



INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM

Modern Rabbinical Judaism: Its practices, beliefs, culture and divisions

Instructor: Mottel Baleston

INTRODUCTION AND COURSE PARAMETERS

1 Corinthians 9:19-22

Romans 11:1-29

I. What is Judaism

A. Religion

B. Racial Group

C. Who is a Jew?

1. Rabbinic

a. Orthodox

b. Conservative

c. Reform

2. Biblical

II. ETHNIC GROUPS & GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

A. Sephardic

B. Ashkenaz

C. Yemenite

D. Smaller Groups

1. Ethiopia – Falasha – Beta Israel

2. India - Bene Israel

E. Myth / False Teaching of “Ten Lost Tribes”

III. LANGUAGES PARTICULAR TO JEWISH USE

A. Hebrew

B. Ladino

C. Yiddish

D. Judeo-Arabic

IV. CREEDAL STATEMENTS & LITERATURE

A. Torah

1. Written Law

2. Oral Law

B. Talmud - Mishna/Gemara

C. Shulchan Aruch

D. Maimonides – Mishneh Torah and 13 Principles of Faith

E. Siddur

F. Responsa

V. RELIGIOUS DIVISIONS

A. Orthodox

1. Claim to be the only true form of Judaism

2. Determines Career, Marriage, Neighborhood - All

3. Divisions of Orthodox Judaism

a. Traditional (Misnagdim/Opponents)

1) Formal / Yeshiva University

2) “Knit Kippa” – Carlebach – Israeli Settlers

b. Modern Orthodox

c. Hasidic

- 1) Origin & practices
- 2) Mysticism - Kabbalah
- 3) Influence of “the Rebbe”
- 4) Hasidic Divisions / Dynasties

a) Lubavitch / Chabad

- Menachem Schneerson “THE REBBE” 1902-94
- Crown Heights, Brooklyn
- Outreach to assimilated Jews

b) Bobov and Borough Park, Brooklyn

c) Satmar and Williamsburgh, Brooklyn

- opposition to Zionism
- opposition to the State of Israel

d) Belz, Vishnitz, Breslov, Ger & dozens more

4. Recent trends within Orthodox Judaism

B. Conservative / Masorti

1. The influence of the movement
2. Recent trends

C. Reform / Liberal

1. Wide appeal of the movement
2. Recent trends
3. Reconstructionist Judaism / Mordechai Kaplan
4. Secular / Humanistic Judaism

VI. BASIC BELIEFS (see chart)

VII. CUISINE

- A. Regional variations
- B. Kashrut/Kosher laws

VIII. SYNAGOGUE LIFE & FUNCTION

- A. Synagogue Services
- B. Religious Objects

- 1. Torah
- 2. Tfillin
- 3. Shofar
- 4. Tallit
- 5. Mezzuzah

IX. HOLY DAYS

- A. Shabbat
- B. Biblical – Seven Holy Days of Leviticus 23
- C. Rabbinical
 - 1. Hanukah
 - 2. Purim
 - 3. Modern
 - a. Yom HaAtzmaut
 - b. Yom HaShoah

X. LIFE CYCLE

- A. Birth
- B. Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- C. Marriage
- D. Death

RESOURCES:

Official AMERICAN Websites of Major Jewish Movements & other major websites

The Orthodox Union – www.OU.org

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism – www.USCJ.org

Union for Reform Judaism – www.URJ.org

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation – www.JRF.org

www.JewishVirtualLibrary.org Well done & comprehensive. Among the many resources here is the online version of “Myths & Facts”, a guide to the Arab-Israel Conflict.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR JUDAISM

Brown, Michael ANSWERING JEWISH OBJECTIONS. Baker Books

Dimont, Max. JEWES, GOD AND HISTORY. A very readable complete overview

Fruchtenbaum, Arnold, G. HEBREW CHRISTIANITY: ITS THEOLOGY, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY. Short but authoritative.

Gilbert, Martin. ATLAS OF JEWISH HISTORY. Excellent maps, a must for your library.

Kollatch, Alfred. THE JEWISH BOOK OF WHY. An introduction to Rabbinical Judaism.

Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph. JEWISH LITERACY. Highly acclaimed book of 346 short chapters, each one a “to the point” explanation of some crucial portion of Jewish history and practice.

ADDENDUM

Maimonides: The 13 principles of faith.

1. The existence of God
2. God's unity
3. God's spirituality and incorporeality
4. God's eternity
5. God alone should be the object of worship
6. Revelation through God's prophets
7. The preeminence of Moses among the prophets
8. God's law given on Mount Sinai
9. The immutability of the Torah as God's Law
10. God's foreknowledge of human actions
11. Reward of good and retribution of evil
12. The coming of the Jewish Messiah
13. The resurrection of the dead

**A COMMENTARY ON CONSERVATIVE (AND REFORM) JUDAISM
BY ORTHODOX RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

The Conservative Lie

By Rabbi Avi Shafran - As Published In Moment Magazine, February 2001

Sincere and dedicated Conservative Jews need to face an uncomfortable fact: Their movement is a failure.

To make so sweeping a statement is painful to me. I have met and been impressed with too many non-Orthodox Jews to be able to cavalierly attack the philosophy of the movement with which they affiliate. Nor do I harbor the illusion that all is well and perfect in my own Orthodox camp. Every Jew, moreover, is equally precious to me. But despite that—indeed, because of it—I feel a responsibility to be blunt, despite my pain. I hope I will be forgiven by Conservative readers for my forthrightness, but their movement is effectively defunct.

To be sure, the endowments and dedications continue unabated. Construction projects, rabbinic programs, and Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) chairs are still well funded. But the essential goal of the entire Conservative experiment—to inspire Jews to Jewish observance—not only remains unrealized, but recedes with each passing year.

That failure has not resulted from any lack of effort. The Conservative rabbinic leadership has done all it could to set less demanding standards for Jewish religious observance, and has produced reams of paper purporting to justify them. It has established pulpits, produced rabbis, and attracted members.

But even the movement's radically relaxed standards remain virtually ignored by the vast majority of Jews who identify as Conservative. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, a mere 29 percent of Conservative congregants buy only kosher meat. A mere 15 percent consider themselves Sabbath observant (even by Conservative standards).

A study of Conservative congregants conducted by the Jewish Theological Seminary's Jack Wertheimer in 1996 confirmed that the movement was utterly failing to meet its most minimal goals. A majority of young Conservative-affiliated Jews polled said that it was "all right for Jews to marry people of other faiths." And nearly three-quarters of Conservative Jews said that they consider a Jew to be anyone raised Jewish, even if his or her mother was a gentile—the official Reform position, rejected by Conservative leaders as nonhalachic. Tellingly, only about half of Conservative bar and bat mitzvah receptions were kosher, by any standard.

There are two explanations for Conservatism's striking failure: (1) The movement is not honest, and (2) it is superfluous.

Conservative leaders are dishonest because they purport to accept and respect halachah (Jewish religious law). United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism executive vice president Rabbi Jerome Epstein, for example, proclaims, "We regard halachah as binding," adding, admirably, that "to be committed to halachah means to live by its values and details even when we don't like the rules or find the regulations inconvenient."

Admirable but outrageous. The facts tell a very different story.

Take the ordination of women. The decision to ordain women was made not by halachic scholars but by a commission composed largely of laypeople. Realizing that the Talmud faculty of JTS—those most knowledgeable about the pertinent halachic sources—opposed ordaining women, the then head of the seminary, Gerson Cohen, opted to let a commission make the decision.

Only one of the commission's 14 seats was assigned to a Talmud faculty member. In a work published by JTS, Dr. Cohen is quoted as having confided to friends his intent "to ram the commission's report down the faculty's throats."

More recently, Rabbi Daniel H. Gordis, acting dean of the University of Judaism's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, admitted that "the Conservative Movement allows its laity to set its religious agenda." That approach may be pragmatic, even democratic, but it is not even arguably halachic.

Only half of JTS rabbinical students polled in the 1980s, moreover, said they consider "living as a halachic Jew" to be an "extremely important" aspect of their lives as Conservative rabbis.

Halachah receives lip service, at best, from the Conservative leadership. In late 1997, for instance, the dean of JTS's rabbinical school, facing the wrath of outraged students, reassessed a letter he had written proscribing premarital and homosexual sex. It had been, Rabbi William H. Lebeau insisted after the uproar, only a "personal statement, not a matter of policy."

Conservative leaders' attitudes toward same-sex relationships are a particularly timely and telling window into the movement's true feelings about halachah. There is an undeniable halachic prohibition—in the case of men, an explicit verse in the Torah—against homosexual activity. Officially, the movement is still on record as prohibiting it; however, Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly, has admitted that "there has always been a group within the RA that had been consistently agitating for a change in halachah" concerning how practicing homosexuals should be regarded. "Changing" a verse in the Torah is about as blatant an abandonment of halachah as can be imagined.

Indeed, the process of changing halachah on this issue has already begun. For starters, the movement's 1996 decision affirming the Torah's prohibition of male homosexual activity contained a striking dissent rejecting the Torah's characterization of such male activity as an abomination. The movement considers such dissenting opinions to be legitimate options for Conservative Jews.

Some Conservative rabbis already are officiating at same-sex ceremonies without jeopardizing their standing in the Rabbinical Assembly, according to Rabbi Meyers. Conservative Rabbi Phil Graubart has even insisted that he is "committed to halachic creativity regarding homosexuality precisely because I'm in the Conservative movement." The former rector of the movement's University of Judaism in Los Angeles, Rabbi Elliot Dorf, has openly endorsed the blessing of "gay unions." He predicts that as time goes on, "there will be an increasing number of Conservative rabbis who will look forward to affirming same-sex unions." All evidence considered, this does not seem an unreasonable expectation.

The bottom line is clear: At the same time that Conservative leaders are waving the banner of halachah, they are effectively ignoring it. Whether the issue is sexuality or Shabbat, the Conservative claim of fealty to traditional Jewish religious law seems little more than a figurative fig leaf, strategically positioned to prevent the exposure of the Conservative movement as nothing more than a timid version of Reform.

Halachah evolves, Conservative spokesmen protest; and in a certain sense it does. There is often a plurality of halachic opinions in a given case, they insist; and indeed there is. But for those who accept Judaism's millennia-old conviction that the Torah and the key to its understanding, the Oral Law, are of divine origin, there are clear rules (part of the Oral Law itself) for applying halachic principles to new situations, and ample precedents delineating when legitimate halachic latitude crosses the line into dissembling. And objectivity is the engine of the halachic process.

The law of probability leads us to expect that there will be times when the halachic result will be more lenient than one might expect, and other times when it will be more demanding. Tellingly, though, and practically without exception, Conservative "reinterpretations" of Jewish law have entailed permitting something previously forbidden. Whether the subject was driving a car on the Sabbath, the introduction of "egalitarian"

services, or the Biblical prohibition of certain marriages, the “reevaluations” have virtually all, amazingly, resulted in new permissions. That is a clear sign not of objectivity but of agenda, of a drastically limited interest in what the Torah wants from us and a strong resolve to use it as a mere tool to promote personal beliefs. Whatever merit such an approach might have to some, it is diametric to what Jewish tradition considers the true Jewish response: As our ancestors declared at Sinai, “Na’aseh v’nishma, We will do and (then endeavor to) hear.”

Honest Conservative intellectuals admit the movement’s disconnect from halachah. Conservative rabbi and respected scholar David Feldman put it succinctly: “Knowing how valiantly the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Conservative Movement have striven to hold halachah as our guide, we mourn all the more the surrender of that effort.” Rabbi J. Simcha Roth, a current member of the Halachah Committee of the Conservative movement’s Israeli affiliate, Masorti, has referred to its American counterpart’s acceptance of Jews driving vehicles on the Sabbath as “untenable sub specie halachah.” At the 1980 convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, influential Conservative rabbi Harold Kushner put it even more bluntly: “Is the Conservative movement halachic?” he asked. “It obviously is not.”

As early as 1955, historian Marshall Sklare declared that Conservative “rabbis now recognize that they are not making [halachic] decisions or writing responsa but merely taking a poll of their membership.” In short, while proclaiming fealty to halachah, the movement’s leaders have brazenly trampled the very concept.

To explain why the movement is not only dishonest but superfluous requires some historical perspective. The Conservative movement was created not, as many assume, as a liberal alternative to Orthodoxy but as a conservative (its name, after all) reaction to Reform. In the 1800s leaders of the Historical School—the forerunner of what became the Conservative movement—minced no words in protesting the radical attitudes of some elements in the Reform movement. When the latter declared the laws of kashrut (which they derided as “kitchen Judaism”) obsolete, and when special services were held on Sunday, leading Historical School rabbis vehemently objected. The adoption in 1885 of the Reform movement’s first official manifesto, the Pittsburgh Platform, was the real impetus behind the birth of the Conservative movement.

Why did the founders of the Conservative movement discount Orthodoxy as an effective means of countering the innovations of Reform? Why did they feel the need to create what they hoped would be, in effect, a new Orthodoxy?

The answer is simple: They expected the “old” Orthodoxy—European-style Orthodox Judaism—to vanish. As a result of its stubborn refusal to tailor Jewish practice to the mores of the surrounding culture, Orthodoxy would simply boil away like so much overheated chicken soup in the American melting pot. Orthodoxy simply lacked the stamina, the assumption went, to confront the scientific, social, and technological challenges looming on the horizon of the 20th century.

The Conservative movement thus envisioned itself as a safety net—designed to break the fall of Jews committed to Jewish tradition when Orthodoxy inevitably vanished—and as a means of conserving Jewish religious practice in the face of the threat posed by the Reform movement.

This is not the place to detail the strengths of contemporary Orthodoxy. Obviously it has not vanished. Despite the many challenges and problems it faces, Orthodoxy is strong and growing, both in numbers and in intensity of observance. While no more than ten percent of the American Jewish population is Orthodox, eighty percent of Jewish day-school students are Orthodox. And considerable numbers of Jews who were not raised Orthodox have become part of the Orthodox community, including scientists, academics, and other highly accomplished intelligentsia. Halachic observance in the Orthodox community is stronger than at any time in American history.

Those Jews in the Conservative movement who, regrettably, have no interest in halachah will increasingly come to see the Reform movement as an attractive and logical option. Those Jews are, in effect, already

Reform Jews. The Reform movement provides the license they seek, without any discomfiting talk of religious law. And in light of the Reform movement's recent reconsideration of its historical rejection of traditional Jewish praxis, a Reform synagogue will become an even more comfortable place for Conservative Jews unconcerned with halachah to hang their kippot.

That is only half the reason Conservative Judaism is superfluous. The other half relates to Conservative Jews who do have regard for Jewish law. For those—and I believe there are many—who are honestly dedicated to halachah and Jewish religious tradition, the challenge will be to face the manifest fact that their affiliation is at undeniable and hopeless odds with their ideals. They may well decide to become part of the only Jewish community that actually does espouse their ideals: the Orthodox.

To be sure, the challenge will be a formidable one. After years, in many cases lifetimes, of sitting with their spouses and children during services, of hearing women leading prayers and chanting from the Torah, of driving to shul on Shabbat, halachically committed Conservative Jews will not find it easy to enter what will surely seem a somewhat alien world. Its unfamiliarity, however, is only a reflection of just how far the Conservative movement has drifted from genuine halachic observance over the decades.

The open-minded and determined, however, will soon come to understand that the truly Jewish time for sitting with one's family is—as it has been among Jews for millennia—Friday nights at the Shabbat table, and that the Jewish time for driving and other acts prohibited on the Sabbath is from Saturday night until Friday afternoon.

Having the courage to recognize misjudgements is a laudable and inherently Jewish trait; the Talmud sees it in the very root of the name Judah from which the word Jew derives. Thus, many are the once-Conservative Jews who have blazed a trail of return to a halachic lifestyle. Others will surely follow.

I pray that my own world will, in turn, meet its own challenge: to be ready to warmly welcome all Jews into our shuls and into our lives. Here, too, there is a well-blazed trail—and much cause for optimism.

Because Ahavat Yisrael, love for fellow Jews, is not only a sublime concept and an underpinning of the Jewish people, it is part of the halachah—something Jews committed to their religious tradition know is God's desire.

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The Three Branches Of Judaism

The three divisions mentioned in this chart are not denominations. They are movements, with classifications according to cultural and doctrinal formulas. Within each branch you will find adherents with varying degrees of observance. Many Jewish people formulate their own informal version of Judaism, and do not fit strictly into any one of these categories. Nevertheless, the chart below should be helpful in outlining basic divisions.

CATEGORY	ORTHODOX	CONSERVATIVE	REFORM
HISTORY	Orthodoxy dates back to the Talmud (2 nd century). It was the only form of Jewish practice prior to the 18 th century and the emergence of Reform Judaism. Orthodoxy today seeks to preserve traditional Judaism.	Conservative Judaism emerged in 19 th century Germany as a reaction to the extreme assimilationist tendencies of Reform Judaism. It tried to be a middle ground, attempting to maintain basic traditions while adapting to modern life.	Reform Judaism emerged following the emancipation from ghetto life in the late 18 th century. It sought to modernize Judaism and thus stem the tide of assimilation threatening German Jewry.
OTHER TERMS	Traditional or Torah Judaism	Masorti, Historical Judaism	Liberal or Progressive Judaism
FORMATIVE PERSONALITIES	Samson Raphael Hirsch Moses Sofer Bernard Revel	Solomon Schechter Louis Ginzberg Zachariah Frankel Isaac Leeser	Moses Mendelsohn Isaac Mayer Wise Abraham Geiger Samuel Holdheim
U.S. MEMBERS (2001 - ABOUT 40% OF JEWS NOT AFFILIATED)	21% Gain of 7% since 1990	33% Loss of 7% since 1990	39% Gain of 5% since 1990
VIEW OF SCRIPTURE	Torah is truth, and man must have faith in its essential, revealed character. A true Jew believes in revelation and the divine origin of the oral and written Torah.	The Bible is the word of God and man. It is not inspired in the traditional sense, but rather dynamically inspired. Revelation is an ongoing process in the evolutionary sense.	Revelation is a continuous process. Torah is a human document preserving the history, culture, legends and hope of a people. It is valuable for deriving moral and ethical insights.
VIEW OF God	God is spirit rather than form. He is a personal God: omnipotent,	The concept of God is non-dogmatic and flexible. There is less atheism in	Allows a varied interpretation of the "God concept" with wide latitude for

	omniscient, omnipresent, eternal and compassionate.	Conservative Judaism than in Reform, but most often God is considered impersonal and ineffable.	naturalists, mystics, & religious humanists. It holds: "The truth is that we do not know the truth."
VIEW OF MAN	Man is morally neutral, with good and evil inclinations. He can overcome his evil bent and be perfected by his own efforts in observance of the Law.	This group tends toward the Reform view, though it is not as likely to espouse humanism. Perfectibility can come through enlightenment. Man is "in partnership" with God.	Man's nature is basically good. Through education, encouragement and evolution he can actualize the potential already existing within him. Mankind may be God.
VIEW OF SIN	Orthodox Jews do not believe in "original sin." Rather, one commits sin by breaking the commandments of the Law.	Conservative Jews do not believe in a sin nature. The individual can sin in moral or social actions.	Reform Jews do not believe in "original sin." Sin is reinterpreted as the ills of society.
VIEW OF SALVATION	Repentance (belief in God's mercy), prayer, and obedience to the Law are necessary for salvation	Conservative Jews tend toward the Reform view, but include the necessity of maintaining Jewish identity.	Salvation is obtained through the betterment of self and society.
VIEW OF THE TRADITION OF THE LAW	The Law is the essence of Judaism. It is authoritative and gives structure and meaning to life. The life of total dedication to * <i>Halakhah</i> leads to a nearness to God. *Authoritative rabbinic judgments	Adaptation to contemporary situations is inevitable. The demands of morality are absolute. The specific laws are relative.	The law is an evolving, ever-dynamic religious code that adapts to every age. They maintain, "If religious observances clash with the just demands of civilized society, then they must be dropped."
VIEW OF MESSIAH	The Messiah is a personal, superhuman being who is not divine. He will restore the Jewish kingdom and extend his righteous rule over	While there may be a Messiah in the future, Judaism should work toward a Messianic Age of peace and justice.	Instead of belief in Messiah as a person or divine being, they favor the concept of a Utopian age toward which mankind is progressing.

	the earth. He will execute judgment and right all wrongs.		
VIEW OF LIFE AFTER DEATH	There will be a physical resurrection. The righteous will exist forever with God in the Garden of Eden. The unrighteous will suffer, but disagreement exists over their ultimate destiny.	Conservative Jews tend toward the Reform view.	Generally, Reform Judaism has no concept of personal life after death. They say a person lives on in their accomplishments or in the minds of others.
ABORTION	Abortion is the taking of a life. Pro-life candidates are usually supported.	Abortion is not an appropriate form of birth control, but access to abortion is a basic right.	Unrestricted access to abortion on demand, even in final trimester, is strongly supported.
WOMENS ROLE	Women's role is primarily in the home, no proactive participation in Synagogue affairs.	Increasing trend toward an egalitarian stance, female Rabbis becoming more common.	Totally egalitarian, in recent years numbers of female Rabbis have equaled males.
HOMOSEXUALITY	The Torah condemns.	Increasing trend toward acceptance, in 2008 the first openly homosexual Rabbis obtained pulpits	Full acceptance and support of the homosexual agenda
DISTINCTIVES IN SYNAGOGUE WORSHIP	The synagogue is a house of prayer & study. Social aspects are incidental. All prayers are recited in Hebrew. Men and women sit separately. The officiants face the same direction as the congregants.	The synagogue is viewed as the basic institution of Jewish life. Alterations listed under Reform are found to a lesser degree in Conservative worship.	Synagogue is known as a " Temple ." The service has been modernized and abbreviated. English, as well as Hebrew, is used. Men and women sit together. Reform temples use choirs and organs in their worship services.
ORGANIZATIONS	Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in America (1898); National Council of Young Israel (1912); Rabbinical Council of America,	Rabbinical Assembly (1900); United Synagogue of America (1913).	Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873); Central Conference of American Rabbis (1889).

	Inc. (1923, 1936)		
SCHOOLS OR SEMINARIES IN U.S.	Yeshiva University (New York City).	Jewish Theological Seminary of America (NYC); University of Judaism (Los Angeles).	Hebrew Union College (campuses in Cincinnati , New York , Los Angeles).
PERIODICALS	<i>Jewish Life; Jewish Forum; Tradition; Intercom</i>	<i>Conservative Judaism</i>	Journal of Reformed Judaism; Reform Judaism
WEBSITE	www.OU.org	www.USCJ.org	www.URJ.org
BOOKS TO READ	A. Cohen, <i>Everyman's Talmud</i> (1932); 5. Schechter, <i>Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology</i> (1936).	<i>Conservative Judaism</i> (1945); Mordecai Waxman (editor), <i>Tradition and Change</i> (1958); Robert Gordis, M. Sklare, <i>Conservative Judaism</i> (1965).	S. B. Freehof, <i>Reform Jewish Practice and its Rabbinic Background</i> (1963); J. Wolf (editor), <i>Rediscovering Judaism</i> (1965).

Sources: Encyclopedia Judaica, Official movement websites, Jews for Jesus Newsletter.
 Edited, expanded & updated by Mottel Baleston