

Class 16 – In Depth: Enlightenment
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Class Outline

- **Review**
- **Forerunner to the Enlightenment**
- **The Enlightenment**
- **Reactions to the Enlightenment**

I. Review

Radical internal and external influences between the 16th and 19th centuries led to a sense of insecurity and unrest in the Jewish community. Specifically, the study of Kabbala combined with the aftermath of the Chmielnicki massacres caused a new found Messianic yearning which gave rise to a stream of false messiahs, most notably Shabtai Tzvi. These false messiahs elicited varied reactions from the Jewish community, all of which modified the transmission of the Oral tradition.

II. Forerunner to the Enlightenment

Tradition and Crisis

Jacob Katz, pg. 75

The balance of power varied from place to place, and monographic studies of various communities or regions reflect different equilibria arrived at by these two forms of authority within the kehila (parnas and rabbi). On the whole, however, it is possible to see the rabbinate gradually gaining a more secure role for itself in communal life, and the rabbi himself becomes a more clearly defined type... The increasing signs of respect accorded the rabbi attest to the rising social status of the office. In the synagogue, the congregation waited for him before starting the service, and the reader would not begin the repetition of the amida until the rabbi had finished his prayers. It seems that much of the prestige that, during the first half of our period, and especially in Poland, was accorded to the head of the yeshiva (who was not always a communal rabbi) now devolved onto the city rabbi, whether or not he functioned as a rosh yeshiva. The rising social status of the rabbinate inevitably brought with it a corresponding rise in expectations of the incumbent and increased emphasis on his responsibilities for what went on in his community. Often he was blamed for the ills of the Jewish society, and he was held responsible for the perfection of public life. It is no wonder, therefore, that the crisis that affected tradition society at the end of our period seemed to many to be primarily a crisis in the rabbinate.

Tradition and Crisis

Jacob Katz, pg. 133

The first split in community might well derive from necessity rather than conscious choice. As population grew, the local synagogue would simply no longer be able to hold all the worshipers. More recent immigrants and those who had newly reached adulthood would be forced, against their will, to find a new place in which to pray. In places where people of different ethnic origin and customs settled, the liturgy in the new synagogue might differ from that in the old. But even if exactly the same liturgy was used, and no new essential religious split or variation was expressed, a social split was created de facto.

Tradition and Crisis

Jacob Katz, pg. 166

Especially after the publication of the Shulchan Aruch, halachik study had separated into two streams: those who were interested in elucidating the practical implications of the law, and those whose goal was purely speculative study. Practical halachik decisions were arrived at, for the most part, through reliance on earlier authorities. The study of primary sources was merely an opportunity for exegesis and development of the halachik mentality for its own sake. This separation of study of the primary sources from any practical halachik concerns encouraged the tendency to over-intellectualize and to indulge in logical games without defined purpose. In its most radical form, such developments, from the sixteenth century on, led to the development of the well known system of "chilukim." Practitioners of this style of argument raised admittedly hypothetical problems in the Talmudic text and in the commentaries and resolved them on the basis of logical assumptions and admittedly doubtful value.

...and don't forget about the rise of mysticism and the Shabtai Tzvi catastrophe

III. The Enlightenment

Thomas Paine (United States 1737-1809)

He that rebels against reason is a real rebel, but he that in defence of reason rebels against tyranny has a better title to Defender of the Faith, than George the Third.

Moses Mendelssohn Visits the Seer of Koenigsberg (1777)

From Simon Dubnow, Juedischer Verlag, 1929

Without paying particular attention to those present, but nonetheless with anxious, quiet steps, a small, physically deformed Jew with a goatee entered the lecture hall and stood standing not far from the entrance. As was to be expected there began sneering and jeering that eventually turned into clicking, whistling and stamping, but to the general astonishment of everyone the stranger stood with an ice-like silence as if tied to his place. For the sake of showing clearly his interest in waiting for the Professor [Immanuel Kant] he took an empty chair and sat. Someone approached him, and inquired [why he was there], and he replied succinctly but courteously that he wanted to stay in order to make the acquaintance of Kant. Only Kant's appearance could finally quiet the uproar. His lecture drew the attention of everyone to other matters, and one became so

enraptured, so immersed in a sea of new ideas, that one long forgot about the presence of the Jew. At the conclusion of the lecture, the Jew pushed himself forward with an intensity, which starkly contrasted with his previous composure, through the crowd in order to reach the Professor. The students hardly noticed him, when suddenly there again resounded a scornful laughter, which immediately gave way to wonder as Kant, after briefly looking at the stranger pensively, and exchanging with him a few words, heartily shook his hand and then embraced him. Like a brushfire there went through the crowd, "Moses Mendelssohn. It is the Jewish philosopher from Berlin." Deferentially the students made way as the two sages left the lecture hall hand in hand.

Moses Mendelssohn

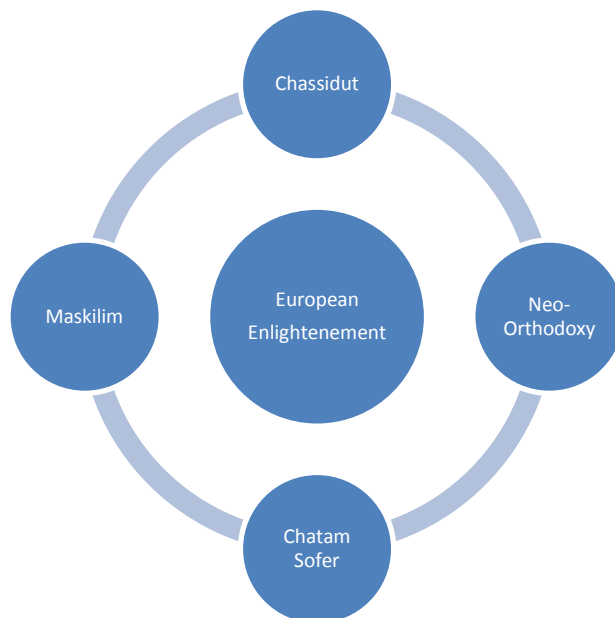
Judaism as Revealed Legislation (1783)

...The Israelites possess a divine legislation – laws, commandments, ordinances, rules of life, instruction in the will of God as to how they should conduct themselves in order to attain temporal and eternal felicity. Propositions and prescriptions of this kind were revealed to them by Moses in a miraculous and supernatural manner, but no doctrinal opinions, no saving truths, no universal propositions of reason. These the Eternal reveals to us and to all other men, at all times, through nature and thing, but never through word and script.

Motto of 19th Century Haskala movement

"Be a cosmopolitan man in the street and a Jew in your home"

IV. Reactions to the Enlightenment



Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Chatam Sofer (Germany 1762 - Hungary 1839)

...May your mind not turn to evil and never engage in corruptible partnership with those fond of innovations, who, as a penalty for our many sins, have strayed from the Almighty and his law! Do not touch the books of Rabbi Moses [Mendelssohn] from Dessau, and your foot will never slip!... Should hunger and misery lead you into temptation, then the Almighty will protect you; resist temptation and do not turn to the idols or to some god of your making! The daughters may read German books, but only those which have been written in our own way, according to the interpretations of our teachers (may they rest in peace), and absolutely no others! Be warned not to change your Jewish names, speech and clothing – God forbid... Never say: “Times have changed!” We have an old Father – praised be His name – who has never changed and never will change... The order of prayer and synagogue shall remain forever as it has been up to now, and no one may presume to change anything of its structure.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany 1808 – 1888)

Religion Allied to Progress, Collected Writings

Judaism is not a mere adjunct to life: it comprises all of life. To be a Jew is not a mere part, it is the sum total of our task in life. To be a Jew in the synagogue and the kitchen, in the field and the warehouse, in the office and the pulpit ... with the needle and the graving-tool, with the pen and the chisel—that is what it means to be a Jew.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Commentary to Vayikra 18:5

The permission to occupy oneself also with other spheres of knowledge (outside Torah studies) is assumed. Only, the knowledge of the Torah and the understanding we derive from it is to be our principle concern and to regard it as having been given as the absolute and firmly established truth... so that when we study and occupy ourselves with other spheres of knowledge we still never leave the basis and aims of the Torah to which alone our intellectual work is dedicated...

Isaac Brauer (1883-1946)

Grandson of Rabbi Hirsch

“Rabbi Hirsch's fight was not for balance and not for reconciliation, nor for synthesis and certainly not for parallel power, but for domination – for the true and absolute domination of the divine precept over the new tendencies”

Once there was a woman whose husband would only eat *fleishig* (meat dishes), which she dutifully prepared for him. Their daughter came to marry a man who would only eat *milchig* (dairy dishes). Not wanting to deprive her son in law, the mother in law prepared for him, as well, the food he craved. For several years this practice continued, with father and son in law eating in separate rooms.

Now, it came to pass that the family became impoverished and could afford neither *fleishig* nor *milchig*. The woman was compelled to cook potatoes for both her husband and son in law.

Nevertheless, the two continued their custom to eat in separate rooms. After several years elapsed in this manner, the two realized that there was, indeed, no point in their remaining separated and finally came to dine together.