

*Samuel Field Y Adult Center*  
**Prayer During The Period Of The German Reform Movement**

**Events And Personalities Leading To The German Reform Movement**

*The Mystics Of Safed*

*Shabbetai Tzvi*

*Baruch Spinoza*

*The Haskala*

*Moses Mendelssohn*

*Emancipation*

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## **Prayer During The Period Of The German Reform Movement**

### **Shabbetai Zvi-The False Messiah And The Sabbatean Movement-1**

Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements  
By: Stephen Sharot, p.86

On the eve of Pentecost 1665, in Gaza, Palestine, a young scholar, Nathan Ashkenazi, fell into a trance during the religious service and made a number of utterances, including a reference to an acquaintance, Sabbatai Zvi. After coming out of the trance, Nathan explained that he had been chosen by God as a prophet and that the meaning of his utterance was that Zvi was the messiah. At the end of May 1665, Zvi accepted Nathan's prophecy and announced that he was the messiah; to signify the break in history, he announced that the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz would be a day of rejoicing. Zvi traveled from Gaza to Jerusalem, where he was expelled by the rabbinic authorities after he ate forbidden animal fat. He then went to Aleppo; in his absence, enthusiasm grew among the communities in Palestine, and miracle stories were communicated to other communities. In a number of towns, such as Aleppo, Smyrna, Safed, and Damascus, the presence of Zvi produced great enthusiasm, but the acceptance of Zvi as the messiah spread far beyond the area of activities of Zvi and Nathan.

Many Jews in Gaza came to accept Zvi as the messiah, but in the first months following Zvi's acceptance of Nathan's prophecy, Nathan, Zvi, and their followers appear to have made little effort to spread the tidings. The movement spread not by organized missionary activity but almost entirely by letters and rumors. Nathan and his group began making definite efforts to spread their message from the middle of September 1665, but only two emissaries were sent from Palestine, one to Egypt and another to Italy, and it is doubtful that even they had a formal mission. Enthusiastic letters from Aleppo, where Zvi stayed for a while, began to arrive in Constantinople in September 1665, and in the following months the messianic tidings spread rapidly to many other communities under Islam. The first reports to reach Christian Europe arrived in Italy at the end of October and beginning of November. From Italy the news traveled to Germany, Holland, England, and the rest of the continent. The news entered Poland from Turkey, via the Balkans.

The commercial and family ties between Jewish communities, especially those in Turkey, Italy, and Holland, greatly facilitated the spread of the message. Amsterdam, which received reports as early as December 1665, became an important center for the transmission of the news. Parts of letters received in Amsterdam were put together and then sent on to London, Germany, and Poland. During 1666 in many Jewish communities each mail brought many letters and created great excitement. As the news passed from one community to another, new interpretations and additions often transformed its content. There were often wide gaps between the teachings of Nathan, the events around Zvi in the

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Middle East, and the content of the news.

Nathan did not expect the Redemption to take place through military action: he did not expect Zvi to take the role of warrior, and vengeance on gentiles was to be limited to those responsible for the massacres in Poland in 1648 and the following years. Nor did Nathan expect a sudden occurrence of miracles: he argued that believers should have faith without a sign or miracle, and those who denied the messiah, however orthodox they might be, would be condemned. He predicted that the reign of the messiah would begin in 1667, but this did not include the ingathering of the exiles. The only miracle at that time would be the rulers' acknowledgment of Zvi as the messiah, which would allow the Jews to live in peace and honor in their societies. The period of messianic woes would begin in 1672, and the miraculous events of the apocalyptic legends would then follow.

The letters and rumors told of miracles and mythological and apocalyptic events occurring in the present, presaging an imminent return to the Holy Land and the Redemption. The earliest reports received in Italy told not of specific events in Palestine but of the ten lost tribes marching on Gaza. Letters from Egypt on the appearance of the lost tribes in Arabia and the conquest and destruction of Mecca were received in Amsterdam. At the end of 1665 the believers in Palestine also began to include legendary material in their letters. They told of a fiery cloud encompassing the prophet, of a voice of an angel emanating from a cloud, and of Christian churches sinking into the earth. The earliest reports received in Amsterdam stated that Zvi had confirmed his messiahship by miracles: he had predicted accurately the sudden death of certain people, a day of darkness, and a storm of great hailstones, fire, and brimstone, and he had entered a fire without harm. News of miraculous events continued after Zvi's imprisonment by the Turkish authorities. Letters told that Zvi had resurrected the dead and had passed through the locked and barred doors of his prison. Christian news reports in the form of small pamphlets were dependent on Jewish sources, but they added distortions, exaggerations, and embellishments of their own. Jews took note of the impression that the movement made on Christians, and they quoted from their reports.

Reports of the appearance of a messiah and signs of an imminent redemption spread throughout a large part of the diaspora. However, Jewish communities differed in the proportion of believers in Zvi, the strength of the community's commitment, and the forms of messianic activity.

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### **The Sabbatean Movement**

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#### Sabbatai Zvi: Imprisonment, Conversion, and Death

Excitement in many Jewish communities reached a pitch early in 1666 when Sabbatai Zvi sailed from Smyrna to Constantinople. They expected that he would remove the crown from the sultan, assume the rule over the Ottoman Empire, and inaugurate the messianic era. On 6 February 1666, however, Turkish authorities intercepted his ship and brought him ashore in chains. Revolts were frequent in the empire, and rebels or suspected rebels were usually speedily executed. Although the Turks had little reason to fear the Sabbatian movement, they may have wished to avoid making Zvi a martyr. Whatever the reason, they showed unusual restraint in his case by putting him in prison. They took him to the fortress of Gallipoli. There, with the help of bribes, he managed to meet with his followers and to hold court in some style for several months. In September, Zvi came before the divan in Adrianople, who gave him the choice between immediate death and conversion to Islam. Zvi denied having made a messianic claim and chose conversion.

p. 117-A minority did not admit that they had been mistaken about Zvi. In most previous Jewish messianic movements believers had accepted the disconfirmation of prophecy and had returned to everyday life. The widespread belief in Zvi in some communities, and the ecstatic behavior that accompanied it, led some to believe that the new era of history had already begun; in their minds, the imminent redemption had become a realized redemption. The mass prophecy, the wave of penitence, and the visions and trances had given an extraordinary inner sense of freedom. Some believers could not admit that their personal experience had been false, and it appeared impossible that so many Jews had had a false experience.

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### **Baruch Spinoza-1**

Fifty Key Jewish Thinkers, By: Dan Cohn-Sherbok, Routledge, 1997.

p. 119- The roots of Jewish thought during the Enlightenment go back to seventeenth-century Holland where a number of Jewish thinkers sought to interpret the Jewish tradition in the light of the new scientific understanding of the world. The greatest of these Dutch Jewish thinkers was Baruch Spinoza who was born in Amsterdam in 1632 of a former Marrano family. Initially Spinoza was exposed to Hebrew, the Bible and the Talmud as well as medieval Jewish philosophy; subsequently he engaged in the study of natural science and contemporary philosophy.

At the age of twenty-three he was questioned by the leaders of the Amsterdam Jewish community about his religious beliefs, and offered a stipend if he would remain silent and conform to Jewish practice. When he refused to comply, he was excommunicated.

p. 120- In the first section of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza maintains that prophecy is of an imaginative-as opposed to philosophical-character. In his view, the biblical prophets were philosophically untrained, indeed they were ignorant of the causes of natural events. Rejecting Maimonides' belief that Hebrew Scriptures were addressed in different ways to both the masses and the intellectuals, Spinoza maintains that the Hebrew Scriptures were directed solely to a general audience. God is presented as a lawgiver to appeal to the multitudes. The function of biblical law is to ensure social and political stability-hence its prescriptions are not of divine origin. In addition, Spinoza asserts that the biblical laws are suitable only to ancient times; they have no relevance for subsequent ages.

Concerning miracles, Spinoza contends that God's nature and activity cannot be known through miraculous events, but only from the order of nature and from clear self-evident ideas. Unlike medieval Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides, who believed that miracles transcend the natural order, Spinoza argues that nothing can occur outside natural law. In this light, Spinoza insists that the Bible must be regarded in the same way as any work of ancient literature-the biblical books should be interpreted only according to their author's intentions. Such a conviction led Spinoza to the view that the Torah as a whole was not written by Moses and that the historical books are compilations assembled by many generations. Ezra, he concludes, was responsible for harmonizing the various discrepancies found in Scripture.

For Spinoza, the function of religion is to provide a framework for ethical action. Philosophy, on the other hand, is concerned with truth, and philosophers should be free to

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### **Baruch Spinoza-2**

engage in philosophical speculation unconstrained by religious opinions:

Faith, therefore, allows the greatest latitude in philosophical speculation, allowing us without blame to think what we like about anything, and only condemning as heretics and schismatics, those who teach opinions which tend to produce obstinacy, hatred, strife and anger, while, on the other hand, only considering as faithful those who persuade us, as far as their reason and faculties will permit, to follow justice and charity. (Spinoza, vol. I, 1956,189)

According to Spinoza, it is a usurpation of the social contract and a violation of the rights of man to legislate belief. On the basis of this view, Spinoza propounded a metaphysical system based on a pantheistic conception of nature. Beginning with a belief in an infinite, unlinked self-caused Substance-which he conceives as God or Nature-Spinoza argues that God and Nature are one. For Spinoza God is totally immanent; hence all interconnections within the one divine system are logical relations. By knowing the truth about the whole system, one is able to comprehend the logical connections between each part. These connections are necessary-there is nothing contingent within the vast complex. 'In the nature of things nothing contingent is admitted, but all things are determined by the necessity of divine nature to exist and act in a certain way' (Spinoza, 1963, part I, prop. 29). According to Spinoza, although God or Nature is self-creating and thereby free, within nature all things are determined and everything is deducible from the concept of God.

Departing from traditional Judaism, Spinoza rejects the belief that there is a final purpose to creation. In his view God does not have a separate existence from the world; instead he is totally immanent as the uniformity and sum of all laws: He is the principle of law and its manifestation in both nature and thought. On such a basis, Spinoza envisages God as the totality of all bodies in the physical universe. Such a conception led Spinoza to the conviction that there is neither creation nor freedom. The whole of Reality is free only in the sense that it is self-caused. Human beings are free, however, when they love God and perceive that they are made of Him. Such freedom consists in the liberation from anxiety and care. For Spinoza, submission to the interconnection of all things brings about a feeling of serenity and peace. Happiness is therefore defined in terms of intellectual joy. Not surprisingly Spinoza's ideas were bitterly attacked by the Jewish establishment of his time and largely ignored by later Jewish thinkers, yet his writings had a profound impact on the history of Western philosophy.

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### **Moses Mendelssohn-1**

Fifty Key Jewish Thinkers, By: Dan Cohn-Sherbok, page 92

The principles of rational investigation propounded by Baruch Spinoza and others in the seventeenth century continued to dominate the intellectual climate of the next century. During the period of the Enlightenment, political and religious reformers pressed for the application of reason to all spheres of inquiry. From France this spirit of rationalism spread throughout Europe to the United States. In Germany the Jewish thinker Moses Mendelssohn spearheaded a revolution in Jewish life and thought. Born in Dessau in 1729, Mendelssohn suffered from a disease as a child which left him with a curvature of the spine.

To bring about the modernization of Jewish life, Mendelssohn also translated the Pentateuch into German so that Jews would be able to learn the language of the country in which they lived, and oversaw the production of commentary on Scripture (Biur) which combined Jewish scholarship with secular thought. Prior to his friendship with Mendelssohn, Lessing had written a play portraying a Jew of exceptional qualities-for Lessing and others Mendelssohn represented such a person. With Lessing's assistance Mendelssohn published a series of philosophical essays in which he argued for the existence of God and creation, insisting that human reason is capable of discovering the reality of God, providence and immortality. At the height of his career, Mendelssohn was challenged by the Christian apologist John Casper Lavater to defend the superiority of Judaism over Christianity. From 1769 he engaged in Jewish apologetics, and in 1783 published his major work on the Jewish faith, *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism*. In this study Mendelssohn maintains that no religious institution should use coercion; neither the Church, nor the state, he argues, has the right to impose its religious views on the individual. Addressing the question whether Jewish law sanctions coercion, he emphasizes that Judaism does not coerce the mind through dogma:

The Israelites possess a divine legislation-laws, commandments, statutes, rules of conduct, instruction in God's will and in what they are to do to attain temporary and eternal salvation. Moses, in a miraculous and supernatural way, revealed to them these laws and commandments, but not dogmas, propositions concerning salvation, or self-evident principles of reason. These the Lord reveals to us and as well to all other men at all times through nature and events, but never through the spoken or written word. (Mendelssohn, 1969, 61)

The distinction Mendelssohn makes between natural religion and the Jewish faith is based on three types of truth:

1. logically necessary truth;

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### **Moses Mendelssohn-2**

2. contingent truths such as the laws of nature; and
3. the temporal truths that take place in history.

In this regard he writes:

Whenever God intends man to understand a certain truth, his wisdom provides man with the means most suited to this purpose. If it is a necessary truth, God provides man with whatever degree of reason he requires for its understanding. If a natural law is to be disclosed to man, God's wisdom will provide him with the necessary capacity for observation; and if a historical truth is to be presented for posterity, God's wisdom authenticates its historicity by establishing the narrator's credibility beyond any doubt. (*Ibid.*, 64-5)

In Mendelssohn's view, all human beings are capable of discovering religious truth. However, Judaism is different from other religions in that it contains a revealed legal code. The Jewish people did not hear God proclaim that he is an eternal, necessary and omniscient being who rewards and punishes humanity; rather, the mitzvot (commandments) were revealed to His chosen people:

The voice that was heard at Sinai on the great day did not proclaim, 'I am the eternal, your God, the necessary autonomous being, omnipotent and omniscient, who rewards men in a future life according to their deeds.' This is the universal religion of mankind, not Judaism, and this kind of universal religion-without which man can become neither virtuous nor happy-was not and, in fact, could not have been revealed at Sinai. For who could have needed the sound of thunder and the blast of trumpets to become convinced of the validity of these eternal verities. (*Ibid.*, 68-9)

Rather at Mount Sinai the Jewish people heard the historical truth, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt'-a statement introducing the legal code which is binding on the Jewish nation.

For Mendelssohn the purpose of ceremonial law is to bring all peoples to a belief in ethical monotheism:

And now I am finally at the point where I can elucidate my hypothesis about the purpose of the ceremonial law in Judaism. Our people's patriarchs-Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-had remained faithful to the Eternal and tried to preserve pure religious concepts free of all idolatry, for their families and descendants. And now these

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### Moses Mendelssohn-3

descendants were chosen by Providence to be a nation of priests, that is, a nation which, through its constitution and institutions, through its laws and conduct, and throughout all changes of life and fortune, was to call wholesome and unadulterated ideas of God and his attributes continuously to the attention of the rest of mankind. It was a nation which through its mere existence, as it were, would unceasingly teach, proclaim, preach and strive to preserve these ideas among the nations. (*Ibid.*, 89)

Yet despite this universal mission, Jews are not at liberty to divorce themselves from their cultural connections with the countries where they dwell. Rather, they must engage in civic life while remaining faithful to their religious heritage:

Adopt the mores and constitution of the country in which you find yourself, but be steadfast in upholding the religion of your fathers, too. Bear both burdens as well as you can. True, on the one hand, people make it difficult for you to bear the burden of civil life because of the religion to which you remain faithful; and, on the other hand, the climate of our time makes the observance of your religious laws in some respects more burdensome than it need be. Persevere nevertheless; stand fast in the place which Providence has assigned everything which may happen, as you were told to do by your Lawgiver long ago. (*Ibid.*, 104-5)

At the end of Jerusalem, Mendelssohn argues for the individuality of all religious traditions. Rejecting the idea that all faiths should be merged into one universal creed, he maintains that the existence of many different religions is fundamental. In Mendelssohn's view, human reason serves as a means by which all people can arrive at universal truths about the nature of God and His activity in the world. In this sense all religions have the capacity to discover the reality of God, divine providence and the immortality of the soul. Yet as far as Judaism is concerned, the Jewish people are the recipients of a divine revelation consisting of ritual and moral law. This supernatural dispensation is what distinguishes Judaism from other faiths, and serves to impel the nation toward their universal mission for all humanity.

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### **The Haskalah: the Jewish Enlightenment**

The Haskalah marked a change in many aspects of Jewish cultural life. At its simplest it was a movement of Jewish writers influenced by European literary forms. But it also had wider ideological goals, and sought to transform almost every aspect of Jewish life from education to communal organization. It viewed the Jews, particularly of Central and Eastern Europe, as remaining in a form of medievalism and challenged them to confront and absorb the best elements of modernity.

The initial period of the Haskalah was led by disciples of Mendelssohn. They championed a return to Hebrew and rejected Yiddish-the traditional language of the Jewish community of the time-as a degenerate form of German. They also respected biblical Hebrew rather than the later rabbinic Hebrew. This stance related to their rejection of traditional Jewish education which emphasized the study of rabbinic texts, particularly the Talmud, almost to the exclusion of any other subject. The reformers viewed rabbinic forms of Judaism as degenerate compared with the purer and earlier biblical form. Like liberal Christians, they sought a return to a purer, more historically authentic faith. Such a project ultimately became one of the building blocks for Reform Judaism as it developed in the nineteenth century. In terms of language the Haskalah initially emphasized Hebrew and subsequently emphasized the use of German-the emphasis on German and the vernacular language of the country of residence also became one of the hallmarks of Reform.

The Haskalah played a provocative and oppositional role in relation to the development of Orthodox Hasidism in modern times. As the Haskalah moved into Eastern Europe and Russia, its opposition to medievalism often translated into a rejection of Hasidism with its emphasis on mysticism and its charismatic leaders, the tzadikim. Its satires often singled out Hasidism for ridicule. One effect was to engender a fierce mutual opposition between the two tendencies in modern Judaism, and to precipitate Hasidic opposition to modernity. The opposition is reflected in many Hasidic tales in which the Maskil (disciple of the Haskalah) is depicted as an opponent.

Like the ideas developed by Mendelssohn, the Haskalah can be seen as transitional. It represented the beginnings of the transformation of the Jewish community through its encounter with modernity. It laid the foundation for many of the religious trends that came to fruition in the middle of the nineteenth century. On the one hand, as missionaries of modern values and culture the Haskalah influenced the early Reformers who sought to create a Judaism that was consonant with modern values and culture. On the other hand, by its opposition to traditional values and the Hasidic community, it helped create a strong association between modernity and the rejection of traditional Judaism and thereby strengthened Orthodox Judaism's suspicion and hostility towards modernity.

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### **The Seeds Of The German Reform Movement-1**

In Leviathan, Saul Ascher (1767-1822) laid the philosophical cornerstone of the Reform movement in Judaism. Unlike Mendelssohn who saw Judaism as a revealed law, Ascher argued that the defining feature of Judaism was its religious faith, not its political or legal constitution. This emphasis on faith, in effect, made Judaism equivalent to other European religions-a theme constantly returned to by modern Reform Judaism. By separating it from its political and practical basis, Ascher placed Judaism among other 'religions', and saw it as compatible with the cultural and political life of modern Europe. Unlike traditional Judaism which treated all aspects of Jewish law and tradition as equally authoritative, Ascher selected or emphasized certain practices as essential while ignoring or de-emphasizing others. He focused on the subjective personal aspects of religion, emphasizing the importance of personal satisfaction and happiness. He saw the law as a means to these ends, thus opposing those who emphasized the communal aspects of religion and who saw faithful observance as the fulfillment of God's will and thus an end in itself. Ascher also emphasized a concept of history which underpins all modern forms of Judaism, that is, as a process of development with the implication of unfolding spiritual progress. Many of these themes, particularly the concept of religious subjectivity, underpinned the ideas of the Reform movement and are still significant features of it. Ascher's arguments also provided a philosophical basis for the changes which were subsequently introduced by both his contemporaries and successors.

The origins of the Reform movement lie not only in the cultural transformations associated with the dawn of modernity (notably the rise of the Enlightenment), but also in the political changes which characterized early modern Europe-most notably the rise of the nation state and individual freedoms. During the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth the Jewish community in Western Europe experienced a significant transformation in status. As the period progressed Jews were increasingly given political freedom-a transformation marked by the move from protected, semi-autonomous minority to citizen (or subject). The French Revolution and the Napoleonic period marked one of the key points in this transformation. With increasing access to political and cultural life and decision-making, Jewish communities, particularly in what was to become Germany, began to develop forms of Judaism more in keeping with their new found status. Although the process of reforming synagogue practice had been progressing since the late eighteenth century in Amsterdam, a more structured programme of reform did not occur until the nineteenth century, under the leadership of Israel Jacobson (1768-1828). It is perhaps significant that Jacobson was a lay rather than a rabbinic leader. The process began in Westphalia and continued in Berlin. Among the changes which were initially instituted was a transformation in the form of service, moving from one which was perceived to be less

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### **The Seeds Of The German Reform Movement-2**

decorous, and thus out of keeping with wider cultural forms, to a form of service which was more highly structured and characterized by European ideas of decorum. Some of these changes included a reduction of physical rituals, for example the procession, and changes in the content and structure of the service, for example minimizing active congregational participation. After his move to Berlin, Reform services were held in the homes of Jacobson and Jacob Baer. These services added to the changes already instituted in Westphalia. The new additions included the use of German elements in the service alongside the Hebrew, removal of the partition between men and women and the removal of repetitions within the service. The process was also occurring in Hamburg with the establishment of the first Reform Temple in 1817.

By the mid-nineteenth century the process of reform moved from a focus on forms of worship and life to include areas of belief and self-perception. Thus in the prayer book reforms of that period we find removal of concepts of messianic ingathering, bodily resurrection and Zionist hopes. The removal of the messianic ingathering was tied to two separate concepts: (a) a transformation of the concept of messiah from the traditional model of an actual political and spiritual leader who would bring about a transformation in the world and gather all Jews back to Israel to a concept of messianic age which would be brought about through the inexorable progress of humanity; and (b) the rejection of the notion that Jews would be returned to Israel as an end to the negative condition of diaspora. Reformers considered diaspora to be a positive state and wanted to emphasize their ongoing commitment to the European states in which they lived. These priorities led them to be hostile to Zionism. They saw Zionism as a statement of Jewish separatism and the desire for a nation set apart. The reformers chose to define Judaism as a religion not a people or nation and thus with no need of a national home or end to diaspora. Likewise, the concept of bodily resurrection offended their ideas of rationality. In many prayer books it was either removed or changed to reflect belief in the immortality of the soul.

Abraham Geiger (1810-74) was another intellectual and rabbinic leader of Reform during this period. He introduced or emphasized several themes which remain characteristic of the Reform movement. He emphasized the historical nature of Judaism and thus the contingent nature of its practices and beliefs. He also emphasized Judaism's universal message-a theme that also has been very influential in changes in the language of prayer. One of Geiger's most significant emphases was the ethical nature of Judaism and the concept of ethical monotheism. For him the key unifying theme of Judaism was not observance but morality. This concept was enshrined in the notion of prophetic Judaism-an emphasis on the ideals proclaimed by the prophets rather than the observances taught by the rabbis.

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### **Examples Of Liturgical Reform Within The German Reform Movement**

The presence of the many pleas for the restoration of Zion and the Return to Jerusalem, in the traditional liturgy, was one of the main motivations for the liturgical reform of the nineteenth century.

Concerning the Aleinu prayer, Abraham Geiger wrote:

The separation between Israel and the other peoples, which existed at one time, has no right to be expressed in prayer. Rather ought there to be an expression of the joy that such barriers are increasingly falling.

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### *Benediction 10*

Traditional Text-Sound the great Shofar for our freedom, and lift up the banner to gather in our exiles, and assemble us together from the four corners of the earth. Praised art Thou, O Lord, who gatherest the dispersed of Thy people Israel.

Hamburg 1841-Sound the call of freedom, and lift up the banner of freedom for all who groan in slavery. Break the yoke, O G-d, from upon our shoulders wherever it still rests heavily upon us. Praised art Thou, O G-d, who truly carest for the outcasts of Thy people Israel.

Leipzig, 1876- Sound the great Shofar for the freedom of all who are oppressed, and lift up the banner for those who hope for Thy redemption; and may the sound of liberty be heard in the four corners of the earth. Praised art Thou, O Lord, who proclaimest liberty to the captives of the whole earth.

### *Benediction 12*

Traditional Text-And to Jerusalem, Thy city, do Thou return in mercy, and do Thou dwell therein as Thou hast spoken. And build it soon in our days as an everlasting building. And speedily set therein the throne of David. Praised art Thou, O Lord, who buildest Jerusalem.

Hamburg 1841-May Thy glory be again enthroned in Thy city of Jerusalem. Establish and strengthen the seat of truth in an everlasting building, even as Thy word hath promised: "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the lord from Jerusalem." Praised art Thou, O G-d, who establishest Jerusalem.

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### **American Reform**

The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in 19th Century America  
By: Moshe Davis JPS 1963 p. 11

#### American Reform

One school of thought, which grew into the American Reform movement and made the greatest headway during the century, explained Judaism essentially as a universal religion that emphasized the ethical tradition as its basic dimension. The eternal moral teachings of Judaism possessed a universal character which all the world, Christianity included, was destined to recognize as the supreme truth. The Reformers held that, in order to fulfill its role in the world, Judaism must constantly keep pace with the changing age, incorporating and reflecting modern developments, without necessarily being bound by the historic evolution and continuity of the Jewish tradition. America was a land where Jews were free to teach their ideas of religion to all mankind. By the term which the Reformers used most, "American Judaism," they meant fundamentally that the ideals of America and Judaism were one. With this American philosophy of Judaism, they hoped to bring back within the Jewish fraternity countless contemporaries who had rejected the traditional view and looked upon ritual practice as obsolete. Yet despite their most radical innovations in Jewish practice and interpretation, the Reformers were most careful not to separate themselves from the living Jewish people, but to function as part of it. They conceived themselves to be not a sect, but a party within Judaism.

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### **The Emergence of Conservative Judaism**

The Emergence of Conservative Judaism: The Historical School in 19th Century America  
By: Moshe Davis JPS 1963 p. 13-

A third school of thought, the Historical School, was no less inspired by the divine character of Jewish Law, taught by the Orthodox, nor by its moral purpose as stressed by Reform. Indeed, leaders of this group maintained that both these fundamentals of the Jewish tradition come into their fullest significance only when they are viewed as part of the totality of the historic Jewish experience. The Bible, the Talmud and commentaries, the Holy Land, the Hebrew language -- these are the seedbeds of the Jewish spirit which nurtured the institutions of Jewish religion and life. Growth and development are inherent in the historical process because they are a response to the demands of life. However, even while affirming the imperative of change and adjustment, the entire Tradition and Jewish experience would have to be explored and studied before specific innovations could be made, so as to prevent the innovation from being at variance with the basic spirit of Jewish legal principles. The exposition of this view was the Historical School's answer to the challenge of contemporaneity. In Europe, the Historical School was shaped by men of great scholarly learning, such as Nachman Krochmal, Leopold Zunz, Solomon J. L. Rapoport, Zacharias Frankel, Heinrich Graetz and others. They used Jewish scholarship as their vehicle for interpreting the present in the light of the past. In America, the rabbinic leaders and laity turned to methods of practical organization and to the building of primary institutions. But the techniques and institutions depended, in the end, on a congeries of ideas and values unique to the School. As we shall explain in detail in the course of the volume, these ideas emphasize the evolving character of the Jewish tradition, the historic experience of the Jewish people as organic to that development, and the acceptance of modernity as a positive force in the growth of that Tradition.

Toward the end of the century these schools of thought became less fluid and they incorporated themselves into three separate religious movements in American Jewry: Reform, Orthodoxy and Conservative Judaism. Each element built its own organization and institutions which consisted of a seminary for the training of a native rabbinate, a union of synagogues and a conference of authorized rabbis. This development did not come about through any preconceived plan or program. Individual positions were fluid and very often contradictory. The conditions of time and place compelled the direction of basic ideas into unchartered institutional forms. Nor could anyone foresee that the shape of events to come would make American Jewry, even toward the end of the century, one of the largest centers of Jewry in history. A difficulty which confronts the student of American Jewish religious history is the possibility of confusing nineteenth- century groups with their respective twentieth-century developments. This confusion must be studiously

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### **The Emergence of Conservative Judaism-2**

avoided, for it is just as anachronistic to identify the formative expressions of the religious groups with their respective contemporary twentieth-century compositions as it is to identify American democracy of that period with the democracy of our times.

The definition of the name " Historical School" and the delineation of the constellation of ideas to which the members of the School stood committed are essential. The name "Historical School" has fallen into disuse in recent decades: it has been supplanted by the more popular name "Conservative Judaism." In fact, some historians of American Jewry declare the name "Historical School" to be a misnomer even of the nineteenth-century group. They prefer to call it "Conservative," thus interpreting the record of events a posteriori rather than out of its origins. Upon considered study of the sources and documents of the period, it seems clear to me that between the two possibilities, with the entire century in mind, the name "Historical School" presents the more accurate description of the pre-twentieth-century "Conservative Movement." It emphasizes the evolutionary character of the idea which only eventually became embodied in particular institutional forms, and includes such differing approaches as the traditionalism of Isaac Leeser and Sabato Morais, the developmental conception of Alexander Kohut and the progressivism of Benjamin Szold and Marcus Jastrow -- all of whom identified themselves with this School and its institutions.

The name " Historical School" is also most appropriate conceptually. It emphasizes the distinctive interpretation of Judaism put forth by the movement as a whole. From its inception and through the years of struggle against factions on the right and the left, many of its leaders, both lay and clerical, have rejected the practice of attaching adjectives to the word "Judaism." By selecting the adjective "historical," it was possible to best define the program of the School, to escape partisanship and to embrace the totality of the Jewish past as well as the varieties of contemporary experience. Regardless of the ideological shadings and personal practice of the individual constituent -- Orthodox, traditional or progressive -- the leaders of the Historical School, who sought to root Judaism in America, were men bound to the spirit and substance of the Jewish tradition. On the other hand, they were also well versed in secular culture and recognized the demands of life. To preserve the Jewish collectivity in America in the encounter between Tradition and environment was a commitment which resulted from their historic consciousness.

Therefore they were prepared to accept the principle of the legitimacy of differences within the all-inclusive idea of historical Judaism, as embodied in the Jewish people. The concept of Klal Yisrael was expressed frequently in the presentations and plans of the spokesmen of the School.

As is shown in this study, this concept was first discussed by Isaac Leeser who spoke of

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Kneset Yisrael ("catholic Israel") as the ideological and social basis for a religiously unified American Jewry within world Jewry, anticipating in part Solomon Schechter, with whom this concept is identified in the thought of Conservative Judaism. Other leaders of the School in the nineteenth century followed in Leeser's foot steps. In the midst of the struggle against Reform, when a suggestion was made to call the new rabbinical seminary "The Orthodox Seminary," Alexander Kohut decided that the new institution must be dedicated to Klal Yisrael. Clearly stating his view of the Seminary, Kohut said, "We do not desire it to be destined for a sect, whether reform, conservative, or orthodox..." This view was immediately accepted by his colleagues; they understood the mission of their movement. It was decided from the beginning to unite various groups with different ideas for the future of Judaism in America. The common element which would unite all of them was the idea of a developing historical Judaism. The Historical School in its interpretation of Klal Yisrael identified itself with the total experience and commitment of the Jewish people throughout the ages. As a result, when the Seminary was reorganized in 1902, it was called the "Jewish Theological Seminary of America," not the "American Jewish Theological Seminary."

Seen in this way, it is possible to understand why and how men whose interpretations of Judaism were as far apart as Isaac Leeser's, Samuel Isaacs', Sabato Morais' and H. P. Mendes', on the one hand, and Benjamin Szold's, Marcus Jastrow's and Frederic de Sola Mendes', on the other, could work together in one direction and for the same cause. Within this framework it was possible for the pioneer leader in American Jewry, Isaac Leeser, who by nature, practice and theology, was a traditionalist, not only to work with the progressivists within the Historical School but actually to lead in the creation of those institutions around which he rallied the rabbinic and lay leaders of various viewpoints in the School. Similarly with the leftists of the School: theologically, Szold and Jastrow were more radical than Isaac Mayer Wise. Yet, when the real test came, they interrupted their tentative working alliances with the Reformers and remained loyal to the foundations and institutions of the Historical group. The Historical School at one time included various strands of American Jewry. Some of them subsequently joined other movements while most of them remained within the School and, despite their differences, worked together to create the Conservative movement.

What then were the basic and uniting ideas which prompted men of such differing modes of practice to remain together in one school of thought and action? Principles crystallized in spite of the different emphases in different periods of the Historical School and in spite of the fact that its members did not systematically articulate any one theology. These ideas, as they emerge from the historical context, can be formulated as follows:

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- 1) The Emancipation and secular Enlightenment must be accepted as significant positive factors in the Jewish present and future development.
- 2) The equal status of Jews in democratic societies generally, and in the United States in particular, offers new opportunities for Jews and Judaism.
- 3) Klal Yisrael is the historic basis for the unity of the people at all times and places.
- 4) Judaism can be adapted to changing conditions according to biblical and talmudic teachings in the light of the development of the Tradition in all ages.
- 5) The traditional mitzvot, the precepts, are the basic precondition for the establishment of a Jewish way of life.

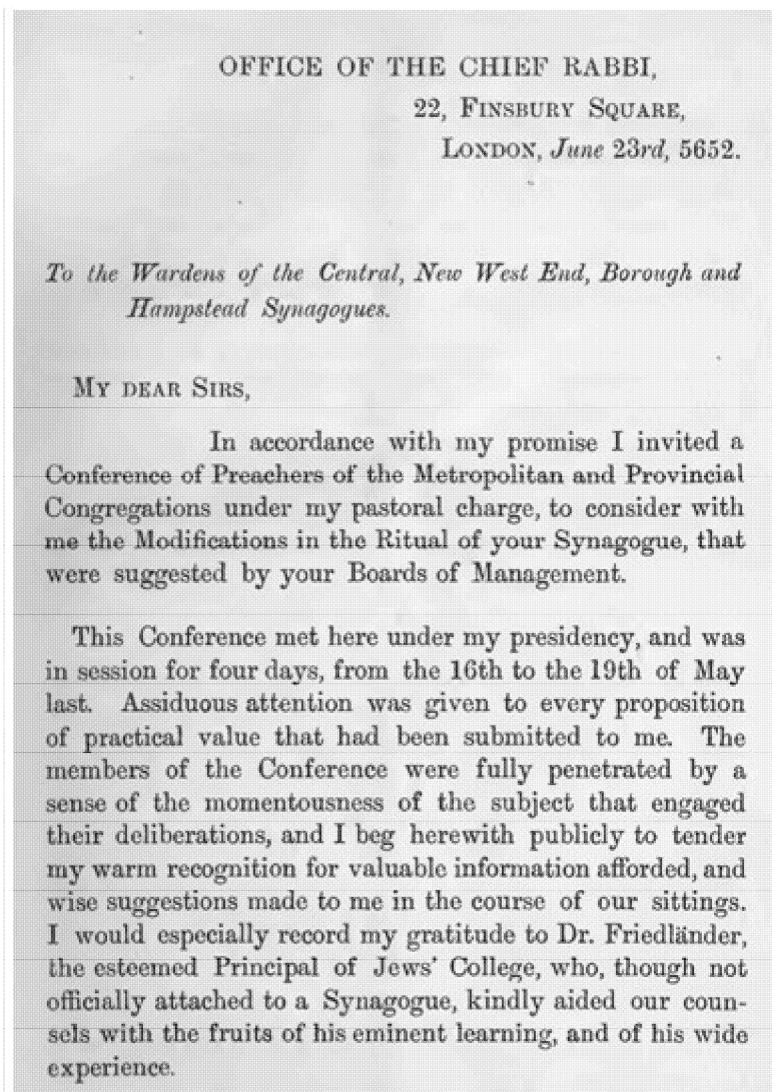
It has been pointed out that these principles were not formulated as a platform of the Historical School at any one occasion or even in one generation. They resulted from the collective judgment of many generations. Nevertheless, these principles were the pivot around which all the polemics against other currents, and the discussion within the Historical School itself, revolved. And these ideas make it possible to assess the adherence of individuals and congregations to the Historical School.

Thus, as far back as 1856, Isaac Leeser, the first spokesman of the Historical School, emphasized that traditional faith and Jewish communal existence must be based on the new conditions of modern society: Jewish emancipation, equality of rights, and practical separation of Church and State. These principles became guiding beacons to all members of the Historical School, whether they accepted the authority of the Shulhan Arukh in all its details or leaned toward modification in observance of the mitzvot. The leaders of the Historical School, unlike the Orthodox but like the Reformers, were willing to accept advantages accompanying the equality of rights and the cultural advances brought by the Enlightenment; they also wanted to benefit from the freedom that came as a result of the separation of Church and State. Unlike the Reformers, however, they were not willing to limit Jewish life so that it might evolve into a "Jewish Church" or to forgo -- within the separation of Church and State principle -- such questions, concerning the survival of the people, as education, family laws, and specifically Jewish aspects of communal life. Consequently, despite its strict insistence on the principle of separation of Church and State, the Historical School, like Orthodoxy, strove vigorously to maintain the religious, ethnic and cultural unity of American Jewry and its indissoluble tie with World Jewry. With Orthodoxy and unlike Reform, it strove to enforce the authority of Jewish Law. The Historical School believed that the Jews, because of their spiritual heritage, were unique among the nations of the world. It insisted upon the necessity of finding new approaches to Judaism which would maintain the integrity of Tradition and be consonant with the strivings for emancipation and democracy in America.

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**Conference In England To Consider Changes To Liturgy -June 23, 1888**

**Orthodox Jewry Reacts To The Reform Movement**



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**Prayer During The Period Of The German Reform Movement**

**Conference In England To Consider Changes To Liturgy -June 23, 1888**

I. MINYAN.—(B. 1).—The supposition that, in the absence of ten male worshippers, Divine Service need not, and should not be held in a Synagogue, is entirely erroneous. I am grieved to learn that, in several of the smaller provincial congregations, some of the members, after awaiting for a little while unsuccessfully the arrival of other worshippers to make up the prescribed *Minyan*, disperse without holding Service. This procedure is due to a misconception. Divine Service should be held, however small the numbers of worshippers may be. The Prayers should be offered up by the Reader with the same solemnity as though *Minyan* were present. But in accordance with our religious statute, certain portions, viz: קדיש וברכו and the repetition of the *Tefillah* with the *Kedushah*, should be omitted. The Scroll of the Law should be taken from the Ark, and the prescribed portion read, without any קוראים. The Haphtarah should also be recited, but without the blessings.

Should any mourner be present, I advise that, as the Kaddish must not be said, he should offer up the Prayer for Departed Relatives אנה י' מלך פלא רחמים. (The Authorised Daily Prayer Book, p. 323.)

**QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE  
BRIDAL COUPLE.**

*The Celebrant*.—“ You, A. B. and C. D., are about to be wedded according to the law of Moses and of Israel.

“ Will you, A. B., take this woman, C. D., to be your wedded wife? Will you be a true and faithful husband unto her? Will you protect and support her? Will you love, honour and cherish her? ”

*The Bridegroom*.—“ I will.”

*The Celebrant*.—“ Will you, C. D., take this man, A. B., to be your wedded husband? Will you be a true and faithful wife unto him? Will you love, honour and cherish him? ”

*The Bride*.—“ I will.”