

A history of the Jewish faith: Explanatory guide

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Lecture 5: Modern Judaism (1): The 18th to mid-19th centuries



A. **'TRADITIONAL JUDASIM'** – That is, the way Judaism was usually practiced in the Kehillah (community) up until the modern era.

Kehillah – Technically, the organization of the Jewish population of a community that deals with charities and other communal affairs. Generally, a Jewish community.

Chmielnicki massacres (1648) - The Cossack riots were pogroms carried out against the Jews of modern Ukraine during the uprising of the Cossacks and serfs led by Bogdan Chmielnicki against the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Some 20,000 Jews died of direct murder or by starvation.

B. **THE ENLIGHTENMENT** - A European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition. It was heavily influenced by 17th-century philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Newton, and its prominent figures included Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith.

Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment) - An 18th–19th-century movement among central and eastern European Jews, begun in Germany under the leadership of Moses Mendelssohn, designed to make Jews and Judaism more cosmopolitan in character by promoting knowledge of and contributions to the secular arts and sciences and encouraging adoption of the dress, customs, and language of the general population.

Maskil - A follower or adherent of the Haskalah movement

Naphtali Hirtz Wessely (1725 – 1805) - 18th-century German Jewish Hebraist and educationist, supporting secular studies. Because of his energetic commitment to the cause of Jewish emancipation, Wessely may be regarded as a leader of the Maskilim.

Moses Mendelssohn (1729 – 1786) - German Jewish philosopher, critic, and Bible translator and commentator who greatly contributed to the efforts of Jews to assimilate to the German bourgeoisie. Called the father of the Haskalah.

C. **REFORM JUDAISM** - Emphasizes the evolving nature of the faith, the superiority of its ethical aspects to the ceremonial ones, and belief in a continuous revelation, closely intertwined with human reason and intellect, and not centred on the theophany (i.e. revelation of G-d) at Mount Sinai.

David Friedlander (1750–1834) - Communal leader and author in Berlin, a pioneer of the practice and ideology of assimilation and a forerunner of Reform Judaism. One of the founders of a Jewish free school (1778).

Leopold Zunz - (1794 – 1886) - German historian of Jewish literature who is often considered the greatest Jewish scholar of the 19th century. He began (1819) the movement called Wissenschaft des Judentums ("Science of Judaism"),

Abraham Geiger (1810 -1874) - German-rabbi, author, and the outstanding leader in the early development of Reform Judaism. Emphasized that Judaism is an evolving and changing religion

Samuel Holdheim (1806–60) - German Reform Jewish leader. He represented the extreme trend in Reform Judaism; he held Sabbath services on a Sunday and defended the right of uncircumcised children to be accepted.

Moses Sofer (Schreiber) (1762 - 1839) - Better known by the name of his work "Chatam Sofer", was one of the leading Orthodox rabbis of Austrian - Hungarian Jewry (Bratislava) in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was a powerful opponent to the Reform movement in Judaism. He produced about 100 volumes of Jewish scholarship.

D. **MODERN ORTHODOXY** - A movement within Orthodox Judaism that attempts to synthesize Jewish values and the observance of Jewish law with the secular, modern world.

Samson Raphael Hirsh - (1808 – 1888) - Major German Jewish religious thinker and founder of Neo-Orthodoxy, a theological system that helped make Orthodox Judaism viable in Germany.

E. **HASIDISM** - Mystical Jewish movement founded in Poland in the 18th century in reaction to the rigid academicism of rabbinical Judaism.

Baal Shem Tov (1698 – 1760) - Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov or as the Besht, was a mystic and healer from Poland, who is regarded as the founder of Hasidic Judaism.

F. **MITNAGDIM ('OPPONENTS')** - A religious movement among the Jews of Eastern Europe which resisted the rise of Hasidism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Misnagdim in Yiddish.

Vilna Gaon (1720 – 1797) - Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, known as the Vilna Gaon or by his Hebrew acronym HaGra, was a Talmudist, kabbalist, and the foremost leader of Misnagdic Jewry.

Yeshivah - A Jewish educational institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts, primarily the Talmud and the Torah, and halacha (Jewish law).

Isaac ber Levinsohn (1788 – 1860) - A notable Ukrainian Hebrew scholar, satirist, writer and Haskalah leader. He was called "the Ukrainian Mendelssohn".