Jewish religious movements

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Jewish religious movements sometimes called "denominations" or "branches", include different groups which have developed among Jews from ancient times and especially in the modern era among Ashkenazi Jews living in anglophone countries. Despite the efforts of several of these movements to expand their membership in Israel and achieve official recognition by the Israeli government, non-Orthodox movements have remained largely a feature of Judaism in the diaspora.

Historically, the division of Jews in many Western countries into denominations, which in the United States in particular took the form of three large groups known as Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, can be traced to Jewish reaction to the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) and its aftermath, and to a certain extent the philosophies of these movements were shaped in reaction to one another. Several smaller movements have emerged in the years since. In more recent years, all of these movements have been shaped by the challenge of assimilation.

- Common values. The movements share common values such as monotheism, charity, and *klal Yisrael* (a sense of being part of, and responsible for, the universal Jewish community). These Jewish values are the basis for cooperation and interplay among the various movements.

- Sacred texts. The movements share a recognition that the Torah and other Jewish spiritual writings such as Tanakh and Talmud are central to Jewish experience. However they differ in their approach to such texts.

The movements differ in their views on various religious issues. These issues include the level of observance, the methodology for interpreting and understanding Jewish Law, biblical authorship, textual criticism, and the nature or role of the messiah (or messianic age). Across these movements, there are marked differences in liturgy, especially in the language in which services are conducted, with the more traditional movements emphasizing Hebrew. The sharpest theological division occurs between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews who adhere to other denominations, such that the non-Orthodox movements are sometimes referred to collectively as the "liberal denominations" or "progressive streams."

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Terminology

Some Jews reject the term *denomination* as a label for different groups and ideologies within Judaism, arguing that the notion of denomination has a specifically Christian resonance that does not translate easily into the Jewish context. However, in recent years the *American Jewish Year Book* has adopted "denomination," as have many scholars and theologians.[1] Other commonly used terms are *movements*, *branches*, *trends*, *streams*, or even *flavors* of Judaism. This article uses the terms interchangeably, without purporting to affirm the validity of one term over another.

The Jewish denominations themselves reject characterization as sects. Sects are traditionally defined as religious subgroups that have broken off from the main body, and this separation usually becomes irreparable over time. Within Judaism, individuals and families often switch affiliation, and individuals are free to marry one another, although the major denominations disagree on who is a Jew. It is not unusual for clergy and Jewish educators trained in one of the liberal denominations to serve in another, and left with no choice, many small Jewish communities combine elements of several movements to achieve a viable level of membership.

Relationships between Jewish religious movements are varied; they are sometimes marked by interdenominational cooperation outside of the realm of halakha (Jewish Law), and sometimes not. Some of the movements sometimes cooperate by uniting with one another in community federations and in campus organizations such as the Hillel Foundation. Jewish religious denominations are distinct from, but often linked to, Jewish ethnic divisions and Jewish political movements.

Judaism and Samaritans

Main article: Samaritan

The Samaritans regard themselves as direct descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh in the northern Kingdom of Israel, which was conquered by Assyria in 722 BCE. The first historical references to the Samaritans date from the Babylonian Exile. The attitude of the Talmud to the Samaritans is that they are to be treated as Jews in matters where their practice agrees with the mainstream but are otherwise to be treated as non-Jews. Modern genetics has suggested some truth to both the claims of the Samaritans and Jewish accounts in the Talmud.[2] Samaritan scripture preserves a version of the Pentateuch in slightly variant forms. The Samaritans have dwindled to two communities numbering about 700 individuals. One is located in the Israeli city of Holon, while the other is located near Nablus on Mount Gerizim, in the West Bank.

Jewish sects in the Second Temple period

Main article: Second Temple Judaism

In the decades before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish people in the Roman province of

Iudaea were divided into several movements, sometimes warring among themselves: Saducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots. Many historic sources, from Flavius Josephus to the Christian New Testament to the recovered fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls, attest to the divisions among Jews at this time. Rabbinical writings from later periods, including the Talmud, attest further to these ancient schisms.

Karaite Judaism and Rabbinic Judaism

Most streams of modern Judaism developed from the Pharisee movement, which became known as Rabbinic Judaism (in Hebrew *Yahadut Rabanit* - יהדות רבנית) with the compilation of the oral law into Mishna. After the destruction of the Second Temple and the Bar Kokhba revolt, the other movements disappeared from the historical record.

Karaite Judaism (in Hebrew *Kara'im* - קראים - "readers") started in the 9th Century when Anan Ben David and his followers rejected the oral law. Modern Karaites accept only the Tanakh as divinely inspired, not recognizing the authority of the Talmud and the Midrashim.

In the 10th century, the Karaites were believed to have comprised about 10% of the world's Jewish population. At the time of the traveler Benjamin of Tudela in the 12th century, Karaites were widely dispersed around the eastern Mediterranean, both in Islamic areas and the Byzantine Empire. Benjamin describes Karaite communities in many of the places he visited.

In the early 20th century, small Karaite communities remained in Egypt, Turkey, the Crimea, and Lithuania. Today, there are about 30,000 Karaite Jews in the world, most of whom live in Israel. Traditionally, Rabbinic Judaism has regarded the Karaites as Jewish, but with an incorrect philosophical understanding of the Torah.

Background: Jewish ethnic and cultural divisions

Main article: Jewish ethnic divisions

Traditionally, Judaism is not divided into religious traditions based on theological difference. However, a wide array of Jewish communities have developed independently, distinguishable by their varying practices in matters that are *not* considered central ideas within Judaism, such as Maimonides' list of the Jewish principles of faith.

Although there are numerous Jewish ethnic communities, there are several that are large enough to be considered "predominant." Ashkenazi communities compose about 75% of the world's Jewish population, and Sephardic communities and the Mizrahi Jewish communities—the "Arab" and "Persian" Jews—compose the greatest part of the rest, with about 20% of the world's Jewish population. Together these ethnic groups compose 95% of the world's Jewish population.

The remaining 5% of Jews are divided among a wide array of small groups (perhaps the Beta Israel group of Ethopian Jews is the most important), some of which are nearing extinction as a result of assimilation and intermarriage into surrounding non-Jewish cultures or surrounding Jewish cultures.

The Enlightenment had a tremendous effect on Jewish identity and on ideas about the importance and role of Jewish observance. Due to the geographical distribution and the geopolitical entities affected by the Enlightenment, this philosophical revolution essentially affected only the Ashkenazi community; however, because of the predominance of the Ashkenazi community in Israeli politics and in Jewish leadership worldwide, the effects have been significant for all Jews.

Sephardic Judaism

Sephardic Judaism is the practice of Judaism as observed by the Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese Jews), Maghrebim and Mizrahi Jews, so far as it is peculiar to themselves and not shared with other Jewish groups such as the Ashkenazim (German Rite). Sephardic Judaism does not constitute a separate denomination within Judaism, but rather a separate cultural tradition.

Sephardim are, primarily, the descendants of Jews from the Iberian peninsula. They may be divided into the families that left in the Expulsion of 1492 and those that remained as crypto-Jews, Marranos and those who left in the following few centuries.

In religious parlance, and by many in modern Israel, the term is used in a broader sense to include all Jews of Ottoman or other Asian or African backgrounds (Mizrachi Jews), whether or not they have any historic link to Spain, though some prefer to distinguish between Sephardim proper and Mizraḥi Jews.

Sephardic Judaism lacks movements such as 'Orthodox', 'conservative' or 'reform'; level of halachic observance is left to each person, but none dispute that contemporary definitions of 'orthodox' represents the level of observance of most Sephardim.

Sephardic and Mizrachi Jewish temples are generally considered "orthodox" by non-sephardic Jews and are primarily run according to the orthodox tradition, even though many of the congregants may not keep a level of observance on par with traditional orthodox belief. For example, many congregants will drive to the temple on the sabbath in violation of halacha, while discreetly entering the synagogue so as not to offend more observant congregants. Unlike the predominantly Ashkenazi Reform, and Reconstructionist denominations, Sephardic and Mizrachi Jews who are not observant generally believe that orthodox Judaism's interpretation and legislation of halacha is appropriate and true to the original philosophy of Judaism. That being said, Sephardic and Mizrachi Rabbis tend to hold different, and generally more lenient, positions on halacha than their Ashkenazi counterparts, but since these positions are based on rulings of Talmudic scholars as well as well documented traditions that can be linked back to well known codifiers of Jewish law, Ashkenazi and Hasidic Rabbis do not believe that these positions are incorrect, but rather that they are the appropriate interpretation of halacha for Jews of Sephardic and Mizrachi descent.

Hasidic Judaism

Hasidic Judaism was founded by Israel ben Eliezer (1700–1760), also known as the Baal Shem Tov or the Besht (the Hebrew and Yiddish acronym of **B**aal **Sh**em **T**ov). His disciples attracted many followers among Ashkenazi Jews, and established numerous Hasidic groups across Europe. The Baal Shem Tov came at a time when the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe were reeling in bewilderment and disappointment engendered by the two notorious Jewish false messiahs Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) and Jacob Frank (1726–1791) and their respective followers. Hasidic Judaism eventually became the way of life for many Jews in Europe. It first came to the United States during the large waves of Jewish emigration beginning in the 1880s.

In the late 18th century, there was a serious schism between Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews. European Jews who rejected the Hasidic movement were dubbed Mitnagdim ("opponents") by the followers of the Baal Shem Tov, who had previously called themselves Freylechn ("happy ones") and now began to call themselves[*citation needed*] Hasidim ("pious ones"). Some of the reasons for the rejection of Hasidic Judaism were the overwhelming exuberance of Hasidic worship, their untraditional ascriptions of infallibility and alleged miracle-working to their leaders, and the concern that it might become a messianic sect. Since then all the sects of Hasidic Judaism have

been subsumed theologically into mainstream Orthodox Judaism, particularly Haredi Judaism, although cultural differences persist. See the articles on Hasidic Judaism and Mitnagdim for more detailed information.

Modern movements or denominations

Perhaps the greatest divisions since the time of the division between the Sadducees and Pharisees two millennia ago are the divisions within the Ashkenazic community that have arisen in the past two centuries, ever since the Enlightenment and the Renaissance influenced Jews from northern and eastern Europe.

The first evidence of this great dogmatic schism was the development of the Reform Judaism movement, which rejected "ethnic Judaism" and preferred to regard Judaism as a religion rather than an ethnicity or a culture. Over time three large movements emerged:

- Orthodox Judaism. Orthodox Jews generally see themselves as practicing normative Judaism, rather than belonging to a particular movement. Within Orthodox Judaism there is a spectrum of communities and practices, including Modern Orthodox Judaism, Haredi Judaism, and a variety of movements that have their origins in Hasidic Judaism.
- Conservative Judaism or Masorti Judaism. Originated in Germany in the 19th century, but became institutionalized in the United States. After the division between Reform and Orthodox Judaism, the Conservative movement tried to provide Jews seeking liberalization of Orthodox theology and practice with a more traditional and halakhically based alternative to Reform Judaism. It has spread to Ashkenazi communities in Anglophone countries and Israel.
- Reform Judaism or Progressive Judaism. Originally formed in Germany as a reaction to traditional Judaism, stresses integration with society and a personal interpretation of the Torah.

Additionally, a number of smaller groups have emerged:

- Reconstructionist Judaism. A small, liberal Jewish movement, found primarily in the United States. It began as a liberal movement within Conservative Judaism and formally separated in the 1980s.
- Classical Reform Judaism. A Jewish movement which regards Judaism as a religious faith with a universal message for all people. It sees Judaism primarily as a religion, rather than an ethnic, cultural or nationalist identity.
- Humanistic Judaism. A nontheistic movement that emphasizes Jewish culture and history as the sources of Jewish identity. Founded by Rabbi Sherwin Wine, it is centered in North America but has spread to Europe, the Far East, Latin America, and Israel.
- Neolog Judaism, a movement in the Kingdom of Hungary and in its territories ceded in 1920, which is similar to the more traditional branch of American Conservative Judaism.
- Jewish Renewal. Founded in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish Renewal tends to embrace the ecstatic worship style and mysticism of hasidism, while rejecting the halakhic rigor of Orthodox Judaism. Jewish Renewal congregations tend to be inclusive on the subject of who is a Jew. The Jewish Renewal movement lacks the formal institutional structure of the other liberal movements.
- Jewish Science. Formed in the early 20th century by Rabbi Alfred G. Moses and Rabbi Morris Lichtenstein. Jewish Science was founded as a counterweight Jewish movement to Christian Science. Jewish Science sees God as a force or energy penetrating the reality of the Universe and emphasis is placed upon the role of affirmative prayer in personal healing and spiritual growth. The Society of Jewish Science in New York is the institutional arm of the movement regularly publishing *The Interpreter*, the movement's primary literary

publication.

Development of modern "denominations"

Development of denominations or movements has been primarily a phenomenon among Ashkenazi Jews who have immigrated to Anglophone countries. Much of the literature of these denominations is in English, not Hebrew. Their development can be seen as both a response to the western Enlightenment and to emancipation and immigration.

Response to Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment

In the late 18th century Europe, and then the rest of the world, was swept by a group of intellectual, social and political movements that taken together were referred to as the Enlightenment. These movements promoted scientific thinking, free thought, and allowed people to question previously unshaken religious dogmas. The emancipation of the Jews in many European communities, and the Haskalah movement started by Moses Mendelssohn, brought the Enlightenment to the Jewish community.

In response to the challenges of integrating Jewish life with Enlightenment values, German Jews in the early 19th century began to develop the concept of Reform Judaism, adapting Jewish practice to the new conditions of an increasingly urbanized and secular community.[3] Staunch opponents of the Reform movement became known as Orthodox Jews. Later, members of the Reform movement who felt that it was moving away from tradition too quickly formed the Conservative movement.

Orthodox Jews who were sympathetic to the Haskalah formed what became known as neo-Orthodox or modern Orthodox Jews.[4] Orthodox Jews who opposed the Haskalah became known as Haredi Jews.

Response to immigration

The particular forms which the denominations have taken on have been shaped by immigration of the Ashkenazi Jewish communities, once concentrated in eastern and central Europe, to western and mostly Anglophone countries (in particular, in North America). In the middle of the 20th Century, the institutional division of North American Jewry between Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox movements still reflected immigrant origins. Reform Jews at that time were predominantly of German or western European origin, while both Conservative and Orthodox Judaism came primarily from eastern European countries.[5]

Response to Israel and Zionism

The issue of Zionism was once very divisive in the Jewish community. Non-Zionists believed that Jews should integrate into the countries in which they lived, rather than moving to the Land of Israel. The original founders of Reform Judaism in Germany rejected traditional prayers for the restoration of Jerusalem. Also, the view among Reform Jews that Judaism was strictly a religion and that Jews should be loyal citizens of their host nations led to a non-Zionist, and sometimes anti-Zionist, stance. Orthodox non-Zionists believed that the return to Israel could only happen with the coming of the Messiah, and that a political attempt to re-establish a Jewish state was contrary to God's plan.

After events of the 20th century, most importantly the Holocaust and the establishment of the modern State of Israel, opposition to Zionism largely disappeared within Reform Judaism. Secular opposition to Zionism has continued among some Jewish political groups, and among some Jews active in leftist political movements. Among

most religious non-Zionists, there is a de facto recognition of Israel, but as a secular state. The Edah Chareidis in Jerusalem does not recognize the legitimacy of the state, and one small group, Neturei Karta, actively opposes the existence of Israel. (See Haredim and Zionism.)

Response to pressures of assimilation

Main article: Jewish intermarriage

Among the most striking differences between the Jewish movements in the 21st century is their response to pressures of assimilation, such as intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews.[6] Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis have been most accepting of intermarried couples, with some rabbis willing to officiate in mixed religious ceremonies, although most insist that children in such families be raised strictly Jewish. Conservative rabbis are not permitted to officiate in such marriages, but are supportive of couples when the non-Jewish partner wishes to convert to Judaism and raise children as Jewish.[7]

Emergence of trans- and post-denominational Judaism

The very idea of Jewish denominationalism is contested by some Jews and Jewish organizations, which consider themselves to be "trans-denominational" or "post-denominational."[8] A variety of new Jewish organizations are emerging that lack such affiliations:

- Some Jewish day schools lack affiliation with any one movement;[9]
- The International Federation of Rabbis (IFR), a non-denominational rabbinical organization for rabbis of all movements and backgrounds;[10] and
- The Hebrew College seminary, in Newton Centre, Massachusetts, near Boston.[11]

Organizations such as these believe that the formal divisions that have arisen among the "denominations" in contemporary Jewish history are unnecessarily divisive, as well as religiously and intellectually simplistic. According to Rachel Rosenthal, "the post-denominational Jew refuses to be labeled or categorized in a religion that thrives on stereotypes. He has seen what the institutional branches of Judaism have to offer and believes that a better Judaism can be created."[12] Such Jews might, out of necessity, affiliate with a synagogue associated with a particular movement, but their own personal Jewish ideology is often shaped by a variety of influences from more than one denomination.

See also

- Jewish views of religious pluralism
- List of religions
- Relationships between Jewish religious movements
- Schisms among the Jews

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External links

- Emergence of Jewish Denominations (http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history_community/Modern/ModernReligionCulture/Emergence.htm) (MyJewishLearning.com)
- Jewish World Today. Overview: State of the Denominations (http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history_community/Jewish_World_Today/Denominations.htm) (MyJewishLearning.com)
- What's the difference between Orthodox, Conservative and Reform? (http://www.chabad.org/holidays/JewishNewYear/template_cdo/aid/4476/jewish/Labels-are-for-Suits.htm) (Chabad.org)
- Jewing Movements - How Jewish movements will and have evolved (http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Jewing-Movements.html)

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