


Jewish Literacy # 17 Jewish Community

Conversion, Movements Synagogue Life, etc.

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Conversion

Traditionally discourage converts 3 times (source is the Book of Ruth), Reform welcomes “unchurched” converts.

- Course of study
- *Beit Din*
- *Mikveh*
- *Brit Milah – Hatafat Dam Brit*



The Jewish Movements

- As we shall see, all are authentic, all are needed
- Most influence in US and Western Europe – not very significant in Israel and Eastern Europe.
 - In Israel, Jews are either religious or secular
- Not comparable to different Christian sects.
 - All Jews claim the same past
 - All want to see a unified Jewish people
 - All Jews accept all other Jews as fellow Jews (except for specific patrilineal descent and conversion issues)
- Many Jews join a congregation based on social and geographical factors



The Jewish Movements

Different religious composition of Jews in Israel and in the U.S.

% of Jewish adults in each country who identify as ...

Israel		%
Orthodox		22
Haredi (ultra-Orthodox)		9
Dati (religious)		13
Non-Orthodox		78
Masorti (traditional)		29
Hiloni (secular)		49
United States		%
Orthodox		10
Haredi		6
Modern Orthodox		3
Other		1
Non-Orthodox		90
Conservative		18
Reform		35
Other denomination		6
No denomination		30

Source: Survey conducted October 2014-May 2015. Data on U.S. Jews from survey conducted February-June 2013. A small proportion of Israeli Jews who did not provide a Jewish subgroup (<1%) are not shown.

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Reform

- Began in Germany in early 1800s. Adopted decorum, prayers and sermon in vernacular. Goal was to allow modern Jews to remain Jewish.
- Fundamental idea is the Judaism evolves – even traditional Judaism
- Many traditional doctrines changed:
 - Focus on Israel reduced – initially anti-Zionist
 - Rationalism replace mysticism
 - Messianic Age replaces concept of individual Messiah
 - Concept of eternity of human soul replaces bodily resurrection
 - Focus on Bible, especially on the Prophets – reduced emphasis on Talmud
 - Individual conscience and informed choice paramount
- Change in the last 30 years – more traditional
- Individual conscience and choice is emphasized. Ethical law is binding but choice allowed in ritual laws.
- Reform in America was intended to bring all the movements together
- Most contentious issue is patrilineal descent
- Congregational Organization: Union for Reform Judaism
- Rabbinic Organization: Central Conference of American Rabbis

Reform



Orthodox

- Only became a movement in response to Reform
- Holds that Jewish law is binding and unchanging
 - Struggle to adapt to Jewish law in the modern world (Shabbat elevator, Shabbat refrigerator, etc.)
 - Women and men are separate and have distinctly different roles
- Not monolithic – Hasidic, modern orthodox, fundamentalist - - each has its own yeshivas and day schools
- Congregational Organization: Union of Orthodox Congregations
- Rabbinic Organization: Rabbinical Council of America and *Agudat Harabbanim* (Union of Orthodox Rabbis) – Hasidic sects do not participate in these.
- *Baalei Teshuvah* Movement: newly observant Jews

Orthodox- Chasidism

- Began as followers of Israel ben Eliezer (the *Baal Shem Tov* [*BESHT*])– “Master of the Good Name.” Born around 1700
- The first “reform” movement – reformed the idea that one had to be a scholar to relate to God. Chasidim value prayer above study.
- Heavily spiritual and Kabbalistic.
- From the *Besht*, came many movements within Chasidim – best known is *Chabad* or the *Lubavicher* movement.

Orthodox



Conservative

- Began early this century in the US as a reaction to Reform.
- Jewish law is binding but can change with the times
 - Authority vested in a central rabbinic authority (note: orthodoxy does not do this – there, authority depends on the reputation of the rabbi) and in the way the congregation interprets it.
 - Examples, women Rabbis, driving to synagogue on Shabbat, mixed seating, etc.
- Services are often very similar to Orthodox.
- Congregational Organization: United Synagogue
- Rabbinic Organization: Rabbinical Assembly

Smaller Movements

- Reconstructionist
 - Founded by Mordecai Kaplan in 1930s
 - He did not believe in a personal God – Kaplan's God is the "Power that makes for salvation."
 - Judaism is the civilization, the culture of the Jewish people; the people are the generators of Jewish life.
 - Rejects the notion of the Jewish people's Chosenness.
 - Congregational Organization: Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and *Havurot*
- Jewish Renewal – an emerging movement.
 - Like Reform, it is not halachic
 - Like Chasidism, it is focused on prayer and spirituality.

Ashkenazim and Sephardim

- **Ashkenazim:** Jews who trace their ancestry back to Western Europe and then to Eastern Europe. Adopted *Yiddish* (a mixture of German and Hebrew) and a distinctive pronunciation for Hebrew.
- **Sephardim:** Jews who trace their ancestry back to Spain and then emigrated to Africa and the Middle East. Adopted *Ladino* (a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew).

All the Movements are Authentic

- In biblical times we had the *Kohanim* (priests), the *Levi'im* (their attendants) and the *Yisroelim* (Israelites, everyone else). Today, each of the movements has its role to fulfill if we are to be a light to the nations and repair the world. If all the Jews in the world lived as secular Zionists – the religion of Judaism would collapse. If no Jews were secular Zionists, we would have no State of Israel.
- **Orthodoxy:** Make the rest of us question every change and keep the sacred texts alive. They also created Jewish Day Schools. But the Orthodox reject interaction with the non-Jewish world on the plane of religious ideas. In a world where the choice is between Orthodoxy and nothing (i.e., modern Israel), most Jews choose nothing (i.e., non-observance).
- **Conservative:** The one movement that struggles with Jewish law; as a result, there is a heavy emphasis on the scientific study of Judaism. Biggest problem: lack of passion.
- **Reform:** Critical since most Jews will not be halachic. Also, the one movement that focuses on interaction with the non-Jewish world. Biggest problems: lack of boundaries, lack of concept of sin, lack of authority. The challenge in Reform is to produce serious, religious Reform Jews. The temptation for Reform Jews is to say “We’re Reform, we don’t need to do that.”

For Our Next (and Last) Class

SEXUALITY

AND ???

**BRING YOUR OWN
QUESTIONS!**