanket statements about who is ineligible for which no proof is provided, except the analogy to women being ineligible to witness without any reason being offered, raising the question of whether this is a halakhic argument or an extra-halakhic argument based on contemporary social conventions. Chapter two contains a nice image of a chain of fires signaling the new month originating in Jerusalem and culminating beyond Syria on the way to Mesopotamia. While this image of bonfires is still found each year on Lag Baomer (this week in fact), it is inconceivable that the fire from the Mount of Olives could have been seen at the next location, 27 miles away and from there to Caesaria on the coast. The chapter ends with the famous story of Rabban Gamaliel, the Patriarch, humiliating R. Joshua ben Chananiah forcing him to violate the Day of Atonement that he had calculated differently than the Patriarch, a classic tale showing how the rabbis asserted their authority. Chapter four deals with the issue of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah that fell on the Sabbath. Although most Jews take such a limitation for granted, the Mishnah offers a range of rabbinic opinions and reasons.

The Talmuds

At the same time the Mishnah was codified, the teachings of the Tanaim also were codified, sometimes with greater commentary, sometimes with less, if not omitted altogether, in the Tosefta. The Tosefta, however, was not the final act of codification or commentary of tanaaitic materials. Other tanaaitic teachers were preserved and presented in the Gemara, the subsequent rabbinic commentary on the Mishnah. Here these teachings are called beraitot and one of the main tasks of the Amoraim, the later generations of rabbinic authorities both in Palestine and Babylonia, was to reconcile beraitot with Mishnaic teachings, serving both as the basis of a further codification of these materials as well as the core of a new level of commentary. Two Gemaras were ultimately produced, one in about the fifth century in Palestine, usually called the Jerusalem Talmud, but, given that after the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132-135 Jews did not live in Jerusalem but the Galilee, such an epithet is hardly accurate. The other was produced in about the sixth century in the rabbinic academies of Babylonia and called the Babylonian Talmud.

The two talmuds are both vast and hardly organized in a systematic manner. Discrete discussions, called sugyot, often follow identifiable patterns of logic and organization, but the works themselves are repetitions, contradictory as the discussion moves from legal to legendary matters based on free association. Written in a combination of Hebrew and Aramaic with no punctuation the study of Talmud was not one that could be entered freely or casually. This created the situation where study of the Talmud was the province of those initiated into it and the meaning of the texts became what they attributed to them, what modern literary critics would call a hermeneutical circle, a situation where the borders of the text and its explanation became totally blurred.

In recent years several advances have been made to liberate Talmud study. Fundamental to such a change in perspective has been the attempt by non-traditional Jews to study Talmud, not only at liberal rabbinic schools but also in the university setting which has also attracted non-Jewish scholars not necessarily committed to the traditional meaning attributed to the text. In addition, dictionaries and grammars of Aramaic have been developed to enable free inquiry into the texts. Other aids include dictionaries of abbreviations and talmudic concepts and modern translations and computer programs which enable the text to be searched freely by those without years of training. So there is now the Soncino Talmud providing an English translation both in paper and on CD-ROM and the Steinsaltz translation into modern Hebrew and English. Of particular interest are places where the two provide different readings and punctuation, often a question mark instead of an exclamation mark. A pioneer in the attempt to provide modern readers with direct access to rabbinic texts in their own terms is Jacob Neusner. His voluminous writings include translations and explications of midrashic texts as well as the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds. He and his students represent major advances in the introduction of the study of the Talmud into the canons of western academic discourse.

***Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 30b-31a (Chapter 5) (Leviant, pp. 97-107) This extract from the Soncino Talmud is unfortunately missing the notes at the bottom of each page which make it much easier to follow the argument. Nevertheless, the text, a discussion of prayer, begins with the Mishnah about establishing a proper spiritual framework for prayer. The Gemara then launches into a discussion where the attempt is made to root the mishnaic teachings to biblical texts. As part of the discussion about establishing the proper mental framework for prayer, an incident is mentioned in which rabbis were getting too merry at a wedding so one of them smashed a valuable cup to instill a more serious mood, perhaps the talmudic basis for the continued custom of smashing a glass at a wedding (now often a lightbulb). After further discussions about the proper mood for prayer drawn from both beraitot and amoraic teachings, the discussion turns to the story in 1 Samuel

about Hannah's appearance in the sanctuary to pray for a son. For the rabbis of the Talmud, Hannah serves as a model for prayer, a paradoxical position given that usually the rabbis do not even require that a woman prays or allow a married woman to be alone with another man.

Geonic Responsa

The codification of the Talmud provided a platform for further commentators. This process began in Babylonia with an institution known as Sheelot uteshuvot, Respona, Questions and Answers, or pesakim, decisions. Jews, usually rabbis, from around the world wrote to the rabbis of the academies to clarify various points of explanation about the newly codified text. This vehicle of commentary has preserved as a way for rabbis to provide both commentary on matters of Jewish law as well as to codify various texts which apply to a particular issue.

***A responsum by Sherira Gaon (906-1006), called Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon, provides a version of the history of rabbinic Judaism, tracing developments through Midrash, Mishnah, Tosefta, beraitot, and Talmud, addressed to Jacob ben Nissim ben Shahin of Kairouan in 987 (Leviant, pp. 274-278). The fundamental problem in the question is that most of the rabbis named in the Mishnah are relatively late, what is the basis for its antiquity. The answer is quite fantastic: earlier rabbis are not mentioned by name in rabbinic texts because they did not disagree with one another. This answer solves not only the basic problem of the antiquity of the rabbinic corpus, but asserts a unified, monolithic quality. Indeed, following the answer further, Sherira asserts that the entire Talmud was already known at the time of the destruction of the Temple in the year 70, when Yohanan be Zakkai established his school at Yavneh. Such a notion of a pre-existent corpus of rabbinic knowledge undermines the notion of historical development based on controversy.

Talmudic Commentary

Also the process of commentary on the talmudic text continued during the middle ages. The foremost commentator was the French Rashi, whose exposition of the text fills one side of the margins of the printed Talmud. The other side of the margins of the printed Talmud are filled by Rashi's descendants the tosafists, or baalei tosafot. Their commentaries, some of the most difficult texts in Jewish literature, are devoted to reconciling differences between Rashi and the text of the Talmud and the text of the Talmud and contemporary Jewish practice. Thus the paradox is created that the tosafists have gotten a bad reputation because of their exercises in pilpul, causistry, literally meaning pepper, but in order to understand subsequent developments in the discussion of Jewish law it is necessary to understand the tosafists. In fact, when later rabbis discuss the Talmud it is not the Talmud itself that they are referring to but as it was understood by the tosafists.

This phenomenon in which subsequent levels of understanding replaced the meaning of the text itself is found regularly in studies of the Mishnah and the Talmud. For example, in the Soncino English translation, the notes on the bottom of the page which look like the literal glosses by the translators are in fact usually summaries of Rashi and tosafists. Similarly in subsequent Jewish commentaries on the Mishnah such as Ovadia Bartinoro, whose travel accounts we have read, and the Blackman translation of the Mishnah regularly base their explanations on the traditional understanding and not the texts themselves. The hermeneutical circle reached its

fullest and most frozen stage of development in the Art Scroll series, see the article by B. Barry Levy in Tradition 19 (1981) and the subsequent waves of letters.

Early Codes of Jewish Law

Commentary on the Gemara became the object for subsequent codifications of Jewish law. This process began early in Babylonia under the leadership of the geonim, literally geniuses, the heads of the rabbinic academies, with the production of early codes of Jewish law such as the Sheiltot of Aha of Shabha (680-752), which significantly maintains the word for questions, sheelot, in its title. This work is the first post-talmudic rabbinic text attributed to a specific named author. This Aramaic work, preserved in many editions in the Cairo Geniza, contains material that antedates and contradicts the Talmud, showing the richness of rabbinic material as illuminated by the gaps between the codificatory and the commentary processes. The principle of organization of this code was to connect the rabbinic material to verses in the Bible, often emphasizing an ethical component, presenting what seems to have been a collection of sermons delivered by Amoraim or Geonim. Saadia Gaon (882-942) also produced a code of Jewish law. As the center of Jewish life shifted from Babylonia westward, early code of Jewish law was the precis of the Talmud, Sefer Hahalakhot or Halakhot Rabbati, made by Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, the Rif (1013-1103) of Fez in northern Africa, sometimes identified as the last gaon.. In this work Alfasi prepared a code of Talmudic law still practiced and commentary from various geonim. Subsequently some of the leading rabbis wrote commentaries on it, creating a work central to all future codes and commentaries of Jewish law produced in both the Islamic and Christian worlds. Another early code of Jewish law was produced by Samuel Halevi ibn Nagrela, Shmuel Hanagid (982/993-1056), a Jewish politician, soldier, and Hebrew poet from Islamic Spain, Sefer Hilkheta Gavrata.

Maimonides' Mishneh Torah

One of the major codes of Jewish law was produced by Maimonides, Rambam (1135-1204), born in Islamic Spain, passed through the land of Israel, and spent most of his life in Egypt, the Mishneh Torah, an allusion to Deuteronomy 34:12, or the Yad Hazakah, the Mighty Hand, based on the fact that the numerical value for hand, 14, is the number of books in his code. He began this Hebrew work in 1168 and completed it in about 1178. Isidore Twersky, the world's leading scholar on Maimonides' code identified five aspects of the Mishneh Torah: 1) Maimonides used a clear mishnaic Hebrew style; 2) Maimonides attempted his own system of classification of Jewish law; 3) Although the format is codificatory, the contents at times includes commentary, interpretation, exegesis, explanations, and, contrary to conventional wisdom, even references to his sources; 4) Maimonides codified all laws from rabbinic Judaism, whether they could be practiced in his day or not, including laws based on the Temple, the Holy Land, and the Messiah; 5) Maimonides fused Jewish law with discussions of Jewish philosophy, theology, and ethics. The books of the MT include: Sefer Hamada, on belief; Sefer Ahavah, on prayer and ritual; Sefer Zemanim, on holidays; Sever Nashim, on women; Sefer Kedushah on forbidden unions, foods, and proselytes; Sefer Haflaah, on vows and oaths; Sefer Zeraim, on agriculture, including tithes, offerings, sabbatical years; Sefer Avodah, on Temple sacrifice; Sefer Taharah, on the uncleanness of corpses, leprosy, food, and women; Sefer Nezikim, on civil damages and murder; Sefer Kinyan, on commercial law and slavery; Sefer Mishpatim, on employers, debtors, and inheritance; Sefer Shoftim, on the Sanhedrin, testimony, mourning, and Jewish kings, and wars.

Maimonides' code was opposed, especially in Babylonia, partially because the codification process in various diasporan centers represented a diminution of their authority and partially because it omitted the back and forth of the talmudic argumentation without even mentioning most talmudic sources, further removing Babylonian influence from diasporan Jewish life. In addition, Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquieres, the Rabad (1125-1198), wrote strident attacks on many of Maimonides' positions.

Subsequent generations of rabbinic scholars devoted their energies to identifying Maimonides's sources and commenting on his conclusions, including works such as Moses of Coucy's *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Semag, 1250), Isaac of Corbeil, *Sefer Mitzvot Katan* (Samak, 1277), and Aaron Halevi of Barcelona, *Sefer Ha-Hinnukh* (1302-1308). The published editions of the MT now have an elaborate exegetical apparatus that reflects these labors, and include the Rabad's critical comments as well. Maimonides' code was crucial for the development of subsequent codes of Jewish law, a phenomenon which prevented his code from becoming the authoritative work he had hoped. The simplicity and beauty of Maimonides' Hebrew makes his work an enduring masterpiece for every student of Hebrew, especially since many editions are printed in large clear text with vowels. However, the entire MT has been translated into English and published in the Yale Judaica Series, with a thorough, but unmarked, critical apparatus in the back of each volume. Twersky's Introduction to the code of Maimonides was also published in this series.

****Mishneh Torah, Book of Knowledge, Laws Concerning the Study of the Torah, chapters 1-2 (Leviant, pp. 293-296)*

Matters of gender were not introduced to the study of Jewish texts by feminists, but were of central concern from their inception. Here Maimonides, following talmudic discussions, dismisses the obligation of women, slaves, and minors to study Torah. The biblical proof text offered (Deut. 11:19), especially as translated here, refers to teaching children and not specifically to teaching sons. The position against teaching the young seems bizarre because it is traditionally children who are educated. Indeed, commentaries on this passage often omit the word minors for this reason. Maimonides himself elaborates on the need to teach young children. His educational system is based upon physical chastisement (2:2), a feature that modern Jews don't often assimilate when bewailing the deterioration of education, not often realizing that the voluntary and less coercive aspects may affect the outcomes.

****Book of Knowledge, Laws Relating to Moral Dispositions and to Ethical Conduct (Leviant, pp. 296-305, NB Leviant's order of the tractates does not follow the order of most editions of Sefer Hamada in the Mishneh Torah.)*

The Hebrew title of this tractate also in the Book of Knowledge, *Sefer Hamada*, is *Hilkhot Deot*, literally something like the laws of attitudes, discernment in one translation, but the modern translator felt the urge to modify this simple Hebrew not once but twice with adjectives that would heighten the ethical and moral nature of the tractate. This tractate deals with matters beyond simple halakhic practice such as ethical, philosophical, and even medical approaches to good, moderate living. Here is the famous Fustat Diet in which Maimonides guided medieval Jews through the ways to eat right and keep fit. 6:3 raises some serious ethical concerns. On the one hand Maimonides reads Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," to mean only other Jews. In 6:4, contrary to the conventional wisdom, including a recent bout in one of my classes, Maimonides encourages welcome of proselytes to Judaism, who then can also be loved. But the avoidance of proselytes is a modern construction of apologetic Jews.

Medieval Responsa

During the Middle Ages in both Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Eastern Jewish communities rabbis continued to write responsa. Often dealing with new situations, they provided the author with an opportunity to examine the various materials available in Jewish law. The names in the published version are usually changed to anonymous names of the tribes, especially Reuven and Shimon, to hide the actual circumstances and to preserve on the halakhic development.

***Responsa, Leviant, pp. 278-290, 305-308, 540-543

Rabbenu Gershom ben Judah (960-1040) thus asserted that rabbis deserved special economic advantages in their communities.

Rabbi Isaac Alfasi, in discussing a contractual matter between a teacher and a client, invoked Zephania 3:12, "The remnant of Israel will not do wrong nor speak falsehood . . ." an appeal to conscience and decency.

Rabbi Jacob Tam (1100-1171) issued a famous responsum according to which divorces granted could not then be revoked on trivial grounds, a major boon to women who were often tied to apostate and recalcitrant husbands. In the course of his responsum he mentions the rate of divorces from apostates.

Maimonides discusses a proselyte to Judaism and the question of whether he can refer to the people of Israel as his ancestors. Further demonstration of the arrival of proselytes at the gates of Israel during the middle ages.

Leon Modena offers a tour de force to permit Jews to engage in music, something that he himself did with regularity.

The Tur

Jacob ben Asher (1280-1340), a German rabbi, the son of the Rosh, Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel (d. 1328), author of Piskei Ha-Rosh, a code that still followed the order of the Talmud, who had migrated to Spain, prepared a major code of Jewish law, the Arba'ah Turim, the four rows (of the high priests ephod), the Tur, which exhaustively covered all areas of law which were currently operative in his day, but which did not give fully the relevant talmudic sources or the names of the later authorities upon whom he relied. Often in connection with a law he quoted many conflicting authorities without establishing which one was to be followed. First published in 1475, the Tur was the second Hebrew book to be printed. It is divided into four parts, established the basic categories of Jewish law till today:

1. Orakh Hayyim-"the way of life," dealing with day to day conduct, prayer, blessings, Sabbath, festivals, fasts, and holidays.
2. Yoreh De'ah-"the teacher of knowledge," treating diet, ritual purity, circumcision, visiting the sick, mourning, interest, agriculture, tithes, and charity.
3. Even ha-Ezer-"the stone of help," concerned with family, marriage, and divorce.

4. Hoshen Mishpat-"the shield of judgment," covering civil law, criminal law, courts, judges, evidence, loans, partnerships, property, theft, and robbery.

Beit Yosef

The Tur served as the basis of many commentaries, the most famous of which was the Beit Yosef of Joseph Caro (1488-1575), a leading rabbinic authority and kabbalist. Sephardic in origin, after living part of his life in the post-expulsion Iberian peninsular, perhaps as a Christian, Caro spend part of his life in Turkey before moving to Safed in 1536. It was in Turkey where he devoted much of his early study to the Mishnah which, after a long period of neglect, was becoming increasingly important for Jews. In Turkey he began his magnum opus, Beit Yosef, a commentary on the Tur. Caro's commentary took twenty years to complete and another twelve to edit. It was finally published between 1550 and 1558. The purpose of Beit Yosef was to investigate thoroughly the sources of every practical law, beginning with its talmudic origins, proceeding through every stage of its development, mentioning every divergent view, and finally, trying to establish what the practice should be. Caro often reached these decisions by following two out of the three major figures in the codification of Jewish law: Alfasi, Mamonides, on whose work he wrote his own commentary, Kesef Mishneh, and the Rosh. However, he also regularly consulted later authorities as well as local customs and the Zohar, the central text of Jewish mysticism.

Shulhan Arukh

Caro is most remembered for his Shulhan Arukh, a Set Table, a code based on his own commentary, Beit Yosef, thus the dialectical movement of codification and commentary are manifested in one and the same person. Like the Mishnah, the Shulhan Arukh was compiled in the Galilee. Caro intended his work to be an aid for established scholars as well as for young students. Originally it was published without the voluminous commentaries that surround it today, the SA was a brief work published in what could be called pocket editions. It was originally divided into thirty sections so that it could be studied on a daily basis for a month. In the SA Caro eliminated much of the midrashic, ethical, theoretical, ideological, theological, philosophical, and kabbalistic aspects of the Tur and Beit Yosef. The SA is an integrated creation which is written in a clear and beautiful Hebrew style The work was first published in Venice in 1567. Most editions of the SA contain not only voluminous commentary but embedded within the text itself are the additions of Moses Isserles (1525-1572), the Remah, who adjusted the SA to Ashkenazic practice.

The Shulhan Arukh, seen by many Jews in the modern period as the sole legitimate representative of The Halakhah, has become a lightning rod for reactions towards Jewish law. Among traditional Jews the SA is seen as the embodiment of all Jewish law and the divine presence itself. Among Conservative Jews, such as Solomon Schechter, it is "still consulted with profit," although, returning to last weeks concerns about Jewish ethics, it is "disfigured by a few paragraphs expressing views incompatible with our present notions of tolerance." Schechter then introduces an individualistic notion of meta-halakhic ethics which seems to undermine the whole rationale for a code of Jewish law about which he is so enthusiastic: "But there the discretion of the Rabbi comes in. By tacit consent these are considered obsolete by all Jewish students." It was among Reform

rabbis that the SA was subjected to the most abuse. They described it as "petrified," associating "shulhan-arukhism" with the era of "ghettoism" and declared it of no significance to them.

The Shulhan Arukh, however, cannot be read out of the context of the development of halakhic literature and if I may be so bold as to suggest that those Jews who like it the least may need it the most. In other words, the attempt to find a Jewish values cannot be based entirely on halakhic texts but nor can it be divorced from them.

***Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah, The Law of Honoring Parents/Charity, no. 240- 252(Leviant, pp. 523-534)

The text here, offering extreme expressions of parental honor, certainly moves beyond behavioristic goals into trying to shape the attitude of the participants. The detailed laws provide almost a philosophical and ethical treatise on the relations between parents and children. In line with earlier medieval enactments, rabbis are endowed with all sorts of communal perks and benefits. As we saw in Maimonides, learning and discipline at school were enhanced by means of corporeal punishment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the features of the halakhic system is that there are no consistent rules for creating and testing various applications, although many are partially and sometimes invoked. Occasionally the principle *hilkhata kebatra*, the law follows the latest authority, is found; but at other times there is the assumption that the earlier authorities carried greater weight and that the later ones are simply gnats on the shoulders of giants. Other times generalizations such as time-bound commandments will be invoked, especially in matters related to women in Jewish law, which will require a separate lecture to develop all the nuances, but such a principle is betrayed by examples and critiqued by other authorities. Thus both the practicing Jew and the social historian are confronted by a lack of binding authority and an inexhaustible ability of rabbis to produce sources which support their views and to omit those which do not.

One of the best descriptions I have found of halakha comes from a new book , *Pesah Dorot* by Yosef Tabori. On p. 28 he writes: "It is possible to liken it [halakha] to a river that its waters are constantly flowing but which nevertheless remains the same river; but more correctly it is like an individual whose cells are constantly changing but he remains the same person."

Week 10

Poetry and History

Hebrew Poetry in Muslim Spain

Dana International, Israel's award winning trans-sexual pop-singer, announced that her entry at this year's Eurovision Song Contest on May 29, to be held in Jerusalem, will be "Dror Yikra." Wearing a strapless dress in the style of traditional Yemenite Jewish costume and heavily guarded by security agents, she noted that "This is a Yemenite song and I am Yemenite. I remember singing it in synagogue when I was young. . . . It's part of

me." According to the Jerusalem Post (5/12/99, p. 2), the organizers of the contest noted that "Dror Yikra" was written by Rabbi Shlomo Shabazi in the sixteenth century and is a poem with no overt religious overtones. The director of the show noted, "People are attributing all kinds of meanings to the words that they wouldn't if Dana wasn't singing it."

One of my now very famous professors of medieval Hebrew poetry once noted that there are three words that don't attract students to courses or lectures: medieval, Hebrew, and poetry, and noted that his field involves all three. Yet this news story, which no doubt will grow in Israel over the next few weeks, especially after the election when new battles will be necessary to sustain life here at its usual combative, bilious level, moves a discussion of medieval Hebrew poetry from the academy to the forefront of Jewish cultural wars.

While Dana International may be able to get an operation to change his sex, he and his promoters cannot so easily change the historical provenance of a major cultural artifact. Deror Yikra was one of the first Hebrew poems written in the rhyme and meter of Arabic verse. It was written in Cordova, Spain in the mid tenth century by Dunash ibn Labrat (d. 990), born in Baghdad where he was a student of Saadia Gaon and later lived in Fez. His poetic innovations gained him the position of court poet or Hebrew secretary to Hasdai ibn Shaprut (910-970 or 905-975) who served as the court physician and vizier for Abdurahman III (912-961), who established the Caliphate of Cordova in 929. Shalem Shabazi was a great seventeenth century Yemenite Hebrew poet, however the time difference between the two is at least seven hundred years, a margin of error greater than most of recorded US history, a fact that highlights the long history of Hebrew poetry, a history that extends beyond both points of reverence in this controversy by many centuries.

Under the influence of Arab culture, Hebrew poets radically changed Hebrew poetry from the often obscure and usually very religious style of piyyut, associated with cultural developments in Palestine, Babylonia, Ashkenazic lands, and Spain up to the tenure of Menahem ibn Saruq whom Dunash ibn Labrat replaced as court poet. Influenced by the Muslims' devotion to the Koran, Dunash marked a return to the purity of the language of the Bible in Hebrew poetry and an end to the language of the midrash in his poetry. Influenced by the secular poetry of the Arabs about love, wine, and war, the Hebrew poets began to write on secular themes as well. Finally, influenced by the quantitative syllabification of the Arabs, Hebrew poets began to include precise rhythms in their poetry

Although the Hebrew poetry of Spain can be understood in translation without commentaries, it is nevertheless stylized in its own way. Since much of it reflects a conscious borrowing of themes, images, and forms from the Muslim poets, it is, therefore, important not to fall into the trap of viewing the motifs of these poems as accurate reflections of the lives of the Jews of Spain. Rather, they are accurate reflections of the kinds of images that Jews borrowed from the poetry of the Arabs. Thus when the Hebrew poets wrote about carousing all night in gardens around bonfires and drinking wine, we cannot assume that this is what Jews did, only that this is what they read. The Jews borrowed these themes in their poems because they wanted to match what the Arabs did in Arabic to show the strength and flexibility of Hebrew. This process reaches its fullest development in the Hebrew poems about physical intimacy-usually just kissing-- between young boys and old men written in biblical Hebrew by rabbis in Medieval Spain (Carmi, pp. 298, 302, 344, 356, 361, 362, 363.)

In this lecture, I will provide a thematic survey of medieval, Renaissance, and early modern Hebrew poetry as a vehicle of Jewish cultural expression. I will pay little attention to the aesthetic and literary qualities and stress the poems as vehicles of ideas. As in the past, I will draw examples from Leviant's Masterpieces (where the poetry is not that well represented and the translations are forced into rhyme) and T. Carmi's Penguin

Anthology of Hebrew Poetry (which uses prose translations to convey the ideas-I retranslate the Hebrew to provide different nuances and in order not to run afoul of copyright regulations). In Carmi each poet and poem is introduced between pages 77 and 143; the introductory materials between pages 7 and 75 are excellent. I have also described the major poets in an early Juice course, Medieval Jewish History, Lesson 5).

1. **Wine Poetry**

Among Jews, the Jews of Muslim Spain wrote the first wine poetry. It was a playful, seemingly secular genre with little obvious religious or ethical purpose. This imitation of the Arabic, like most subsequent drinking literature, usually had six basic themes: 1) the place where the wine was drunk; 2) the group of drinkers; 3) the time of the drinking; 4) a description of the wine; 5) an erotic image of the person serving the wine; 6) a description of the musicians playing in the background.

Dana International's contention that the author of Deror Yikra may not have been as religiously devout as some of the singer's religious detractors finds mixed support in the fact that the first Hebrew wine poem was written by Dunash (Carmi, p. 280). In this poem, the listener is encouraged not to sleep but rather to spend the whole night up amid all sorts of fragrant spices in a garden of pomegranates filled with fountains and musical instruments. However, after a call to drink by the bowl, the poem shifts to a call for offering a sacrifice of choice bulls and rams and calves along with the anointing of oil and the lighting of incense. Now this could be a BBQ, sixties style, or it could be a reference to the Temple sacrificial cult, leading us to reconsider the beginning of the poem and to ask whether it referred to natural bounty or a specific religious setting. This impression is sustained in the next stanza as well. There, as part of a poetic dialogue, the listener reproaches his interlocutor to ask how he could issue such an invitation when the Holy House, the footstool of God, is in the hands of the uncircumcised ones. He further chastises him for neglecting the Torah while Zion lies in desolation, adding nationalistic to religious themes.

Samuel Ha-Nagid, the Jewish vizier of Cordoba also wrote some zesty wine poems. At first one might be tempted to say that they are purely secular, focussing on the hedonistic aspects of life with calls for drinking, often to excess, and good company. A careful examination, however, of each of the poems usually reveals some connection with religious themes. In one, *The Reward* (Carmi, p. 296), the poet suggests dividing one's time evenly between serving God and carousing with wine. In another, *Winter Wine Song* (Met Av, Carmi, p. 296), the development of the vintage process traces the Jewish calendar from Av and Elul to Tishri, reaching its height at the time of the high holidays. In another, however (Carmi, p. 298) he connects wine with the theme of the love of men for young boys, "I would be a ransom for the fawn who gets up at night with the sound of the harp and flute." Moses ibn Ezra connects wine with sexual lust (Carmi, p. 324), "Hug the breasts of the beautiful woman all night; kiss her image all day." But even here religious imagery from Temple sacrifice is added for almost hilarious consequences: "This is earthly delight-take your portion from it as did the priests from the ram of installation . . . don't stop sucking your moist lips until you have taken your portion-a breast and a thigh (cf. Leviticus 10:15). (See also Leviant, pp. 175, 190-191.)

2. **Love Poetry**

Hebrew love poetry had a secular, hedonistic side to it, often as part of a wine song. These poems were a continuation of Arabic themes, not biblical motifs, despite the use of biblical terminology. The basic themes of secular love poetry include: 1) the lover is usually described as tall, with white skin and dark eyes and hair; 2) the lover is called by the names of biblical animals, such as deer, gazelle, or biblical personalities; 3) the love is

kept a secret, especially from the family; 4) the love is described in terms of a stylized frustration--the poet is awake, cannot sleep, and has no appetite; 5) the lover can be a young man or a woman; 6) a friend tries to convince the poet to give up the frustrating relationship; 7) the poet sees himself as a sacrifice and the object of his affection as an animal of prey; often parts of the woman's body, especially her eyes, are described as weapons. In short, people who are happily in love rarely write love poetry. These love poems are usually about frustrated love and can lead to misogyny.

Judah Ha-levi (Carmi, p. 343) captures the spirit of the victimization of the man by his unavailable but radiant object of affection, "Ophra washes her clothing in the water of my tears and spreads them out to dry in her radiance. With my two eyes, she doesn't bother with water from the well; nor, with the beauty of her body, with the sun." He cries his eyes out over his lover but all she can do is use his tears to do her laundry an image that both elevates her and condemns her in the harshest terms.(See also Carmi, pp. 342-346, Leviant, p. 200)

3. **Religious Poetry**

The Hebrew religious poetry of Muslim Spain borrowed many themes from secular love poetry and often the only difference was the choice of the object of desire.

Solomon ibn Gabirol (Carmi, p. 314) wrote two religious poems that follow all the contours of erotic poetry. The cause for confusion between the two genres is, as in Dunash's wine poem above, his description of the Temple cult with the double entendre as a house of earthly assignation as well. "The gate which was shut, arise and open it, and the gazelle that fled, send him to me! On the day that you (m) come to me to lie between my breasts, there you will cause you pleasant odor to linger. . . Carmi's translation includes explanations not found in the Hebrew that show the reader that the poem is a conversation between God and Israel. The Hebrew certainly allows for this but not in uncertain terms.

Similarly Gabirol's "He who lies on beds of gold," which Carmi translates as "Zion longing for the messiah," begins with a woman speaking to a man, not addressing him as "Lord," as the Carmi translation indicates: "He who dwells on beds of gold in my castle, when, O God, will you ready my bed for the redhead?" The text then finds the loved one sleeping in the morning and an affirmation of their suitability for each other. The poem ends with "He who comes in my castle will find my hidden delights, the juice of my pomegranate, my myrrh and my cinnamon." These expressions point to either a amorous tryst or Temple sacrifice.

4. **Zion**

Religious poetry like love poetry included the element of pining for a lost object, sometimes Zion, particularly the Temple and its cult, connected with both memories of the past and messianic hopes for the future. Judah Halevi's odes to Zion represent some of the most important examples of this genre. These hopes for a return to Zion, where ever they appear are often accompanied by polemical utterances, in coded language, against Muslims and Christians (Carmi, p 347; Leviant, pp. 204-207). "My heart is in the east and I am in the distant west-how can I taste what I eat and how can it be sweet? How can I fulfill by vows and oaths as long as Zion is in the chains of Edom and I am in the binds of the Arabs?" Contrary to Carmi's note about the author having vowed to leave Spain for the Land of Israel, the point of this verse is the poet's emphatic sense that he cannot function fully as long as the Temple is destroyed. Like a frustrated lover he can't eat and sleep. Edom is a medieval Hebrew reference to Christianity, referring in particular to the Crusader Kingdom in Jerusalem. "It would be easy in my eyes to leave all the good of Spain, how dear it would be in my eyes to see the dust of the

destroyed Temple." The poet prefers the salvific power of the ruined Temple to the good life in Spain. In his Ode to Zion he gives a graphic description of the Holy Land, almost a traveler's account, based on the biblical text, and the immediacy of God's presence there, especially where the Temple once stood.

5. The Dirge

The Hebrew dirge in Muslim Spain, despite antecedents in the Bible, was based on the Muslim genre. There are four aspects of the dirge: 1) the crying: the personalized pain of the poet over his loss, the negative image of the messenger who brought the news of the death, the projection of personal feelings on the whole world and all of nature; 2) the eulogy: praise of the dead, especially his generosity towards the poet; 3) the expression of wisdom about fate, the world, life, and death; 4) the consolation: usually the superficial notion that all life must endure death.

One of the most beautiful poems of this type from the period is Solomon ibn Gabirol's tribute to Yekutiel, his late patron (Carmi, p. 306; Leviant, p. 180). In it, all of nature shares his grief: "See how red the sun is at evening time, like it is dressed in a scarlet robe. It uncovers the corners of the north and the west and it covers the south and the east with purple. It has left the earth naked, . . . and the world becomes dark, as if it is covered in sackcloth because of the death of Yekutiel."

Hebrew Poetry in Christian Spain

Whatever of a golden age happened in Islamic Spain was over by the eleventh century. At that time, with Christian successes in reconquering Spain, Jews began to enjoy a golden age of cultural creativity in the Christian north. One of the outstanding cultural creations of this period was the *Tahkemoni* by Judah Al-Harizi (1170-1235), an epic containing both poetry and rhymed prose, *makama*, which with its picaresque adventures resembles a traveler's account, including accounts of Jerusalem, a history of Hebrew poetry, and much on the subject of women, usually hostile if not violent. The sixth gate of the *Tahkemoni* formulates quite clearly the juxtaposition commonly found in medieval discussions between the good woman and the bad woman, the goddess and the whore. At the beginning of the chapter the protagonist is promised the ideal woman. Instead he gets a very unattractive woman whose disparagement is found in Carmi (p. 391). Here he draws together all sorts of biblical quotations to present what is a literary tour de force, but less than satisfying towards the end where he beats her, but then she turns out to be his best friend and long time fellow joker. His abuse of men is equally cutting: "He is afraid to urinate lest he be thirsty and he is reluctant to move his bowels lest he be hungry." (See also Leviant, pp. 389-414). Al-Harizi is drawing on the medieval popular culture of the grotesque, exaggerated, mocking, and satirical uses of bodily processes, especially sexual and digestive.

Similar developments are seen in the work of Todros Abulafia (1247-1295). He writes with even less restraint, fantasizing that he were a woman so he could kiss an Arab woman with whom he is infatuated. ". . . because I am a male, I lost out (Carmi, p. 410). I think that Carmi, though certainly not providing a Bawlderized version of one of Abulafia's poems, missed the point. The poem is about his request for figs from a friend: ". . . send a ripening fig, give a portion for seven of them, even for eight." Carmi then translates the next line as "And in return, here is my flatus," noting that the Hebrew word used, *zemorah*, also means vine-twig. In addition, *zemorah* also means penis and fig, vagina. I think that this is a sexual and not a scatological reference; both,

however, fit the category of the grotesque. The next line translates: "Henceforth I won't give it to strangers" could fit either way.

Hebrew Poetry in Italy

Hebrew poetry reached both new creative heights in the work of Immanuel of Rome (1261-1328) as well as what some Jews saw as new depths in terms of taste and suitability, culminating in his work being explicitly banned in the Shulhan Arukh (Orakh Hayyim 307:16). A friend of Dante and familiar with the Divine Comedy, which he imitated, Immanuel was for a while a correspondent for the Roman Jewish community until he went into exile. His Makhberot, collections of poetry and rhymed prose on many subjects, usually combining biblical and rabbinic idioms with intensive mockery, have not been fully translated. I first encountered Immanuel when my Hebrew was better than my taste and found his use of religious terminology to describe a patient taking a laxative to be utterly hilarious: "Isolate yourself after you drink this mixture and set aside all your work until your body is purged and do not trouble your thoughts with anything. Shut the doors of your house from all sides because the wind will cause tekiah, teruah, and three shevarim. . ." Hence flatus is described in beautiful Hebrew prose as the sounds of the shofar blowing on the High Holidays.

Immanuel's work is filled with misogynistic passages as well as a few barbs at men. In mocking the miser he says (Carmi, p. 425): "Though he has a penis, for fear of wearing it out, when he has sex he uses somebody else's." Again showing Jewish poets writing in Hebrew drawing heavily upon popular usage of the grotesque, a usage that seems different than that of Arab countries. There the non-Jewish forbidden realms popularized in the literature included the love of young boys and the drinking of wine, whereas in the Christian countries misogyny, sexuality, and scatological writings appear regularly. In neither case do these trends represent positivistic reporting about actual behavior but almost mirror images of popular conceptions of the grotesque..

One of the paradoxes of Italian Hebrew poetry is the fate of Leon Modena's Yom Zeh Mishkal (Carmi, p. 491), Song for the Minor Day of Atonement. This is the fast day at the end of every Hebrew month initiated by the kabbalists. Modena (Yehudah Aryeh mi-Modena, 1571-1648) was a bitter opponent of Kabbalah, yet it was his poem that became the anthem for that day, leaving not only his words, but his name spelled out in the acrostic that begins every other line. Heightening the paradox is the fact that many years after his death various rabbis tried to ban the poem because of its alleged reference to Shabbetai Tzi, the messianic pretender whose movement formed in the year 1666, many years after Modena's death. In the last stanza, notice how strongly it too expresses the hope to return to burnt sacrifices, the expression hod roshenu, translated simply as Messiah, replaces the original nezer roshenu which adds up to the numerical value of Shabbetai Tzvi (814), a fact invoked by opponents of Sabbatai Tzvi after his death..

Many of the rollicking, frivolous, witty and abusive qualities of Immanuel are also found in the poetry of the Frances brothers, Jacob (1615-1667) and Immanuel (1618-1710). They, often re-writing each other's work, cover many of the conventional themes of wine, women (oversexed or undersexed), and misogyny. Carmi's translation of one such poem alters the meaning (p. 502). The Hebrew is called, Levad Shalosh Yetziot, There are only Three Exits, a poem in which he lords three moments of transition and subordination in the life of women over them: when she is born, in filth, when she gets married, and when she dies, which he viciously calls the most exalted of all. This poem is about all women, "great and small," and not just about the Gadabout, as the English title says.

Reaching the eighteenth century, Ephraim Luzzatto, expresses a new sense of self in his poetry in which he writes about his land, his street, his house, and even his own name (Carmi, p. 504). Still in the tradition of Italian Hebrew literature, Luzzatto, moving from the politically incorrect to sexual harassment, describes a doctor who becomes passionately in love with his female patient and propositions her.

Hebrew Poetry in the East

Several poems from Hebrew poets from eastern Mediterranean countries have made an enduring impact on Jewish culture. With roots in both Spain and Italy as well as in indigenous Jewish culture, these poems often reflect mystical traditions. Simon Labi (1492-1585), a Spanish, North African writer, wrote a poem, now a popular song on Lag Baomer, which has been recorded, called Bar Yohai. Simon Bar Yohai was a first century rabbi who, with his young son, hid from the Romans in a cave for many years during the first century. When the Zohar, the classic of Jewish mysticism emerged in Christian Spain in the thirteenth century it was attributed to him. Carmi connected each stanza of this poem to a different one of the ten Sephirot, the mediating stages between God and humans. I don't think that this is the case. It seems that each stanza rather refers to a different moment in the mystical experience of Simon Bar Yohai or the Jewish people: acacia wood refers to the Temple and not to the seraphim; the Apple Trees, if referring to the Garden of Eden, is a reference borrowed from Christianity since rabbinic literature never identifies the tree of the Garden as an apple tree; the sword is the flaming sword protecting the entrance to the Garden; the marble stones is from the talmudic story of the four men who entered Paradise, etc.

Yedid Nefesh, which now adorns most prayerbooks as well as many tape and record collections, was composed in Safed by the kabbalists Eliezer Azikri. One of the most famous verses in this poem, ". . . eli, mahmad libi, husha na, ve-al titalem," "my God, my heart's delight, have compassion, and do not disappear." From this emerged a popular Hebrew song which garbles the words, "Ele hamda libi . . ." which makes no sense whatsoever with its masculine subject and feminine predicate.

Concluding the presentation, and returning to the theme we discussed earlier in the course, Israel Najara (c. 1555-1625), author of the Sabbath hymn Yah Ribbon, rabbi in various cities in the land of Israel, and noted for acquiring his melodies in Arab taverns, composed a dirge for the fast of the Ninth of Av on the theme of child sacrifice based on a midrashic story (Carmi, p. 472). In his poem, a mother builds an altar to sacrifice her son, slaughters him, and removes his flesh like a sacrificial offering and dismembering him into twelve parts. When the other Jews found her they confronted her with a verse from the Akedah, "Here are the fire and the wood!" Significantly, it is in the land of Israel that the imperative to sacrifice emerges.

The fact remains that a central theme in all periods of Hebrew poetry was the desire to offer sacrifices. Whether writing about drinking wine, or love, or prayer, the poets gave expression to the continued desire of Jews to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. A desire not eliminated by the destruction of the Temple and one that continues to loom large in our own day.

In the meantime, during the long and often culturally very productive diaspora from the land of Israel and from the Temple, Jews in all parts of the world continued literary, cultural, and religious traditions from Palestine while at the same time, continually influenced by their neighbors, produced new works which reflected the environment they lived in, Christian or Islamic.

So when Dana International steps up to the microphone at the end of the month, here are a couple of the cultural features of the first stanza of Deror Yikra. The first letter of each line of the stanza, and several others as well, spells out Dunash (not Shalem). The last word of each line of the first stanza rhyme, vat, vat, bat, bat. The Spanish Hebrew poetry scanned with the sheva [:] or vowels that combine with a sheva [-:] being short and every other vowel long so that this poem's basic meter would be short-long-long-long short-long-long-long. If, however, you look at various songbooks or even prayerbooks, you'll see that this pattern has been broken by some of them. For example while the last line of the first stanza in Dunash's text reads she-vu-nu-hu be-yom-sha-bat, in some places it reads she-vu ve-nu-hu be-yom-sha-bat. What does it mean? Following the biblical idea of proclaiming liberty, as found on the Liberty Bell, the shabbat is a day of freedom for both men and women. By the way, there is some evidence that Dunash's wife was also a Hebrew poet. The poem then moves to connect the Sabbath observers with God and promises that their name will be preserved. And encourages them to observe the Sabbath. I hope this helps and permits those who see the show to pay more attention to the costumes.

Week 11

Modern Hebrew Poetry and Jewish History and Culture

This is the penultimate lecture in this series on Jewish cultural history, my third course for Juice. Doing these courses has become one of the highlights of my week. If students do file their nails or take phone calls during them, I don't see or hear it. Likewise on my part I can deliver a lecture without getting washed or dressed. The questions, comments, and criticisms I receive are fascinating for me. And I enjoy the virtual office hours and the continued visits of students to Jerusalem. Before concluding the course, I would like to thank the course director Rabbi Sidney Slivko for all his support during the semester editing, organizing distribution and redistribution of the lectures, and for fielding questions directed to him. I would also like to thank the many students around the world whose weekly comments, questions, and criticisms added so much to my understanding of the material.

There was not too much comment about the lecture on medieval Hebrew poetry, perhaps because for many the issue of cultural borrowing is less troublesome when the discussion does not involve matters such as the prayers, or perhaps people were more caught up with other matters such as the elections here.

In the last lecture I forgot to mention that fact that many bilingual editions of medieval Hebrew poetry have been published, making the material accessible for those with all levels of Hebrew skills. One of the best is by a former teacher, Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death*; others include specific works devoted to Judah Halevi, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Samuel ibn Nagrela, and Judah al-harizi. Two of the more thorough histories of Jewish literature are those by Meyer Waxman and Israel Zinberg. As always, on most matters, the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, now available on CD-ROM, is not only a reliable source of information but of further bibliography (up to date as of about 1970). For a comparison with the Arabic forms of this period, see James' Kritzeck's *Anthology of Islamic Literature*.

In the course of this semester at various times I promised a few units which I did not deliver because of a lack of time. I will be pulling these together with other related topics to a coherent course, as coherent as I can deliver, next semester on Juice. It will probably be called something like *Jewish Social History* and it will use

cultural documents for social history. Although I have continually cast aspersions on the positivistic approach to reading these texts for historical data, nevertheless, I believe that they can be a source for understanding Jewish mentalities, discourse, and the development of ideas. Some of the topics I will cover involve gender, family, childhood, women, self, communal control, punishment, violence, the rodef and moser, death, chosen death, and attitudes towards non-Jews, particularly the seven nations (amamin) of Palestine, especially as reflected in current discourse, including two controversial books Barukh Hagever and Hamoro Shel Mashiah. In addition, I will be working with several degree granting institutions giving on-line courses for credit.

This week's presentation is on modern Hebrew poetry. Before beginning, while the pile of books is still in front of me and I don't forget, let me mention some basic sources for further reading, especially bilingual reading. In addition to all the materials in T. Carmi's Penguin Anthology of Hebrew Poetry, which will be my source here, The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself talks the reader through many works, even those who cannot read Hebrew, but many in aesthetic terms. One of the classic introductions to modern Hebrew literature is Hebrew Reborn by Shalom Spiegel, whose work on the Akedda I mentioned earlier in the semester. There are many bilingual anthologies, such as Ruth Finer Mintz's as well as many translations. Finally, one very important resource is Yohai Goell's Bibliography of Modern Hebrew Literature in English Translation. In this work it is possible to locate where every translation of modern Hebrew works, prose and poetry, were published (prior to 1968).

Modern Hebrew poetry represents a culmination of the development of the richness of Jewish culture. By virtue of its being written in Hebrew it resonates, whether its authors wanted to or not, all the stages in the development of Hebrew literature. In addition, it reflects the century of developments from the 1880s with Yehudah Leib Gordon's Nietzschean reactions until recent Israeli creations. The historical background includes reactions to pogroms in Russia, settlement in Palestine, the Holocaust, the creation of Israel, and the attendant issues in Israeli life, with themes including emerging individualism, changing landscapes, alienation, sexuality and sexism, and the changing role of spoken Hebrew, including the change from the Ashkenazic to the Sephardic accent.. I will focus on in particular is the way in which Jewish and general culture is transferred and transformed in modern Hebrew poetry. These developments are summarized well in Carmi, pp. 40-50.

Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934) was the commanding figure in the revival of Hebrew poetry, moving from eastern Europe, to Odessa (1892), to Berlin (1917), to Tel Aviv (1921). Most accounts of Bialik's poetry focus on his childhood: life in the forest, orphaned, raised by a stern grandfather, a tavern keeper, who provided him with a traditional Jewish education. Studying at the Volozhin Yeshiva, the flagship of traditional Talmud study in Russia, and imbued with the spirit of nature, he fused both Jewish tradition with a rediscovery of nature. Bialik's literary career is divided into several periods: 1) 1891-1900, national themes, concern for the plight of his people, the most common word he used was tear, during this period he composed Hamatmid, an ode to the perpetual Talmud student, 2) 1900-1905, the height of his poetic powers, he treated themes of childhood and nature, paying especial attention to light. It was during this period that he also wrote strong nationalist reactions to the pogroms in eastern Europe. 3) 1905-1934, retreat and silence, a period of disillusionment, brooding about death and his people's weakness, a general sense of futility (see Carmi, p. 515, "My Soul Has Sunk Down." He broke his silence a few times, but rarely after he arrived in Palestine where he spend most of his efforts editing classics of rabbinic literature (Sefer Aggadah) and inspiring Jewish construction crews, especially in Beit Hakerem.

It should be noted that the selections in Carmi barely do Bialik justice. "At Twilight," (1902, Carmi, p. 509) reflects Bialik at the height of his poetic powers. The poem is filled with terms for light, descriptions of beautiful landscapes, a couple in love, and ultimately turning to themes of yearning for a homeland and national

alienation, all in one short poem! These themes also appear in "From the Winter Song," (1902, Carmi, p. 510), but with the added dimension of a description of God, the brutal force behind a frigid winter, making nature much more hostile in this poem.

Bialik's rage against God pours out in "On the Slaughter," (Carmi, p. 512, 1903), one of his reactions to the pogroms of Russia. Here he casts doubts about the existence of God, the efficacy of prayer, the presence of justice, and the futility of calls for vengeance. The poem is filled with the blood of the victims, presenting a challenge to traditional Jewish belief in God's saving powers.

"It was a summer evening" mixes many traditional Jewish images: the daughters of Lilith, the legendary first wife of the biblical Adam. However, contrary to the legend which depicts Lilith as a source of impurity, her daughters here are pure. Like other women in Jewish lore, they are spinning garments by the moonlight. These, however, are not only for a swineherd, but for high priests, sustaining even in what is essentially a poem laced with subtle promiscuity and sexuality, continued interest in Temple sacrifice (Carmi, p. 19, 1908).

Bialik went on to write many classic Hebrew children's songs, established a very profitable Hebrew publishing empire, and built a fabulous house in Tel Aviv which was a center for intellectuals during the twenties. He had plans to build another house in Jerusalem, but died in Vienna during heart surgery. The lot on which he planned to build is now a park named in his honor on the street named for him.

Saul Tchernichowsky's (1875-1943) contributions to modern Hebrew poetry and Jewish culture complemented those of Bialik making the two of them the guiding figures at the turn of the century. Tchernichowsky was born in Russia where he enjoyed village life and rural landscapes rather than a traditional Jewish education. Like Bialik he too spent time in Odessa. From 1890-1899 he received a secondary education there in German, French, English, Greek, and Latin and studied the leading poets of Europe, including Pushkin, Goethe, Heine, Shakespeare, Byron, Burns, and Longfellow. At this time he also became interested in Zionism and socialism and wrote his first Hebrew poems. His early poems were both complex rhythmically and critical of diasporan Jewry. From 1899-1906 he studied medicine in Heidelberg and Luusanne and wrote long poetic epics and ballads, reflecting both Jewish history, nature, paganism, and a call for a transvaluation of Jewish values. One of his most revealing works of this period is "Before the Statue of Apollo," a paean to both ancient Hebrew as well as Greek might. In answer to the question he posed to Apollo of what happened to the ancient Hebrew God of might and beauty, he answered that the Jews strangled him with a tefillin strap. >From 1906-1922 he wandered and suffered hardship in Russia. During this period he worked on translating many classics of world literature into Hebrew. From 1922-1931, unable to find work in Palestine (join the club!) he joined the Hebrew circle active in Germany, wrote Hebrew children's works, traveled in the US, and wrote Zionist poems (always easier far away). Indeed, most of Tchernichowski's poems about the land were inspired by German landscapes. From 1931-1943 he lived in Palestine and edited medical works. Like Bialik he too had trouble writing poetry in Palestine, but he also suffered economic and social difficulties. Tchernichowsky, like many subsequent Hebrew poets, was right wing in his politics, favoring Kol Yisrael Shelemah, the Greater Israel Movement, a movement which many pundits here have been exaggerating reports of its death this week.

Similarly, the collection in Carmi barely does Tchernichowski justice. "Eagle! Eagle Over you Mountains," (Carmi, p. 517) expresses many of the themes in Tchernichowski's work by describing the raw power in nature and the sinister forces in human history as well. I remember as an impressionable undergraduate hearing the professor, Stanley Nash, read the first line in Hebrew: "AyiT, AyiT, al harayikh, ayiT al harayikh af!" to show Tchernichowski's powerful language. The end of this poem, written in 1936, is puzzling if not paradoxical.

Although he address the Land, when he says that there is an eagle with its massive shadow, one cannot help but thinking of the Nazi menace in Europe, which would lead the reader to the conclusion that for Tchernichowski the mountains of God were in fact in Germany and not in Palestine.

"The First Dead," written in 1942, ostensibly about the black death, seems to be an early, but muted response to the Holocaust of European Jewry. The poem, relying on the historical fact that because of the nature of plague cycles, Jews, living separately-but not yet in ghettos during the middle ages-did not suffer from the plague at the same time as the rest of the population. Since Jews appeared therefore to be healthy they were often accused of causing the plague. Tchernichowski's poem treats this phenomenon with great irony by having the Jews when they are finally smitten by the plague celebrating and thanking God so that they would not be blamed.

Avraham ben Yitzhak (1883-1950) in his small output reflects many of the features of eastern European Hebrew poets. Although he left Eastern Europe, and traveled twice in Palestine, he spent most of his life, and certainly his period of greatest creativity in Vienna and Berlin.. He moved to Israel in 1949 at the age of 56, and like other Hebrew poets produced no poetry there. Most of his work appeared before the first World War and the poem "Happy Are they who Sow," was written in 1928 after a twelve year silence. The "Happy are they" (Ashrey) format is borrowed from Psalms 126 which also appears regularly in the liturgy (later Hannah Senesh would use it in one of her famous poems). Here, however, the usage is paradoxical because it reverses the biblical texts and creates a feeling of sterility, uprootedness, and frustration.

The life of David Vogel (1891-1943) reflects that of his generation of east European Hebrew writers. He was born in Russia, traveled through Galicia, and settled in Vienna. Like so many Hebrew poets he could not settle permanently in Palestine, and after two years in Palestine from 1925-1927 he returned to Berlin and Paris. Eventually, he was caught and killed by the Nazis. Vogel's poetry evokes personal moods, both erotic and anxious. There seems to be little collective sense of Jewish destiny in them. "When Night Draws Near," (Carmi, p. 525) contains glimmers of eroticism without the silliness of medieval Hebrew writers. "My Childhood Cites" conveys a sense of personal loss and alienation.

Uri Zvi Greenberg (1897-1980) continues the pattern of east European Hebrew poets. He was born in Galicia to a Hasidic family, received a traditional Jewish education, passed through Warsaw and Berlin, wrote first in Yiddish, and settled in Palestine in 1924. There he worked as an editor and became involved in the Revisionist movement of Jabotinsky. From 1929-1939 he left Palestine to work for the movement in Warsaw. With the start of the war in Poland he returned to Palestine, worked with the Irgun, and with Israeli Independence served in the first Knesset. His poetry mixes European influence, personal pathos, biblical, and extremist Jewish national themes, in particular he offers the first Israeli response to the Holocaust. "With God, the Blacksmith," written in 1928 he reacts to the massacres of World War I in the extreme terms of a biblical prophet, though, like Bialik, also depicts God in harsh terms. The poems he wrote from 1939-1945 were collected in Rehovot Hanahar, The Streets of the River, published in 1951. "At the rim of the Heavens," (Carmi, p. 529) offers a veneration of the martyrs of the Holocaust period, purified by the water of the sea, they gather, with (Jewish?) stars in their mouths, perhaps in Israel. Other poems, mentioned already in this course, deal with the Akedah (p. 530). One mysterious poem, written in 1955, deals with a man who stepped out of his shoes, I suspect a description of a camp inmate who committed suicide against the electric fence (p. 532).

Abraham Shlonsky (1900-1973) was born in the Ukraine, studied for a while in Palestine, returned to Russia, and settled in Palestine in 1921, writing poetry and building roads. He studied for a while in Paris and then returned to Palestine to be the literary editor of major papers and journals. His poetry combines religious and

modern Hebrew expressions together and speaks to the condition of the working pioneers in Palestine. In "Toil," (Carmi, p. 534) written in 1928 Shlonsky describes the modern land of Israel in religious terms: the land is wrapped in light as if it were a prayer shawl and the houses are like the boxes on the tefilin and the roads he paves are like the tefilin straps. While Tchernichowski saw tefilin as symbolic of the pernicious quality of rabbinic Judaism against the pristine and powerful nature of the biblical God, Shlonsky saw them as symbolizing the modern Jewish rebirth in the land. Here he identifies himself in the frame of reference of the biblical Abraham but also as a road-building poet (payytan). Shlonsky provides an ideal example of the transition from the pioneer period to the modern period. In "Thus saith so and so concerning his neighborhood," (Carmi, p. 536) Shlonsky uses powerful biblical expressions to describe the alienation of modern Israeli society in a somewhat mocking manner. After ascending to the level of biblical prophecy in the title, the rest of the poem describes the banality of modern city life: apartment buildings, bus routes, boredom, movie theatres, and a suicide. The suicide was done by a woman, usually not a vibrant presence in most of these works. The poem ends with wry irony, perhaps mocking small mindedness: "My apartment house is five stories high-the woman who jumped from the window across the way-only needed three."

Yokheved Bat-Miriam (1901-1980) is one of the few anthologized women poets of this period, though there were others (Rachel Blaustein, after whom a street in Jerusalem is named, is surprisingly missing from Carmi, and who is one of the major cult figures of modern Israel, see Susan Sered's recent article in the new journal called *Nashim*). Indeed her name is based on the name of her mother. She followed the route from a traditional Jewish family in Russia, to university in Odessa and Moscow, to Paris, to Palestine in 1929. She stopped writing poetry after the death of her son in the War of Independence in 1948. "Cranes from the Threshold," (p. 537) is addressed to an unnamed female, "you" in the second person. The usual interpretation is that the poem is addressed to the landscape that she left behind in Russia as a child. While such a view ties her in nicely with her male colleagues, it misses the possibility that she may have addressed her poem to a woman. The rest of the poem, however, can also be read as referring to a relationship between two women: the reference to sheaves suggests Naomi and Ruth; your quivering stammer is also addressed to a woman and does not seem to fit a land; the crying and breathing seem more like activities of a woman than a land; and the name on the woman's first page sounds more like a book from a woman than a land.

Yonatan Ratosh's life (1908-198x) may be more interesting than his poetry. Like the rest of modern Hebrew poets he was born in Russia, but was only raised in Hebrew. He settled in Palestine in 1921. There, like other poets, he became involved in the Revisionist Party, editing its newspaper and turning to right-wing underground activities against the British. His dual claims to fame include his expressed desire to expel the British from Palestine, a view which inspired Abraham Stern to found the Irgun, and his founding of the Young Hebrews, known as the Cananites, in 1939. This movement rejected both Judaism and Zionism preferring the formation of a new identity based in the local culture, especially the recently discovered Canaanite myths and Ugaritic epics. In his poems he therefore invokes various ancient Canaanite deities. Like Tchernikowski's poem to Apollo, "Et Nishmat," invokes both traditional Jewish religious imagery as well as the gods of the sea, Baal, Anat, Asherat and others.

Forgive me for my sins, for they are many. . . although Nathan Alterman (1910-1970) is regarded as one of the most influential modern Hebrew poets, has never spoken to me, although I have his massive complete poet works and a thick file about him. I have always felt that working on him is more of a chore than an intellectual pleasure, perhaps because his work is devoted to poetry for art's sake and does not speak to Jewish cultural matters, or it does and awareness of his references is beyond my ken. He was born in Warsaw, raised in Kishnev, received a thorough Hebrew education from his father, settled in Israel at the age of fifteen, and

graduated gymnasium in Tel Aviv, but returned to study in Europe. Altermann wrote popular weekly poetry columns in the Hebrew papers of Palestine from the thirties till the sixties. He also wrote poetry for children which has become popular songs. But, for those not truly dedicated to poetry and willing to read it for intellectual, historical, and cultural content, it would be best not to invest the time and energy in Altermann.

While the biographies of these poets start to sound the same, that of Leah Goldberg highlights the contribution of a woman in these circles. Born in Lithuania, awarded a doctorate in literature, she settled in Palestine in 1935. Like most intellectuals here until this day she held several jobs, working for Habimah theatre, a publishing house, and teaching literature at the Hebrew University. In addition to writing her own poetry she translated many classics of European poetry to Hebrew. Her poem "Tel Aviv 1935" (Carmi, p. 553) shows the harsh realities of living in Palestine, continuing the work of Shlonsky who also chronicled the boredom and alienation of Jewish life in Tel Aviv rather than the dreamy fantasies about "the Land" that earlier poets such as Tchernichowski and Bialik wrote in Europe. This poem shows the disembodied kit-bags of travelers walking down the street and describes the harsh reality of a hamsin heat wave with the paradoxical language of a cold knife. The poem then shifts to the issue of the burden of memories contained in the city, a paradoxical idea to be connected with such a new city so free of memory and historical association. Goldberg pursues this idea, personalizing every person's childhood memories and lost loves, and comparing the process of memory to the workings of a camera that is both dark inside and turns things around. She then turns to the collective memory of the Jews of Tel Aviv and depicts, borrowing from a midrashic theme, the churches of the residents' home towns washing up on the beach of Tel Aviv. A brilliant image that vividly shows that despite the newness of the city and the youngness of the Yishuv, the inability of the Jews in Palestine to escape from memories of their pasts.

Gabriel Preil is an interesting cultural phenomenon. He was born in Estonia in 1911 and lived in the United States since 1922 where he published several volumes of Hebrew poetry which was widely acclaimed, including in Israel, although he had not been there until very late in life. His poems, unfortunately not the ones in Carmi, reflect the American reality of New York City, New England landscapes, and the African American experience.

Zelda Mishkovsky (1914-) was born in the Ukraine and settled in Palestine in 1925. Her work reflects her experiences as a religious woman who taught and combines Jewish materials and modern poetry. It is interesting that a woman had the educational liberty to attain such accomplishments, not usually found in religious men whose intellectual world is often more narrowly circumscribed. The theme of both poems presented in Carmi (p. 557) deals with the centrality of a person's name to their existence and identity. In "Then my soul cried Out" she describes what appears to be the death of a woman dear to her. In "Each Person Has a Name" she describes the various names that a person accumulates in the course of one's lifetime from the name given by God till the name given at death.

Similarly, Dalia Ravikovitch (b. 1936) born and educated in Palestine brings themes of feminism to her poetry. In "Mechanical Doll" she describes what seems to be the shattering experience of a sexual encounter, or just general awkwardness, and the need to protect herself by being poised, submissive, and controlled. It ends with a description of herself, her hair, eyes, and dress (p. 578). A poem that continues to show the struggle between the individual and society in modern Israel.

Abba Kovner (1918-) followed the usual route: born in the Crimea, educated in Hebrew in Vilna, but departed from it by remaining in Europe. During the Holocaust he was leader of the Jewish Partisan Fighters in Vilna.

After the war he settled in a kibbutz in Palestine, fought in the War of Independence, and continued to write poetry, often with Holocaust related themes. "My Sister" involves a paradoxical and perhaps cynical depiction of his father's religious faith and practice, punctuated with the traditional epithets of Barukh Hashem, Be-ezrat Hashem, Blessed is God and With God's Help, against the graphic image of the Jewish people going up in smoke in ovens (Carmi, p. 565).

Yehudah Amichai (1924-) is one of the most intriguing Hebrew poets of modern Israel. His work, both profound, ironic, and entertaining, translates easily to other languages and many bilingual editions of his books have been published. He is a regular feature on the lecture circuit and an evening with him is a very worthwhile experience. Amichai was born in Germany, left for Palestine in 1936, where he served in the army and educational system. His work mixes graphic sexual images with Jewish religious images, criticized by some, surprising criticism in light of similar mixtures by medieval Hebrew poets. In one poem (Akhshav bara'ash, p. 88; in his Selected poems, p. 80), he describes sexual intercourse using biblical images: "We did it in front of the mirror/ And in the light. We did it in darkness. /In water, and in the high grass . . . and in honor of God . . . We did it / Like wheels and holy creatures / and with chariot-feats of prophets. / We did it six wings /And six legs.") More tame is the example in Carmi on p. 568 in which he remembers his physical linkage to a woman as a union or invention that was dismembered. It was nevertheless a good loving invention while it lasted, ". . . an airplane made from a man and a woman, with wings and everything: we got off the ground and flew a little."

He writes elsewhere, "And what about God? Once we sang 'There is no God like ours (the synagogue hymn Ein Kelohenu).' Now we sing 'There is no God of ours (ein elohenu).' But we sing, we still sing. (Gam ha-egrof, p. 137)

"On the Day of Atonement," (p. 571) describes a visit in the Arab market of Jerusalem in the pious terms of the liturgy for the high holidays. One of the Arab shops, which reminded him of a shop his father had in Europe before the Holocaust, is described in terms of the holy Ark of the synagogue. He then compared the Arab closing his shop with the final prayer of the holiday, neilah, the closing of the gates.

Amichai mixes freely images of the Holocaust, Israeli wars, and his past loves. In "The City in Which I was Born," (p. 572) he describes a trajectory of destruction which seems to follow him from Germany to Palestine to modern Israel, mentioning his memories, especially those of past lovers.

One of Amichai's most touching writings is more of a poetic short story than a poem. The full text in Hebrew and English is found in the Bantam Anthology of Modern Hebrew Short Stories. In it he describes what he calls the deaths of his father, reviewing the traumas from his father's life. In the excerpt in Carmi (p. 568), he presents in touching yet ironic terms how his father's participation in war did not inoculate him from having to fight in wars as well.

Nathan Zach (b. 1930) brings a new dimension to Hebrew poetry, Christian themes. Also a refugee from Germany, he held the usual array of writing, publishing, and teaching jobs in Israel in addition to writing and translating poetry. Here in modern Hebrew, despite strong cultural biases against doing so, he felt comfortable or motivated to write poems about Jesus drawing on passages from the New Testament. This is still a book that is forbidden in Israeli culture where laws prohibit school use of Bibles that contain New Testaments. It seems strange that as a world superpower with a nuclear arsenal Israelis would not be so paranoid about Christianity. In fact, I remember teaching one class here, following the arguments I made in a lecture in this series on the similarities between the Binding of Isaac and the Crucifixion of Jesus. In summarizing the Jesus story (beloved

son, died for atonement of sins . . .) I asked the classes-hundreds of future Israeli teachers-- what story this was. The only student who could finally identify it was one of the extremely religious students rather than any of the secular Israelis.

One of the major cultural lessons learned from this poetry is the richness of European Hebrew culture during the twentieth century. That most of these poets received their Hebrew training in the diaspora is fascinating, if not shocking, in light of the relatively low level of Hebrew cultural creativity outside of Israel today, in part due to the destruction of the European center. More important, however, is the fact that this poetry serves to display, often with great artistry, the development of Jewish thought, culture, and values, particularly a strident critique of contemporary Jewish life and values using traditional terminology. Taking this thought one step further, I might add that for most such developments are often exclusively presented in religious terms, the emergence of the various denominations and the theological works of Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, and Martin Buber, and others. For many, however, such works are not only not intrinsically interesting, but do not speak to the range of passions and emotions in the Jewish world during this period.

Expressing in his usual ironic way the relationship between Jewish religion and Jewish culture, Yehudah Amichai once said in an interview (quoted as were other passages here from Yoseph Milman, *Sacrilegious Imagery in Yehudah Amichai's Poetry*, *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 20 1995): "I grew up in a religious home . . . I naturally take all those treasures with me now. I would advise any child who wants to be a poet to grow up in a very religious home, or a communist one, with a religion that fills the parents' entire being. Afterwards you fight against it, but the treasure remains."

This may be why despite all the difficulties we send our children to religious run schools. As we tell those who question such a decision, better that our children should be apikorsim, heretics, than am haartzim, ignoramuses. With the Hebrew and religious skills they will have something to rebel against and a background for further investigations, the reason that religiously educated students in Israel can engage in the serious study of Jewish culture while secularly educated Jews can often only mutter pious platitudes or resort to extremist behavior for or against religion. And maybe this is the reason we subconsciously gave one son the middle name of Amichai.

Week 12

Modern Jewish Short Stories and Diasporan Culture

In this lecture I will try to accomplish two tasks almost simultaneously. On the one hand, I would like introduce possibility of using the short story as a vehicle for studying Jewish culture and, on the other hand, I would like to raise the question about the viability of diasporan Jewish culture. In particular, the paradoxical question emerges whether most of the authors we shall study are in fact writing from a culture that is Jewish. In other words, just because an author is Jewish, or even writes about Jews, does that mean that the author reflects Jewish culture. This question further begs the question of what is exactly Jewish culture. Many of the writers are from the United States and the question has regularly been asked whether there is an

American Jewish culture. A few of the authors are from other diasporan countries, notably Russia and Germany, with further stories in the anthologies by British and South African writers, though there are other authors who could be studied from every country in the world, including Latin America, Canada, France, and many other places, and similar questions could be asked about these writers as well. Some of the authors are from Israel, where the question can be asked in reverse, just because they come from a culture that is primarily and consciously Jewish and write in Hebrew, does their work represent an extension of Jewish culture.

For purposes of convenience, I will discuss short stories from two of the most popular anthologies of Jewish short stories, *Great Jewish Short Stories*, edited by Saul Bellow, and *The Penguin Book of Jewish Short Stories*, edited by Emanuel Litvinoff. Because several editions of each book have appeared, I won't give specific page numbers. Most of the stories in these books, representing almost some sort of canon, appear in many other anthologies as well as in the basic works of the authors mentioned. I will occasionally mention other stories and other writers as well.

Hasidic Stories

Not merely an early manifestation of modern Jewish short stories but a major leitmotif in subsequent authors as well, running as far a field as Philip Roth and Woody Allen, the hasidic tale constitutes a major transition between traditional Jewish culture, including the hasidic critique of it, and modern Jewish culture. The classic repository, *In Praise of the Baal Shem Tov, Shivhei Ha-besht* (1700-1760), mentioned in earlier lectures, continues mystical hagiographical tales such as *Shivhei Ha-Ari*, *In Praise of Isaac Luria*, a borrowing betrayed by the appearance of the Palestinian palm trees in stories about Poland. The *Praise of the Baal Shem Tov* (available in English) based on Yiddish oral traditions, first appeared in 1815 in Hebrew, but most hasidic stories were published later in the century, precisely the time when modern Hebrew, Yiddish, and other modern vernacular Jewish literatures were forming. In the same year the stories of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772-1810) appeared in a bilingual Hebrew and Yiddish edition. Questions of influence go both ways. Gershon Scholem, one of the first scholars to take Jewish mysticism and hasidic teachings seriously, raised the question, especially in light of Martin Buber's popularization of hasidic tales at the turn of this century, whether they actually represent hasidic teaching, especially when compared to other genres of hasidic literature, or whether they constitute an attempt by hasidim themselves to popularize and westernize their teachings.

The retelling of hasidic tales by non-hasidic authors further distanced the images of Hasidim from reality. In particular, western writers for their own reasons often accentuated the antinomian tendencies of the Hasidim rather than their strict adherence to Jewish law. In Mayer Levin's retelling of Nachman of Bratzlav's "The Rabbi's Son," (Bellow) the tensions between traditional rabbis and wonderworking hasidic zaddikim are shown. The problem is, however, that despite the attempt to make a clear distinction between the obsessive observance of the rabbi and the wild, questionable observance of the zaddik, in this story the rabbi too believes in omens, dreams, and divine and demonic intervention in mundane matters, and the zaddik, with his Christ-like mediations between the holy and the sinful, is actually not unobservant after all. The story ends with the anti-hasidic rabbi, whose beloved son died before his father allowed him a meeting with the zaddik, which may have saved his life, making a pilgrimage to the zaddik. (To save a few letters, I have used the term "Christ" consciously to refer to the supernatural, divine aspects in Christian tradition; "Jesus" is a convenient term for the person. My point here is that the Hasidim were interested in the zaddikim as divine intermediaries and their views, like Jews in every period and location, were influenced by contemporary Christian beliefs.)

This ending is very similar to that of "Elie, The Fanatic," by Philip Roth. While this story is not in the collections mentioned above, it is in Roth's first collection called *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories*, perhaps the most exciting and controversial modern Jewish stories written. Invariably when I have taught versions of this course, students have gravitated towards Roth. While I will speak about him in his proper place, a brief comparison between Nachman of Bratslav and Philip Roth will put our theme in perspective. In "Elie," a Hasid and Holocaust survivor, Leo Tzoref, wants to establish a residential yeshivah in a suburban New York community. And Eli Peck, a Jewish lawyer, opposed this move ostensibly on the basis of the zoning laws, but actually on the appearance of the Hasidim, especially their hats, to modern suburban Jews trying to integrate into a once restricted community. Unable to grasp either the nature of the Hasidic community or the experiences they endured during the Holocaust, Elie becomes obsessed with the way that the Hasidim dress and tries to convince them to change their ways. His obsession, similar to the rabbi in Nahaman of Bratslav's hasidic story who lost his son, became incapable of dealing with his own pregnant wife. The Jews work themselves into a frenzy against the fanaticism of the Hasidim (reminding me of a local bumper-sticker Yamutu Hakanaim, Death to the Zealots), including accusing them of inventing the idea that the biblical Abraham was going to kill his own kid for a sacrifice. The story ends with Elie dressing up in the Hasid's clothing and walking through the town to the

astonished reactions of the townspeople. One neighbor called him and said, "Eli, there's a Jew at your door." To which he responded, "That's me."

In "The Judgment," as retold by Martin Buber, the zaddik, here the Baal Shem Tov himself, as we saw earlier in our discussion of medieval German Jewish pietism, served as a liaison between the living and the dead. Here not only are many of the classic hasidic themes in place such as fantastic travel and a Christ-like revival of the dead, but the events are witnessed, and hence verified, by a non-hasidic observer. We shall meet these themes in modern Jewish literature. The one thing that seems to be off in this version of the story, which means that there are probably other matters askew as well, is that Jewish weddings don't usually take place on the Sabbath. Moreover, reconstructing the sequence of events carefully may lead to the possibility that some of the healing took place on the Sabbath as well, furthering the Christ-like aspects of the Baal Shem Tov.

Modern German Jewish Literature

One of the first modern Jewish short stories, though launched as a novel but never completed, was begun in 1824 the year before the author, Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), converted to Christianity and was published as a fragment in 1840, the year of the Damascus Blood Libel. Heine's "Rabbi of Bacherach" (in Bellow) is about a blood libel at Passover time in medieval Germany. Having previously discussed Heine's involvement in the Verein fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums, the Organization for the Scientific Study of Judaism, his subsequent conversion, and sentimental attachment to Judaism, I would stress now that this somewhat rambling story reflects both imperfect knowledge of Jewish history, barely a field of research at the time, and intensive first hand experience with the Jewish Question. Heine began the novel as a student in Goettingen, after he had returned to Berlin to celebrate Passover there with friends.

Key to Heine's presentation of Jewish history, based on his reading of Jacques Basnage's History of the Jews and various medieval chronicles, is what we would now call the lachrymose conception of Jewish history, Jewish history being the shortest distance between two massacres. Heine contrasts bleak external circumstances with Jewish piety and Spanish Jewish skepticism with Ashkenazic Jewish piety. He, like the translators of the hasidic stories often get matters of Jewish law and legend wrong: to marry witnesses are required, holiday candles are lit before not after sunset, mixed choirs were not allowed by traditional Jews, David did not build the Temple, but Solomon, and the king would not have entered the Holy of Holies.. The rabbi and his wife fled an anticipated blood libel leaving not only all their possessions but also his students

and the rest of the community to fend for themselves. Earlier the rabbi had married his wife, seemingly without her consent, and then fled from her for seven years to study in Spain.

The novel is not fully developed, but contains many points of interest relevant to German Jewish culture in the time of Heine more than to medieval Germany. As we saw with several later Hebrew poets, Heine, most famous for his Lorelei, was enchanted by the ancient German legends of the Nibelungs, Astarte, and the Rhine River. Like so many other works of Jewish literature, this story too touches on the Akedah, noting that had Abraham actually killed Isaac "there would be more goats and fewer Jews in the world." It also describes a custom of not only dipping the finger in the wine during the recitation of the plagues, but sprinkling the wine on the children. Like many German Jews, especially those involved in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Heine saw Spanish Jewry as a model for his time, identifying with the Spanish Jews, and with lapsed Jews, many of whom returned to the fold only for major events such as Passover. He also saw the baptisms of Spain as emblematic of the situation in Germany, "Water-you well know what I mean-water is your misfortune and you will sink." He even has one lapsed Spanish Jew express the idea that even had he lived in the biblical period he would have felt the narrowness of living in Jewish kingdoms and left to live among the Phoenicians or the Babylonians. Heine, who once noted that the three volumes of the *Zeitschrift fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums* did not do as much to save Judaism as Kugel, puts similar sentiments into the mouth of one of the characters: "I love your cooking much better than your faith. It lacks the proper sauce."

As we have seen many times in this course, the editor's introductions are rarely adequate and often misleading. A particular case in point is Bellow's introduction to Stefan Zweig (1881-1942) which leaves out some of the most important aspects of his life, especially in terms of his relationship with Jewish culture. His entry into the world of Viennese literature was paved by Theodor Herzl who as literary editor of the *Neue Freie Presse*, published one of his essays. The war in no way interrupted his activities. After the Nazis came to power, he wrote the libretto for an opera by Richard Strauss, but they suppressed it and he soon left for England. Zweig had little to do with organized Jewish life, but did see himself and many other prominent Austrian writers as Jews. He wrote several stories on Jewish themes. One of the most prominent writers in the first half of the twentieth century, Zweig and his second wife, distressed over the fate of Europe, committed suicide together in Petropolis, outside of Rio de Janeiro.

Zweig's story "Buchmendel," situated during the first World War, may reflect more the culture of the Jews than Jewish culture. Jacob Mendel,

who had left the world of traditional Judaism, "the worship of the harsh and jealous Jehovah," for the world of antiquarian books, "the more lively and polytheistic cult of books." He reads with rocking motions acquired in Galician talmudic academies, a training that left him void of other culture and unable to adjust to the mundane world. His devotion to his trade is described in religious terms, like a man at prayer, engaged in a solemn ritual. After his disappearance, when the author inquired after him at the cafe where he had conducted his business for almost forty years, he invoked Exodus, "there had arisen a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph." Finally the Toilettenfrau, was able to report to the narrator Mendel's story. Lost in his world of books, Mendel did not register as an alien in Vienna at the start of the war. Continuing to make inquiries to enemy countries about bibliographic matters the censors arrested him and sent him to a concentration camp for two years, an experience which, despite his eventual release marred him in a manner which must have been similar to what Zweig experienced with the rise of the Nazis. When the cafe was sold, the new owners were not pleased with "this dirty little Russian Jew." It was the Catholic Klofrau who, although she never read a book in her life, was most concerned about his welfare, but unable to locate him, settled for having a mass said for him.

Modern Yiddish Literature

After a period of polemical preoccupation with battles between Hasidim and their enlightened opponents, with the work of Mendele Mokher Seforim, the pen name of S. Y. Abramowitz (1835-1917), who wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish, modern Yiddish began as a literary genre during the 1860s and 1870s. Mendele offered harsh criticisms of Jewish life and Jewish leadership.

One of the most powerful criticisms of Jewish life was offered by Isaac Leib Peretz (1851-1915) in his story "Bontsha the Silent," "Bontsha Schweig," a name that now is as much an epithet as the name of a specific story (which appears in both Bellow and Litvinoff). My reading of this story about the ultimate Jewish victim has rarely been easily accepted by students who want to see in the story a paean to piety rather than a strident critique of Jewish passivity. After describing his suffering almost excessively, I think the point is made at the end of the story when he is judged in heaven, "You never understood that you need not have been silent, that you could have cried out and that your outcries would have brought down the world itself and ended it. You never understood your sleeping strength." When offered his reward in Paradise he asks for breakfast every morning a hot roll with fresh butter. At which point there is shocked silence and then bitter laughter. I think that this reaction is negative and critical.

As proof of this view I offer his story "The Golem," also found in both books, which seems to be about the incredible powers for revenge among the Jews. When operative, however, here in the form of killing all the gentiles, the Jews are concerned that with their demise they will be deprived of gentiles to serve them on the Sabbath. Such a reaction I think reflects a Kulturkampf, a conscious Nietzschean attack on traditional Jewish values.

Peretz, however, also began a neo-hasidic trend in Yiddish and Hebrew literature, idolizing rather than criticizing the hasidic masters. A famous example of this is the story, "If Not Higher." This story, like the story by Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, shows the tensions between Hasidim and their opponents, here designated as a Litvak, a Lithuanian rabbi obsessed with the study of Jewish law. To find out what happens to the famous zaddik who disappears each year on Friday before the High Holidays, he hides under the rabbi's bed. This is a situation filled with sexual suggestiveness, which Peretz exploits, describing the groaning going on in the bed, but describing it as sorrow for the people Israel. The plot shows the zaddik dressing as a Russian peasant providing an old woman with fire wood, during which time he recited his penitential prayers. In the course of his investigations, as in the Bratslav and the Philip Roth story, the rabbi becomes a disciple of the zaddik.

Yiddish literature reached its peak in the prolific work of Sholom Aleichem, the pen name of Sholom Rabinowitz (1859-1916). Born in the Ukraine, he received a traditional Jewish education and then a secular one. He spent time in Odessa and the US. Like the other major Yiddish writers he also wrote in Hebrew. Despite his voluminous productivity, range of accomplishments, and his elevation of Yiddish literature, in his day Sholom Aleichem struggled and suffered from lack of recognition. The story "Hodel," anthologized in both readers (why they both had to repeat stories rather than draw on different selections the rich corpus of each author is beyond me) is part of a larger cycle of stories about Tevya the dairyman and his daughters, which became the basis of both some of the earliest Yiddish films as well as the American Broadway and Hollywood extravaganza, *Fiddler on the Roof*. A comparison between these different works constitutes a fascinating study beyond the scope of this introductory presentation. The main features of the "Hodel" story are the narrator talking to Sholom Aleichem, Tevye's warped quotations from Jewish tradition, and the tensions between modernity and tradition, both in terms of marriage customs and learning, "You can go around bareheaded . . . but if you know what Rashi and the others have said, you are a man after my own heart." The story with all its pathos of Tevya coming to grips with his daughter's choice of a mate who will take her far from home, ends with one of the most famous lines in Jewish literature, long

separated from the story and his own mother's tragic death, "And now let's talk about more cheerful things. Tell me, what news is there about the cholera in Odessa."

Yiddish literature received recognition with the awarding of a Nobel Prize in Literature to Isaac Bashevis Singer (b. 1904) in 1978. Singer was raised in a traditional Jewish family in Warsaw where he received a Jewish religious as well as a secular education and also spent three years in a village with his grandfather. He arrived in the US in 1935 where his work was serialized in the Yiddish Jewish Daily Forward and gradually appeared in English, sometimes as the original language, especially for sophisticated, less Jewishly literate audiences such as the New Yorker. In addition to short pieces he produced many long epics. Singer's works regularly draw on the forces of folklore and the demonic. "Gimpel the Fool" draws on classic traditions of the literature of the fool (Erasmus) and the grotesque (Rablais). Moving from goat turds to cemetery weddings to family violence and adultery to discussions of the existence of God, the story mixes serious social critique with frivolousness that reflects literary trends rather than positivistic data on Jewish life. "A Friend of Kafka" evokes a similar surrealistic mixture of reality and fantasy, including many names such as Chagall, Stefan Zweig and Martin Buber. Our encounter with Kafka is mediated by Jacques (Jankel) Kohn, a former actor in the Yiddish theater, an image rarely associated with serious endeavors, though he offers some fascinating insight along the way: "Jews Remember too much. That is our misfortune. . . . If our literature would only reflect this insanity, it would be great. But our literature is uncannily sane. . ."

Singer's brother, Israel Joshua Singer (1893-1944) was also a popular Yiddish writer. His story "Repentance" (Bellow) sets up a comparison between two rabbis, the joyous Rabbi Ezekiel, whose followers omitted most traditional Jewish fasts and enjoyed the Day of Atonement, and Rabbi Naphtali, "a weakling and a pygmy of a Jew." Passing judgment on these two polar opposites, Singer offers a critique of morose Jewish life by ending the story with Rabbi Naphtali dying of gloom.

Russian Jewish Literature

Isaac Babel (1894-1941) was born in the Jewish cultural center of Odessa and was killed by the Soviet Communists in 1941. Considered one of the best writers in the Soviet Union, most intriguing from the vantage point of Jewish culture was the fact that his first book, *Red Cavalry*, published in 1924, was an appreciation of Cossack Soldiers, himself having joined a Cossack regiment in the Red Army. Indeed, he sees Jews through the vantage point of the Cossacks. In the autobiographical "The Story of My Dovecot," (both anthologies) he describes himself as short,

weakly, and suffering from headaches from excessive studying, and refers to other Jews a vulgar parvenus. The story ends with the death of his grand-uncle Shoyl at the hands of a mob during a pogrom. Similar critiques of the Jews are found in two other stories "Gedali" and "Awakening" (Bellow). "O the rotted Talmuds of my childhood! O the dense melancholy of memories! . . . By the ancient synagogue, by its yellow and indifferent walls, old Jews with prophets' beards and passionate rags on their sunken chests . . . " . . . from our house, impregnated with the smell of leeks and Jewish destiny. . . In my childhood, chained to the Gemara, I had led the life of a sage. When I grew up I started climbing trees."

Modern Hebrew Short Stories

S. Y. Agnon (1880-1970), who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966, represents, contrary to Bellow's note and Agnon's own statements, a major imaginative synthesis between hasidic literature, rabbinic texts, and western literary tradition. A native of Galicia, Agnon immigrated to Palestine and then returned to spend an extended period of time in the Hebrew circles of Berlin and Bad Homburg. As I have mentioned earlier, at the beginning of the twentieth century Germany was a major center for modern Hebrew literature and home to writers such as Micha Josef Berdychewsky, David Frishman, Zalman Shazar, Fischel Lachower, Hayyim Nakhman Bialik, Saul Tchernichowski, Simon Rawidowicz, Ahad Haam, and many others. Already in Palestine and in Germany as well Agnon read the classics of modern literature and parallel developments such as folklore. Of great controversy is the question whether he read and was influenced by Kafka. Although he denied doing so, indeed he orchestrated many of the myths associated with his persona, scholars have found various types of evidence, albeit inconclusive, to indicate such influence on his work. Despite gullible reports offered by some scholars about the surprise of his receiving the Nobel prize, typical of his construction of his own persona were his attempts throughout the 1950s to lobby for the prize, one of which ended with his getting a heart attack in Stockholm in 1951 and the other his having a friend appointed ambassador to Stockholm in 1955 (with connections who needs protection?) His stories can barely be summarized and their success as literature is based on the intricate web of traditional imagery mixed with modern atmospherics. The fullest explication of the levels of meaning in Agnon's stories is found in Arnold Band's *Nostalgia and Nightmare*.

Aaron Appelfeld (b. 1932), a Holocaust concentration camp survivor who settled in Israel, was one of the first Israeli writers to deal with the Holocaust, like the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, without actually mentioning it. "Badenheim 1939," part of a longer novella, presents life in an Austrian resort outside Vienna after the country was annexed by the Nazis. The meandering description touches on the requirement of Jews to

register as such with the Sanitation Department and the attendant reactions of various Jews and former Jews. Despite ghettoization of the Jews, there is never a realization on their part of the issues involved nor does the author explicate them.

One of the most powerful stories in these collections is Amos Oz's "Setting the World to Rights." Oz, a contemporary Israeli writer, a kibbutznik who confronts the issues facing a kibbutznik, and by extension, Israeli society. The story is about a kibbutznik filled with hatred, overwhelmed by the inability of his ideals and those of the state to sustain him in a world of corruption and degeneracy. One of the central metaphors of the story that of whoredom, borrowed from the biblical indictment of all that does not confirm to its strict canons of morality, is applied as a critique to the State of Israel. The story ends with the subject spending a night with a whore and then killing himself.

Other important Israeli writers not included in these collections are Asher Barash, especially his historical stories "The Last in Toledo," "Before the Gate of Heaven, and "In Marburg"; Devorah Baron, one of the few women writers of modern Israel.

The United States

The US has not been a center of Hebrew creativity, with a few minor exceptions. Yiddish stories which did flourish in the US, and many more are available in the anthologies than I discussed, gradually made way for English writing. The writer who best embodies the issues of American Jewish culture is Philip Roth (b. 1933), despite-- indeed because --- of the harsh criticism directed against him by communal leaders and congregational rabbis. Roth, despite his own strident rejection of the label of being a Jewish writer, has fulfilled the tradition of Jewish writers serving as critics of Jewish culture and society.

Not only has Roth exposed the vacuousness of suburban Jewish life, especially cinderblock synagogue schools, but he has explicated the conflicts and tensions among Jews and captured their verbal and intellectual patterns better than anybody else. After having worked in religious schools, my all time favorite Philip Roth story is "The Conversion of the Jews." Indeed the story was a veritable beacon of light as I found my way through the reality of contemporary Jewish education. Roth, who grew up in suburban New Jersey wrote this story when he was twenty-three years old. In this story Roth manages to pack all the issues that trouble modern Jews: Christian theology (despite all denials and institutionalized contempt, all Jews are fascinated by discussions of the Trinity), the chosen people, sexuality, Jewish

particularism, and rabbinic authority and hypocrisy. Central to the story was, despite a liberal and open facade, the rabbi's inability to deal open and honestly with questions that troubled his students.

One of the classical scenes of suburban Jewish identity offered by Roth is the discussion between the mother and the grandmother of the hero of the story, Ozzie, about whether there were eight or nine Jews on a plane that crashed based on the list of fatalities published in the paper because of the contested name of "Miller." Ultimately, Ozzie's posture was not so much driven by rebellion, which it may have seemed, but by genuine piety. If God were as omnipotent as the rabbi claimed, then why could He not have a virgin conceive.. Moved to great spiritual depths by his mother's lighting Sabbath candles, his questions and the rabbi's objections to them provoke her to slap him in the face for the first time in his life, a reaction that will be repeated by the rabbi himself. Ozzie accused him of not knowing about God. The story reaches a climax with a wounded Ozzie running to the roof of the synagogue threatening to jump unless the rabbi and the assembled crowd below expressed their belief in Jesus Christ. It concludes with Ozzie asking his mother to promise that "you'll never hit anybody about God."

In a way, the standoff between Ozzie and the rabbi is very similar to the previous collisions we have seen in Jewish literature between rabbis and zaddikim. Ozzie represented a spontaneity and an honesty towards religion and community which may have been the reason that so many rabbis and community leaders expressed such revulsion for Roth and his work. For fascinating reading about Roth, I highly recommend, at the suggestion of at least one student, his own collection of essays in *Reading Myself and Others*.

Cynthia Ozick, whose fame has greatly increased, writes the "Pagan Rabbi" using a man's voice. The story begins with the fact that a prominent rabbi had hanged himself in a public park. The story then traces the spiritual odyssey of the rabbi by one of his colleagues who learned, with little patience or empathy, that the rabbi had acquired all sorts of pagan, pantheistic tendencies. Rather, however, than seeing such a development as abnormal, I think that we have seen enough developments in modern Jewish culture to indicate that Jews had developed many pagan tendencies.

Finally, Grace Paley (b. 1922), provides a hilarious collection of voices in dialect in "Goodbye and Good Luck." "With me, we will raise up the sands of Palestine to make a nation. That is the land of tomorrow for us Jews." "Ha-Ha, . . . I'll go tomorrow then."

Conclusion

Because of space limitations I have not been able to cover all the modern short story writers that I wished to treat. Nevertheless, from these stories it is clear that like the sands of Palestine, Jewish culture is continually shifting. Indeed, as I prepared the last two lectures my own views have shifted yet again. Never enthusiastic for the diaspora negation associated with most trends in Zionist thought, while I may have cast aspersions on the vitality of diasporan culture, a review of these materials has led me to reaffirm my sense that the grounding of the most profound Israeli writers is in the diaspora. While I may occasionally mistake Hebrew continuity for Jewish creativity, the fact remains that Jews have flourished in a range of languages.

During this course, the 2,400 subscribers plus those who are getting the lectures indirectly constitute evidence of thriving Jewish culture around the world. The range of serious learning that students have brought to our discussions both from very traditional Jewish backgrounds, liberal Jewish backgrounds, and Christian backgrounds, shows that Jewish culture can flourish and that Jews and Jews and Christians can engage it critically and analytically. Students in this course constitute many teachers, professors, rabbis, filmmakers, writers, and I am happy that people have both sought my input on various projects and given me their input to this project. As questions and criticisms come in I continue to update my files, but paradoxically continue to distribute the unchanged version as requests for back issues come in. Feel free to contact me over the summer should you need missing lectures.

As a result of doing these courses, I feel as if I have found a voice and a medium to teach which is new and exciting, for students who would never meet in the same classroom. Maybe the beauty of the virtual classroom is that it brings together students and teachers who would not meet in any other circumstances. It has been said that any teacher who can be replaced by a computer should. With these courses I don't think that we are replacing traditional learning sites, but creating new ones. In addition to the standard evaluation forms, I would be interested in receiving any additional feedback from students. From these courses I have been invited to join other virtual study programs and some real ones too, and am continually working to make the courses better. Students continue to visit in Jerusalem; next week I will receive my fourth visitor from the third continent.

Where to go from Here: One of the best books written introducing the Jewish textual tradition is the collection of essays in Barry W. Holtz's *Back to the Sources*. Each chapter provides further direction for additional reading. On Jewish literature the journals *Prooftexts* and

the Association for Jewish Studies Review have provided consistently innovative studies on various authors, works, and genres. For Yiddish stories, see I. Howe and E. Greenberg, *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*. For recent Jewish fiction I would highly recommend the novels of Naomi Regan.

As I finish up this lecture, Dana International, Israel's trans-sexual singing star, has just finished performing Dunash ibn Labrat's sabbath hymn *Deror Yikra* and collapsed on stage unable to hand the medals to this year's Swedish winners. Israel participated in a contest with many nations, such as Spain and Germany, that once tried to obliterate her, voting for her singers. Germany, after years of denial, has finally recognized the rights of its Turkish citizens and not only moved towards citizenship rights, but entered a song in Turkish instead of German. In Israel, with a new government being formed by the broadest coalition ever, adjustments are being made to return territories to Syria, Lebanon, and to a Palestinian State. Whether one may be for or against such events, the consequences are inevitable. Israel and its supporters are moving from a defensive/aggressive posture to one in which questions of culture will again play a prominent role. As such adjustments take place, matters related to Jews and Judaism around the world will become of even greater interest than the simple "erev tov yerushalayim" that the vote counters called in to the hosts of Eurovision in Jerusalem. I hope that this course helped provide a background for what will continue to be interesting discussions about Jewish culture in Israel and around the world. Thank you for your interest and participation.