





***American Jewish Committee***

*The Jacob Blaustein Building  
165 East 56 Street  
New York, NY 10022*

*The American Jewish Committee publishes in these areas:*

- *Hatred and Anti-Semitism* • *Pluralism* • *Israel*
- *American Jewish Life* • *International Jewish Life* • *Human Rights*

*www.ajc.org  
August 2005*

*\$5.00*

*The American Jewish Committee protects the rights and freedoms of Jews the world over; combats bigotry and anti-Semitism and promotes human rights for all; works for the security of Israel and deepened understanding between Americans and Israelis; advocates public policy positions rooted in American democratic values and the perspectives of the Jewish heritage; and enhances the creative vitality of the Jewish people. Founded in 1906, it is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States.*

# CANON OF JEWISH LITERACY

Guide  
for the Thoughtful Jewish Leader

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson (<http://www.bradartson.com>) is the dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies and vice president of the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, where he teaches Ancient and Medieval Jewish Philosophy, as well as Senior Homiletics. He is a doctoral candidate in Constructive Theology at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He is the author of six books and a weekly email commentary on the Torah portion that goes to almost 12,000 subscribers; his book on leadership, *The Gift of Soul*, is scheduled for release this spring. Rabbi Artson served as a congregational rabbi in Southern California for ten years. On the editorial board of several journals and magazines, Rabbi Artson has written over 165 articles, serves on the faculty of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, and speaks frequently for UJA/Federation communities. He lives with his wife, Elana, and their twins, Shira and Jacob.

# Contents

Foreword	<i>v</i>
<b>Canon of Jewish Literacy: Guide for the Thoughtful Jewish Leader</b>	1
Reference Works	2
Introduction to Judaism	4
The Bible	6
Rabbinic Judaism	9
History	15
Israel and Zionism	20
Philosophy and Theology	24
Laws, Ethics, and Observance	27
Spirituality and Mysticism	31
Prayer and Holy Days	34
Women and Gender	37
Appendix: List of Books in the Canon	40

Visit [www.ajc.org/canon](http://www.ajc.org/canon) for a full range of resources related to *Canon of Jewish Literacy*. At the *Canon* Web page, you will be able to order additional copies of the *Canon*, download study and program guides, access a link for purchase of *Canon* volumes, participate in a message board discussion of the *Canon*, and more.

## Foreword

Jews have long been known as the “People of the Book.” Originally the term was coined by Muhammad as an epithet describing the Jews as among those who revere Scripture. The term has come to assume multiple meanings, including the intellectual curiosity of the Jews, and, most commonly, ascribing meaning to Jewish identity through the act of Jewish learning. To the question “What is a Jew?” a fruitful answer might be one who sets aside time regularly for the study of Jewish text. This definition of Jewish identity as intellectual wrestling with Jewish teachings stands in pronounced contrast to other traditions that emphasize a leap of faith by the believer.

Within AJC, this depiction of the Jews has particular salience. An intellectual agency that prides itself on careful research and belief in the power of ideas to change society, AJC is a natural setting for encouraging Jews to live up to their designation as “People of the Book.” In recent years especially, the gap between the secular educational attainments of American Jews and their Jewish educational achievements has widened considerably. We insist upon excellence in our university educations, yet often content ourselves with the most minimal of Judaic knowledge. To be sure, coexisting with a narrative of Jewish assimilation in America has been a renaissance of Jewish learning. Close to 30 percent of Jewish children today attend full-time Jewish day school. Close to 40 percent of recent college graduates have taken at least one course in Jewish studies. On more senior levels, high-quality adult Jewish education programs, especially targeted to Jewish leadership, make available the treasures of Jewish scholarship to a broader cross section of today’s Jews.

In this American context of a dual narrative, we have sought to create a *Canon of Jewish Literacy*, identifying key volumes that every literate Jew, ideally, should own and read. To be sure, the term “canon” is problematic for some. For one thing, battles over books have at times been vitriolic, resulting in the infamous burning of the *Guide for the Perplexed* in the thirteenth century and, more recently, similar treatment for Mordecai Kaplan’s *New Haggadah*. Canon implies a list of “approved” books, which, of course, only feeds the unhealthy appetite for censorship that, unfortunately, possesses too strong a current within Jewish history.

Secondly, canon suggests a relatively closed set. Canons act more often to exclude than to include. From the earliest days of the canonization of the Bible, non-biblical books effectively became “external works,” inaccessible to most and sorely deficient in readership.

Nevertheless, not all books possess equal value. As Francis Bacon observed, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed

and digested.” A *Canon of Jewish Literacy* permits us to differentiate between essential and recommended reading and, especially for Jewish leadership, create a standard of Jewish literacy that all may attain. Moreover, it suggests quite properly that the Jewish home will be uplifted by the quality of Jewish books within it.

Moreover, we have introduced several correctives to the pitfalls of a closed canon. A page on the AJC Web site, [www.ajc.org/canon](http://www.ajc.org/canon), enables us to solicit suggestions and recommendations for future editions. We invite you to visit this Web address and be a part of the ongoing discussion about both the choices of the *Canon* and the books themselves. This message board will be a lively forum to talk about books. Secondly, we have tried to err on the side of inclusivity, assigning to the *Canon* volumes on subjects often downplayed in discussions of Judaic heritage.

Of particular value to us has been the involvement from the beginning of Rabbi Bradley Artson, dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, University of Judaism, who accepted our invitation to develop the *Canon*. An outstanding teacher, Rabbi Artson clearly embodies the definition of Jewish identity as embracing Jewish learning. His choices for the *Canon* were both broad-ranging and wise, and his mini-essays explain those often difficult decisions while providing a descriptive guide, including both the strengths and weaknesses of individual volumes.

Not everyone will necessarily agree with Rabbi Artson’s choices. I have my own disagreements, and others will inevitably have theirs. Hence, the critical importance of the open nature of the *Canon*. By sending us your disagreements and alternatives, you enter into an ongoing discussion that will be revisited for future editions in the years ahead. The *Canon* is not designed to offer the final word on Judaic literacy. It is meant to stimulate thinking about what a Jewish book is, how one reads it, and what relevance it has to Jews living in twenty-first-century America.

Many individuals contributed to making this project a reality. The idea for the *Canon* originated with the Contemporary Jewish Life Commission’s Steering Committee. Lynn Korda Kroll, then the commission chair, initiated the concept. Key AJC lay leaders, including Dr. Sam Klagsbrun, current commission chair, Mimi Alperin, public affairs chair, and Billie Gold all endorsed the idea and helped develop it. AJC president E. Robert Goodkind has never ceased to challenge us to stress the centrality of Jewish learning to our role as Jewish leaders. Staff members Noam Marans and Susie Baumohl have helped to develop the *Canon* programmatically for AJC chapters. Last, and by no means least, Rabbi Artson, through his personal example, has given real meaning to the phrase “People of the Book.”

Steven Bayme, National Director  
Contemporary Jewish Life Department

# Canon of Jewish Literacy: Guide for the Thoughtful Jewish Leader

Jewish tradition revels in words. God speaks the world into creation, calling us to be a people, and revealing a sacred way of life through the gift of words. We Jews, in turn, have joined in this millennial cascade of speech in a series of books, commentaries, and debates that provide the garment through which our people have come to know God, to define ourselves, and to clarify our role in the world.

A tradition of words and books requires a high level of literacy for those seeking to participate in the life of the Jewish people, all the more so for those who would provide leadership during times of challenge and opportunity. To equip our leaders for the task by providing access to the profundities of Jewish insight and reflection, we have created this admittedly partial *Canon of Jewish Literacy*. We have tried to include books of sufficient depth to be worthy of serious attention while at the same time not excluding the intelligent lay reader by an excessively academic approach. We have deliberately sought out scholars across denominational lines, from all streams of Jewish life, and from male and female perspectives.

Given the remarkable range of writings of such a prolific people, any list would have to be partial and subjective. Weight was given to recent and contemporary writings, not because they are necessarily better than their predecessors, but because they are more accessible to the leaders we seek to prepare.

We begin with a collection of “Resources,” books that belong in every Jewish home as they are the backbone of our culture, faith, and people. Where there are denominational editions (e.g., with the *Humash*, the Pentateuch, or the *Siddur*, the prayer book), we have provided alternatives, encouraging the reader to view them, not as mutually exclusive competitors, but as supplements to the core text, each elucidating a particular perspective from which to embrace Jewish tradition.

The core of this *Canon* consists of thirty books that cover the broad range of topics encompassing Jewish experience, spirit, and thought. Most of these books themselves provide bibliographies for further study in each field.

It remains only to thank the American Jewish Committee, particularly David Harris, Steven Bayme, and Rabbi Noam Marans, for their vision and initiative in recognizing the need for a literate leadership and for moving this canon into reality.

As always, I thank מי שאמר והיה העולם, the One-Who-Spoke-And-The-World-Existed, for the gifts of speech and existence. May we be blessed to use them wisely.

## Reference Works

### Atlases, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias

All fields of Jewish learning assume some familiarity with geography as well as an ability to access specific information and to reference Scripture and liturgy. Fortunately, these references are easy to compile.

- ▶ *A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*, Eli Barnavi, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1992) presents a tremendous amount of information, including superb maps, photographs, and essays. It is an excellent introduction to Jewish history and culture.
- ▶ More straightforward essays on a wide range of topics are to be found in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. in chief (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and in *The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, Louis Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). The advantage of both these works is that each is a single volume. Werblowsky and Wigoder assembled a masterful team of scholars, while Jacobs himself was well up to the task.
- ▶ For multivolume works, the reader is encouraged to turn to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (accessible online at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>) and *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing; New York: Macmillan, 1972; CD-ROM, Davka). For anything that happened or was thought prior to 1901, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* remains the superior work.

### Bibles

All subsequent Jewish thought and history saw itself in light of the Bible; hence a good Bible is a necessity for every Jewish field of inquiry. *The Jewish Study Bible*, Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) is a superb one-volume edition of the Hebrew Scripture, with excellent essays that constitute an education in and of themselves. Each denomination has produced its own *Humash* (Five Books of Moses) with a commentary. By far the best is *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, David L. Lieber, Jules Harlow, eds. (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001). Also excellent is *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, W. Gunther

Plaut, ed. (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, 2005). An Orthodox perspective can be found in *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, Nosson Scherman, ed. (New York: Mesorah, 1993).

## Siddurim

The *Siddur* is almost as essential as Scriptures, since it was the prayer book that was the constant companion of the Jew throughout the ages. Each denomination has produced its own version of this supple compilation, the most recent being *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1998) and *Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2002). The Reform movement uses *Gates of Prayer* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975), while the Reconstructionists use *Kol Haneshamah* (Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1994), and the Orthodox have produced the *Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984).

## Introduction to Judaism

### 1. Leo Schwartz, *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People* (New York: Modern Library, 1977).

First published in 1956, this collection of extended essays covers the grand sweep of Jewish history and Jewish thought better than any volume before or since. The master scholars who wrote each of its sections remain foundational giants of the academic study of Judaism. While subsequent scholarship may have superseded some of the book's particulars, the grandeur and scope of their vision remain unsurpassed.

Yehezkel Kaufmann lays out the flow of the biblical age in the first section, setting the Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context. But he also addresses the uniqueness of the Bible's insights and perspectives and their flowering, first in Israel's classical prophets (specifically Isaiah and Jeremiah) and then in the emergence of classical Judaism at the end of the biblical period, when the Torah became a book. Ralph Marcus, on the Hellenistic age, examines how Judaism rose to the challenge of the Greco-Roman period, largely by internalizing and filtering the larger culture through Jewish perspectives. Gerson Cohen's masterful summation of the Talmudic age remains a model for careful historical and intellectual exposition, as does Abraham Halkin's survey of the Judeo-Islamic age and Cecil Roth's discussion of the European Age (by which he means medieval times). Roth's great strength is in challenging the smugness of modernity, which continues to see the medieval period as "dark," despite the flowering of so many Jewish communities and so many realms of Jewish creativity. Finally, Salo Baron presents his perspective on the modern age, offering a synthetic approach to the challenges that modernity poses for Jewish survival and the various ways that different segments of the Jewish community have responded to those challenges.

This book remains both a description of paths taken and an in-depth perspective on how our past continues to shape the present and color our future. The particular strength of this book is also its most visible weakness: It is the conviction of each of the authors that what is most worthy of our attention are the ideas and culture of the Jewish people—which is the scholarly way of saying religion. Seeing the sweep of Jewish history in the light of Jewish religion gives coherence and direction to their narratives, making possible synthesis, prognosis, and prognostication. As helpful as that perspective is, and as widely shared, it does have its challengers who would argue that any single perspective applied to all of Jewish history can't help but

flatten the diversity of Jewish experiences (as opposed to “the Jewish experience”). Furthermore, it defines away much that would otherwise command greater attention—economics, for example.

## The Bible

2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*  
(New York: Basic Books, 1981) and  
*The Art of Biblical Poetry*  
(New York: Basic Books, 1985).

It sounds so simple: Treat the greatest work of literature in human history like a work of literature and see what you come up with. When Robert Alter burst onto the scene of biblical studies with his revolutionary tools of literary analysis, the clarity and beauty of his prose, the laser focus of his analysis, and his marvelous insights rocked the literate readers of the Bible across North America. His deft touch and scholarly credentials as a serious reader of literature made those familiar with the great works of Western fiction feel comfortable, reassured, and sure. His lack of credentials in any field of academic biblical scholarship (i.e., archaeology, history, or even biblical scholarship itself) made him a ready target for professional Bible scholars (some of whom, to this day, brush off his writing as “not serious.”)

For all the controversy that has accompanied his work, it is hard to find a substitute for these two gems. If you want to find a way to take the Bible seriously, seeing its form and style as contributing to its message, you can do no better than to spend some serious time reading Robert Alter.

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Alter works to illuminate and provide examples of how biblical narrative works. Focusing extensively on the stories of Genesis and Exodus as well as the David cycle, Alter applies the tools of Western literary analysis, to great profit. For example, he notes the recurrence of stories involving boy-meets-girl (in this case, often patriarch-meets-future-matriarch or prophet-meets-wife) at a well. Comparing that stock scene to the shoot-out sequences in Westerns, Alter allows us to focus on the not-so-subtle distinctions between one well scene and another, giving us a fuller understanding of Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, and Zipporah. Those literary types lend the biblical characters nuance and depth that otherwise might elude a less careful read.

*The Art of Biblical Poetry* advances the agenda of the previous book. This time Alter looks at the structure of biblical poetry, focusing especially on parallelism and how it intensifies meaning in the second line (so that the second part is, in fact, more than merely parallel). Alter then uses his approach to analyze selected poems in the Hebrew Bible and Psalter. Many of his insights can be found in the work of other

scholars as well, but that in no way detracts from Alter's contribution in making these insights available to a larger public—and a good read at that!

### 3. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*

(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Summit Books, 1987;  
San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

Richard Elliot Friedman is that rare creative scholar who produces first-rate academic research while also writing popular works that translate significant finds of his field into language that intelligent lay readers find accessible and compelling. By far his most popular work (though not his only book worth reading) is *Who Wrote the Bible?* Like his *Disappearance of God*, this book is written as a mystery. In this case, he reveals the sleuthlike work that first created the problem and then the academic detectives who assembled the evidence finally to name names. Friedman begins by explaining what compelled scholars to reject the simple (and straightforward) traditional notion that Moses was personally responsible for each and every word found in the Torah. Duplicate stories, distinctive vocabulary in the different tellings, consistently different names for God in the different versions—these and other revealing pieces of data compelled the scholars (who were often clergymen too) to reject the dogma of Mosaic authorship and to substitute a theory of different documents blended by a master editor (the “documentary hypothesis” that now inspires the allegiance of virtually the entire field of biblical scholarship).

Far from making for dry reading, Friedman has created a real page-turner, as the reader is led down byways and dead ends, chasing the evidence closer and closer until finally coming face to face with the man who wrote the Bible—or at least the work of D.

Whether subsequent scholarship vindicates Friedman's audacious claim to have identified the specific author of the Bible, this book remains the best and most compelling guide to how the Torah came to be, why it has some of the traits it has, and why scholars account for its origins in the way they do. Besides approaching the Torah in a spirit of dispassionate scholarship, Friedman is also respectful (almost reverent) toward the Torah and the world it created. Knowing who wrote the Bible isn't the same as knowing Who inspired it, or Who can be met in its words. Friedman has faith, shared by many of us, that exposure to the methods and insights of Western learning can only enhance our ability to live worthy lives illumined by the light of Torah and its traditions. For an introduction to the academic study of the Bible, there is simply no better guide than Friedman, and no better book than this one.

4. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*

(Minneapolis: Winston Seabury, 1985;

paperback, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

Christian theologians throughout the last century have worked to distill a single, coherent biblical theology that would provide an independent yardstick for evaluating the authenticity of religious claims and, perhaps, could even be used to formulate priorities and agendas into the future. While there have been few comparable efforts from Jewish scholars (in part, because Jewish theology has generally been rooted in rabbinical texts, seeing biblical literature through rabbinic spectacles), this fascinating book by Jon Levenson is a notable and worthy exception. Levenson is a superb scholar, punctilious, learned, literate, and creative. In this pearl of a book, he attempts to distill a coherent message from the Hebrew Bible, and, to my mind, succeeds admirably.

Levenson establishes two poles between which biblical theology functions, each represented by a mountain. Sinai is the mountain of covenant—a relationship with God that is conditional, dependent on human participation, saturated with ethical implication, and manifest in law. Moses is the key figure in this drama, and the Jewish people play their role by rising to the challenge of interpreting and applying the demands of law and morality to their personal and communal life. The second pole of biblical value is Zion, a cosmic eruption into the world, absolute and unconditional. This intrusion of the holy into the secular is embodied by David and by the monarchical dynasty that bears his name and stretches into the messianic future. While the Mosaic covenant can be retracted if Israel doesn't adhere to its ethical and normative obligations, the Davidic dynasty implies a line leading to the advent of the messiah, in an act of Divine *hesed* (kindness). The promises made to the House of David are absolute and independent of Israel's behavior.

Between these two modes of being, these two pivotal ways of seeing God in the world, the Hebrew Bible creates a dynamic tension—absolute and conditional, law and cosmos, ethics and holiness—interacting, competing, and complementing each other in a dynamic and fruitful tension.

Levenson knows his Bible and is steeped in biblical theology. He is a reliable and courageous guide who asks us not only to know the words of Torah, but to ponder what the Torah *means* for us today and how we should translate this book into life. His questions are always worth reflecting upon, and his answers are pretty solid, too.

# Rabbinic Judaism

## Primary Documents

### 5. *Talmud Bavli*, Schottenstein Edition

(Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications);

English edition, 73 volumes, begun in 1990, completed in 2005.

For at least the past 1,500 years, the Babylonian Talmud has been the single most significant collection of Jewish writing—a compilation touching upon law, agriculture, medicine, poetry, philosophy, and just about every other intellectual and social endeavor known to humankind. Nothing is outside the purview or interest of the Talmud, which, by its structure and content, invites the reader to join a conversation that spans continents and generations in a great cosmic symposium. “Judaism” in many ways is a synonym for Talmud (which may be one reason why the Talmud was the first book to be consumed in the pyres of medieval anti-Semitism).

The Talmud, for all that, is also unique. It has no real beginning—every part of the Talmud assumes familiarity with every other part. It has no finality—of the 5,000 or so arguments, only fifty end in a conclusion; the rest simply pause and are replaced by another discussion. The Talmud seems keenly interested in questioning and process, yet remarkably uninterested in definitive answers or conclusions. Partly a commentary on the Bible, the Talmud has an agenda, content, and organization that are independent of the Bible, as are many of its concerns. Rabbis argue vehemently with each other, yet remain colleagues, friends, and often relatives. A book with many characters yet no identified author or narrator, its structure is one of a series of discussions, all already launched, all in mid-stride. (Want to find any quotation or topic in particular? There is no “Table of Contents,” beyond the names of the books, which do and do not describe what is in each tractate, but there are now CD-ROMs available from Davka Corporation that will scan for an English or Hebrew word or phrase.)

Perhaps because the Talmud is unique, it poses a particular challenge to anyone seeking to enter its portals. Yet its prominence as the central address of rabbinic Judaism dooms anyone not familiar with it to marginal status in terms of Jewish learning. Until recently, this dichotomy was not a problem. Those who revered the Talmud could understand Aramaic, and those who couldn’t understand Aramaic didn’t want to read the Talmud. In one of the unanticipated miracles of Jewish life, we now live in a time when large numbers of Jews who are ill-equipped to learn Tal-

mud are hungry to do so. And for that effort, the valiant commentators and publishers at ArtScroll have performed a service of remarkable proportion. Their teams of rabbis have translated the Talmud anew (in editions in English, French, Spanish, Hebrew, and Russian), and organized their translation with a flowing commentary that explains the debates, issues, backgrounds, and approaches, so that an intelligent reader can follow along. As you learn Talmud, the enormity of their contribution becomes clear. Wisely, next to each page of their commentary, they have printed the traditional standardized page of the Vilna Talmud (published between 1835 and 1854), so you can study with people who don't use the ArtScroll edition, or you can look up a traditional commentator (such as Rashi or Rabbenu Hananel) on the facing page.

At present, there is simply no competition. If you want to learn Talmud and can't sit in a yeshiva all day, ArtScroll is the way to go.

6. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds.,  
**The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah:  
Legends from the Talmud and Midrash,**  
translated by William G. Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).  
**Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews***  
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society); first edition,  
seven volumes, 1938, translated by Henrietta Szold;  
new edition, two volumes, 2003, introduction by David Stern.

As central as the Talmud is, the literature of rabbinic Judaism is not exhausted by the text of the Talmud alone. Extensive collections of rabbinic commentary on the Bible (*midrash*) contain gems of interpretation, both legal (*halakha*) and narrative (*aggada*). *Midrash* is a genre, a way of reading, and a library, that is, a collection of specific books containing *midrashim*. Some *midrashim* are organized by the book of the Bible that provides their primary focus (such as *Genesis Rabbah*, or *Sifra* to Leviticus). Other *midrashim* are organized by the liturgical calendar (such as *Pirkei de-Rebbe Eliezer*). All of these *midrashim* delight the soul with their wordplay, their pithy insights, their profound revelations, and their deep understanding of the human soul. Like the Talmud, the unpruned growth of *midrash* can be difficult for a novice to enter, yet anyone who wants to understand the Jewish delight in literature, creativity, and intellectual play must learn to dance with *midrash*. Anyone who wants to provide roots and antecedents to contemporary ways to read and explicate literature and philosophy will also want to spend time with *midrash*. There are two wonderful books that can make that initial exposure substantive and pleasant.

The great Israeli poet Hayim Nahman Bialik teamed up with his colleague Yehoshua Ravnitzky to organize various *midrashim* by topic and by personality. Going through the great figures of the Bible, then the leading sages, then a selection of Jewish values and priorities, *The Book of Legends* makes it possible to read the highlights of *midrashim* culled from collections spanning a thousand years and much of the globe. They are organized by topics, and present a range of rabbinic thought on a wide variety of religious topics, including holy days, festivals, observances, and commandments, as well as Jewish values and ethics. Bialik's selections are wonderful, and really do present a solid sampling of the voices of *midrash* and its concerns. An additional strength of this collection is that the separate sources and voices of each *midrash* are maintained distinctly, so one is able to appreciate the different sources of *midrashim* from which Bialik's selections were taken.

Taking a very different organizational model, Louis Ginzberg created a new work: Going through the stories of the Bible and telling the various midrashic additions and stories that clung to the biblical core, he became the new narrator, recounting the stories as a seamless whole. Only by consulting his copious notes can you discern the stunning range of his literary mastery and the artful way he wove these disparate strands into a single telling.

Both books possess considerable strengths, both will reward repeated reading, and both will allow you to see wonders in Torah and the world that you never appreciated before.

## Understanding Rabbinic Judaism

### 7. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice*

(Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

Understanding the agenda and motivation of the ancient rabbis requires more than simply reading the primary sources of rabbinic Judaism. The material is so dense, so different from Western models of literature, and assumes so much knowledge of the rabbinic mindset that it is virtually impossible to study without an expert scholar to guide your learning. One area in which rabbinics is particularly opaque to the modern reader is in deciphering the attitudes of the sages toward women and gender relations. On the one extreme, there are scholars (and plenty of texts) asserting that women are chattel and, like cattle or real estate, can be transferred from the authority of one man to another in highly controlled legal exchanges. On the other end, there are scholars (and plenty of texts) maintaining that women are men's equals or that they occupy an even higher spiritual plane than men can attain.

Refusing to be swayed by the extremes of either misogyny or propaganda, Judith Hauptman, rabbi, Jewish Theological Seminary professor, and Talmudist, has earned a reputation as a preeminent guide through the maze of rabbinics. In *Rereading the Rabbis* she sets her sights on bringing coherence and clarity to how the rabbis understood gender relations and the roles of women in Jewish life. Rather than seeing the Talmud as a random collection of laws and stories, Hauptman lays out the evidence for a nuanced and surprisingly upbeat view of a coherent agenda seeking to expand the rights and standing of women within a patriarchal system (that was, itself, nestled within an all-encompassing patriarchal world). The range of topics is breathtaking: the wife accused of adultery, relations between the sexes, marriage, rape and seduction, divorce, procreation, menstrual impurity, inheritance, testimony, and ritual.

Hauptman amasses a large body of rabbinic law and narrative to demonstrate that the rabbis deliberately assigned themselves the task of advancing the status of women beyond where the Bible had left off and of elevating the legal prerogatives of women beyond those enjoyed by women under other contemporary legal systems. Comparing the place and rights of Jewish women to those under Greek and Roman law, Hauptman makes a compelling case that rabbinic Judaism regularly added power and choice to the roles women exercised in areas as diverse as inheritance, marriage, divorce, and economics. She lays out a theoretical model for reading a coherent message into the amorphous mass of rabbinic writings, and at the same time, provides numerous specific examples and extensive quotations to support her claims. Her writing is a model that is at once scholarly and engaged, illuminating the ancient sources of Judaism, while simultaneously advocating a contemporary agenda for the modern-day heirs to the Talmud.

**8. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Rabbinic Stories***

(New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

One of the most delightful aspects of rabbinic literature, a facet that has delighted the Jewish masses across the generations, is the emphasis on story found throughout the writings of the rabbis. Given that rabbinic literature is, in an important sense, communal (the first rabbinic book written by an individual was the philosophical treatise of Rav Sa'adia Gaon in the tenth century), these stories grant access into the playful and trusting side of the rabbinic mind. Less interested in laying down law, these narratives explore philosophical and theological insights, teach morality and ethics, embody folk wisdom, or translate biblical implications into contemporary life.

Jeffrey Rubenstein is the right person to introduce these stories to us. A rabbi and a professor of Judaic studies, he authored the single most insightful book on the rabbinic transformation of the festival of Sukkot and a scholarly analysis of the role of talmudic stories. This collection of stories, more popular in tone, comes graced with a thoughtful introduction by Rubenstein, who also makes explanatory comments with each set of tales, giving us the necessary background and context to appreciate the stories' purpose and function. He divides the stories into nine large rubrics: Historical Memory; Rabbinic Authority and Character; Life and Death; Holy Men and Rabbinic Masters; Women and Marriage; Romans and Others; The Life of Piety; Suffering and Martyrdom; Sin and Repentance. Through these headings, Rubenstein allows the stories to present a large overview of rabbinic priorities, values, and concerns.

The stories invite us inside the rabbinic mind, and are all the more important because the ancient rabbis did not write history or philosophical tracts. The stories function to reveal their thoughts on a wide range of nonlegal topics, and reveal the central role of the rabbi as holy man. Not only are authoritative interpretations of Torah distilled into words, but they are also revealed in the lives and behaviors of the rabbis themselves. Because of this identification of Torah and rabbis, their deeds and teachings embody living Torah, which could inspire and instruct new generations of sages to follow suit.

Rabbinic texts are often divided into two broad categories: *halakha* (law) and *aggada* (narrative). Each informs the other, as *halakha* crystallizes and embodies *aggada*, and *aggada* extends and informs *halakha*. By offering us this organized and narrated collection of rabbinic stories, Rubenstein allows us to peer into Judaism's dynamic engine, the living resources that drive the halakhic process under the surface and that exemplify the rabbis' values as they made their way in the world. The stories entertain (and were intended to entertain), but they do far more than that. They instruct, and their teaching ("Torah" means "teaching") offers a timeless guide for Jewish identity and commitment today.

**9. Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book***  
(New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

It is no exaggeration to say that Jacob Neusner is the most prolific academic scholar of rabbinics alive. In the course of his extraordinary career, he has transformed the study not only of rabbinics but of Judaism as a whole, by regularly asking questions that his predecessors had neglected, compiling data, and translating vast documents. He has opened rabbinics to non-Jewish scholars by translating all of rabbinic litera-

ture (itself a staggering attainment) and has written works of such creativity and significance that scholars will be addressing his questions and challenges for a century to come.

The capstone of Neusner's greatness is that he is not content to speak only within the small, self-contained borders of academia. In popular writings, articles, and books, Neusner has made himself a model of the scholar concerned to create an educated public and to foster a broad and informed conversation about Judaism that is nourished by Jewish sources. What other professor has written textbooks for children? His popular books on every aspect of Judaism—on interfaith relations, on Jewish history and its significance, on contemporary Jewish life, on Israel, on politics—have revealed his indefatigable commitment to provide Jews with the tools they need to fashion a Jewish life worthy of the name.

For that reason, no canon of Jewish literacy could today ignore Neusner's presence. Especially in the realm of rabbinics, Neusner is an important guide. In this *Invitation*, he opens the gates of Talmud for the adult who wants to learn to navigate its essential text but needs a competent scholar to assist him. Beginning with a brilliant essay that sets the Talmud in context, he then lays out the nature of the Mishna, Tosefta, and the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, finally closing with a magnificent essay on "Talmudic Thinking and Us." The vast amount of learning that writing such a book requires is both staggering and invisible to the reader, who is presented with a work that makes the Talmud accessible and significant. Ample quotations from rabbinic literature expose the reader to the cadence, content, and methods of rabbinics, guided by Neusner's gentle comments and insights.

There is no single work that can introduce the Talmud better than this one. If you can't afford to take off a year to sit in a yeshiva and learn, this book is your best shot at learning to navigate the sea of Talmud.

# History

## Primary Documents

10. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book: 315–1791* (Cincinnati: Sinai Press, 1938; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999).

The Middle Ages, ever since the beginning of the Renaissance, have suffered a terrible reputation, in part because of the ardent desire of succeeding generations to think that they were different (and better) than the so-called “Dark Ages.” One doesn’t have to be a great admirer of bubonic plagues or crusades to insist that the Middle Ages were a period of remarkable transformation, growth, and dynamism. Judaism looks like Judaism because of the Middle Ages, and many of the remarkable innovations that make our modern world familiar are the products of medieval minds and efforts. During the early part of this period the redaction of the Talmud took place, and it became the dominant expression of Jewish inquiry and observance. Hebrew poetry, Jewish philosophy, codes, the *Siddur*—all were products of the Middle Ages. Letting this thousand-year period of creativity, nuance, and complexity speak for itself is the gift that Jacob Rader Marcus makes possible through this masterful anthology of sources.

Marcus brings the touch of a master historian to the task of organizing a vast array of documents into a developing story line. By dividing the topics into coherent subjects, he makes it possible for us to see the dynamism and shifts in the status of Jews in medieval polities; the rich harvests in Jewish intellectual and religious life, and in the relations between the Jewish people and the Christian Church; and the move toward modernity in economics, social relations, and thought. The reader will be surprised by the vitality encountered on every page, repulsed by the barbarities that theological hubris and political entitlement made acceptable, and in awe of the creativity and energy that the Jews of the period harnessed to live meaningful and fruitful lives throughout the era.

The medieval period is characterized by competing monotheisms (Christianity vs. Islam, with Judaism getting squeezed from both sides) as well as a static vision of society as unchanging and divinely ordained and of people as minding their places—both geographically and socially.

Contemporary Jews expect to find that Jewish-Christian relations in the Mid-

dle Ages were bleak, and they often were. They expect to find Jewish spiritual and intellectual life dynamic and compelling (after all, the eleventh and twelfth centuries were the period of the great scholars Rashi and Maimonides), and they were. They expect to find the persecutions, book burnings, and Inquisitions repugnant, and indeed they were. But today's Jews are often shocked and surprised by the complexity and authority of Jewish communal life. Reading about the Jewish organizations of Poland, one cannot but envy their ability to care for the Jewish poor, to provide for education so widely, and to care for visitors and strangers with such quiet efficiency.

The arrogance of modernity is to presume superiority over the dead. Other than in technological sophistication, the claim to superiority is difficult to sustain, as this collection makes clear. For that reason alone, and to provide us access to a remarkable collection of evidences of Jewish vitality, this book is a must read.

**11. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds.,**  
*The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*  
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 1995).

The erosion of the medieval structures—the feudal manor, the static social hierarchy, the domination of a monolithic church and Islam—was accompanied by considerable economic innovation and a shifting of power toward a growing, acquisitive business class; the rise of the notion of a citizen, an individual who relates directly to the state rather than through a particular community or group; and a growing demand for individual freedoms. That dynamic continues to reverberate throughout the globe, and its implications are by no means fully realized even today.

How did that transformation play itself out for the Jews? This masterful collection by Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz allows us to watch as modernity sweeps up the Jews and carries them onto the roller-coaster ride that is modernity. Starting in the sixteenth century, the anthology offers a wonderful synthesis of political, social, religious, and intellectual currents that contributed to the diversity that is Jewish identity now. We begin with Baruch Spinoza and those Marrano-influenced thinkers who broke with traditional Judaism (some with their Jewish identities entirely) and carved out new ways to be Jewish in the world. Looking at settlement of Jewish life in America, we see new patterns emerging from the start, and how those same patterns required modification and accommodation in Europe and Asia Minor. The anthology gives serious attention to the rise of Jewish denominationalism and various ways of responding to the Enlightenment and Emancipation. Not surprisingly, great space is given to the rise of Zionism, Jewish life in North America, Nazism and the Holocaust, and the establishment and struggle for the State of Israel.

The list of topics indicates just how much ground such an anthology must

cover, and it is a tribute to the stellar scholarship and judicious insight of the two editors that the anthology is able to carry its heavy load successfully. As with Marcus's anthology (on which this one is modeled), we are permitted to listen in on some contentious debates, stirring breakthroughs, and tragic horrors, with just enough commentary to get our bearings and focus our attention where it will be most productive. Want to know why Jewish life looks like it does? This is the book to read.

## Understanding Jewish History

### 12. H. H. Ben Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Having been around for such a long time, and having lived among so many different peoples and cultures, the Jewish people have a history that is extraordinary for its variety, complexity, and significance. It takes an extraordinary breadth of education to be able to situate Jewish history in its many contexts, to distinguish between the ephemeral and the significant, and to tell the tale in a manner both responsible and compelling. This history, edited by Ben Sasson, brings together a collection of remarkable scholars, fully qualified to succeed in the task.

*A History of the Jewish People* integrates within its purview the fullest range of considerations—religion, intellectual history, political, social, cultural, and economic considerations, all presented dispassionately, allowing us to see the Jewish people, shaping and being shaped by the same diverse circumstances that shape other people, and simultaneously allowing us to see the remarkable distinctiveness of the Jewish people across the ages.

Each scholar addresses the area of his own expertise: Abraham Malamat discusses the beginnings of the Jewish people, and Hayim Tadmor advances the story through the conclusion of the First Temple period to the Babylonian exile. Jews under Hellenistic and Roman rule receive attention from Menahem Stern, and Shmuel Safrai explicates the history of the Jews at the birth and growth of rabbinic Judaism, the creation of the Talmud, and the rise of Islam. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, the editor, presents the challenges and dynamism of the medieval period, while Shmuel Ettinger presents the transformations of modernity and the contemporary world, with special attention given to Zionism and the establishment of the State of Israel. The superb maps commissioned for the book and the thoughtful selection of photographs significantly augment the value of the volume. An extensive bibliography opens the door to further research by the interested reader.

Clearly, scholarship has moved forward since 1985, and the perspectives permeating this work are not shared by all scholars in the field. This book is by no means definitive or the last word, but it is a superb first word, opening up the broadest overview of Jewish history, giving it coherence and drawing our attention to the reality that the Jewish people were an actual people, living in the world, rather than simply the biological carriers of some timeless ideas. Jews have a history, and that history has shaped the Judaism that took on the garment of each age and culture with which it interacted. To understand the dynamics of Jewish life today requires a grounding in Jewish history, with its diversity and its consistency; it also requires attending to the ways Jews have reacted to (and internalized) outside influences while understanding the unfolding of an internal Jewish dynamic. This book remains the best single address for that first step.

**13. Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History***  
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

The challenge in writing a book on American Judaism is that:

- (a) it's very much a work in progress; there is no consensus where it is heading, and hence it's hard to know what is significant and what is not;
- (b) it requires knowing a lot about Jewish history elsewhere and deciding what is really just an extension of the age-old Jewish story;
- (c) it requires knowing the larger story of American history to know how much of American Judaism is simply the Jewish version of the American story;
- (d) it requires a judgment as to whether America (and hence, American Judaism) is qualitatively unique and unprecedented; and
- (e) it requires knowing the forest from the trees.

Jonathan Sarna, professor of American Jewish history, does the job exceedingly well. Not only is he a superb scholar, but also he's a great storyteller, and he makes the history of American Judaism a real page-turner.

The drama of the tale lies in the special character of the American experience—a nation created as an Enlightenment experiment whereby individuals would come together to create a society in which all are created equal. That ideal has guided the history of the nation, even as it has eluded our grasp. But recognizing its implications and expanding the boundaries has been a constant process throughout American history, starting with its Colonial origins. That ideal has created a special challenge for Jewish faith and community, since Judaism comes from a premodern world of communal identity and religious obligation. How to integrate a structure of *mitzvot* and duty into a society of freedom and rights has been the constant dilemma

of American Judaism, and Sarna traces the myriad ways in which different American Jews have attempted to integrate, balance, subvert, or prioritize those competing values.

Looming large throughout the book is each generation's fear that they are the last. American Jewry has been haunted by the (very real) possibility that Judaism cannot survive in the land of the free, that the allure (and blessing) of freedom will sufficiently undermine the discipline and sacrifice that Jewish life requires, that the pursuit of easy entertainment and diversion will substitute for the education, observance, and literacy necessary for meaningful Jewish identity. The jury is still out, but the story is gripping, not least because the choices of our past continue to constrain and inform our options today, and what we resolve today will constrain and shape our tomorrows.

Sarna freely admits to distinctive choices he has made in this book: He emphasizes the early period of American Jewish history, based on the conviction that American Jewish history in the Colonial period already diverged significantly from Jewish history in the Old World. He is also distinctive in tracing periodic revivals in American Jewish history—seeing the ways that Jews and Jewish institutions mobilized particular bursts of activity and energy that were unexpected and unpredictable. Sarna avoids the term “assimilation,” no longer helpful in analysis and too often reduced to an insult or a threat, and correctly understands that denominationalism in Jewish life is so different from denominationalism in Protestantism that the utility of its comparison is sharply constrained. Finally, this book offers hope for a meaningful Jewish future *if* we understand our past and the challenges that continue to face us, *if* we mobilize ourselves to address those challenges, and *if* we are sufficiently committed to having a future in the first place.

## Israel and Zionism

14. Reuven Hammer, *The Jerusalem Anthology: A Literary Guide*  
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995).

Over the centuries, the Jewish people have cultivated a special love affair with a city—a love that has spread into poetry, prayer, and prose. Our love of Jerusalem was expressed in *midrashim*, theology, and categories of *halakha* unique to the Holy City and designed to impress upon people Jerusalem's centrality. Travelers recorded their intense emotions as they visited throughout the Middle Ages, and Kabbalists rendered the city a metaphor for a world whole and holy. In the modern period, the rise of political Zionism created new genres of Jerusalem literature—political theory and propaganda, and the development of modern fiction. In every age, Jerusalem has entered into song, and each period composed melodies and lyrics that extolled, longed for, and celebrated this enchanting and beautiful place.

Rabbi Reuven Hammer is a man who willingly has fallen under the spell of Jerusalem. An American who chose to make *aliya*, he has lived and worked productively in Jerusalem for decades. In this wonderful anthology, he mines his remarkable love and his wide literacy to present nuggets of literature from every age and genre, offering a sampling of Jewish thought and expression about Jerusalem. As an added bonus, the book also assembles dozens of photographs, maps, and illustrations that bring Jerusalem to life through art and memory in ways words cannot.

For someone who has spent time in Jerusalem, this book is an opportunity to deepen one's love and to locate one's connection to Jerusalem in the fullness of the flow of Jewish history and spirit. For one who has not yet been to Jerusalem—not watched the sun turn the Jerusalem stone golden, then red, then brown—this book beckons as a calling card from a city like none other.

Above all else, though, this collection of snippets of individuals' memories makes the Jerusalem presented here intensely personal. Rather than a single voice expounding on Jerusalem from nowhere in particular, or from eternity, the many voices reinforce the sense that everyone creates his or her own distinct connections to Jerusalem, associations with Jerusalem—one's own Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is the heart of the Jewish people—embodied, grounded, and tangible. One cannot know the Jewish people from the inside without also feeling the longing for this place that is more than a place, but also an ideal and an escape. Hammer's book gives the reader access to all these Jerusalems, seeing them through

both Israeli and Diaspora eyes, loving the city with a Jewish heart, mourning its tragedies and awaiting the fullness of its redemption.

15. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Herzl Press, 1959; reissued, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997).

Arthur Hertzberg is a member of an increasingly rare species—a congregational rabbi combined with a first-rate academic scholar and communal activist. Over the course of his prodigious and prestigious career, he presided over a national Jewish agency and taught at a university while providing spiritual leadership to his synagogue community. Hertzberg's area of specialty is the modern period of Jewish history, and his hallmarks are a remarkable ability to organize massive amounts of information into conceptual groupings and a keen ability to synthesize, analyze, and contrast. Hertzberg's writings always provide a nourishing feast.

An anthology of Zionist thinking from before its political organization into the midtwentieth century, *The Zionist Idea* certainly meets these high standards. Hertzberg focuses on the ideas of Zionism rather than on its politics, battles, or history. He offers generous and wisely-chosen excerpts, allowing the proponents of various types of Zionism to speak for themselves. Yet he introduces each section with his own trenchant analysis, to ensure that his readers don't lose their way and are able to locate the core ideas that distinguish each individual thinker. His extensive introduction runs for almost one hundred pages, forming a worthwhile book on its own, the best analysis and presentation of the richness of Zionist thought available.

Hertzberg begins with the rabbis and scholars prior to Theodor Herzl who emphasized the corporate and political implications of classical Jewish liturgy, the link to the Land of Israel, and the need for a Jewish movement to respond to world events by colonizing the Holy Land. Properly understood as part of pre-Zionism, these selections allow us to recognize what was unprecedented and transformative in Herzl. By harnessing the messianic yearning for a homeland to the political nationalism that emerged across the world in the nineteenth century, Herzl moved Zionism from the realm of religious aspiration to that of political action. One sees in Herzl's writings the perspective of a man of action; he never really stopped being a journalist, and his writings have the immediacy (and often the superficiality) of a magazine story. It wasn't the depth of his thinking, but the combination of charisma, a compelling narrative, and lots of moxy that enabled Herzl to move his idea into the realm of action.

Another virtue of Hertzberg's sage collection is that it highlights the diversity

of Zionist thinking. With the establishment of the State of Israel, it is sometimes harder to recall the range of Zionist ideas and ideological systems that existed—ranging from the traditionally religious to the socialist, from a return to a grounded paganism (the Canaanite movement) to Jewish thought bordering on the fascist. No reader will agree with every thinker presented in this volume, but all will enjoy discovering the vigor and variety of Zionist thought. As Israel continues to struggle to survive and thrive into the future, and as American Jews wrestle to clarify the role that Israel will have in their own consciousness and identity, this volume offers many helpful insights to guide the conversation.

**16. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel***

(New York: Knopf); first edition, two volumes, 1987;  
second edition, one volume, 1996.

Howard Sachar is one of those compelling historians who can marshal a staggering amount of information, distill it in a way that gives it coherence and direction, and at the same time tell a rousingly good story. This fortuitous confluence is a particularly happy reality because the State of Israel is itself a really good story. It is a story of a diasporic people, excluded from military and political power for millennia, who reclaimed power, statehood, and land, and then struggled for survival while also having to navigate some of the more distasteful realities of *realpolitik*—e.g., navigating the Cold War, dealing with an Arab minority within and an Arab majority without, bringing together Western and Sephardic Jewry, and addressing issues of gender and religion and secularity. This is a story sufficiently complex and nuanced that only a really great historian could do it justice. Sachar is that historian.

One of the great strengths of Sachar's vision is its comprehensiveness. He begins with the formation of Zionism as an idea and a movement, tracing its beginnings in the context of European nationalism and a rising consciousness of the Jews as a people no different than other nations under another's sovereignty. Sachar traces the genesis of organized programs to move Jews to the Land of Israel, with the antagonisms that accompanied those early efforts. Highlighting the conflicting visions of Theodor Herzl and Ahad Ha'Am (Asher Ginsberg), Sachar take the reader through the rise of the Zionist movement, the formation of diverse parties within Zionism, and the breakthrough of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. Sachar then portrays the swirling events leading into World War II, focusing on the nascent Jewish settlements (the *Yishuv*) in the maelstrom of world powers, the birth of Israeli independence, and the struggle for political, military, and economic survival in the ensuing decades. The rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt leads into the

simmering conflict that erupted in the Six-Day War and the new challenges of occupation and power that Israel's decisive victory created. Finally the rise of the Soviet Jewry movement and the Yom Kippur War conclude the first volume, with renewed isolation for a beleaguered Israel, unresolved challenges from a new Palestinian movement willing to resort to terror, and the steady backdrop of Cold War struggles.

Volume II carries the story forward from the consequences of the Yom Kippur War and Anwar Sadat's unexpected overture for peace, the Camp David Accords (and Jimmy Carter's underappreciated role in them) to Menachem Begin's war in Lebanon and the end of his premiership, and finally to the brief rule of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres.

Noteworthy in this book is its political balance, all the more apparent with the passage of subsequent decades. Sachar attends to the dilemma of Israel's Arab minority and to the aspirations of Palestinian nationalism (ironically shaped in the image of the Zionism it opposes), as well as to the ways in which the world has treated Israel as a Rorschach test for its own superpower conflicts. His attention to the simmering resentment of the Sephardic minority (now a majority) and the role the Sephardim played in overthrowing the monopoly of the Labor Party has proven prescient.

Israel plays a crucial role in contemporary Jewish identity, and that will only increase in the years ahead. For a gripping and balanced presentation of the remarkable history and promise of this little country, Sachar's book remains the compelling best.

## Philosophy and Theology

### Primary Documents

17. Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, eds.,  
*The Jewish Philosophy Reader*  
(London: Routledge, 2000).

If ever there were an impossible task, creating an anthology of all of Jewish philosophy is surely that. As the scholarly editors of this volume explain, the category of Jewish philosophy is a retrospective imposition: It describes how later people subsequently treated an earlier body of writing (or a thinker) rather than describing in advance what Jewish philosophy ought to resemble or ought to cover. Because of the diverse agendas of philosophy/theology across the ages, different styles, forms, and methods make categorizing complicated. Any anthology must therefore begin with its own criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and none can pretend to correspond to some objective definition of Jewish philosophy/theology.

Like the task of the theologian in general (putting into words that which remains ineffable), the job of the editor of a book of Jewish philosophy is to make difficult choices about who gets in, who's left out, and how much of each selection deserves inclusion. This anthology does as good a job as one could hope; there are no other anthologies to do a better job. There are anthologies of medieval Jewish philosophy, but these generally assume a normative theological stance that flattens the diversity of medieval Jewish thought, and there are excellent anthologies of modern and contemporary Jewish thought, but some focus on particular aspects of contemporary theological reflection. But if you want a one-volume collection that allows you to sample the giants of Jewish speculative thought from antiquity to the present, this volume does so, presenting Philo, Sa'adia, and Maimonides from the ancient and medieval periods, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Mordecai Kaplan from the modern period.

If you are looking for a collection that offers selections from major schools of Jewish thought in context, then this is the book to read. You will find the Kalam and Neoplatonist schools of thought, the anti-Maimonidean school, the conservative reactions of fifteenth-century Spain, as well as newer voices from Jewish feminism, neo-Orthodoxy, postmodernism, Emmanuel Levinas, and contemporary trends in Jewish philosophical thought.

The reader is assisted by the introductions to each of the major sections, in

which the scholar responsible for that section's choices summarizes the selections and highlights the salient issues for each period. Another strength of this courageous collection is that it moves beyond a straightforward history of Jewish philosophy, devoting sections to how subsequent Jewish thought uses the Bible for philosophical reflection, how later theologians sift through rabbinic literature for a similar purpose, and how Jewish thought has responded to the Shoah, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the challenge and opportunities of modernity. There is no such thing as a "representative sample" of Jewish thought, but there is such a thing as a responsible selection of Jewish thought, and this volume is it. For a single volume showcasing the breadth and vitality of Jewish thought in every age, this collection succeeds admirably.

## Understanding Jewish Philosophy and Theology

### 18. Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide* (West Orange: Behrman House, 1995).

Eugene Borowitz is the dean of contemporary Jewish theologians. For half a century, he has taught Jewish thought to generations of aspiring Jewish professionals and has reached a broader audience through his popular and scholarly books, articles, and the pluralist journal, *Sh'ma*, which he established and edited for several decades. In word and example, Borowitz has demonstrated a passion for clear thinking, tough questions, and strong identity. How those three can go together in the contemporary age is precisely the challenge that Borowitz set for himself as the key intellectual challenge for our age. His own response to that challenge is masterfully explicated in his magnum opus, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991). In *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought*, he does the careful preparatory work of explicating the major Jewish thinkers of the modern era—presenting their core ideas, critiquing those ideas, and presenting his own admittedly particular view of what works and fails in each thinker presented.

For the reader who is being introduced to the realm of Jewish thought for the first time, Borowitz's laser-sharp writing and his skills as a master teacher make this the ideal work for creating literacy in the options of modern Jewish thought. For someone already familiar with Jewish thinkers in the modern era, this book will create a healthy challenge—inviting the reader to answer Borowitz's critiques for each thinker and to justify one's own theological assertions and commitments when they don't correspond to the author's own.

It is a measure of Borowitz's humility and integrity that he invited another scholar, Ellen Umansky, to contribute a chapter on Jewish feminism. Umansky herself is a theologian of note, and her ability to take the structure that Borowitz has created and apply it in her own distinct voice to an approach to Jewish thought significantly enhances an already worthy book. The chapter on feminism invites more than simply agreement or dismissal. Rising to the challenges that feminism uncovers/discovers/creates requires an energetic reengagement with the full range of Jewish thinking and writing of every age, asking new questions and posing new challenges.

There is even a distillation and presentation of Borowitz's own postmodernist theology, one of the more promising ventures in contemporary Jewish (re)formulation. He also considers and critiques the contemporary turn to mysticism and to various current paths of Jewish thought.

A thoughtful reading of this wonderful book will make it possible to join in the conversation that is Jewish theology, permitting the contemporary reader to wrestle with alternative percolations of Jewish religion and theology, with the hope of distilling a new synthesis that can carry the enterprise into the next generation with depth, significance, and responsibility.

## Law, Ethics, and Observance

19. Eliezer Berkovits, *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halakha* (New York: KTAV, 1983).

It is a measure of the unrecognized greatness of Eliezer Berkovits, an Orthodox rabbi and professor of Jewish thought, that for many years his book on the nature of Jewish law was not assigned in any rabbinics or *halakha* classes in rabbinical school but only in a philosophy class. During his lifetime, Berkovits was largely disregarded by the leading rabbinic sages, but he has enjoyed the beginning of what one can only hope will be renewed attention through the diligent efforts of the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, which has committed to republishing his major works under their imprint, the Shalem Press. Already they have reissued a collection of Berkovits's writings (*Essential Essays on Judaism*) and *God, Man and History*.

To my mind, his most significant—and startling—work is *Not in Heaven*. There he outlines an understanding of Jewish law that is, to use his phrases, “the wisdom of the feasible” and “the priority of the ethical.” One might be less surprised to read a liberal rabbi articulating such an understanding, but what gives this presentation its power is that it comes from an Orthodox rabbi. Berkovits accepts the Divine source of the Torah and rabbinic tradition and accepts that the *halakha* encapsulates Divine will. Yet he also affirms that *halakha* as process continues to grow and to live as a dynamic organism. It is responsive to two primary goals: regulating the world of reality (not imposing some timeless Platonic perfection) and seeking to direct our attention and efforts toward the priority of ethical behavior.

Those values guide the entire halakhic enterprise, in Berkovits's view, and he documents that conviction with abundant citations and examples from throughout the history of Jewish law. Having established the nature and function of *halakha*, he goes on to flesh out the nature of halakhic authority—of the reality of halakhic pluralism (the existence of multiple legitimate rulings on the same issue) and the extent of the power of the *posek* (the legal decisor) to exercise subjective judgment and to rule according to “what the judges' eyes see,” even when that contradicts the contextual meaning of a biblical verse or requires the reversal of legal precedent. Again, Berkovits provides ample citations to support these claims.

Finally, the capstone of this effort is his analysis of the place and role of *halakha* in our time, focusing on *halakha* in a democratic society. Affirming his faith in freedom (and his continuing faith in God's Torah and *mitzvot*), Berkovits insists on the necessity of promoting halakhic loyalty and observance through education and con-

versation rather than coercion. Imagine a Jewish world in which proponents with strong convictions could meet each other in an affirmation of one another's value (even when in disagreement) and legitimacy, a world in which we could converse *with* each other rather than *through* each other. Berkovits demonstrates that this respect, pluralism, and morality is, indeed, the Jewish way.

20. Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman, eds.,  
*Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader*  
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman have mustered the creative energies of a large number of men and women eminently qualified to lay out the richness of contemporary Jewish ethical theories and their moral application to particular cases. Diverse voices from every spectrum of Jewish affiliation, all of them scholarly, thoughtful, and engaged, offer the reader a rich grounding in the application of an ancient and complex tradition to novel dilemmas and moral conflicts.

Dorff and Newman divide their collection into two large groupings: The first, Jewish ethics, examines the theoretical issues involved in discerning coherence and judgment from a collection of texts that could be seen as amorphous, multivalenced, and indeterminate. Essays by Harold Schulweis, David Novak, Dorff, and Newman present the theoretical issues emerging from traditional Jewish ethics, and analyses by S. Daniel Breslauer, Eugene Borowitz, and Richard Israel offer ways to reconceive the endeavor in modern times. Finally, we are treated to the application of these diverse approaches to questions of bioethics (an area of specialization of Rabbi Dorff) and to alternative visions of Jewish ethics, including a wonderful discussion by Annette Aronowicz of the Talmudic commentaries of the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas.

The second section of the anthology focuses not on theoretical approaches (ethics), but on their practical application (morality). Grouping issues into four major areas, the authors present various concretizations of Jewish understandings of sex and family, social problems, medical ethics, and political power in the Jewish state. Given that rabbinic Judaism is often case-based (i.e., the Talmud notoriously avoids overarching theoretical perspectives, and *midrash* is based on atomizing particular verses removed from their larger context), it is fitting that one can only "do" Jewish ethics within particular circumstances. The essays selected offer a wide range of approaches that demonstrate the possibilities for such an endeavor.

In the epilogue, Dorff and Newman wisely counsel that, although the two pillars are distinct, ethics and morality intertwine. A contemporary conversation about

a moral issue that doesn't address ethics makes those ethical choices invisible—as though Jewish tradition inevitably speaks in a single voice. Each choice is neither inevitable nor monolithic, and needs discussion. Similarly, an ethical discussion that remains theoretical is too ethereal to be truly Jewish. The editors explore the nature of authority in establishing Jewish moral norms, recognizing that some Jews ground the authority in God's explicit will, while others take a more secular approach, using the format of a Jewish conversation, without privileging any voice with greater authority than any other. A middle group (with which both authors align themselves) confronts what it means to frame a moral discussion in religious terms and percolate God's will through human words, form, and agency. The anthology concludes with a superb bibliography for further study.

**21. Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice***

(New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979, 1992).

If you are looking for a reputable one-volume guide to Jewish ritual law, there is no greater summation available in English than Rabbi Isaac Klein's *Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*. This book is a collection of notes that the author compiled in response to an invitation by JTS Chancellor Louis Finkelstein to deliver a series of lectures to rabbinical students, presenting them with a broad overview of "laws and standards for religious observance." Given that his focus was to prepare rabbis to answer questions that people would pose to them, the focus on Jewish ritual is self-explanatory. Klein notes that he leaves out both civil law and ethical conduct—a rather serious omission, since it may perpetuate the misconception that Judaism (or religion) is primarily about ritual.

With that defect noted, however, it must be said that Klein's treatment is superb and comprehensive. He addresses himself first to daily prayer and the blessings recited throughout the day, then moves through the yearly cycle, beginning with the Sabbath and including all major holidays, the Days of Awe, minor festivals, public fasts, and Rosh Hodesh (celebration of the new moon). Klein next moves to consider the cycle of human life—starting with death and mourning, marriage, circumcision, adoption, conversion, divorce, and family purity. Within that cycle, he also deals extensively with the laws of *kashrut* (dietary laws). Noteworthy is the way that Klein presents valid halakhic alternatives when they exist and the effort he makes to present the reasons for a practice and its contemporary value—not just a description of what is to be done, but why. Klein also goes out of his way to include the decisions of contemporary rabbis as authoritative rather than pretending that the traditional part of tradition stopped at some arbitrary date in the past. After

Rabbi Klein's death in 1979, Rabbi Joel Roth, a noted halakhic authority, updated the book by incorporating significant decisions of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Law and Standards since the first edition of Klein's book.

Rabbi Klein's knowledge of Judaism is prodigious, and this book distills more knowledge than at first appears. For many years a congregational rabbi, Klein possessed skill in delivering a compelling sermon, which is evidenced throughout the book, as he weaves moral inspiration and philosophical depth into his presentation of legal standards and practices. A table of contents and index add to the utility of this fine reference work, which provides a cover-to-cover presentation of the manifestations of Jewish law in the calendrical and life cycles.

## Spirituality and Mysticism

22. Louis Jacobs, *The Schocken Book of Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996).

Rabbi Louis Jacobs is one of the great rabbi scholars of recent times. In his many fruitful years in the rabbinate, Rabbi Jacobs has served as a model of the rabbi/scholar, producing fine essays and books to illumine the teachings of Judaism for scholar and layperson alike. Over the years, some of his most helpful compilations have gone out of print, which is especially regrettable because their vitality and utility have in no way diminished with the passing of time. One such case is his *Book of Mystical Testimonies*, now thankfully reissued by Schocken Books.

This wonderful book contains accounts of mystics throughout the millennia who recorded their experiences in encountering the Divine. Such autobiographical testimony is particularly rare in Jewish mystical circles, which makes these words all the more precious. Beyond providing gripping reading as eyewitness accounts of God's glory in the world, these testimonies together create a larger picture of the history of Jewish mysticism over time. Beginning with the first chapter of Ezekiel, with its strange vision of the chariot and the Divine image, running through Maimonides's instructions on how to attain prophetic insight, to the communications of the *maggid* (an angelic voice) to Rabbi Yosef Karo and another *maggid*'s words to Rabbi Hayim Luzzatto, to modern encounters with mysticism through *Hasidut* (Hasidism), this book offers a "you-were-there" picture of the contours and developments in Jewish mystical thought. Jacobs's breadth is incredible—from the Bible and Talmud, to mystics of the twentieth century, Jacobs brings us compelling reading, both of historical and of spiritual import.

Rabbi Jacobs has selected memorable texts to present to his readers, and each selection is graced with a helpful introduction and valuable notes and commentary at the end. The texts, coupled with a solid narrative history of Jewish mysticism, provide a profound and accessible introduction to Jewish mystical thought and experience in many ages and places. Given that Kabbala is enjoying such a powerful resurgence in non-Orthodox circles today, this book offers a helpful tool in our hands for grounding the mystical search within the context of rabbinic study and observance, which is precisely where Kabbala belongs.

23. Norman Lamm, ed., *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary*  
(New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999).

Hasidic thought is a gold mine for contemporary Jews, but it remains largely inaccessible. Because most of the great masters of *Hasidut* wrote in Hebrew, and their devout followers read Hebrew, there was little felt need on the part of the Hasidic community to translate their works into English. Until recently, that indifference was reciprocated from the other side as well, with many liberal Jews viewing the Hasidim as backward, superstitious, and medieval. Such mutual antipathy is lamentable, as both groups of Jews have so much to offer the other.

From the perspective of non-Hasidic Jews, what *Hasidut* can offer is a Jewish pathway toward the embrace of raw emotion, coupled with a strategy for reclaiming classical Jewish texts that is psychologically oriented and inner driven. While so much of the Torah and Talmud appear to be about legislation for a community, the Hasidic innovation, building upon earlier strata of Jewish mysticism, is to reread those stories and laws as the external projection of inner dynamics. Instead of seeing Pharaoh merely as an ancient despot, Hasidic masters invite us to look within for the despotism of our urges, our vanity, and our shortcomings. Heaven and *Gebenna* as well as the great laws of the Torah all express longings, aspirations, and shortcomings of the human heart. The bridge between Jewish tradition and the inner Jew, if one is to be constructed, will surely begin here.

Norman Lamm is sufficiently grounded in both the Hasidic and the modern world to be our reliable guide. He offers generous translations of the great Hasidic writings, coupled with learned introductions that give the reader the tools necessary to follow the arguments that might otherwise be lost amid the poetry and biblical citations. The general introduction is a great overview of the thought of *Hasidut* in general, and the rest of the book is divided into large chapters, each with their own topic.

The book starts, appropriately enough, with reflections about God and providence. The depth of Hasidic theology will dazzle readers unfamiliar with the resonance and sophistication of its thought. Moving on to sections about the soul, faith, love and fear, and clinging to God (*deveikut*), Lamm lays out the basic building blocks of Hasidic piety and faithfulness. The next two sections deal with worship and Torah study, the core sources for the renewal of Hasidic faith, followed by a section on the *zaddik* (the holy man), which may well be the most radical (and challenging) of the Hasidic contributions to Jewish practice and thought.

After these preliminaries, Lamm moves us through a series of emotional states: repentance, joy and dejection, smallness and greatness, peace, and pride and humility. The concluding sections deal with evil and suffering, life and death, exile and redemption, and, finally, messianism.

This anthology is itself a religious document, enabling the reader to view the range of Hasidic fervor, depth, and innovation within the framework of a traditional Jewish structure. You will emerge the richer for having read these texts in a slow and reflective manner.

24. Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism*  
(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

The alert reader of this *Canon* might wonder why Daniel Matt's book is needed if Jacobs's anthology already presents a selection of mystical texts across the ages. How many introductory anthologies does one list require?

Matt's book remains because it opens a very different face of Kabbala, one that is not organized around personal testimony or firsthand experience. It remains because Matt's translations are themselves glimpses of a shimmering poetic spirit; he is, to my mind, the premier living translator of mystical texts. Third, he remains on this list because he has produced a book that can be used as a springboard for mystical experience itself. Through his deft selection of texts that are radical, shocking, paradoxical, and luminous, he holds out the possibility that his readers will use these writings as springboards for their own spiritual explorations.

His introductory essay, "A Glimpse of the Orchard," is a superb presentation of core doctrines of Kabbala: the *Sefirot* (modes of the Divine relating to creation), nothingness, and creation. The selections, often presented as poetry, provide evocative opportunities to meditate and reflect on the truth that can only lurk underneath paradox and dance through contradiction. He presents the ways that the mystics perceived special powers in the letters of the Hebrew *alef-bet*, how that mystical experience transcended mundane rationality (and the dangers of that transcendence), as well as some shocking ideas about how revelation enters materiality and what a cosmic Torah might mean.

Of all the books on the list, this one is the most resistant to summary. It is short and rich. Its impact can be great. Get it. Read it.

## Prayer and Holy Days

25. Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).

Hammer's subtitle reveals the dual agenda of his book: to guide the reader in personal devotion while somehow also elucidating the Jewish worship service. The two tasks are not necessarily the same, and one of the plagues facing Jewish religious life is the conflation of the two. Ask a Jew to pray, and he wants to know the page number. While the *Siddur*, the prayer book, is indeed a pathway into the Jewish soul, it is important also to remember that knowing Hebrew and understanding the history of Jewish prayers are not the same thing as praying. As Hammer himself notes at the outset of the book:

A "sympathetic" approach intends not merely to convey information but to place that information in a framework that will enhance the capacity of the individual to find a place for prayer within his or her life. I can know everything about who wrote a prayer and when, the various versions of it that exist, and all the manuscript evidence, yet still not be able to pray. But if I sympathetically experience the impulses and the yearnings, the cries and the anguish, the joys and celebrations that led to the creation of that prayer or of those particular expressions, and if I can re-create that spiritual environment in my own life in terms that are both intellectually honest and emotionally meaningful to me, then that information can only enrich the experience of prayer. This is the orientation I seek to create.

Thus, Hammer's task is more than historical, more than literary, more than philosophical—although it encompasses all of these. He is well qualified, both as a congregational rabbi of many years and as a professor of rabbinics and theology, to describe how praying grew from an aspect of Temple sacrifice to a printed liturgy for all occasions. He explicates the meaning and ideas embedded in the prayers and offers us lengthy excerpts from the prayer book. But this book does more than the scholarly digging we might expect. Hammer's goal is to give the reader the tools to pray those prayers, not merely understand them or read them. He attends to the person who would hold the *Siddur*, who would seek to encounter the Divine in the presence of these ancient poems, and who seeks knowledge to transform those prayers from dead letters into living vessels for our aspirations, disappointments, and gratitude.

In this task, he succeeds admirably. Hammer's writing is brisk and clean. He covers a lot of material and the full sweep of Jewish history, but he makes it look easy. In the process, he walks us through the daily and weekly prayers, the holy days and festivals, the prayers of mourning, as well as the garments of prayer: the *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries). This is the best presentation of the history and meaning of Jewish prayer, and a great springboard for lively Jewish praying.

**26. Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays***

(New York: Touchstone, 1993).

Rabbi Irving Greenberg ("Yitz" to all who know him) has made himself a teacher to thousands of contemporary Jews. By dint of his remarkable intelligence, his rootedness in traditional Jewish life yet also in Western culture, but most of all through his compassion and kindness, Greenberg can justly lay claim to being America's rabbi (although he's too humble to ever do so). He is a featured speaker at the General Assembly (the annual gathering of the Federation/UJA system), Wexner, Limmud, and many other occasions of serious adult learning.

In *The Jewish Way*, Greenberg does far more than simply sketch the practices and history of the many Jewish holy days and festivals. Instead, he starts with a far larger premise—that the Jewish people have a mission toward the rest of humanity. We are the people who insist that good enough isn't good enough, that the gap between our ideals and reality can and will be bridged, and that Jewish faith is the catalyst to keep us focused on this crucial task. Covenanted not only to God but also to the rest of humanity, the Jews are agents for progress, justice, and inclusion for all. Because our faith rests on the conviction that all people are made in the Divine image, all people have equal dignity. That fundamental value achieved social and political expression through the story of the Exodus—the liberation of the Hebrew slaves and God's defeat of the despot, Pharaoh. Ever since then, Jews have stood for human dignity and freedom.

How does one harness a real people—flawed and finite—to a superhuman task? How do they live out the dialectic of existing within a larger culture and humanity while simultaneously maintaining a distinct consciousness and identity necessary for that mission? For Greenberg, the answer is *halakha* ("Jewish law," literally, "the way"). *Halakha* creates thousands of self-conscious acts and moments that are distinctively Jewish and linked to the nexus of values that culminate in covenant and mission. By living a life in accordance with *halakha*, a Jew is forever oriented toward the sacred and the redemptive.

Much of *halakha* is directed toward the holidays, a cycle of celebration and memorial that contains a central metaphor crucial for Jewish life and identity.

Greenberg lays out the vision and “the way” through essays exploring each of the three *regalim* (pilgrimage festivals): Passover as an exodus celebration, Shavuot as the covenant of redemption, and Sukkot as the journey to liberation. Having sketched out these three bases for Jewish life, he then shows how this core is expressed in personal and historical terms: It is personalized through Shabbat—how to live the dream, and the High Holy Days, a period of rebirth and renewal. And the history is consecrated through Purim (confronting Jewish destiny), Hanukka (wrestling with assimilation and Jewish survival), and Tisha B’Av (confronting destruction and response). Finally, he devotes a section to the way that Jewish holidays have continued to evolve in our own time, with Yom Ha-Shoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) as a shattering of the paradigm and Yom Ha-Atzma’ut (Israeli Independence Day) as resurrection and redemption.

In his vision of the holidays, Greenberg presents a rich portrait of Judaism as a world faith, not simply the private property of a small band of Semites. His view of Judaism has something to teach the world and to give the world. It is surely a vision worthy of our attention and our efforts.

## Women and Gender

27. Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*  
(New York: Schocken Books, 1983).

Taking seriously the way that Jewish tradition has long been a male preserve (written by men, addressed to men) is not an exercise for the weak. It is no small thing to confront the myriad ways, large and small, that Jewish tradition privileges men and men's roles while simultaneously marginalizing women (explicitly and without apology for most of our history, with rationalizations and gentle dissimulations more recently). It is possibly the greatest challenge facing anyone who loves Jewish tradition but also affirms the humanity of women. Does God speak through Jewish texts, or is it just the way that Jewish men hold onto power? Is *halakha* the implementation of the Divine will, or just the way that men keep women out of the conversation? Are families where people support each other, or are they systems that men use to con women into cooking, cleaning, and raising their sons (while providing daughters for those sons to use to produce yet more sons)? Taking feminism seriously is a far more encompassing task than simply including women in the existing structures; it means asking profoundly unsettling questions about one's most precious convictions and memories. It means holding up everything for review of the most honest and subversive kind.

If being a feminist means approaching all the world's traditions and institutions through a skeptical lens, challenging the marginalization or exclusion of women, regardless of the source or duration of the exclusion, then it is doubly difficult to be a "Jewish feminist." It means attempting to maintain engagement and allegiance toward a tradition that is itself guilty of exclusion and marginalization.

My personal sense is that we, the Jewish people, are dependent precisely on such people—those courageous and brilliant women (mostly) willing to pioneer a path that is simultaneously critical and constructive, loyal yet subversive. It is their courage, integrity, and refusal to compromise that will provide for the rest of us a Judaism worthy of our loyalty and God's presence. For many of us, our introduction to this piercing light came through an anthology by Prof. Susannah Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist*. This collection of superb essays opened my eyes to the systematic way that women have been made the objects of male action, the facilitators of male privilege, the caretakers for male power. Reading Jewish tradition through this filter is jarring, disturbing, disorienting, but also liberating, humanizing, and profoundly energizing.

Heschel's introduction is worth the price of the entire book. She presents the reasons that feminism deserves our attention and the claims that feminism makes in a manner that is comprehensive, accessible, and important. Each of the essays selected is worthy of slow and careful study, but two stand out: "The Jew Who Wasn't There: *Halakhah* and the Jewish Woman" by Rachel Adler forever changed the way I understand rabbinics and *halakha*; and Cynthia Ozick's "Notes toward Finding the Right Question" levels an unflinching indictment. I will let Ozick have the last searing word:

This is the terrifying wall of scandal built within the tower of Torah itself. In creating the Sabbath, Torah came face to face with a nature that says, "I make no difference among the days." And Torah made a difference among the days. In giving the Commandment against idolatry, Torah came face to face with a society in competition with the Creator. And Torah taught the Unity of the Creator. In making the Commandment against dishonor of parents, Torah came face to face with merciless usage of the old. And Torah ordained devotion to parents. In every instance Torah strives to teach *No* to unrestraint, *No* to victimization, *No* to dehumanization. The Covenant is a bond with the Creator, not with the practices of the world as they are found in actuality.

With one tragic exception. With regard to women, Torah does not say *No* to the practices of the world as they are found in actuality; here alone Torah confirms the world, denying the meaning of its own Covenant.

**28. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, eds.,**

*Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue*

(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992).

This fine book is a solid work of engaged scholarship. It has a specific agenda in contemporary Jewish life, yet roots itself in the evidence of Jewish writings and material remains from antiquity and the medieval period, as well as in the tenets of reasonable debate. Susan Grossman, a Conservative rabbi and a scholar, and Rivka Haut, a prominent feminist voice within the Orthodox community, sought out committed and learned voices to present the evidence for a renewed vision of the role of women in the synagogue.

Grossman and Haut provide a real service with this collaborative work: Their introduction is ideal for those unfamiliar with the debate on the role of women within Judaism and on the present state of the issues. The book proceeds to discuss the history of women and Jewish worship, from the *beit hamikdash* (the Temple)

through ancient synagogues and into the late medieval period. The second section of the book deals with matters of Jewish law. Particularly compelling are the articles by Shaye Cohen and Judith Hauptman. Prof. Cohen traces the history of the exclusion of menstruant women from the synagogue, an exclusion that has no basis in biblical or Talmudic law. Prof. Hauptman traces the *halakha* of women's participation, accurately noting that their emerging exclusion was based on sociological reality in antiquity, not on the text of the Torah itself or its values.

The third section of the book addresses "Contemporary Realities." Among these articles, Rela Geffen Monson speaks to the important question of the impact of the feminist movement on American synagogues. The book concludes with a series of personal vignettes from women from across the religious spectrum: *klei kodesh* (a cantor, rabbi, and rebbetzin), a ceremony for after a miscarriage, and one for "affirming and accepting pregnancy." Not surprisingly, the quality of these vignettes is uneven, but some are quite powerful.

Finally, Prof. Paula Hyman provides a look into the future that meets our high expectations whenever we see her name. For those already convinced that women should have no barriers of gender placed before them, this book will provide traditional grounding. For those who are not, it will be a troubling read, but a necessary one for grasping that women (and men) who call for gender equality can, indeed, be traditional and pious Jews.

## Appendix: List of Books in the Canon

### Reference Works

Atlases, Dictionaries, Encyclopedias

*A Historical Atlas of the Jewish People: From the Time of the Patriarchs to the Present*, Eli Barnavi, ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

*The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. in chief (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

*The Jewish Religion: A Companion*, Louis Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

*Jewish Encyclopedia* (accessible online at <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>) and *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing; New York: Macmillan, 1972; CD-ROM, Davka).

Bibles

*The Jewish Study Bible*, Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

*Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, David L. Lieber, Jules Harlow, eds. (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2001).

*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, W. Gunther Plaut, ed. (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981, 2005).

*The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, Nosson Scherman, ed. (New York: Mesorah, 1993).

Siddurim

*Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1998).

*Siddur Sim Shalom for Weekdays* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2002).

*Gates of Prayer* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975).

*Kol Haneshamah* (Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1994).

*Complete ArtScroll Siddur* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications Ltd., 1984).

### Introduction to Judaism

1. Leo Schwartz, *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People* (New York: Modern Library, 1977).

### The Bible

2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
3. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Summit Books, 1987; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).
4. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Seabury, 1985; paperback, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

## Rabbinic Judaism

### *Primary Documents*

5. *Talmud Bavli*, Schottenstein Edition (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications); English edition, 73 volumes, begun in 1990, completed in 2005.
6. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends: Sefer Haggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, translated by William G. Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).  
Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society); first edition, seven volumes, 1938, translated by Henrietta Szold; second edition, two volumes, 2003, introduction by David Stern.

### *Understanding Rabbinic Judaism*

7. Judith Hauptman, *Rereading the Rabbis: A Woman's Voice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).
8. Jeffrey Rubenstein, *Rabbinic Stories* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).
9. Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

## History

### *Primary Documents*

10. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book: 315–1791* (Cincinnati: Sinai Press, 1938; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999).
11. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 1995).

### *Understanding Jewish History*

12. H. H. Ben Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
13. Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

## Israel and Zionism

14. Reuven Hammer, *The Jerusalem Anthology: A Literary Guide* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995).
15. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Herzl Press, 1959; reissued, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997).
16. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel* (New York: Knopf); first edition, two volumes, 1987; second edition, one volume, 1996.

## Philosophy and Theology

### *Primary Documents*

17. Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, eds., *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

*Understanding Jewish Philosophy and Theology*

18. Eugene Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide* (West Orange: Behrman House, 1995).

**Law, Ethics, and Observance**

19. Eliezer Berkovits, *Not in Heaven: The Nature and Function of Halakha* (New York: KTAV, 1983).
20. Elliot N. Dorff and Louis E. Newman, eds., *Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
21. Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1979, 1992).

**Spirituality and Mysticism**

22. Louis Jacobs, *The Schocken Book of Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996).
23. Norman Lamm, ed., *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999).
24. Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (San Francisco: HarperSan-Francisco, 1995).

**Prayers and Holy Days**

25. Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion and the Worship Service* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985).
26. Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays* (New York: Touchstone, 1993).

**Women and Gender**

27. Susannah Heschel, ed., *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983).
28. Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, eds., *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992).