Introduction

Jewish life has diverse faces. The six-pointed star of David appears in synagogue design, on the flag of the State of Israel, and as a pendant on a necklace. Some aspects of Judaism seem closed to the outside world, such as the practices of ultraorthodox Jews garbed in black. Others may receive extensive exposure; in recent years the president of the United States has participated in lighting Hanukkah candles. Judaism has its own calendar—its New Year is in the fall—and its own life-cycle markers—the circumcision of boys at eight days after birth and the celebration of bat and bar mitzvah for girls and boys at ages twelve and thirteen, respectively. Within those frameworks, contemporary Jews from different parts of the world express their religion in many forms.

Today's diversity must be viewed against the background of major demographic shifts that took place in recent centuries. At around 1700, there were about two million Jews in the world. Half of them were Ashkenazim in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, and the other half were Sephardim, in Southeastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East and, in small numbers, in Northwest Europe and the Americas. By the end of the nineteenth century, the total number of Jews had increased dramatically, to about twelve million. Much of the increase was in the Ashkenazi world, particularly in Eastern Europe. The number of Sephardim was still around one million.

Transformations that shaped today's portrait of the Jewish people were already taking place. Most dramatic was the mass migration of Eastern European Jews to the West—notably to the United States. At

the same period, Zionists, seeking to create a new kind of Jewish society, began immigrating to Palestine. Half a century later, Nazi atrocities reduced world Jewry from about sixteen million to ten million. In 1948, three years after the end of World War II, the State of Israel was founded, and its Jewish population grew from about six hundred thousand to about five million.

Israel's emergence as a sovereign state made it a lodestone of immigration in the second half of the twentieth century as well as a stimulant to Jewish migration elsewhere. Within three and a half years of its establishment, Israel took in over three hundred thousand survivors of Nazi Europe and a roughly similar number of Jews from Arab countries, Turkey, and Iran. In the next three decades, the Jewish communities in the Middle East dwindled to very small numbers, with Israel being the main, but not the only, destination of migration. From the late 1960s on, migration from the Soviet Union was selectively allowed, and after 1989 it continued in larger numbers from the states of the former Soviet Union. Now in Israel, there is a rough fifty-fifty demographic division of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. The only other country with similar demographics is France, where North African Jews are in the majority. Today Sephardim constitute less then 20 percent of world Jewry (and intermarriage between Sephardim and Ashkenazim is frequent), but the cultural importance of Sephardic communities outweighs their numerical value.

Along with these demographic changes were far-reaching social, political, and cultural developments. Until just slightly more than two hundred years ago, in Europe and the Middle East, Jews were institutionally separate from the rest of society. They interacted with Christians and Muslims in the work world, but their social and religious lives were distinct from those of the majority. Jews were often distinguishable by the clothes they wore and by their language or dialect and typically were concentrated in certain areas of a city or town. There they were usually free to follow their laws and customs, as long as their practices did not impinge on the sensibilities of the dominant religion. Although important variations existed within and among Jewish communities, all saw their lives as based on the Torah: the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, and subsequent rabbinic interpretations. These books provided guidance in ritual, communal, and even commercial matters. Communal leaders had the power to enforce social and religious norms and could proclaim a ban against a recalcitrant individual who continually challenged accepted norms. Such a person had nowhere to go, short of converting to Christianity or Islam. This control over the lives of

Jews stemmed from the autonomy granted communal leaders by the ruling power, whether Christian or Muslim. This situation changed radically with emancipation.

Emancipation was the legal and political shift in European countries that allowed Jews, in principle, to be members of civil society. Emancipation took place for the first time in France in 1791, thereafter spreading unevenly to other parts of Europe. Jews could fully become French citizens, for example, while keeping their religion as a matter of personal conscience. When Jews later became members of German society, they sometimes referred to themselves as Germans "of the Mosaic persuasion."

Jews began to integrate themselves into their surroundings. They learned the national languages of their countries and gained the education necessary to enter the growing middle class, which was built on industrializing economies. This integration, however, seemed to demand that they abandon practices associated with segregated Jewish living. In addition, in late-eighteenth-century Europe, ideological changes within Jewish society undermined traditional attachments to a religious way of life. Jews were encouraged to be active participants in the wider non-Jewish culture. They began to make their way in society as individuals rather than as members of a group. Yet these changes did not result in a full disestablishment of organized Jewish life. France, and other countries that emancipated the Jews in the course of the nineteenth century, created various forms of state-supported Jewish communal structures. The power that these organizations had over Jews, however, was restricted to matters of religion and was no longer all encompassing. At the same time, Jews who wished to hold on to religious and communal forms began to do so voluntarily.

This new situation, in which Jews saw themselves as members of different national communities, had a far-reaching impact both on their sense of identity and on their approach to religion. Jews sought ways in which they could maintain religious values, anchored in ancient texts and in practice over the centuries, while at the same time identifying with the societies of which they were now a part. This dilemma gave rise to various directions of religious change. The Reform movement altered the prayer service, declared that many ritual rules were no longer binding, and stressed the universal values of Judaism. Advocates of Reform Judaism also based their beliefs and practices on new intellectual understandings. Viewing Judaism historically, they claimed that it had always evolved and that the current changes were justified by social and ideological circumstances.

Later, in reaction to this trend, some Reform leaders claimed that change was happening too quickly. They wanted to retain Hebrew in the synagogue liturgy, for example, while the more radical reformers felt that Jews should pray in the languages they now spoke. In addition, there were conservative reactions on the part of many ordinary Jews. A small group of reformers in the mid-nineteenth century sought to abolish circumcision, citing both health reasons and the desire to move beyond outdated rituals, but most Jews would not relinquish a practice that since antiquity had been an intimate sign of belonging to the Jewish people. Eventually an approach called Positive Historical Judaism emerged, whose supporters accepted the basic notion that religious change was necessary but believed it should take place more gradually and with continued respect for rabbinic tradition. Both these approaches became important in the United States, in the shape of Reform Judaism early in the mid-nineteenth century and of Conservative Judaism around the turn of the twentieth.

The original growth of these movements should be understood in sociopolitical terms as well as religious ones. They were most prominent in Germany, which was not a unified nation-state in the first part of the nineteenth century and therefore provided an open field for competing religious ideologies and their organizational expressions. In that setting, Jews who opposed the various trends of the Reform movement, identifying themselves as Orthodox Jews, were also able to organize and promote their own ideology, claiming that Judaism never changed. Orthodox groups pressed to be allowed to leave the general Jewish community and to set up autonomous organizations following their own norms. This meant that Orthodox ideology was not connected to a full local community but was followed by some Jews, in any locale, who wished to voluntarily base their practices on its precepts. From this point of view, orthodoxy must be seen as a religious trend growing out of the modern situation. As in the case of Reform Judaism, it entailed a new vision of the relationship between Judaism and Jews' new social identities.

Eastern European Jews' experience with modernity was different from that of Jews in Central Europe or America. The ideas of emancipation had only begun to affect these regions toward the end of the nineteenth century. Most Jews did not see themselves, for example, as "Russians of the Mosaic persuasion." Rather, their identity was based on belonging to the Jewish people. The Jews compared themselves to the peoples around them such as the Slavs or Greeks. As a nation, they

strove to become part of the emerging economic and intellectual world. In response to poverty and oppression, many were attracted to socialist ideologies—either combined with Zionism or with Yiddish-oriented Jewish nationalism. As their economic and social positions improved, Jews in Western Europe also concerned themselves with bettering the situation of their less fortunate brethren. They did this in the form of humanitarian assistance, not as acts of national self-help and renewal.

In turning to new political ideologies, Eastern European Jews often rebelled against religion, which they saw as a force fostering ignorance and economic backwardness. They wished to be free from rabbinic authority and from communal control. To them, the main cultural task was to forge a new type of Jew. They reworked ancient symbols to take on secular meanings. Most of these Jews knew only one type of religion—that represented by traditional rabbis; they had little interest in new formulations of Judaism that had arisen in Central Europe. This left the realms of religious creativity and organizational initiative in Eastern Europe open to various trends within orthodoxy. Because Jews from that region were the numerically dominant group in the small but growing Jewish society in Palestine, the tension between Jews defining themselves as "free" and secular and those who were "religious" later became a basic feature of Israel's culture.

Neither the liberalizing religious trends of West-Central Europe nor the growth of orthodoxy had much of an immediate impact on Jews in the Middle East. In some countries, like Yemen, Jews were minimally touched by the forces of European modernity, while in others, such as Algeria, the influence was more direct. In the latter country, French citizenship was bestowed on the Jews in 1870. This initiative was led by French Jews and did not grow out of the desire of North African Jews themselves to become French citizens. These Jews felt no need to adopt new religious perspectives. They were content to maintain traditional patterns that had long existed or to slowly drop some ritual practices without ideological justification or a shift in their basic identity. In the mid-twentieth century, most Jews in the Middle East eventually migrated to Europe and Israel, where they came into more direct contact with new religious ideologies that had emerged and been established there.

If we link the demographic trends discussed earlier to these religious developments, we begin to grasp the social and political frameworks of the present diversity of religious life among Jews. Roughly thirteen million people define themselves as Jews today. About three-fourths of

them reside in two countries, Israel and the United States, and more than two million elsewhere, with Europe having the largest concentration. That so many people today are counted as Jews is complex in itself. For example, many people with Jewish parents choose not to define themselves as Jewish. And although intermarriage brings about a decrease in the number of Jews, it also is capable of attaching individuals, through conversion, to Jewish communities. In addition, a small but growing number of people see themselves as Jews in some contexts and connected to a different religion in other settings. For example, it is not unusual for Jews to practice meditation, with some seeing themselves as Buddhist as well as Jewish.

Most basically, being Jewish usually entails a sense of ethnic or communal belonging. In the case of Israel, and some Diaspora Jews, this sense takes the form of a national identity. Many Jews also see themselves in religious terms. Before emancipation, belonging to the Jewish people and following the Jewish religion were two sides of the same coin that reinforced each other; but this connection has become seriously loosened. As discussed, the liberal forms of Judaism that arose in Europe had their greatest impact in North America, where, in the context of democratic regimes, competing versions of Judaism developed voluntarily. In contrast, various kinds of orthodoxy arising in Europe became dominant in Palestine and were given the official position as the only legitimate expressions of Judaism within the State of Israel. There, only Orthodox rabbis may carry out the rituals of marriage and divorce or convert people to Judaism, rites that determine the religious status of individuals or of their children. In the background of all these trends is an increasing complexity and tension between the ethnic and religious sides of Judaism.

Orthodoxy, of course, exists in North America as well; it began to establish its own institutions there at the end of the nineteenth century and was reinforced, demographically, by surviving Jews who reached the United States after World War II. It is sustained in the United States within a wider democratic culture. Orthodox Jews are free to choose to live within Orthodox frameworks and to select from a range of options, all falling under the Orthodox rubric. Some of them, often deemed ultraorthodox Jews, have religious commitments that accord minimum value to the wider American society in which they are found or to the State of Israel. These politics are seen only as useful frameworks enabling observant Jews to cultivate their own lives according to strict religious standards.

In Israel, despite the monopoly that the state has given to Orthodox expressions of religion, there in fact exists a great variety of religious sensibilities. The immigrants from Middle Eastern societies brought a style now called "traditional," which values religious practice in the home and synagogue but doesn't follow orthodoxy in its strictness or worldview. Among European Israelis, there has been a decline in the secularist ideology that animated some of the early builders of Zionist society. Many of them are still critical of the entrenched authority of Orthodox rabbis but express an interest in some attachment to traditional religious symbols. In addition, there are small groups of organized Conservative and Reform Jews in Israel. They take on significance because of the support they receive from American Jewry, within which they are the dominant religious streams.

Viewed broadly, it is precisely the demographic success of Israeli society, its ability to take in Jews from all over the world with diverse religious histories, that accounts for the varieties of, and tension over, religion in Israel today. An obvious example is found in the recent debate, which seeks to enshrine in law the monopoly of Orthodox rabbis over conversion to Judaism. Large numbers of women from the former Soviet Union who are married to Jewish men but who are not themselves Jewish have migrated to Israel and given birth to children who will not be considered Jews religiously. Life in the Soviet Union, where Jews were barred from cultivating their traditions, is the background to this widespread intermarriage. The children of such couples now grow up speaking Hebrew, living side-by-side with fully recognized Israeli Jews and serving in the army. The rabbinate has been reluctant to convert such people unless they pledge to follow a fully Orthodox life, which most immigrants refuse to do. This situation raises the possibility, of course, that conversion by Conservative or Reform rabbis, who have a greater openness to general cultural currents, might be appropriate. Such a possibility, or course, threatens the monopoly of orthodoxy. There have been serious attempts to find a compromise solution to this particular dilemma, but Israeli society remains a hotbed of contestation in which Jewish issues, reflecting postemancipation developments in various parts of the world, are debated and fought out.

This latter example also points to the growing interlinking of religious issues in Israel and the United States, even though in many ways the histories and milieus of the two countries have encouraged very different religious formations. In both societies, during the past two generations, a variety of new religious groups and ideologies have emerged.

These new expressions of, or emphases within, Jewish life are very much a product of wider trends in America and of political developments within Israel. A quick look at the decade of the 1960s will put these trends into context.

One development within the United States was the demand for greater political power by American blacks and a growing awareness of their heritage and history. This movement evoked an emphasis on ethnicity among many groups in America, including Jews. Jewish reactions ranged from the founding of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), which advocated "Jewish power" through the turn to orthodoxy by those with no involvement in it previously to the cultivation of Jewish studies in universities, open to any student. Some issues mobilized Jews of diverse backgrounds, such as opposition to the policies of the Soviet Union, which suppressed religious life and prohibited emigration to Israel or elsewhere. The plight of Soviet Jewry was a rallying cry of the JDL in America, but its leader later moved to Israel and was elected to the Knesset on an ultranationalist platform based on religion. These developments are one example of the intermeshing of perceived Jewish existence in different parts of the world, even as the way such perceptions were translated into action varied in each country and locale.

Another example of interwoven Jewish concerns is provided by the 1967 war in Israel in relation to the involvement of the United States in Vietnam. Opposition to the latter war grew throughout the 1960s, and college campuses were a major site for the expression of such opposition. The high percentage of Jews attending college meant that Jews were heavily exposed to ideas critical of imperialism, but they were also faced with a situation in which Israel suddenly and unpredictably came to dominate large territories of neighboring Arab states and to rule over many Palestinians. Young Jews often faced the dilemma of sympathizing with anticolonialist critiques and at the same time identifying with Israel even as it was being cast in the role of an oppressor. They therefore had to find their own way and identities in the emerging counterculture, which both criticized American foreign policy and supported ethnic expression at home, which to them meant pro-Jewishness.

Yet another prominent force in the 1960s was, and continues to be, feminism. In mid-twentieth-century America, Conservative and Reform congregations, in Hebrew schools and Sunday schools, gave basically the same education to boys and girls. Yet the religious roles available to women, after the age of bat mitzvah, were not the same as those that could be assumed by men. In tune with the feminist critique of American society in general, women began demanding the right to lead

prayers, read from the Torah in public worship, and eventually be ordained as rabbis. The feminist search dovetailed with a rebellion against the formality and passivity of synagogue life in post–World War II American suburbia. Various ideological positions, ideas about how change should take place, and actual practices gave rise to a range of experimental groups from the 1960s onward, which are sometimes collectively referred to as the *havura* (a group that prays or studies together) movement. These developments also implied questions about the locus of religious authority in contemporary society. Although they first were formulated most poignantly within American Jewry, they also are relevant to Israeli society.

The 1967 war turned out to be a religious as well as a political watershed in Israeli history, raising profound questions about the meaning of Israeli society and its relationship to the Jewish past. The events of the war constituted an existential paradox. During the weeks before its outbreak, there was widespread anxiety that the Jewish state, and therefore Jews everywhere, might be facing a major catastrophe. Within six days, however, Israel emerged with the strongest armed forces in the Middle East. This drama, and the subsequent war in 1973, helped cement the Holocaust in Israel's national consciousness. In the decade after Israeli statehood was declared, Jews born in Palestine or Israel found it hard to understand the passivity of Europe's Jews in the face of Nazi aggression, while after 1967, collective memory of the Holocaust came to figure prominently in Israelis' perception of their own situation. It was expressed in a foreign policy, which was reluctant to cede territory because of the society's seemingly eternal vulnerability in the face of implacable enemies.

The 1967 victory thus seemed to some to bring relief—even salvation—of near cosmic dimensions to Israel. Though the results of the war created new configurations of realpolitik, many Israelis saw the emerging situation mainly through religious eyes. Some of the territories conquered (the West Bank, for example) were precisely those that appear prominently in biblical history, and the new Gush Emunim religious movement insisted that it was a religious duty to live in this region and never relinquish it to Gentile hands. Their creation of new settlements was a pious act of far-reaching political consequence, the outcome of which remains a matter of international maneuvering today. This relatively small movement undertook politically significant acts, believing that it represented and spearheaded the direction of divine will with regard to Israel as a whole.

In spite of such rhetoric, which depicted the people of Israel as a

single entity, Israeli society was becoming more diversified both socially and religiously. Some symbols of unity emerged right after the war, such as the plaza constructed adjacent to the ancient Western Wall of Second Temple Jerusalem, where all Jews could come to visit, pray, or meditate regardless of their specific identities. It is precisely under this umbrella of unity, however, that the diversity of Judaism became apparent, to say nothing of the outright conflict between its various segments. One example is the group called Women of the Wall, including Israelis and women from abroad, which seeks to carry out public worship in the women's section of the Western Wall plaza in a manner not acceptable to the official rabbinate. Another is the regular attack, in recent years, by ultraorthodox Jews on Conservative Jews who come on the festival of Shavuot and pray at the periphery of the plaza. This struggle has required police intervention and highlights the divisive place of Judaism in Israeli life.

In the 1960s, furthermore, the religious heterogeneity introduced to Israel by Jews from the Middle East began to be expressed more clearly. Contrary to the expectations of authorities, who guided immigration in the 1940s and 1950s, immigrants were not rapidly absorbed into the host society. Their overall numbers, and their concentration in certain settlements and urban enclaves, meant that they preserved many aspects of their previous religious practice. Their approach to religion came to be known as "traditional," because it was not backed up by an ideology. The preservation was a dynamic one, however, and patterns from abroad were modified to fit the new challenges of Israeli life. One such pattern, prominent among North African Jews, entailed pilgrimages to the graves of sainted rabbis. These pilgrimages, known as *hillulot,* have a basis in Jewish mystical writings but reflect popular social and religious sentiments as well. While mothers in North Africa prayed to sainted rabbis for the health of their children, in Israel such supplications were expanded to include the well-being of sons serving in the army and indeed of all Israeli soldiers. Since the 1960s pilgrimage shrines have spread throughout Israel, and *hillulot* have become an established feature on the map of religious life, often reflecting a combination of local and ethnic identities merged with broader Israeli ones.

Links between religiosity rooted in Europe and those originating in the Middle East have also emerged. An example is the SHAS (The Torah-Observant Sephardim) political party, now the third largest in Israel. Activists in SHAS are young men whose parents migrated to Israel from Middle Eastern countries but who received education in ultra-

orthodox institutions, even to the extent of learning some Yiddish used in the study of Torah. When those youngsters felt that their mobility within the Ashkenazi ultraorthodox world was blocked, they turned to Sephardi rabbis and formed their own party in the 1980s. The party has mobilized a cadre of yeshiva (academy of advanced Torah study) students but has also appealed broadly to families that are traditional in orientation but sympathize with the recently regained sense of Sephardi pride. SHAS, which now cultivates its own school system and religious worldview, reflects a new kind of identity born of a previous intense involvement with several disparate religious arenas.

The case of SHAS also highlights the dynamic quality of religious life in Israel. New identities are formed, challenged, and further reshaped, always with an ability to call on ancient texts and traditions to give backing to religious creativity and innovation. At times, social and political change presents the religious imagination with situations that require more daring than usual. In addition to the many families of mixed marriages from the former Soviet Union, the 1980s and 1990s saw the immigration of tens of thousands of Jews from Ethiopia to Israel, whose religious status was also a topic of much debate. Among the variety of ways that people have related to Judaism in postemancipation times—in terms of religion, culture, peoplehood, or nationality—this immigration unexpectedly inserted the question of race into the field, demanding a religious response.

The selections that follow provide the background to, and exemplify, many of the trends during the past two decades to which I have alluded. The first three illustrate aspects of traditional Jewish life, with one taken from Europe and two from Middle Eastern settings. The last of these focuses on the religious activities and understandings of women, a topic that has been neglected until recently. The following two chapters present pictures of what were fairly typical religious patterns among American Jews at mid-century, one portraying a Reform synagogue and the other an Orthodox congregation. The remaining ten selections attempt to capture the diversity and specificity of some of the religious developments since the 1960s, both in America and Israel. The introductions to the chapters locate each expression of Judaism on this background and point out links among them.

With all the variety in content and in the range of contexts, a number of themes emerge in the selections. One is the continued expression of Judaism in the details of daily activity, whether this activity is preparing food at home, celebrating a bar mitzvah, solemnizing a wedding,

worshiping, or studying. Another is the attachment of Jews to the cultures of specific communities, whether they be the Soviet Union or Morocco, even as they seek to make their way in a new country. At the same time, all Jews, whatever their provenance, are forced to ponder the impact of the Holocaust, although the lessons they have derived from it may vary dramatically. The State of Israel, too, has created a new reality about which most Jews explicitly or implicitly take a stand. The link between politics and religion characterizing that society sometimes threatens to estrange it from Diaspora communities, but other topics, like feminism—which includes concrete issues such as the rights of women in marriage and divorce situations—has created a community of concern for Jewish women wherever they are. In general, the ease of communication and travel in the late twentieth century has made possible frequent contact, and at times conflict, between Jews of both similar and diverging backgrounds. Visiting distinctive Jewish spaces has become a major mode of cultivating specific identities and senses of a Jewish past. Finally, Judaism continues to be a religion that demands study. As ritual, prayers, and attitudes toward authority undergo new constructions and personal interpretations, Judaism of "the book" also takes on new forms. The multiple forms of living Judaism entail different ways of understanding its history and reading its texts.

All the selections show how various themes are intertwined in practice and are not easily divided into separate "topics." Both worldview and a sense of history are embodied in rituals that use ritually correct food. Details of synagogue worship create identification with some coreligionists around the world, while separating individuals and groups from other Jews. And the study of texts and of the Jewish past may become relevant to married life or to attempts to grasp the Holocaust. The selections that follow, which have been slightly edited for the purposes of this volume, all illustrate the interconnectedness composed of threads of the Jewish past that give color, texture, and meaning to the immediacies of the present.

Additional Reading

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Figure 1. A traditional wedding procession in a shtetl in Eastern Europe. (A. Tranowsky, nineteenth-century Russia, oil on canvas. Courtesy Judah L. Magnes Museum.)