

The Rabbis on Gentiles

The Tannaim (the early rabbis) argued over the status of gentiles, but eventually they decided that the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come.

Rabbi Eliezer said: 'All the nations will have no share in the world to come, even as it is said, "The wicked shall go into Sheol, and all the nations that forget God" [Psalm 9: 17]. The wicked shall go into Sheol—these are the wicked among Israel.' Rabbi Joshua said to him: 'If the verse had said, "The wicked shall go into Sheol with all the nations," and had stopped there, I should have agreed with you, but as it goes on to say "who forget God," it means there are righteous men among the nations who have a share in the world to come' (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13: 2).

Rabbi Jeremiah said: 'Whence can you know that the gentile that practices the law is equal to the high priest? Because it is said, "which, if a man do, he shall live through them" [Leviticus 18: 5]. And it says, "This is the Torah of man" [2 Samuel 7: 19]. It does not say, "the law of the priests, Levites, Israelites," but "This is the law of man, O Lord God." And it does not say, "Open the gates and let the priests and Levites and Israel enter," but it says: "Open the gates that the righteous may enter" [Isaiah 26: 2]. And it says, "This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter it." It does not say, "The priests and the Levites and Israel shall enter it," but it says, "The righteous shall enter it" [Psalm 118: 20]. And it does not say, "Rejoice ye, priests, Levites, and Israelites," but it says, "Rejoice ye righteous" [Psalm 33: 1]. And it does not say, "Do good, O Lord, to the priests and the Levites and the Israelites," but it says, "Do good, O Lord, to the good" [Psalm 124: 4]. So even a gentile, if he practises the Torah, is equal to the high priest' (Sifra 86b; b. Baba Kamma 38a).

to understand why devout Jews do not bear witness to their faith by proselytizing, but Jews see no need to convert others in order to ensure their salvation: for them it is enough to preach the righteousness that makes all people, Jewish or gentile, equal in the eyes of God. The decision to convert is entirely personal, reserved for those who sincerely wish to join their fate with that of the people Israel.

DIFFERENTIATION

The Medieval Period

By convention, the Jews of the premodern world were divided geographically into two groups, **Sephardim** and **Ashkenazim**. The former lived in

the region of the Mediterranean, while the latter lived in central and eastern Europe, away from the Mediterranean. (A handful of much smaller communities belonging to neither group are discussed on p. 126.)

By the medieval period, Sepharad was identified primarily with Spain, which with Portugal came to dominate Sephardic intellectual history. European Jewish settlement in the New World began with Sephardim from Spain, Portugal, and Italy—the pioneering lands of exploration and colonial empire-building. There have been important Sephardic centres in Italy and the Turkish Empire, and Jews across North Africa and the Middle East can all be counted among the Sephardim.

Ashkenaz was identified primarily with Germany, but in time, as persecution forced its members to migrate, came to include Poland, Hungary,

Romania, and Russia as well. Some Ashkenazim settled in France and England over the centuries before their descendants moved to North America. In the medieval period all Ashkenazim lived as minorities under Christian domination, and after the middle of the nineteenth century, Ashkenazic Jews, so often uprooted in Europe, migrated to the New World in numbers so great that the earlier Sephardic immigrants became almost invisible. North American Jews are today overwhelmingly Ashkenazic in custom and culture. Jews from Muslim lands have been much more likely to settle in Israel. As a consequence, the Israeli population today is more or less balanced between Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

In the Middle Ages, Jewish cultural and intellectual life fared better in the Islamic world than in Christian Europe. The prophet Muhammad had been deeply influenced by Christian and Jewish teachers before his experience of revelation. Therefore Islam remained officially tolerant of both Christians and Jews, who as 'People of the

Book' were entitled to certain legal rights, including the right to practise their own religion.

Not all Muslim rulers lived up to Islam's principles, however. In most places Jews were subject to discriminatory legislation forcing them to pay special taxes, wear special garments, live in special quarters, stay off the roads when Muslims approached, and so on. Nevertheless, in every place conquered by the Muslims—from Spain in the eighth century to Anatolia in the fifteenth—the new rulers were welcomed as liberators by Jewish communities that had suffered under Christian oppression.

Medieval Jewish Philosophy

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Saadia

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Marital Customs

Marital customs in Jewish communities depended to a significant degree on the culture of the larger society in which the Jewish community was situated. Thus in Muslim-controlled regions, Jewish men who could afford to support more than one wife continued to practise polygamy, as the ancient Hebrews had; however, the Jewish marriage contract included a number of safeguards for women that were not necessarily available to women in the host society.

Over the centuries, changes in the status of women have required the use of a rare but important rabbinic legal instrument called the *takkanah* ('repair', here with the sense of 'repeal'). The most famous *takkanah* on the subject of marriage banned the practice of polygamy and is usually attributed to Rabbenu Gershom of Mainz (c. 960–1028), who is also credited with a *takkanah* forbidding a husband to divorce his wife against her will. The polygamy *takkanah* was essentially directed at Jews living in Christian lands (Jews living under Islamic law may still have more than one wife today). It is possible, however, that the *takkanah* had little practical effect: some scholars suggest that the practice of polygamy simply died out in the West, more or less by common agreement.

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The variations in customs across the Jewish world would become an important issue in the modern state of Israel, where a single legal system had to be created for Jews from many different societies, on the basis of Jewish law, British mandatory law, and Turkish law. So Israel is not so much governed by Jewish law as influenced by it, having developed its own traditions of civil and criminal law. Bigamy was outlawed in 1951 by a civil law designed to protect the rights of women, but immigrants who had already been legally married to more than one wife in their country of origin were exempted.

A *Techina* (Devotional Prayer) for Women

Women developed special devotional prayers (called Techinot) for themselves, to be recited as they did the usual preparations for the Sabbath and holidays. Here is one that women have traditionally said as they place a loaf of challah (a braided bread) in the oven on Fridays so that there will be a special bread to bless for the Sabbath.

This the woman says when she puts the Sabbath loaf into the oven:

Lord of all the world, in your hand is all blessing. I come now to revere your holiness, and I pray you to bestow your blessing on the baked goods. Send an angel to guard the baking, so that all will be well baked, will rise nicely, and will not burn, to honor the holy Sabbath (which you have chosen so that Israel your children may rest thereon) and over which one recites the holy blessing—as you blessed the dough of Sarah and Rebecca our mothers. My Lord God, listen to my voice; you are the God who hears the voices of those who call to you with the whole heart. May you be praised to eternity (Umansky and Ashton 1992: 55).

the *gaon*, or principal, of the important rabbinic academy of Sura in Babylonia. He translated the Hebrew Bible into Arabic and defended rabbinic Judaism against the teachings of the Karaites.

A major theme in all Jewish philosophical writings was the tension between reason and revelation. But Saadia believed there was no such conflict: whenever biblical events or texts appeared to contradict rational principles, they should be taken allegorically rather than literally. In this, Saadia was following a tradition that had begun with Philo in Alexandria in the first century. Saadia's best-known philosophical work is *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (*Sefer Emunoth veDeoth*), in which he maintains that Judaism alone is the divinely revealed truth. The use of human reason would eventually lead to the same truth, but revelation is a gift from God that makes it available instantaneously.

(written in Hebrew using the conventions current in Arabic poetry) and philosophical work called *The Kuzari*, based on a famous legend according to which the Khazars, a Tatar people living near the Caspian Sea, had converted to Judaism sometime in the eighth century. In Ha-Levi's version of the story, the conversion of the Khazars takes place after their king has listened to presentations by advocates of each of the three great religions—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. The rabbi cites the notion of *netzah Yisrael* ('the eternity of Israel'; that is, its survival against all odds through the many catastrophes of history) as proof of God's special interest in Israel. He also mentions the unbroken tradition of Judaism, which is much longer than Christian or Islamic tradition, together with the Jews' bravery in allowing themselves to be martyred for their faith.

Ha-Levi even suggests that Islam and Christianity are appropriate preparatory faiths for na-

From *The Kuzari*

Yehuda Ha-Levi was quite critical of the pagan philosophers, who attempted to understand the world without the help of the Bible. He much preferred the exercise of reason to be guided by scripture. But he respected the philosophers for having learned so much without biblical guidance.

On fundamental principles, the philosophers hold opinions which are absurd to the intellect, and which the intellect treats with contempt. Such, for example, is their explanation of the revolution of the celestial sphere. They state that the sphere seeks for a perfection which it lacks, namely, to occupy all possible spatial positions. Since it cannot achieve such a state simultaneously in respect of each of its constituent parts, it attempts to achieve it by occupying each possible position in turn. Equally false is their opinion regarding the emanations which flow from the First Cause. They maintain that from an angel's knowledge of the First Cause there arises of necessity another angel, and from the angel's knowledge of itself there arises a sphere; and so the process of emanation advances step by step down through eleven stages till the emanations come to an end with the Active Intellect, from which arises neither an angel nor a sphere. And they hold other views like these, which are less convincing than those advanced in the *Sefer Yezirah*. All these opinions are highly dubious, and it is impossible to find any two philosophers agreeing on them. However, we should not blame the philosophers for this. Rather, they deserve our praise for what they managed to achieve simply through the force of rational argument. Their intentions were good, they established the laws of thought, and they rejected the pleasures of this world. They may, in any case, be granted superiority since they were not obliged to accept our opinions. We, however, are obliged to accept whatever we see with our own eyes, or any well-founded tradition, which is tantamount to seeing for oneself (Alexander 1984: 14–19).

in Ha-Levi's story the rabbi is the most persuasive of the three advocates, which is the reason that the Khazars became Jews.

Maimonides

Moses Maimonides, or Moses ben Maimon (1135–1204), was born in Cordoba, Spain, lived in Egypt, and is undoubtedly the most famous of all Jewish philosophers. In religious texts he is usually known as 'Rambam': R–M–B–M, the acronym of 'Rabbi Moses ben Maimon'.

Maimonides became a refugee at the age of thirteen when the Almohads, a Muslim fundamentalist group from North Africa, took control in Spain. He fled first to Morocco, then to Palestine, which was under the control of the Crusaders, and finally to Egypt. There he found employment—and the

freedom to practise his religion—as physician in the court of the Muslim sultan of Egypt, the famous Salah al-Din (Saladin).

Other medieval Jewish philosophers wrote on an impressive range of subjects, scriptural, devotional, and scientific, but Maimonides' accomplishments were truly prodigious. He wrote the famous code of Jewish law, *Mishneh Torah*, in Hebrew; several treatises on medicine; a treatise on logic as well as several on medicine; and a number of *responsa* advising Jewish communities around the world on matters such as false conversion, the concept of resurrection, and the arrival of the messiah.

Perhaps to underline the shift in focus from technical matters in Judaism to a wider concern with religious thought generally, Maimonides

Maimonides' Twelfth Fundamental Principle of Faith

In his commentary on the Mishnah, called the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides included a summary of Judaism under the heading 'Thirteen Principles of Faith'. His twelfth principle, that no one should try to determine the date of the messiah's arrival, was a reflection of the apocalyptic speculation that was widespread among Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike in the twelfth century.

I believe in perfect faith that the Messiah will come, and we should not consider him as tardy: 'Should he tarry, wait for him' [Habakkuk 2: 13]. No date may be fixed for his appearance, nor may the Scriptures be interpreted in such a way as to derive from them the time of his coming.

wrote his most important philosophical treatise, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, in Arabic, although it was quickly translated into Hebrew. Ostensibly a letter of advice addressed to a single student, the *Guide* was aimed at the many acculturated Jews who, living in a cosmopolitan and philosophically sophisticated environment, had begun to question the truth of their own religion.

Maimonides' deep knowledge of Aristotle put him at the forefront of the intellectual life of his day. Earlier medieval philosophers such as Saadia and Ha-Levi had drawn on Neoplatonism, a tradition based on the work of Plato that spoke of abstract ideas, a universe of emanating intellects, and mystical or intuitive insight, which allowed humans to receive an intuition of the highest good. By contrast, the Aristotelian tradition was based on analytic observation of physical phenomena and human behaviour, and most religious thinkers were wary of it because it took a more mechanistic view of the universe.

Aristotle believed the universe to be eternal, not created as the Bible maintains. Nevertheless, Maimonides accepted Aristotle's physics provisionally for the purpose of proving the existence of God. Rambam's greatest contribution was to

taken literally when it attributes human forms and feelings to the divine.

In addition, however, Maimonides argues that the truths revealed through the visions of the prophets represent the perfect union of the intellectual and imaginative faculties, and that all the laws Jews are required to follow are ultimately rational, even if the reasons for them seem beyond human ken.

The last part of *The Guide of the Perplexed* tackles difficult questions regarding God's providence. The rabbis understood that, for the moral system they had designed to make sense, humanity must have free choice: without free will, a system of rewards and punishments based on the moral choices of individual humans would be meaningless. For them, the story of Adam and Eve marked the beginning of that power of choice, and Maimonides did not challenge that position.

Whatever freedom is granted to individual humans, however, appears to take away from God's perfect sovereignty. The rabbis were content to express the problem in paradoxical statements: 'All is foreseen yet free will is given,' they said. Or: 'All is in the hands of heaven except for the fear of heav-

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Aristotle believed the universe to be eternal, not created as the Bible maintains. Nevertheless, Maimonides accepted Aristotle's physics provisionally for the purpose of proving the existence of God. Rambam's greatest contribution was his effort to resolve the tension between faith and knowledge. Like most Jewish philosophers before him, he saw no contradiction between reason and revelation, and held that the Bible should not be

taken literally when it attributes human forms and feelings to the divine.

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Whatever freedom is granted to individual humans, however, appears to take away from God's perfect sovereignty. The rabbis were content to express the problem in paradoxical statements: 'All is foreseen yet free will is given,' they said. Or: 'All is in the hands of heaven except for the fear of heaven'—meaning that God controls everything except whether people respond to him. For the rabbis, this amounted to a statement of faith that God's powers are so great that they will prevail and yet still provide for human will. But the problem did

not go away; Arab philosophers and intellectuals agonized over the question of which principle was more fundamental: human free will or God's sovereignty.

Maimonides contributed to this discussion by using Aristotle's cosmology to arrive at a compromise. He asked the question of divine providence in a traditional scholastic way: 'How far does God's knowledge extend into our imperfect world?' For philosophers in the Platonic tradition, who typically thought of divinity as perfect and changeless, such a question immediately posed a new problem: If we suppose that God knows change, does this not compromise divine perfection?

According to Arabic Aristotelian philosophy, God's knowledge of his creation ends at the species level; he knows sparrows as a species, for instance, but his providence does not extend to the individual sparrow. Maimonides suggests that this analysis is correct for all species except humans. What enables God's providence to extend to the individual level in humans, he says, is the human capacity for rational thought. To the extent that humans use their rational facilities, God is able to perceive them as individuals and guide their actions. The prophets, who perfected both their rational and imaginative facilities, are therefore the model for all humans. The more we train and use our rational faculties, the more we value moral behaviour—because true morality is truly rational—and the more capable we are of receiving divine guidance. This does not mean that fully rational humans will never experience sorrow or misfortune. But it does mean that their misfortunes and setbacks are specifically known by God and are somehow part of a divine plan. By contrast, non-rational humans, who are intellectually and morally insensitive, cannot be known to God in this way, as individuals. Therefore what happens to them is accidental in the same way that it is accidental whether a particular sparrow falls prey to a cat or flies free. ('Accidental', for Maimonides, meant non-essential in the way that a person's height is non-essential.)

For Maimonides, rationality is essential to God himself. But God's intelligence is different from ours. In fact, God has no attributes because attributes are accidental. Everything God is, he is essentially. His intelligence is entirely active, a truly creative essence that describes only God. He creates the universe by thinking, and it exists only because he is thinking it.

The same rationality is made accessible to humans through a series of 'emanations' forming the heavenly spheres. Transferred from one sphere to the next through their angelic rulers, the divine rationality eventually reaches the angel responsible for the lunar sphere, the one closest to earth. It is this angel, known as the Active Intellect, who enables the human mind to form thoughts. We need the Active Intellect because our minds in themselves are passive, possessing only the potential for intelligence—*tabulae rasae* ('blank slates') in Latin scholastic parlance.

In order to understand the emanations conveyed by the Active Intellect, however, we need to perfect our intellects through moral and intellectual schooling. The Active Intellect is also the angel of prophecy, which for Maimonides (as we have seen) represents the perfection of the intellectual and imaginative faculties. In this way revelation is explained as the perfection of the rational principle. God's emanations cannot be automatic because God must be free to give prophecy to whomever he wills.

Of course, God can withhold prophecy even from the perfectly trained human, but this would be exceptional. Prophetic powers are the acme and zenith of the intellectual life. The Torah, the perfect embodiment of prophecy, is a special gift to the Jewish people. All those who study and follow the law are, in fact, training to be prophets. But all humans can participate in prophecy to the extent to which they perfect their potentialities. The Greek philosophers, as well as the religions of Christianity and Islam, also and necessarily partake in this truth, though usually to a lesser degree because they have each fallen victim to error in

one way or another. So for Maimonides, reason and revelation are identical processes, and they are both identical with the power by which God creates and preserves the universe.

Rambam's great accomplishment was to promote a view of Judaism as thoroughly rational. This view itself was not new, but he provided the intellectual structure to sustain it, and that structure has characterized Jewish self-understanding to this day. Whereas orthodox Islam maintained that reason should retreat before faith, and Christian Aristotelianism, as exemplified by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, argued that faith must retreat in the face of issues that are proven right or wrong by reason, Maimonides saw all seeming contradictions between reason or science and faith as just that: only apparent and ephemeral. Rationality and good religion are equivalent.

Thus science and religion were in harmony for Maimonides, not in opposition, and Judaism was perfectly consistent with the Aristotelian

worldview that the acculturated and affluent Jews shared with the enlightened Islamic society around them. The guidance he offered the 'perplexed' among them was that the principles of 'science' (i.e., learning) need not bring their faith into question. Rather, a correct intellectual understanding of the world and Jewish tradition would show the two to be in perfect agreement.

It cannot be said that Jews universally admired or adopted Maimonides' system. He wrote for an intellectual elite among the Jews of his day in the Islamic world, speakers of Arabic who shared the Aristotelian assumptions of medieval Islamic thinkers. The situation of Jews was very different in Christian lands such as France, where his writing set off a century of fierce controversy punctuated by book burnings and occasional edicts of ostracism by rabbis opposed to Maimonides' enterprise.

On the whole, Maimonides' emphasis on reason has served the Jewish community well in

From Bahya Ibn Paquda's *Duties of the Heart*

Bahya Ibn Paquda was an eleventh-century moralist living in Saraossa, Spain, who sought to express the essence of the law in his book Duties of the Heart. Written in Arabic, it was translated into Hebrew in the twelfth century.

You should know, O mortal, that the greatest enemy you have in the world is our evil inclination, which is woven into the powers of your soul and intertwined with the constitution of your spirit, sharing with you the direction of your bodily senses and mental faculties. He rules over the secrets of your soul, over the thoughts you keep hidden away in your mind. He is your counsellor in all your actions—seen and unseen—which you perform out of free choice. He lies in wait for your moments of inattention: you may be asleep to him, but he is always awake to you; you may be unaware of him, but he is never unaware of you. He dons for you the robe of friendship, and bedecks himself with the guise of love for you. He becomes one of your confidants and counsellors, one of the sincerest of your friends. He subtly deceives you, going along with what you want with outward signs and gestures of agreement, but all the while he is shooting at you his deadly arrows in order to destroy you, after the fashion of one of whom Scripture speaks: 'Like a madman shooting deadly darts and arrows, so is the man who deceives his fellow and then says, "I was only joking" [Proverbs 26: 18–19]' (Alexander 1984: 98–100).

times of peace and prosperity, when intellectual life has been able to flourish. In times of trial and tribulation, however, Jews have been more likely to turn to mysticism for consolation.

The Early Modern Period

It was the toleration of Jews in Islamic Spain that allowed Maimonides' thought to flourish. But that 'Golden Age' came to a definitive end in 1492,

when the Christian monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella took control of Granada, the last remaining Muslim stronghold. The Jewish presence might have been helpful to the Christians in a culture shared with Muslims, but once the Reconquista—the campaign to reconquer Spain and take it back into Christendom—was largely complete, the regime wasted no time in expelling the Jews. When Columbus set out for the New World in August 1492, he had to sail from a small port in southern

Map 3.1 Expulsion and Migration of Jews from Europe, c. 1000–1500 CE



Spain because all the major ports were clogged by Jews leaving their centuries-old home.

Ferdinand and Isabella were by no means the first Christian monarchs in western Europe to expel Jews. But the effect was particularly devastating for the Iberian Peninsula, where Jewish culture was well-established and highly sophisticated. To avoid expulsion, some Jews converted to Christianity while continuing to practise their ancestral faith in secret. But even the *conversos* ('New Christians') who abandoned Judaism faced persecution by the Spanish Inquisition. An arm of the Church established in Spain in 1478 and dedicated to rooting out Christian heresy, it developed a new specialty in uncovering Jewish beliefs and observances among the *conversos* or Marranos ('pigs'), as they were sometimes derisively called.

Most of the Jews who left Spain found their way to the Ottoman Turkish Empire. When its ruler, Sultan Bayazid II (r. 1481–1512), heard of the Jewish expulsion, he mocked the Spanish monarchs' folly and suggested that Turkey would take advantage of the squandered 'wealth' of Spain. He thereafter encouraged the dispossessed Jews to take shelter in his empire. As a result, some Jews living in contemporary Turkey still speak a dialect of Spanish called Ladino, as well as Turkish.

Jewish Mysticism

The spiritual crisis generated by the expulsion sparked a new interest in mystical practice and pietistic devotion to the ordinary customs of Judaism. Jewish mysticism traces its roots back as far as the biblical prophets themselves. There is some evidence that they may have used various physical techniques to induce ecstatic visions. Hellenistic and medieval Jewish mystical writers, however, claimed to be capable of receiving divine visions solely through their interpretation of the imagery used by the prophets. For these mystics the most interesting biblical passages are the ones where God shows himself to his people in a human form or 'presence' known as the *kavod*,

'glory of God'—a form that was understood to be the principal messenger of God, the angel of the Lord.

In the apocalyptic tradition that followed the age of prophecy, some visions involve human manifestations of the divine. Especially interesting is the so-called 'Son of Man' (apparently a Hebrew expression meaning a 'manlike figure'). Probably an archangel such as Michael or Gabriel, he symbolizes the martyrs of the community in *Daniel* 7: 13: 'I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days and they brought him near before Him.' There is good evidence that these images played a crucial role in the conversion of Paul, whose identification of Jesus as the Christ recalls Daniel's identification of the 'Son of Man' as the messiah and the angel of the Lord. Those early mystical traditions were increasingly disturbing to the rabbis, who feared that mystical interpretation of texts would lead to heresy and abrogation of the law.

The earliest and longest phase of Jewish mysticism, stretching from the prophecies of *Ezekiel* through the apocalyptic visions in *Daniel* to the emergence of **Kabbalah** in the twelfth century, is known as Merkabah ('chariot') mysticism. The central aspects of Merkabah mysticism were (1) an anthropomorphic concept of God and a keen interest in matters such as his size, as in the so-called *Shiur Koma* ('measurement of the body') literature, (2) heavenly ascents, (3) theurgic (magical) spells and motifs, and (4) apocalyptic and revelatory writings.

The central experience was the ecstatic journey of the adept to the heavenly throne room. Although the human-like figure on the throne was usually referred to by a name associated with angels (such as Metatron or Zoharariel), it was understood to represent 'the king in his glory'. These *Hekhaloth* ('Palaces') texts were edited and re-edited throughout the entire first period of Jewish mysticism. In the form in which we have them, they display many of the characteristic concerns

of the Hasidei Ashkenaz, a pietist group that flourished in fourteenth-century Germany.

The development of the teaching called Kabbalah ('received tradition') is probably most responsible for the gradual diminution of Merkabah mysticism, though Kabbalah in turn was probably influenced by Islamic Sufi mysticism. In medieval Jewish mysticism, the heavenly journey of the Merkabah mystics came to be understood as symbolizing a journey into the self.

In place of the heavenly palaces, Kabbalah developed a notion of ten *spherot* ('countings' or 'spheres'). By correctly aligning these *spherot* through rituals, pious deeds, and mystical meditation, the Kabbalist can affect the future course of events and participate in the divine plan for the universe.

The Zohar

The principal text of Kabbalah is the *Zohar*. Although it purports to be the work of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a famous second-century rabbi, its real author was probably the Spanish Kabbalist Moses ben Shemtov of León (1250–1305). The *Zohar* has a special mystical agenda. It describes God as an unlimited divine principle, *En Sof* ('without end'), who produces the universe indirectly through the series of emanations called the *spherot*.

Sometimes the *spherot* recall the heavenly spheres of philosophical discourse; but sometimes they suggest more imaginative configurations of the different powers of God. They can be envisioned as forming a tree of life or even the primeval, cosmic man, *adam ha-kadmon*. When they are arrayed as the latter, they seem to be related to the earlier notion of a gigantic angelic mediator who somehow embodies the name of God. The correct alignments, or 'unifications', of the *spherot* will bring about the most harmonious balance of divine forces.

The *Zohar* suggests that this insight is implied in the biblical text. In form, then, the *Zohar*

resembles a midrashic exposition of scripture; but instead of explaining the sense of a verse, it explains the secret knowledge that could be derived from it:

He who desires to understand the wisdom of holy unity, let him contemplate the flame which rises from coal or from a candle for the flame rises only when it is attached to a material thing. Come and see: in the rising flame there are two lights, one a white shining light, and the other a dark bluish light that holds on directly to the candle. . . . Come and see: there is no stimulus for the kindling of the blue light that it might provide the basis for the white light save through the people of Israel who . . . unite with it from below and continue in their endurance (*Zohar* III, 290a; Caplan and Ribalow 1952: 161–2).

In this passage, the blue light symbolizes the aspect of divinity *spherah* known as Malkut ('kingship') or *Shekhinah* ('God's indwelling'), which in turn is identified with the spiritual presence of the people Israel. This particular *spherah* (grammatically feminine in Hebrew) has an explicitly feminine identity, and is imagined in sexual union with the masculine aspect of God.

The white light conventionally symbolizes the higher *spherah* of *hesed*, God's aspect of 'loving-kindness'. Thus the passage tells us that even a simple flame reveals something about the relationship between God and Israel: specifically, that the existence and behaviour of Israel are integrally related to God's loving-kindness in the world. The purpose of these manifestations of God's various aspects in the world is to ensure the correct flow of divine effulgence (*shefa*), which is generally thought to be balanced when the upper *spherah* (usually Tiferet, 'beauty') is properly related to the *spherah* Malkut or Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of God that signifies Israel.

The mystic tradition maintains that this balance is affected by human behaviour, ritual and otherwise. Thus, sexual intercourse between Kabbalistically sophisticated spouses, when performed with the proper meditations, could help to align the heavenly dimensions of God. But any properly completed ritual action—like the blessing over wine before a meal—could have a beneficial effect on the universe. In the following passage, the bride and the husband together represent the *spherah* Malkut or Shekhinah, while the husband alone represents Tiferet:

Rabbi Simeon would sit and study Torah all night when the bride was about to be united with her husband. . . . the companions of the household in the bride's palace are needed on that night when the bride is prepared for her meeting on the morrow with her husband under the bridal canopy. They need to be with her all that night and rejoice with her in the preparations with which she is adorned, studying Torah—progressing from the Pentateuch to the Prophets, and from the Prophets to the writings, and then to the midrashic and mystical interpretations of the verses, for these are her adornments and her finery (*Zohar* 1, 8a).

On one level, this passage is a simple description of a bride's preparations for marriage. On another level, it is an allegory of the role that Jewish learning plays in the 'love affair' between God and the world.

Many of the deepest Jewish minds have seen Kabbalah as irrational, even absurd, and condemned it as undermining the fundamental principle of monotheism. Nevertheless, it has appealed to great numbers of people troubled by the suffering that Jews have experienced and the enormous part that evil plays in the world. Kabbalah explains evil as the result of a misalignment of

divine effulgence and offers humans the hope that their action will help the divinity in his progress towards the goal of cosmic perfection:

The story of Jonah [the name literally means 'aggrieved'] may be construed as an allegory of the course of a man's life in this world. Jonah descends into the ship: this is parallel to man's soul descending to enter into his body in this world. Why is the soul called Jonah? For the reason that she becomes subject to all manner of vexation when once she enters into partnership with the body. Thus, a man in this world is as in a ship crossing the vast ocean and like to be broken, as it is written 'so that the ship was like to be broken' (*Zohar* on *Jonah* 1: 4; Scholem 1949: 103).

In this view, the 'vexation' of the body has a purpose: to motivate the soul to strive towards perfection.

Luria and Sabbatai Zvi

Until the sixteenth century, Kabbalah was largely a private contemplative discipline. That changed with Isaac Luria (1534–72), who founded a community of mystics in the hilltop town of Safed in the Galilee region. Luria explained the tragedy of Jewish life in terms of a split in the Godhead that occurs in the process of the creation, when God must contract himself to make room for the universe. When his perfection was removed from the area that was to be the universe, the divine sparks became contaminated with the gross and evil material of creation. The earthly counterpart of this cosmic process was the exile of Israel.

According to Luria, mystics can help God return the divine sparks to their correct place—and in so doing assist in the rectification (*tikkun*) of the universe—through meditation, magic, and acts of piety, including ritual activities. The community that Luria founded in Safed practised asceticism

and observed the special rules of Judaism with special intensity, hoping that this would assist God in the enterprise of redemption and hasten the coming of the messiah.

Messianic expectations came to a head in 1666, when an adept of Lurianic Kabbalah named Sabbatai Zvi was proclaimed the messiah in Smyrna and attracted a varied following of mystically oriented Jews. Influenced by the quickening of millennial expectations among Christians—who associated the year 1666 with the references in *Revelation* (13: 17–18) to ‘666’, the supposed ‘number of the beast’—the followers of the mystical messiah marched on the sultan in Istanbul. At first, the sultan ignored the rag-tag army camped outside the walls; then he had Zvi imprisoned. Finally he offered Zvi the choice between conversion to Islam and death. Zvi chose the former, and most of his followers gave up in despair.

Those who did not repudiate him understood Zvi’s choice as a way of fulfilling the Jewish commandments by taking on evil directly and conquering it. This idea, which they called ‘the commandment that comes by infraction’ (*hamitzvah haba’ah b’averah*), gave further impetus to the aspect of mysticism that is called ‘antinomian’, that is, counter to rule or law. Many of Zvi’s most devoted supporters followed his lead, converting to Islam but continuing to practise their ancestral Sephardic traditions in secret, mystical ways. (There are still some members of this sect in modern Turkey, known as the Dönme, ‘returners’.)

Other supporters carried the movement as far as Germany. A woman known as Glueckl of Hamelin later wrote a memoir in which she described the movement’s impact there:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them

The Sephardic youth came dressed in their best finery and decked in broad green silk ribbons, the gear of Sabbatai Zvi ‘with timbrels and with dances’ they one and all trooped to the synagogue, and they read the letters forth with joy like the ‘joy of the Feast of Water-Drawing.’

Many sold their houses and lands and all their possessions, for any day they hoped to be redeemed. My good father-in-law left his home in Hamelin, abandoned his house and lands all his goodly furniture, and moved to Hildesheim. He sent on to us in Hamburg two enormous casks packed with linens and with peas, beans, dried meats, shredded prunes and like stuff, every manner of food that would keep. For the old man expected to sail any moment from Hamburg to the Holy Land. . . . For three years the casks stood ready, and all this while my father-in-law awaited the signal to depart. But the Most High pleased otherwise (Lowenthal 1977: 46–7).

From the point of view of Orthodox Judaism, the Sabbatians resembled Christians in that they were a mystical and antinomian messianic group who took their original teachings from Judaism but who abandoned it over issues involving Jewish law. Roughly a century later, another group of this type, in Podolia (western Ukraine), became outwardly Christian under the influence of a later Sabbatian named Jacob Frank.

Hasidism

The founder of **Hasidism** was Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1759), better known as the Baal Shem Tov (‘master of the Good Name’), the Baal Shem, or simply ‘the Besht’ (an acronym). Orphaned short-

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Other supporters carried the movement as far as Germany. A woman known as Glueckl of Hamelin later wrote a memoir in which she described the movement's impact there:

Our joy, when the letters arrived [from Smyrna] is not to be told. Most of them were addressed to the Sephardim who, as fast they came, took them to their synagogue and read them aloud; young and old, the Germans too hastened to the Sephardic synagogue.

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From the Memoirs of Glueckl of Hamelin

Glueckl (1646–1724) married a merchant named Hayyim of Hamelin at the age of fourteen. She bore twelve children, became his adviser in business, and, after his death in 1689, carried on the business alone. Her touching memoir offers a rare window into the private life of a Jewish family in the seventeenth century.

In my great grief and for my heart's ease I begin this book the year of creation 5451 [1690–1]—God soon rejoice us and send us His redeemer!

I began writing it, dear children, upon the death of your good father, in the hope of distracting my soul from the burdens laid upon it, and the bitter thought that we have lost our faithful shepherd. In this way, I have managed to live through many wakeful nights, and springing from my bed shortened the sleepless hours.

This, dear children, will be no book of morals. Such I could not write, and our sages have already written many. Moreover, we have our holy Torah, in which we may find and learn all that we need for our long journey through this world to the world to come. It is like a rope which the great and gracious God has thrown to us as we drown in the stormy sea of life, that we may seize hold of it and be saved.

The kernel of the Torah is 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' But in our days we seldom find it so, and few are they who love their fellow men with all their heart—on the contrary, if a man can contrive to ruin his neighbour, nothing pleases him more (Lowenthal 1977: 1–2).

As an adult he worked as a Hebrew teacher, lime quarrier, and small innkeeper—and dabbled in Kabbalah—but above all he wandered from community to community in Podolia (western Ukraine) and Walachia (southern Romania), meeting ordinary people and making disciples. Everyone who met him was impressed by his humility. He appears to have received the title 'Baal Shem' in recognition of his success as a healer, bringing about miraculous cures through the use of God's name. Sometimes he organized impromptu retreats where he preached through informal conversations and humble lessons.

Though the common folk who were his principal audience knew enough Hebrew to say their prayers, they were largely uneducated, and the scholars produced by the rigorous and elitist Talmudic academies of eastern Europe had little to offer them. By contrast, the Baal Shem Tov proclaimed a simple and accessible message: that the

best way of communing with God was through humility, good deeds, prayer (ecstatic and otherwise), and joy. He preached the importance of mutual help, forbearance, and other virtues. He himself became the model for a Hasidic leader, a **zaddik** ('righteous person'). He sought the presence of God in everyday life.

Like *aggadah*, Hasidic stories seek to teach a moral lesson, often through the most mundane aspects of ordinary life—in one famous Hasidic tale, a student learns about the divine from watching his master tie his shoes. The stories of Hasidic masters often bear a striking resemblance to the paradoxical exercise of a Zen *koan*.

The Besht's pietistic Judaism became very popular in eighteenth-century eastern Europe. The name given to its adherents, Hasidim ('pious ones'), recalls the virtue of *hesed*, steadfast loyalty or faithfulness owed to the other by each party to the biblical covenant relationship. (In the second

Jewish Communities in Africa and Asia

Beyond the eastern Mediterranean world were a number of Jewish communities that had little or no contact with the currents of either Sephardic or Ashkenazic Jewry. In Ethiopia, the people derogatorily referred to as Falashas ('exiles') survived in isolated villages until modern times. According to their own tradition, they are descendants of the retinue that accompanied the legendary Arabian Queen of Sheba on her visit to King Solomon in the tenth century BCE; but their ancestors are now generally thought to have been Ethiopians who were converted to a form of Judaism practised in southern Arabia in the period shortly before the emergence of Islam. In 1975, the Israeli rabbinate ruled that the Habashim (Ethiopians) qualified for entry into Israel, and since then most have moved there.

Iran has had a historically and intellectually significant Jewish minority since early Islamic times; the ninth-century Karaite Benjamin of Nehavand, for instance, was an Iranian Jew. Since the establishment of modern Israel, Iranian Jews have seen their status become politically more and more sensitive, and some have been wrongly prosecuted as suspected Israeli sympathizers. But this was not salient in 1948, when Iran maintained relations with Israel. The Iranian suspicion of Jews has developed only since the fundamentalist imams came to power in the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Still farther east, India has two historic Jewish communities, one on the southwestern Malabar Coast, in Cochin, and the other on the western coast just south of Mumbai. Their origins are uncertain, but both claim to be related to the legendary ten lost tribes of northern Israel, which were scattered by the Assyrian invasion of 722 BCE. The Cochin community, documented by medieval European and Arab travellers, was probably augmented by some of the Spanish Jews expelled from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century. Its members assimilated to Indian life, and even developed the rudiments of a caste structure in their own community. Soon after Indian and Israeli independence (in 1947 and 1948, respectively), most of one subgroup left for Israel, but the other remained in India because the Indian government would not allow them to take their financial assets out of the country.

The community known as the Bene Israel ('children of Israel'), near Mumbai, appears to have had only a sketchy acquaintance with Jewish tradition until the eighteenth century, when it came into contact with Jews in Cochin and Baghdad, along with some Presbyterian missionaries from Scotland. The Bene Israel wear Indian dress and do not condemn their Hindu neighbours' polytheism. Until recently, they did not allow widows to remarry and thought that the Bible prohibited the eating of beef.

More recently, a tribal people living in northeastern India have also identified themselves as descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel—an idea that may have originated in the teachings of Christian missionaries. Quite recently, they invited the Orthodox rabbinate of Israel to convert them and took the name Bnei Menashe as their ethnic identity. Whatever their origins, they are now considered fully Jewish, and many of them are moving to Israel.

Finally, the presence of a small community of Jews in the central Chinese city of Kaifeng has been traced to traders from Yemen, Iraq, or Iran who settled in coastal cities in the Middle Ages. In the past, the Kaifeng community appears to have had Torah scrolls, and until a couple of generations ago its members still avoided pork. But the last rabbi died two hundred years ago, and the Communist government's repression of religion accelerated the community's decline in the twentieth century. Even so, approximately 200 families claimed some recollection of their Jewish ancestry in the 1980s, and some Jewish visitors have taken them books about Judaism in the hope of reviving their religious life.

century BCE, Jewish loyalists in the Maccabean uprising were also called 'Hasidim', but their movement was entirely separate from the Baal Shem Tov's.) After the death of the Besht, the Hasidim were led by his disciple Rabbi Ber of Mezeritz, also known as the Maggid ('preacher').

The theory of leadership under the *zaddikim* was first articulated during the Maggid's life. All the subsequent leaders of Hasidism after the Baal Shem Tov were titled Zaddik and were entitled to pass their authority on to their children. Thus a *zaddik* (or 'Rebbe' in **Yiddish**) was both the holder of a hereditary office and a kind of intermediary between the people and God. The popular appeal of Hasidism provoked the opposition of the rabbinic community, characterized by the Hasidim as Mitnagdim ('opponents'). One of the things the Mitnagdim found most suspect about the Hasidim was that they deified their leaders.

When Hasidism spread to Latvia and Lithuania, the centre of rabbinic rationalism in eastern Europe, it changed character again. In those communities Talmudic training was quite common, and, for Hasidism to attract adherents there, it needed Talmudic credentials. It gained those credentials in the person of a respected Belorussian Talmudist named Shneur Zalman (1746–1812), the author of a philosophic tractate known as *Tania* ('As It Is Taught'). Zalman's membership marked a synthesis of Talmudic Judaism with Hasidic piety. His followers were known by the acronym Habad (or Chabad), representing the names of three *spherot*: Hokhma ('wisdom'), Bina ('insight'), and Da'at ('knowledge'). Because the centre of the movement was the Belorussian town of Lubavitch, they are often called Lubavitcher Hasidim.

Today the followers of Shneur Zalman's descendants, who took the name Schneerson, are centred in Brooklyn in New York City. They proselytize other Jews and for that purpose have opened

one of the targets in the terrorist attacks on that city in November 2008.) To the untrained eye, the Lubavitcher Hasidim may resemble strict Orthodox Jews, but technically they are not Orthodox in either their beliefs or their practices. Since 1994, when Rabbi Menachem Schneerson died without a male heir, the Lubavitcher have been without a leader, which has stimulated some messianic expectations. They are only one of several Hasidic sects, each founded by another early disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, that have often been in sharp competition with one another as well as the Orthodox mainstream, which remains quite hostile to most of the Hasidic program.

✿ PRACTICE

Prayer

The rabbis took a lively interest in the subject of prayer. Among the commandments given in *Deuteronomy* 6: 4–9 is one calling on Israel to speak of the Lord's laws morning and evening. This the rabbis interpreted as a reference to prayer. Accordingly, Jews are instructed to pray before they go to sleep and when they rise.

Public prayer follows the order of the Temple service, which was performed three times a day. Therefore Jews typically pray in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening. Although these prayers may be private, they are quite often performed in a synagogue, preferably with a *minyan* (a group of ten) as a quorum. Jews also pray privately upon retiring and rising. For convenience a number of the daily prayers can be grouped and performed together.

Additional prayers are acceptable any time and virtually anywhere, as long as the setting does not detract from the dignity of the prayer or make it

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Today the followers of Shneur Zalman's descendants, who took the name Schneerson, are centred in Brooklyn in New York City. They proselytize other Jews and for that purpose have opened branches in many countries, including Israel and India. (The Lubavitcher House in Mumbai was

one of the targets in the terrorist attacks on that city in November 2008.) To the untrained eye, the Lubavitcher Hasidim may resemble strict Orthodox Jews, but technically they are not Orthodox in either their beliefs or their practices. Since 1994, when Rabbi Menachem Schneerson died without a male heir, the Lubavitcher have been without a leader, which has stimulated some messianic expectations. They are only one of several Hasidic sects, each founded by another early disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, that have often been in sharp competition with one another as well as the Orthodox mainstream, which remains quite hostile to most of the Hasidic program.

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Additional prayers are acceptable any time and virtually anywhere, as long as the setting does not detract from the dignity of the prayer or make it impossible to achieve the proper state of mind or spiritual intention (*kavvanah*).

The Shema

In Jewish liturgy, the following passage (from Deuteronomy 6: 4–9) is called the Shema, after its first word in the Hebrew. It is the watchword of Israel's faith, repeated 'morning and night'.

Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words which I command you this day are to be kept in your heart. You shall repeat them to your children, speaking of them indoors and outdoors, morning and night. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and wear them as signs upon your forehead; you shall write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

The Content of Prayer

To avoid any risk of idolatry or polytheism, the rabbis forbade Jews to pray to angels or intermediary beings of any kind. In keeping with their emphasis on ethics, the rabbis also insisted that prayer be subject to the same ethical standards that govern every other aspect of Jewish life. Thus it is permissible to pray for God's special favour, but only if the advantage sought would not adversely affect anyone else. To pray for something that might cause harm to others is strictly forbidden. Seeing a plume of smoke in the distance, for instance, a Jew is not allowed to pray that the building on fire not be his own house, because that would amount to praying that the fire be in someone else's house. Jews are not allowed even to pray for the fall of their enemies. By contrast, prayer for the benefit of others is strongly encouraged.

The particular kinds of prayers offered and the specific texts of the prayers have developed over millennia of Jewish history. Although the prayer books of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews differ somewhat, on the whole prayer is something that unites Jews the world over. By tradition, the language of prayer is Hebrew, and many prayers end with the word *amen*, meaning 'so be it'.

intention, or *kavvanah*, can be defined in a variety of ways. One of the characteristics of the Hasidic movement is the special attention it pays to *kavvanah* in prayer.

Items Worn in Prayer

To help foster the appropriate *kavvanah* for prayer and other ceremonial functions, many Jewish men wear special garments and other articles of dress called for in the Bible. Among those articles is the *tallith* or prayer shawl: a rectangular piece of material with long fringes at the corners as specified by biblical law (*Numbers* 15: 37–41). Based on a standard outer garment from Hellenistic times, the *tallith* today is usually striped in blue and white (though other colours are also possible) and comes in two sizes. Some Jews prefer a very large one that covers the shoulders as well as the neck and can be drawn over the head, like a kind of hood, when the wearer is concentrating in prayer. Others prefer a short *tallith* that is simply draped around the shoulders like a scarf.

Since the Bible calls for the *tallith* to be worn at all times, very Orthodox Jews wear a short 'half *tallith*'—a kind of undershirt with the fringes of the longer garment—under their street clothes. At

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The Content of Prayer

To avoid any risk of idolatry or polytheism, the rabbis forbade Jews to pray to angels or intermediary beings of any kind. In keeping with their emphasis on ethics, the rabbis also insisted that prayer be subject to the same ethical standards that govern every other aspect of Jewish life. Thus it is permissible to pray for God's special favour, but only if the advantage sought would not adversely affect anyone else. To pray for something that might cause harm to others is strictly forbidden. Seeing a plume of smoke in the distance, for instance, a Jew is not allowed to pray that the building on fire not be his own house, because that would amount to praying that the fire be in someone else's house. Jews are not allowed even to pray for the fall of their enemies. By contrast, prayer for the benefit of others is strongly encouraged.

The particular kinds of prayers offered and the specific texts of the prayers have developed over millennia of Jewish history. Although the prayer books of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews differ somewhat, on the whole prayer is something that unites Jews the world over. By tradition, the language of prayer is Hebrew, and many prayers end with the word *amen*, meaning 'so be it'.

Kavvanah

Rabbinic law requires that every action, including prayer, be rightly intentioned towards God. This

intention, or *kavvanah*, can be defined in a variety of ways. One of the characteristics of the Hasidic movement is the special attention it pays to *kavvanah* in prayer.

Items Worn in Prayer

To help foster the appropriate *kavvanah* for prayer and other ceremonial functions, many Jewish men wear special garments and other articles of dress called for in the Bible. Among those articles is the *tallith* or prayer shawl: a rectangular piece of material with long fringes at the corners as specified by biblical law (*Numbers* 15: 37–41). Based on a standard outer garment from Hellenistic times, the *tallith* today is usually striped in blue and white (though other colours are also possible) and comes in two sizes. Some Jews prefer a very large one that covers the shoulders as well as the neck and can be drawn over the head, like a kind of hood, when the wearer is concentrating in prayer. Others prefer a short *tallith* that is simply draped around the shoulders like a scarf.

Since the Bible calls for the *tallith* to be worn at all times, very Orthodox Jews wear a short 'half *tallith*'—a kind of undershirt with the fringes of the longer garment—under their street clothes. At the other extreme, most Reform Jews have given up the prayer shawl altogether.

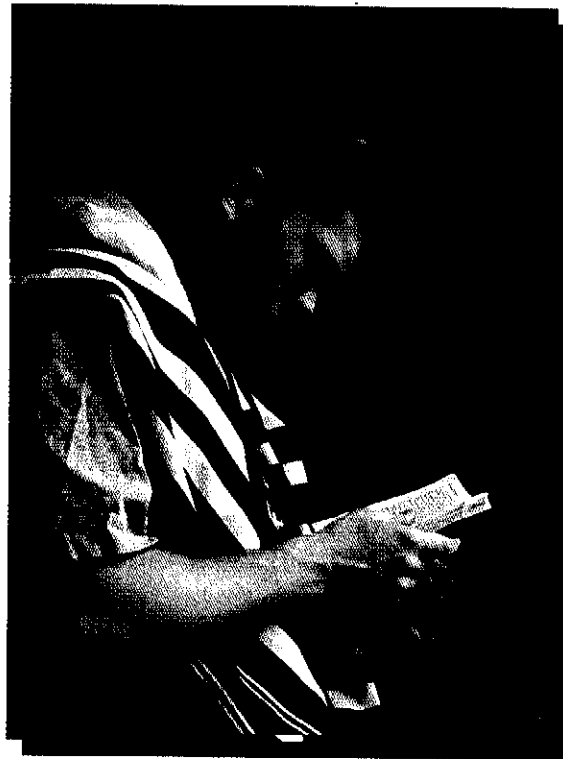
Another common item of dress for Jewish males is a skullcap (*kippah* in Hebrew, *yarmulke*

in Yiddish), worn in observance of the injunction to cover the head when praying. Since every day brings many occasions that call for a prayer or blessing, more traditional Jews simply wear a head covering all the time. The history of this practice is unclear, though it may have evolved from the use of the *tallith* to veil the head in the presence of divinity. The earliest evidence for use of the *kippah* comes from the Middle Ages, when it was considerably larger than it is today. Devout Orthodox Jews wear a *kippah* at all times, even under ordinary hats or baseball caps, while most Reform Jews do not wear them at all, even in prayer. But a fair number of modern Jewish males, particularly students, now choose to wear skullcaps as a public statement of their Jewish identity. In the spirit of equality, some Jewish women have begun to wear both the *tallith* and the *kippah* as well.

Finally, *tefillin* are traditional prayer garb worn by men on weekdays. They are two small black boxes that hold passages from scripture. Long leather straps attached to the boxes are used to tie one box to the forehead and the other to the upper arm, facing the heart. The usual English term for *tefillin* is 'phylacteries', from a Greek term meaning 'protective charm', but this is actually misleading, since the boxes have no protective value. Rather, they are intended to fulfill literally the commandment in *Deuteronomy* 6 to bind the words of Torah 'upon the hand and as frontlets between the eyes'. Pious Jews put on *tefillin* for morning prayers every day except Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. *Tefillin* dating to the time of the Bar Cochba revolt (132–5) have been found in the caves of Judea, so we know that they were already in use in the first century. Orthodox Jews use them regularly as an aid to prayer, in order to concentrate the mind and fulfill the commandment. Reform Jews have suspended their use almost entirely, however.

Blessings

The early rabbis believed that all the gifts God provides should be acknowledged. To that end they designed a formula for expressing gratitude that



A young man at prayer wearing *tefillin* (AFP/Getty Images).

begins 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe' and then continues with words of thanks appropriate to the occasion. Wine and bread in particular are blessed whenever they are offered; it seems likely that the Christian Eucharist grew out of this custom, as reinterpreted by Jesus. After the meal, a longer formula of praise is customarily chanted or—if a sufficient number of people have eaten together—sung by all present.

Jewish prayer is both a comfort and an expression of joy in God's creation. Some Jews feel that God responds to prayer; others do not, but still feel that the regular sequence of prayers throughout the day is beneficial in concentrating attention on the ethical goals of life.

Sabbath Observance

The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and continues until sunset on Saturday. On Friday night many Jews attend synagogue services: Orthodox

Sabbath Blessings for Reading the Torah Scroll

The following prayers and responses are almost always spoken in Hebrew. Although the word translated here as 'Blessed' (Baruch) is sometimes rendered as 'Praised', 'blessing' is an appropriate response for humans to make in response to God's continuous bounty. Note that it is the fact that the Torah was given to the Jews that makes them the 'chosen' people.

Before reading from the Torah:

Reader: Blessed be the Lord, the source of blessing.

Congregation: Blessed be the Lord, the source of blessing, throughout all time.

Reader: Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has chosen us from among all peoples by giving us His Torah. Blessed are You, Lord who gives the Torah.

After reading from the Torah:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has given us the Torah of Truth, planting within us eternal life. Blessed are You, Lord who gives the Torah.

Before reading from the Prophets:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has chosen the good prophets, and maintained them, whose utterances were truthful. Blessed are You, Lord, who chose the Torah, Moses His servant, Israel His people and prophets of truth and righteousness.

After reading from the Prophets:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Rock of all ages, righteous in all generations, steadfast God, who speaks and the deed is accomplished, who decrees and fulfils, whose every word is truth and righteousness. Faithful are you, who is the Lord our God, and faithful are all Your words. None of your words will ever be found empty, for You are a faithful and merciful God and King. Blessed are You, Lord, who are the faithful God in all your promises.

Show compassion for Zion, the habitation of our lives. And bring hope speedily in our days to the humbled soul. Blessed are You, Lord who brings joy to Zion by her descendants.

Bring us joy, Lord our God, through Your prophet Elijah and the kingdom of the House of David Your anointed. May Elijah come soon, to gladden our hearts. May no usurper sit on David's throne, and may no other inherit his glory. For by Your holy name you have promised that his light shall never be extinguished. Blessed are you, Lord shield of David.

For the Torah, for worship, for the prophets, and for this Sabbath day which you have given us for holiness and rest, for dignity and splendour—for everything—do we thank You and bless You. May Your name be blessed continually for every living creature. Blessed are You, Lord who sanctifies the Sabbath.

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services tend to be short and close to sunset, but most Conservative and Reform congregations now favour a longer service in the evening, after the Sabbath dinner.

Even though it occurs every week, the Sabbath is undoubtedly the most sacred day in the Jewish calendar, consecrated by special prayers. Observant Jews cease all work by sundown on Friday

that they can experience to the fullest the special quiet of a day devoted entirely to song, prayer, and contemplation.

In the grand six-day creation story in *Genesis*, the Sabbath is built into the order of the universe. This is frequently mentioned in the special prayers for the Sabbath. It serves as a remembrance of the Garden of Eden and a foretaste of the return to Eden that is expected to come with the messiah. The Sabbath is also a primary sign of the enduring covenant with God:

The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed (*Exodus* 31: 16–17; also Sabbath prayerbook).

Jews return home early on Friday afternoon so that they can have all the preparations for the Sabbath meal—cooking, cleaning, lighting candles—completed before sundown. The meal itself is typically a special one, served on the best dishes, and accompanied by special prayers celebrating God's work of creation, psalms, hymns, and special Sabbath songs, as well as all the customary blessings of bread and wine. Still, the Sabbath meal is really just an augmented form of an ordinary Jewish meal, for Jews do not eat any food without praising and thanking God. Virtually every action of the day is sanctified by Jewish law. Every action is subject to moral analysis and every religious rite is an object lesson in morality. Denied a country of their own, with their own great religious monuments, the Jewish people instead built up a system that sanctified everyday life and sought the presence of God in it.

On Saturday, synagogue services continue through the morning. The afternoon is devoted to learning or quiet contemplation. Then many Jews return to synagogue in the evening to mark the

end of the Sabbath with a boundary-marking observance called Havdalah. Celebrated with wine, a braided candle, and a spice box symbolizing the sweetness of the Sabbath, the Havdalah ('distinction' between the Sabbath and weekdays) service also blesses the promise of the new week and includes a reference to the prophet Elijah, presumably in the hope that he will appear and mark the arrival of the messianic age before the next Sabbath.

Sabbath Restrictions

Orthodox Jews will do nothing on the Sabbath that could be defined as work—from kindling a fire or cooking food to driving a car or playing tennis. In strict observance, they may not even turn on a light or push an elevator button because using electricity falls into the category of building a fire; hence in many modern high-rises and hospitals the elevators are programmed to stop at every floor continuously on the Sabbath. The Orthodox, who seek to live within walking distance of the synagogue, spend the entire Sabbath there. Reform and Conservative Jews also attend their synagogues, but they may drive there, and some will even do secular work, go to the beach, or enjoy a game of golf after services finish.

The ancient rabbis emphasized participation in religious rituals for all Jews, not just religious specialists, which had the effect of strengthening Jewish resistance to acculturation in the Roman and Persian worlds. At the same time, however, they worked to make the rules more livable. One hardship in the rabbinic calendar arose whenever a holiday and the Sabbath fell on consecutive days, making it necessary to prepare food too far in advance. In such cases, a legal fiction called an *eruv* ('mixing', perhaps of the sacred with the profane) was used to change the time frame involved. The *eruv tavshilin*, or 'cooking *eruv*', legitimizes cooking on the festival day preceding a Sabbath by symbolically starting the preparation of the Sabbath food before the festival. This is done with a conscious intent, a declaration, a prayer, and a symbolic act

of food preparation and can be performed either individually or by the rabbi on behalf of the entire community.

Similarly, the spatial frame of Sabbath activity can be extended. Ancient Sabbath laws forbade carrying anything between 'private' and 'public' domains or walking farther than 2,000 cubits (0.8 kilometres or 0.55 miles) from one's house. An *eruv hatzerot* ('*eruv* of courtyards') links various private areas together so that the prohibition on 'public areas' does not apply. This can be accomplished in various ways, but today it is common for an Orthodox Jewish community to use a wire strung around the tops of several telephone poles to encircle the community. Symbolically, this turns the area enclosed by the wire into a walled city, in which carrying is permitted. In New York, Toronto, and elsewhere in North America, many of the large Jewish communities have erected *eruvs* around entire cities or neighbourhoods; one in Washington incorporates the White House. As a result, observant Jews may walk farther than the biblical Sabbath journey of 2,000 cubits while carrying articles, strolling with their babies, or otherwise enjoying the peace of the Sabbath.

Dietary Laws

Jewish dietary laws address three subjects in particular: (1) permitted and prohibited foods, (2) food preparation, and (3) the foods that may be combined in the same meal.

Meat that is not **kosher** (ritually acceptable) may not be eaten under any circumstances. In addition to pork, all land animals and birds that prey on others are excluded, though all fish with fins and scales are permitted. Land animals must have a split hoof and chew the cud; thus beef is a typical Jewish meat dish. In North America chicken has become the classic Sabbath evening meal; kosher chicken soup with matzoh balls (*knaydelach*, 'dumplings', in Yiddish) is a quintessential Ashkenazic dish, popularly known as Jewish penicillin for its abilities to soothe a cold. Chopped chicken liver is another classic Ashkenazic dish.

Since sea creatures must have both scales and fins, sharks, shellfish, invertebrates, and a variety of lower marine forms are all prohibited. North American Jews, most of whom share north European culinary traditions, eat many smoked fish, including lox (smoked salmon), herring, sable, or whitefish, often with cream cheese on a bagel, traditionally for Sunday brunch. Gefilte ('filled') fish is an Ashkenazic dish of ground carp and pike that was originally cooked with vegetables and then stuffed back into the fish skin, but now more often takes the form of dumplings. Sephardic Jews from Spain or Italy, or those from Arab, Iranian, or North African backgrounds, eat various kosher variations on foods from those regions, such as stuffed pitas, falafel (fried chickpea balls), and tabbouleh (bulgur salad).

Kosher slaughtering practice follows the prohibition against eating the blood of animals or birds. Thus every piece of meat is thoroughly drained, washed, and salted to remove any trace of blood. Animals must be slaughtered in such a way that they die immediately without feeling pain. In practice, this means one quick stroke from a very sharp knife with no nicks in it. The animal may not be stunned or hurt before the slaughter, contrary to the common practice in non-kosher slaughterhouses. The carcass is then inspected for a variety of impairments, any of which can disqualify the animal. The meat must also be cut in specific ways so as to remove several parts that are not considered fit for Jewish consumption.

Most contemporary North American slaughterhouses and government regulators do not know or concern themselves with these special practices. Therefore observant Jews consider produce from these sources, as well as meat from animals hunted for sport, to be inhumane and *treif* ('carion') or non-kosher. Some of the specially trained butchers called *shokhets*, familiar with all the laws, are rabbis themselves, but even they are supervised by rabbis who periodically inspect the premises and seek to confirm that the employees have led observant and moral lives.

At Passover, a time of 'spring cleaning' and fresh beginnings, Jews add to the normal preparation regulations the requirement that food be free of yeast or leaven. All the equipment used to prepare Passover food must be either new or thoroughly cleaned.

Many Jews observe elaborate rules designed to prevent any combination of milk with meat. These rules are based on the biblical injunction not to eat a kid boiled in its mother's milk (*Exodus* 23: 19). In order not to transgress this rule inadvertently, observant Jews who have eaten one of those foods will wait a specified period of time before consuming the other. Observant Jews will never eat a cheeseburger, and after a meat meal they will not have ice cream for dessert, or put milk in their tea or coffee. There are even special requirements for the production of cheese, which is usually made from milk or cream curdled with rennet from a cow's stomach. Many Jews keep two complete sets of dishes, silverware, pots and pans, and cooking utensils for use with milk and with meat. Some also insist on two different dishwashers, sinks, and ovens as well. European Jews classify foods using terms in Yiddish: *flaischich* (meat), *milkich* (dairy), *pareve* or *parve* (neither), and *kosher lepaysach* (kosher for Passover).

Today many younger Jews are simplifying their lives by choosing vegetarianism. Some Jews maintain a kosher home and so are able to entertain observant guests, but eat non-kosher food outside. This practice, of course, does not satisfy the requirements of Jewish law but it is a surprisingly popular compromise. Reform Jews vary widely: most do not observe dietary laws at all, some observe them symbolically by abstaining from shellfish and pork only, and a few observe them in full. Conservative Jews usually try to observe the rabbinic ordinances and will eat in a restaurant only if they can find fish on the menu. since ordinary restaurants do not nor-

The care with which different people observe the dietary laws is taken as an indicator of their piety, and the distinctions between degrees of care can be quite subtle. Because the laws are so comprehensive, observant Jews need to know exactly what is in commercially packaged foods, particularly where dairy or meat products are concerned. Increasingly, the North American food industry has co-operated, in part because many foodstuffs need little or no special preparation to pass the kosher inspections. There are two large supervisory bodies whose insignia (a small K or U in a circle) can be found on an enormous variety of foodstuffs—even on such unlikely products as Easter eggs and chocolate Santa Clauses. One of the marks of the acceptance of Jews in North American life is the widespread availability of kosher food not only in supermarkets but on airlines, trains, and university campuses. For many people, Jews included, the kosher laws have become the most obvious marker of Jewishness and the principal way of distinguishing Jews from others.

Synagogue Service

The chanting in the synagogue reaches a crescendo with the reading of the Torah scrolls, which is traditionally done on Mondays, Thursdays, the Sabbath (Saturday), and special holidays. The synagogue service today, as in antiquity, is conducted largely by laypersons rather than the rabbi, who is not a priest; however, in North America, Reform and Conservative rabbis have taken on the role of a minister, leading parts of the service and usually giving the weekly sermon.

The basic order of formal service follows the order established at the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, which consisted of song, musical accompaniment, and sacrifice. With the destruction of the Temple the practice of animal sacrifice came to an end, but the other elements of the Temple service

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An early example of the rabbinical project to transfer Temple activities into the purview of the

synagogue can be seen in the work of Yochanan ben Zakkai (c. 30–90 CE), who issued numerous rulings on matters such as when and where the *shofar* (ram's horn) should be blown. In this way the rabbis appointed the synagogue the successor to the Temple as the pre-eminent place for Jewish prayer. Before the publication of prayerbooks, the order of the service was fluid within the limits established by the rabbis' rulings, but these were probably based on what was already common practice in the community. People recited largely from memory and leaders were free to insert their own personal prayers or texts.

In time, services came to include professional singers called *hazanim*, or 'cantors', who continue to be part of Jewish worship. Today they lead the congregation by singing lines from the prayer books—in effect, marking the progress of the service—while members of the congregation pray quietly (but audibly) at their own rate. The Reform movement adopted a more formal European model in which prayers were recited in unison, but some congregations are now returning to the more traditional Jewish style.

There are three basic chanting traditions: Yeminite (by far the oldest), German, and Spanish. Different cantillations (special marks inserted in printed versions of the Torah to indicate the correct melody to chant) are used for recitations from the Torah and the *Prophets*, as well the solemn holidays of **Rosh Hashanah** and **Yom Kippur**.

A Bar Mitzvah ceremony in any denomination will normally include some chanting. Therefore candidates are given a basic introduction to the chant notations, though many of them simply memorize their parts from recordings. **Cantors** are specially trained in the subject, however. In North America today, modern synagogues usually include a large social hall for the celebrations that follow events such as Bar Mitzvah ceremonies and weddings, as well as a library and classrooms that reflect their traditional role as houses of study. Many also offer temporary shelter for the homeless, especially in winter.

The Annual Festival Cycle

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar. Each month starts with the new moon, which is a time for special prayers, and consequently the fourteenth or fifteenth of every month coincides with the full moon. Since twelve lunar months add up to only 354 days, Jews have decided that the lunar calendar must be kept in phase with the solar year through the addition of a leap month, Adar Sheni ('second Adar'), in a fixed schedule of seven years out of every nineteen. The rabbis used to base the calendar on direct observation, taking testimony from witnesses who had seen the new moon. Today astronomical calculations are used and festival dates and leap months are projected far in advance.

Years are now counted from the creation of the universe, which the rabbis calculated by adding up the life spans and time spans mentioned in the biblical text; thus 2010 CE is the year 5771 by Jewish reckoning. Each year begins with a new moon in the fall, usually close to the equinox, following the rules for lunar–solar correction. The holiday is called Rosh Hashanah, 'the head of the year' and inaugurates the 'High Holidays', a time of special meditation and examination of one's moral behaviour during the previous year.

Most of the holidays observed today have their roots in the ancient agricultural and pastoral festivals of the ancient Hebrews, but even in biblical times they were associated with specific events in the historical narrative of the people Israel. Eventually rabbinical interpretation gave them new dimensions of symbolic meaning. The fall holidays were associated with contrition in the Bible and this association has been strengthened since they have been celebrated according to the rabbinic liturgy. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur especially have become spiritual holidays of repentance and contemplation.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) are celebrated at the time of

autumn harvest and were traditionally marked by the blowing of the ram's horn, or *shofar*. In rabbinic observance, the *shofar* allegorically wakes up the congregation from its moral slumber with a reminder to consider carefully the deeds of the past year. On the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the year and a strict fast day, the liturgy uses the imagery of the shepherd counting his sheep or the commander counting his troops to describe the yearly judgment of people by God.

Sukkoth

At Sukkoth (the festival of booths or 'tabernacles', derived from the Greek word for a temporary dwelling), which concludes the autumn harvest, many Jews still build a *sukkah*, a small temporary shelter, outside the house and sleep (or at least eat) in it for some or all of the eight-day festival. No doubt this tradition originated in the ancient farmers' practice of camping out in the fields to protect the ripening crops. In the biblical interpretation, however, it recalls the Israelites' reliance on temporary shelters during their migration from Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

Hanukkah

Unlike the other festivals, Hanukkah did not originate in the practices of the ancient Hebrews. It dates from the Hellenistic period, specifically the mid-second century BCE, when the Maccabean Jews drove the Seleucids out of Jerusalem. It celebrates the purification and rededication (*hanukkah*) of the Temple after its profanation by the Seleucids.

The fact that there is no treatise on Hanukkah in the *Mishnah* suggests that the rabbis did not consider it a major part of the Hebrew spiritual tradition. Nevertheless, they managed to give it a spiritual dimension by turning it into a celebration of deliverance through divine intervention: the miraculous eight-day duration of one day's quantity of oil is symbolized by the Hanukkah menorah. As a post-biblical holiday, Hanukkah was long considered of minor importance, but in the

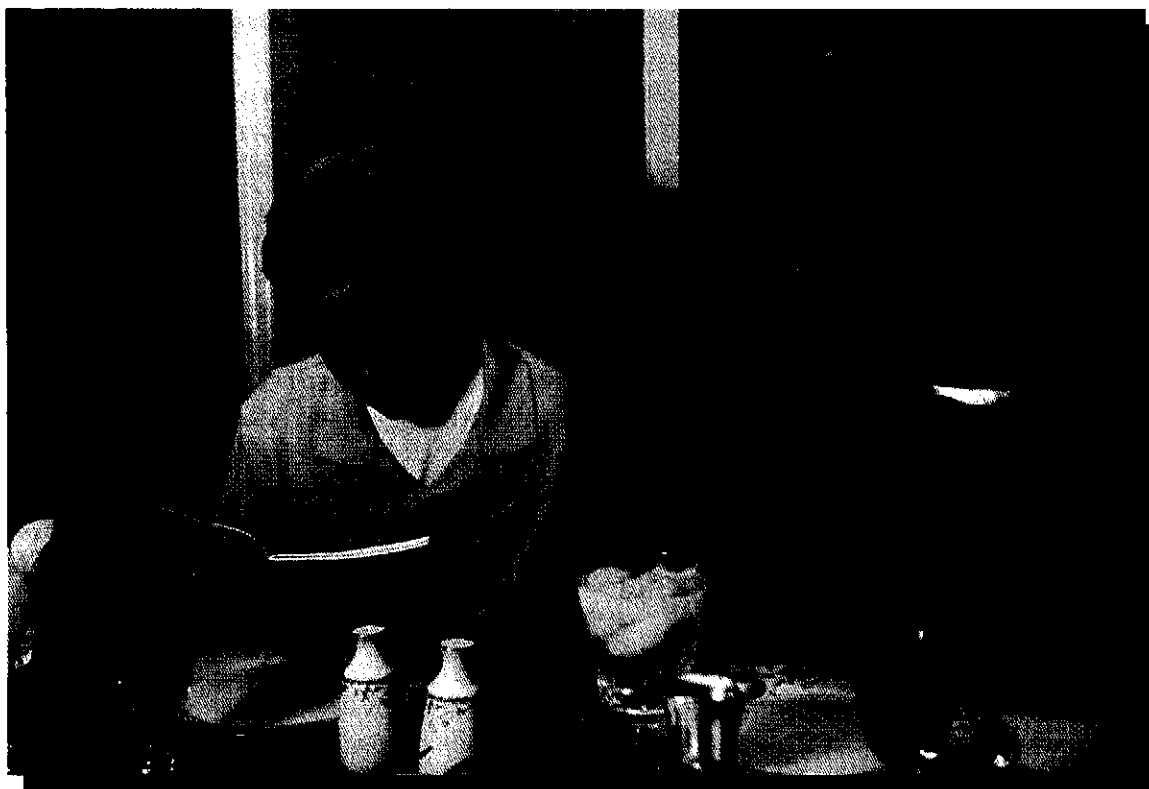
twentieth century North American Jews began to pay more attention to it because of its proximity to Christmas. Modern Israelis also celebrate Hanukkah with gusto as a reminder of an earlier victory in the struggle for national liberation from foreign oppression.

Purim

Purim, another minor festival, usually falls in March. Its narrative, taken from the book of *Esther*, recalls the deliverance of the Jews in Persia from destruction at the hands of an evil Persian official named Haman. Speculation on its antecedents focuses on the resemblances between the names Esther and Mordechai and the names of the Babylonian divinities Ishtar and Marduk. The Purim celebrations are reminiscent of the North American Hallowe'en, with costume parties, merrymaking, and gifts of candy. It can also be compared with Mardi Gras, with its late winter date and its indulgent partying.

Passover (Pesach)

The major festival of Passover comes in the spring, the season of agricultural rebirth and renewal. It ritually enacts 'spring cleaning' in the home. All the food to be eaten during the eight days of the festival, for instance, must be prepared on newly cleaned equipment. But its real significance is spiritual, for it commemorates the Exodus—the critical moment when Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and towards freedom in the promised land. Like the Sabbath, Passover is closely associated with the home, and is usually celebrated with a family meal called a **seder**. The Passover liturgy, called the **Haggadah** ('narrative'), recounts the story, explains the significance of the symbols associated with it—most notably the unleavened bread eaten in memory of the Israelites' hasty departure, when they had to leave before the bread they were making could be baked—and emphasizes the participation of all Jews, past and present, in that experience of divine deliverance.



A brother and sister read from the Haggadah at the Passover seder (Ira Block/National Geographic/Getty Images).

Shavuoth

Shavuoth ('weeks'), in late spring, can be traced to the barley harvest, and its observance came to be associated with the eating of dairy foods, perhaps because spring is also calving time. In rabbinic Judaism it celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Coming fifty days after the first day of Passover, it is also known as Pentecost (from the Greek meaning 'fiftieth') and is associated by Christians with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Ninth of Ab

The Ninth of Ab means literally the ninth day of the month of Ab. It is a fast day observed in late summer in memory of the destruction of the first and second Temples. The fast continues from sunset to sunset, and includes the avoidance of all luxurious display. Because leather was a luxury item in rabbinic times, Orthodox Jews today avoid

wearing leather shoes on the Ninth of Ab; sometimes an entire congregation will attend the synagogue in canvas running shoes.

Life-Cycle Rituals

Common to all the world's religious traditions is the custom of marking certain transitional moments in a person's life—'rites of passage'—such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. The Jewish tradition is no exception. Since this chapter began with the coming-of-age ceremony, the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, and will conclude with the marriage ceremony, we will focus here on the rituals surrounding birth and death.

Birth

The most characteristic ritual concerned with birth is circumcision: the removal of the male foreskin. As a rule, this is done on the eighth day

From the Passover Haggadah Liturgy

This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come to our Passover seder. Now we are here; next year may we be in Jerusalem. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free!

of life, unless the infant's health is endangered. Normally, the procedure is carried out by a ritual circumciser called a *mohel*, hired for the occasion. These days, the *mohel* may also be a physician, but there are still many 'paramedical' people who have been thoroughly trained in the rabbinic procedure.

Jewish circumcision usually takes place in the home, in the presence of family members who have come together to celebrate the birth. The liturgy emphasizes the parents' commitment to giving the child a proper Jewish education, to prepare him for learning, doing good deeds, marriage, and a life within the community. Because the ritual is in the hands of the individual family, sometimes significant family traditions are included within it. In most cases there is no need for a rabbi, but many families still ask one to attend, to make sure that the ceremony is legally acceptable.

After any birth, male or female, the family normally goes to synagogue and is awarded an *aliyah* ('going up'), one of the honours surrounding the reading of the Torah. The parents recite the blessing over the Torah passage that is to be read; then the rabbi or the service leader asks for special blessings on the child and announces the child's name. Since there are normally seven *aliyoth* each week, there are often several announcements of baby namings, engagements, and so on; sometimes they also include requests for prayers for the sick. In this way, the entire community is kept abreast of the important events in the lives of individual families. These customs, which were largely eliminated by Reform Judaism, are now

being reinstated even there because they mean so much to the community.

Marriage

Marriage is universally praised in Judaism. Though some great scholars may be forgiven for remaining single, everyone is encouraged to marry and raise children. Sexual relations within the sanctified bounds of marriage are encouraged both for procreation and for the pleasure they bring to the couple; sexual fulfillment is generally included among the responsibilities that a man owes his wife. Thus Jewish marriages are occasions for great happiness within a context of religious seriousness and sanctity. A marriage can be celebrated almost anywhere: in a home, a synagogue, a hotel, a catering establishment. A rabbi is present in a legal capacity, to make sure that the marriage contract is properly prepared and the proper procedures are followed. Official witnesses to the legal proceedings must also be present. (The same is true for a Jewish divorce.) Although rabbinic specifications are rarely followed exactly in North America today, Orthodox couples will observe Orthodox marriage customs as well as the legal formalities required by the state.

Divorce

Divorce is mentioned several times in the Bible (most explicitly in *Deuteronomy* 24: 1-4) and Judaism accepts it as a legal institution. As in Islam, the grounds for divorce are theoretically quite wide, but in practice divorce is frowned on and hence relatively rare.

Even today, Jewish divorce rates in the Americas are considerably lower than those of the non-Jewish majorities. A divorce must be instigated by the husband, though in some cases a court will ask a husband to divorce his wife upon her request. On the other hand, no woman can be divorced against her will; mutual consent is required. The divorce decree, called a *get* in Hebrew, is presented to the wife by the husband. It regularly includes a financial settlement and provisions for the return of property that rightfully belongs to the wife.

Death

Jews believe that death should be faced resolutely and without illusion. There are several strange and interesting customs, and not a few superstitions, that accompany the bereavement process, but all are directed towards allowing the bereaved to come to terms with the separation from their departed loved ones. Funeral activities can even be

conducted in the home, although that is extremely rare in North America today.

The liturgy for the funeral is meant to console the grieving family. It explicitly states that God will resurrect the righteous, that they will shine as the brightness of the firmament, and that they will be bound up in the bonds of life. But even at these moments, Judaism is not specific about how God will fulfill the promise that the dead will live again.

In the Hellenistic period, the remains of the deceased were first placed in sarcophagi (stone coffins) kept above the floor in tombs; approximately a year later, after the flesh had decomposed, the bones were ceremonially interred by the family. This system, known as secondary burial, was standard among gentiles as well as Jews at the time, and was reflected in the Christian account of the tomb where Jesus' body was placed immediately after his death. In modern Judaism, the remains are always placed in a plain coffin, without

The Kaddish Prayer

Reader:

Hallowed and enchaned may He be throughout the world of His own creation. May He cause His sovereignty soon to be accepted, during our life and the life of all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

Congregation and Reader:

May He be praised throughout all time.

Reader:

Glorified and celebrated, lauded and worshiped, acclaimed and honoured, extolled and exalted may the Holy One be, praised beyond all song and psalm, beyond all tributes that mortals can utter. And let us say: Amen.

May the prayers and praise of the whole House of Israel be accepted by our Father in Heaven. And let us say: Amen.

Let there be abundant peace from Heaven, with life's goodness for us and for all the people Israel. And let us say: Amen.

He who brings peace to His universe will bring peace to us and to all the people Israel. And let us say: Amen.

embalming, and interred as soon as possible after the death, though no funerals are held on the Sabbath, that is, between Friday sundown and Saturday sundown. *

When a death occurs, community members band together to cook and otherwise help the bereaved family however they can, freeing them from mundane responsibilities so that they can 'sit Shiva' (from the Hebrew for 'seven'). For seven days after the burial, the family will receive visitors who wish to pay their respects. Mirrors are covered, and family members dress in sombre colours and either rip their clothing or wear a short black ribbon with a cut in it to symbolize ripping. The children, traditionally the sons in particular, honour the memory of the dead by reciting a special prayer called the Kaddish every day for a year. Recitation of the Kaddish has been associated with grieving, but the prayer itself never mentions death or dying and only praises God for his many daily miracles.

Religious Education

Though women were often literate in the vernacular language, traditionally education was confined to men until the modern period. Traditional religious education began at about the age of five, and in many places the new students would be displayed to the community in a ceremonial parade. Young children began by learning the Hebrew alphabet, sometimes with the help of cakes baked in the shape of the various letters. The first subject of study during the school years was the Bible, followed by the medieval Bible commentators Abraham ibn Ezra and Rashi.

Advanced education took place in a *yeshiva*, where the young men worked with acknowledged Talmudic masters to understand the difficult text of the *Talmud* and studied a variety of commentaries, starting with Rashi's commentary on the plain meaning of the text. Primary among the other commentaries are the *Tosafot*, the 'additions' that appear in the outside margins of the printed

Talmudic texts, though other commentaries were published separately.

Most contemporary North American Jewish families are less interested in the *Talmud* than traditional Jews but still want their children to learn about Jewish literature, history, customs, and ceremonies, and often Hebrew as well. Most do not adopt the traditional curriculum described above. Rather, children usually attend after-school classes three or even four days a week. In more traditional families boys are also taught the rudiments of Jewish law, including not only its content but its sophisticated methods of reasoning. Today, even in very conservative Jewish households, women receive a similar education. Families who belong to synagogues usually consider the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah ceremony a kind of 'elementary school' graduation from the special religious training the child has undergone.

In North America, a significant minority of Jewish parents look to private Jewish day schools to provide an even more thorough religious training. In these cases, the children normally spend about half the day studying Jewish subjects and the other half studying the regular curriculum. Many young people continue their Jewish education after the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Reform Judaism has instituted a ceremony known as confirmation, usually at the completion of grade nine. Jewish confirmation is another graduation ceremony, held at the late spring holiday of Shavuoth (Pentecost), which roughly coincides with the end of the school year in North America. Shavuoth is especially appropriate because it is associated with the giving of the Torah. But every graduation is also a commencement, as educators in the United States are fond of reminding their audiences, and a young Jew's obligation to learn is lifelong. In Orthodox Jewish homes, the children are supposed to continue studying Jewish texts throughout their lives, working with their parents on Sabbaths and holidays just as they do with their peers during the week.



Pupils at a Hebrew school in Newton, Massachusetts (Michele McDonald/Boston Globe/Landov).

Members of other religious communities admire and sometimes envy the central role that study has in the Jewish tradition. It is pursued in the home; for example, it is not unusual for the leader of a Passover seder to open some aspects of the ceremony for debate and discussion, encouraging the various participants to bring all their acumen to bear on resolving wide-ranging issues suggested by the liturgy. Study is pursued in the community; most North American synagogues sponsor high schools, where issues of Jewish life are discussed in an informal way, usually a few times a week. Extensive continuing and adult education programs cover elementary Hebrew, the prayer book, the musical chant, philosophy, mysticism, and current books of special interest to Jews. The complexity of the rabbinic tradition provides endless food for thought.

Conversion to Judaism

In the time of the Babylonian Exile, and as a direct consequence of it, Hebrew communities began to establish themselves here and there among other populations. Until then only those living in the Hebrew kingdoms would have been considered Israelites; now it was possible to be a Jew while living elsewhere. At the same time, the possibility arose that people of various other origins might wish to be considered Jews.

Whether others could belong became a subject of debate in the postexilic Judean community. The biblical book of *Ruth*, discussed earlier, takes an inclusivist position. And the book of *Jonah* argues that God cares about the people of Nineveh in Assyria. Scholars remain divided, however, concerning how much energy Jews actually devoted to proselytizing in the Persian, Greek, and Roman

worlds. We know that conversions took place because there are reports of them and because rabbinic law contains a very detailed set of procedures for accepting converts. Still, there is no evidence of any active mission to convert gentiles.

Perhaps it was the need to live as members of a minority, as guests in foreign nations, that dampened the Jewish urge to proselytize, since any effort to convert the children of the host country would surely have been seen as hostile. Indeed, proselytizing activity in medieval Christian and Islamic lands was punishable by death. In such a climate, active missionary work was necessarily curtailed. Nevertheless, Jews since ancient times have been willing to receive converts who truly desire to join the Jewish people.

Rabbinic Judaism came to specify three conditions for conversion: male circumcision, ritual immersion (or baptism), and acceptance of the commandments. There are many stories of conversion in the rabbinic literature. The rabbis took care to ensure that candidates for conversion were sincere, for insincerity would endanger the community. They verified that converts were willing to cast their lot with this unfortunate and endangered people. With a 'yes' answer to all questions, one was accepted. Usually conversions involved a period of training in the specific responsibilities of an adult Jew.

When a male student is ready, the ceremony of circumcision is performed. Even a man who has already been circumcised must undergo a symbolic shedding of blood. Perhaps the difficulties surrounding this operation have contributed to the fact that conversion has been more common among women than men.

The next requirement is baptism by total bodily immersion. Orthodox Jews, who still rely on ritual immersion for a variety of purifying purposes, build special facilities for the purpose. Men and women visit these baths (*mikvehs*) separately at specific times during the week. When converts begin their new life, the first ritual immersion they

undergo symbolizes the purification required for the transition from gentile to Jewish life. Every *mikveh* must contain a certain amount of 'living water' from streams or rainfall.

When a convert enters a *mikveh*, a court of three rabbis is usually convened at the site. The rabbis question the candidate, from behind a curtain if she is a woman. They ask about the convert's willingness to perform Jewish rites and responsibilities. They also allow the convert to demonstrate the knowledge he or she has learned from instruction. Then the candidate submerges him- or herself completely in the *mikveh* several times and on coming up is a Jew in every respect. Converts are named as the son or daughter of Abraham and are given complete Jewish names, indistinguishable from those of other Jews.

Once one has joined the people Israel—whether by birth or by conversion—it is impossible to leave. Jews may reject Judaism or convert to a different faith, but they can never change their Jewish identity.

✿ INTERACTION AND ADAPTATION

Judaism and Modernity

Both the Sabbatian movement and Hasidism may be seen as reform movements within Judaism that emerged in the early modern era. Another early move towards reform may be seen in the writings of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Living in the Netherlands, where Jews had achieved a relatively free and equal life under the tolerant Dutch regime, Spinoza challenged many of the traditional tenets of both Judaism and Christianity.

A more far-reaching desire to reform Judaism, however, developed as Jews came into closer contact with European life. For Jews, the real