JUDAISM

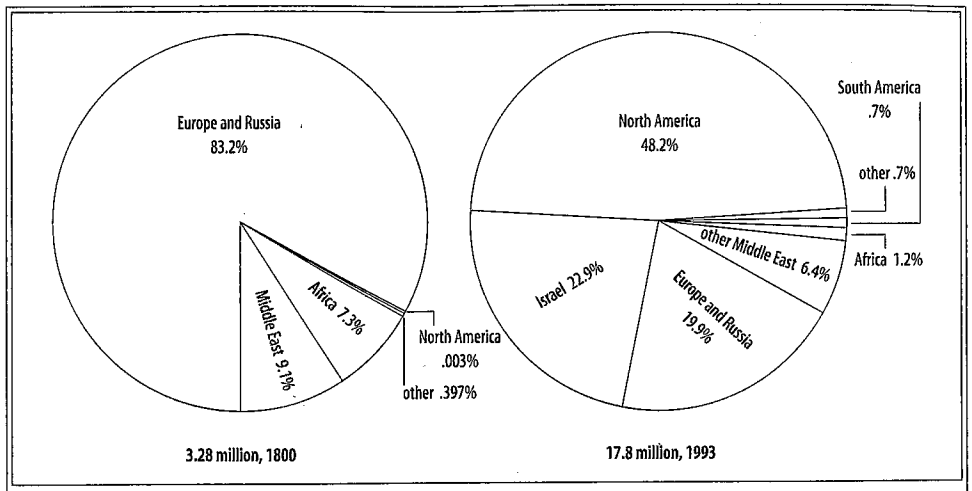
A religious system, Judaism appeals to the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses, called the Torah, as the foundational account of God's revelation to humanity through Israel, the holy people. Judaism is a monotheist religion. The word *Judaism* applies to a variety of closely related religions, past and present. A Judaism, or Judaic religious system, is made up of (1) a worldview, which by reference to Torah sets forth the intersection of the supernatural and the natural worlds, accounts for how things are, and puts them together into a cogent and harmonious picture; (2) a way of life explained by that worldview that carries out the concrete laws of the Torah and so expresses the worldview in concrete actions; and (3) a social group, called by a Judaism (an) "Israel," for which the worldview accounts and which is defined as an entity and in concrete terms by the way of life. A Judaic system constitutes an explanation for the group (again: "Israel") that gives social form to the system and an account of the distinctive way of life of that group. A Judaic system derives from and focuses upon a social entity, a group of Jews who (in their minds at least) constitute not *an* Israel but Israel.

There is not now, and never has been, a single Judaism. No Judaic religious system recapitulates any other, and no linear and incremental history of one continuous Judaism is possible. But each Judaism reworks in its own circumstance and context a single paradigmatic and definitive human experience. All Judaisms over time have worked out the pentateuchal pattern of exile and return.

It is an error to view all Judaisms as a single unitary religion and to ignore the profound differences in belief and behavior among the Judaic faithful in times past as much as in our own day.

Through history, diverse Judaisms have won the allegiance of groups of Jews here and there, each system specifying the things it regards as urgent in both belief and behavior. Yet all systems allege that they represent the true and authentic Judaism, or Torah, or will of God for Israel, and that their devotees *are* Israel. Each Judaism ordinarily situates itself in a single historical line—hence, a linear history—from the entirety of the past. How do we distinguish one Judaism from another? We can do so when we identify the principal symbol to which a given system on its own appeals, when we uncover its urgent question, and thus define the answer it considers "natural."

All Judaisms do begin with and refer back to one Judaic system, that of the



Distribution of the world Jewish population (1800, 1993)

Pentateuch. The first and paradigmatic Judaic religious system, the Pentateuch, ca. 500 B.C., represented the Jews' existence as exile and return. The way of life was one of sanctification of everyday affairs, e.g., eating, drinking, sexual conduct; the worldview stressed God's conditional covenant with Israel, the terms of which are set forth in the Pentateuch. The definition of Israel was genealogical, and Israel was represented as a family descended from a single couple, Abraham and Sarah. Composed in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. and in response to the exile to Babylonia, the Pentateuch selected as its urgent question the conditions under which Israel retains the land of Israel. Hence exile and restoration formed the paradigm for the initial Judaic system.

Because the formative pattern imposed perpetual, self-conscious uncertainty, treating the life of the group as conditional and discontinuous, Jews have asked themselves who they are and invented Judaisms to answer that question. On account of the definitive paradigm affecting their group life in various contexts, no circumstances have permitted Jews to assume their existence as a group. Looking back on scripture and its message, Jews have ordinarily treated as special, subject to conditions, and therefore uncertain what (in their view) other groups enjoyed as unconditional and simply given. Why the paradigm renewed itself is clear: this particular view of matters generated expectations that could not be met, hence created resentment—and then provided comfort and hope that made possible coping with that resentment. Promising what could not be delivered, then providing solace for the consequent disappointment, the system at hand precipitated in age succeeding age the very conditions necessary for its own replication.

Subsequent systems, to be identified by their distinctive framing of their generative symbol, their definition of the canon of writings in addition to the Old Testament, and their definitions of the way of life and worldview that would

600–500 B.C.	500–400 B.C.	400–300 B.C.	300–200 B.C.	200–100 B.C.	100–1 B.C.
Destruction of first Temple in Jerusalem by Babylonians (586) Babylonian exile (or, captivity) (586–538) Return from exile; construction of second Temple in Jerusalem (538–515) Persian period; most of Hebrew Bible either written or edited (538–333)	Ezra (ca. 450)	Hellenistic period; Jewish religious literature in Greek flourishes (367–334)	Seleucid period (281–267) Translation of Hebrew Bible into Greek (250 B.C.–A.D. 200)	Maccabaean conflict; Jewish civil war (167) Hasmonean (Maccabaean) "kingship" (163–152)	Rome establishes control of province of Palestine (67–62) Herodian dynasty established by Rome (37 B.C.–A.D. 93)

1–100	100–200	200–300	300–400	400–500	500–600
Roman prefecture or procuratorship in Palestine (6–66) Unsuccessful Jewish revolt against Roman rule (66–73) Destruction of second Temple in Jerusalem by Roman armies (70) Rabbinic academy at Yavneh (Jamnia) (70–132)	Unsuccessful revolt against Roman rule led by Simon bar Koseba (bar Kokhba). Expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem (131–135) Mishnah edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (ca. 200)	Parthian Babylonia becomes new religious and intellectual center (3rd century)	Beginning of construction of Christian Jerusalem under Constantine (335)	Editing of Jerusalem Talmud (the Talmud of the Land of Israel) (ca. 400)	Editing of Babylonian Talmud (ca. 500) Babylonian gaonate (6th–11th centuries)

characterize their Israel, recapitulated that same issue. The recurrent pattern set forth the view that the life of the group is uncertain, subject to conditions and stipulations. Nothing is set and given, all things are a gift: land and life itself. But what actually did happen in that uncertain world—exile followed by restoration—marked the group as special, different, select. With the promulgation of the Pentateuch as the "Torah of Moses" under the sponsorship of Ezra, the Persians' viceroy, ca. 450 B.C., all future Judaisms and their Israels would then refer to that formative experience as it had been set down and preserved as the norm; exile and return then stood for alienation and remission.

The definition and history of Judaism then comprises definitions and histories of Judaisms, all of them responding to a single paradigm, and none of them recapitulating any other. Moreover, none stands in a linear and incremental relationship with any prior one. Each took shape in its own circumstance and in response to its own political and social issues. But all Judaisms have recapitulated that single paradigmatic experience of the Torah of "Moses," the authorship that reflected on the meaning of the events of 586–450 B.C. selected for the composition of history and therefore interpretation. That experience (in theological terms) rehearsed the conditional moral existence of sin and punishment, suffering and atonement and reconciliation, and (in social terms) the uncertain and always conditional national destiny of disintegration and renewal of the group. That moment captured within the Five Books of Moses, that is to say, the judgment of the generation of the return to Zion, led by Ezra, about its extraordinary experience of exile and return, would inform the attitude and viewpoint of all the Israels beyond.

Consequently, each Judaism identifies what is wrong with the present and promises to make things tolerable now and perfect in the indeterminate future. A Judaism therefore stands for a situation to escape, overcome, survive. The repeated pattern of finding the world out of kilter ("exile") but then making it possible to live for the interim in that sort of world, that generative paradigm, perpetuates profound resentment: Why here? Why us? Why now? And, to the contrary (and this is the resentment), why not always, everywhere, and forever? A Judaic religious system recapitulates a particular resentment. In this way each Judaism relates to other Judaisms.

Two reasons account for the perennial power of the pentateuchal system and perspective. One is that for many Jews the generative tension precipitated by the interpretation of the Jews' life as exile and return, which forms the critical center of the Torah of Moses, persisted. Therefore the urgent question answered by the Torah retained its original character and definition, and the self-evident answer—read in the synagogue every Sabbath morning as well as on Monday and on Thursday—retained its relevance. But the other reason is that people saw what was not always there because through the Torah of Moses they were taught to.

The second of the two reasons is the more important: the question answered by the Five Books of Moses persisted at the center of the national life and

600–700	700–800	800–900
	Beginning of Karaite movement (8th century)	Muslim pact of Omer (800)
	Independent Khazar kingdom (8th–13th centuries)	

900–1000	1000–1100	1100–1200
Sa'adia Gaon (882–942)	"Golden Age" in Spain (11th–13th centuries)	Abraham ben David (= Rabad) (1125–98)
	Solomon ben Isaac (= Rashi) (1040–1105)	Moses Maimonides (= Rambam) (1135–1204)
	Judah ha-Levi (1075–1141)	First blood libel charge, Norwich, England (1144)

1200–1300	1300–1400	1400–1500
Nachmanides (= Ramban) (1194–1270)	Forced conversion to Catholicism of Spanish Jews, beginning of Marranos (1391)	Don Isaac Abrabanel (1437–1508)
Zohar, beginning of kabbalah in Spain and Provence (13th century)		Joseph Caro (1488–1575)
Solomon Adret (= Rashba) (1235–1310)		Expulsion of Jews from Spain (1492)
First Disputation (1240)		Lithuanian Council of Four Lands (mid-15th century–1764)
Abraham Abulafia (1240–91)		

1500–1600	1600–1700	1700–1800
Moses Cordovero (1522–1609)	Shabbetai Tzevi (1626–76)	Baal Shem Tov, beginning of Hasidism (1700–1760)
Judah Loew, the Maharel of Prague (1525–1609)	Nathan of Gaza (1643–80)	Moses Chaim Luzzatto (1707–46)
Isaac Luria (1534–72)	Chmielnicki massacre (1648–49)	Ezekiel Landau (1713–93)
Date of Messiah according to Solomon Molcho (1540)	Jews first arrive in North America (1654)	Elijah, Gaon of Vilna (1720–97)
Chaim Vital (1542–1620)		Jacob Frank (1726–91)
		Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86)
		Emancipation period (1740–1878)
		Shneur Zalman (1747–1813)
		Beginning of Haskalah (ca. 1770)

remained, if chronic, also urgent. The answer provided by the Pentateuch therefore retained its self-evident importance. The question persisted because scripture kept reminding people to ask that question, to see the world as the world was described, in scripture's mythic terms, out of the perception of the experience of exile and return. To those troubled by the question of exile and return, that is, the chronic allegation that Israel's group life did not constitute a given but formed a gift accorded on conditions and stipulations, the answer enjoyed the status of (mere) fact.

While Jewish history records a variety of competing Judaisms, from late antiquity to the nineteenth century, a single Judaism predominated, the Judaism of the dual Torah, both written and oral. This Judaism is called, variously, "rabbinic," after its principal authorities; "talmudic," after its authoritative document; "classical," because of its theological standing; or, simply, "Judaism." The histories of Judaisms are to be divided into four periods. The first was the age of diversity, in which many Judaic systems flourished, from the period of the formation of the Hebrew scriptures, ca. 586 B.C., to the destruction of the Second Temple, in A.D. 70. The second was the formative age, from 70 to closure of the Talmud of Babylonia, ca. 600. The third was the classical age, from late antiquity to the late eighteenth century, in which that original definition dominated the lives of the Jewish people nearly everywhere they lived. The fourth is the modern age, from the late eighteenth century to our own day, when an essentially religious understanding of what it means to be Israel, the Jewish people, came to compete among Jews with other views and other symbolic expressions of those views.

THE AGE OF DIVERSITY (586 B.C.–A.D. 70)

In the first period there were various Judaisms, that is, diverse compositions of a worldview and a way of life that people believed both represented God's will for Israel, the Jewish people, and defined who is and who is not "Israel," or truly an heir to scripture and its promises and blessings. During that long age, nearly five hundred years, a number of different kinds of Judaisms came into being. Also during that time the Judaism of the dual Torah came into being and competed for Jews' loyalty with those other Judaisms.

THE FORMATIVE AGE OF JUDAISM (70–640)

The first date, 70, marks the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans. The second, 640, refers to the Arab conquest of the Near and Middle East in the early years of Islam. During this period the canon—authoritative writings—of the Judaism of the dual Torah, which became normative, took shape. That canon consisted of "the one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi," reaching Israel in two forms, that is, through two media. One was the written Torah, which the world knows as the Hebrew scriptures or the Old Testament. During the formative age sages selected those particular books of ancient Israel's library that Judaism would accept. During that same period the part of the Torah

Judaism

1800–1900

Moses Montefiore (1784–1885)
Samuel Raphael Hirsch (1808–88)
Seesen synagogue established (1810)
Israel Salanter (1810–83)
Major German Jewish emigration to North America (1836–60)
Breslau Seminary established (1854)
Theodor Herzl (1860–1904)
Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935)
Union of American Hebrew Congregations established (1873)
Major Eastern European Jewish emigration to North America (1880–1929)
First European emigration (*aliyah*) to Israel (1882–1903)
"Tref Banquet" (1883)
Pittsburgh Platform (1885)
Jewish Theological Seminary established (1887–1902)
Central Conference of American Rabbis founded (1889)
Verein Deutscher Staatsbuerger Juedischen Glaubens established in Berlin (1893)
Dreyfus Affair (1894–1906)
Jewish Workers Alliance (Bund) established in Vilna (1897)
Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations (U.S.) (1899)

1900–

Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (1902–94)
Kehillah (New York City) (1909)
Hadassah founded (1912)
United Synagogues of America established (1913)
Balfour Declaration (1917)
British Palestinian Mandate (1922)
Reconstructionism begins (1922)
Yeshiva University founded (1928)
Nazi Nuremberg laws (1935)
World Jewish Congress founded (1936)
Holocaust (Shoah) (1938–1945)
United Jewish Appeal established (1939)
Dead Sea Scrolls discovered (1947)
Israel declares independence (May 14, 1948)
Excavation and reconstruction of Masada (1965)
Six-Day War (1967)
Yom Kippur War (1973)

that came to Israel not in writing but orally, through the memory of Moses, the prophets, and the sages, down to the present, also reached definition. The first of the documents that preserved this memorized and orally transmitted Torah in writing was the Mishnah; the last was the Talmud of Babylonia. In between, writings of two kinds reached authoritative status, first, amplifications and commentaries for the Mishnah, and second, the same sort of writing for scripture. So the formative age saw the composition of a single, cogent canon, that "one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi," that constituted Judaism.

That Judaism took shape in two distinct stages, 70 to 200 and 200 to 600. The first stage is represented by the Mishnah, a philosophical law code, ca. 200, in the consequence of the destruction of the Second Temple and the defeat of Bar Kokhba three generations later, emphasizing sanctification. The question addressed by the mishnaic system was where and how Israel remained holy even without its holy city and temple. The second stage, 200 to 600, is marked by the Talmud of the Land of Israel, also called the Yerushalmi or Jerusalem Talmud, an amplification and expansion of the Mishnah, ca. 400, in the aftermath of the rise to political power of Christianity, presenting a dual emphasis on both sanctification and salvation. The question taken up by the talmudic system—the dual Torah in its first definitive statement—was when and how holy Israel would be saved, even with a world in the hands of the sibling of Israel, Esau, or Christendom (and, later on, in the power of the sibling Ishmael, or Islam, as well). A second Talmud, also serving to explain the Mishnah, took shape in Babylonia and reached closure at ca. 600. This other Talmud, called the Talmud of Babylonia or the Bavli, drew into itself a vast range of materials, treating both the Mishnah and scripture, and presented the definitive statement of Judaism, then to now.

The Judaism of the dual Torah, written (scripture, pentateuchal) and oral (the Mishnah and its exegetical works, as well as the exegetical treatments of scripture called midrashim), confronted the chronic and pressing questions of the Jews' circumstance and provided answers deemed self-evidently valid. It asked the question of the ascendancy of Esau and Ishmael and answered that holy Israel would ultimately find salvation at the end of time through its life of sanctification of the here and now. That self-evidently valid answer to the urgent question of existence is why the system endured from its origin, in the fourth century, to the point, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at which the original circumstance addressed by that Judaism radically changed. Then new questions, out of phase with the old, would demand new answers.

The Judaism of the dual Torah came into being—at its first stage—as the amalgam of two of the three strands of the period of diversity, specifically, the priestly and the sagacious. Among three main choices we have outlined, the messianic, priestly, and scribal, the Judaism of the two Torahs began with the priestly, now represented by the Pharisees and their method, and the scribal, now in the persons of the scribes, or sages and rabbis, and their Torah teachings. The priestly-Pharisaic strand contributed the method, the emphasis on the sanctification of the everyday. The scribal strand defined the content, the substance of Torah study, with stress on mastery of scripture and application of the contents of scripture to ordinary affairs.

The third, the messianic strand, with its emphasis on history, the nation-society as a whole, and the end of time, would become important as the Judaism of the two Torahs developed in its second stage. But at the outset the definitive documents, the Mishnah and its closest relations, paid slight attention to that theme. It entered the picture when, after the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, Christianity became the dominant religion of the West. Then the messianic theme demanded attention, since Christianity laid stress on Christ as Messiah. The vast movements of history, culminating in the enthronement of Christ as king of the world in the Roman Empire, demanded a response from Israel's sages. Sages of the time in the Yerushalmi and in *Genesis Rabbah* and *Leviticus Rabbah* framed an appropriate doctrine of history and of the Messiah: the Messiah will come to Israel when Israel keeps the Torah as sages teach it. From Late Antiquity to the nineteenth century, this is the Judaism that predominated.

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD OF JUDAISM (640–1787)

The rise of Islam marks the end of the formative period of the Judaism that would prove normative. The end of the classical period is marked by the Ameri-

can Constitution, drawn up in 1787, which inaugurated the world in which the political and cultural setting for the Jews in Europe and America changed from what it had been under Christendom. In the long intervening age, here called the classical period, a single Judaism, the one teaching the dual Torah of Sinai, came to full definition and predominated. During that time, whatever important ideas or issues developed Jews addressed them within the categories of the Judaism of the dual Torah. For example, a variety of mystical ideas and practices entered the world of Judaism and attained naturalization within the Torah, and a philosophical tradition restated the truths of the Torah in terms of Greek modes of thought represented by Aristotle and Plato as the Muslim philosophical schools transmitted them to the West.

In the mystical tradition, the great work was the *Zohar*, written toward the end of the thirteenth century in Spain, and, in the philosophical tradition, the most important figure was Maimonides, 1135–1204, who restated the whole of Judaic law and theology in a systematic and profoundly philosophical way. Both of these encompassing modes of thought, the mystical and the philosophical, transformed "the one whole Torah of Moses, our rabbi" from a mythic to, on the one side, an intensely felt and profound doctrine of the true nature of God's being, and, on the other side, an intellectually rich and rational statement of the Torah as truth. And both found an ample place well within the received canon, to which each made a massive contribution of new and authoritative writings. The power of the one whole Torah, oral and written, to encompass and make its own essentially fresh ways of thought and life testifies to the classical character of this Judaism, everywhere definitive. So mysticism and philosophy alike made their contribution to the altar of the Judaism of the dual Torah. What is more interesting still, that same original system possessed the power to define its own heresies. This we see in Karaism, the heresy that rejected the myth of the dual Torah, and Sabbateanism, the heresy that rejected the myth of the Messiah as a Torah sage.

THE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY SCENE (1787–)

In modern times, the diversity characteristic of the period of origins has come to prevail once again. Now the symbolic system and structure of the Judaism of the dual Torah has come to compete for Jews' attention with other Judaic systems, on the one side, and with a wildly diverse range of symbols of other-than-Jewish origin and meaning on the other. What of the Judaism of the dual Torah in relationship to the life of Israel, the Jewish people over time (not to be identified only with the contemporary State of Israel, which came into being in 1948)? That Judaism of the dual Torah endured and flourishes today as the religion of a small group of people.

From 1800 to 1900 a number of other Judaic systems—worldviews, ways of life, addressed to an "Israel"—came into being. These included Reform Judaism, the first and most important of the Judaisms of modern times. The changes deemed reforms involved at first matters of liturgy, then important issues of doctrine. Reform took seriously the political changes that accorded to Jews the rights of citizens and demanded that they conform, in important ways, to the common practices of their countries of citizenship. Reform took shape in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Some decades later, in the middle of the century, Orthodoxy stated the position that one may observe the law and also enter into the civilization of the West. Affirming the divine origin of the Torah, Orthodoxy effected a selective piety, e.g., affirming secular education in addition to study of the Torah. These are the two modern Judaisms of keenest interest in the spelling out of any theory of the history of Judaism.

The Judaic systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries took shape within a span of not much more than a hundred years, from somewhat before 1800 to somewhat after 1900. The weakening of the Judaism of the dual Torah and the development of competing Judaisms find exemplification in two important Judaisms in no way continuous with the received system. Zionism and American Judaism constitute not heresies of the Judaism of the dual Torah but Judaisms in no way defined within the terms and categories of that Torah. They derive from experiences in no way generated by the Torah myth. And yet both Judaisms very clearly and strikingly recapitulate the original paradigm of exile and return—even in America, where that paradigm forms an utterly dissonant conflict with the political and social reality confronting the Jewish group.

It remains to ask, Who is a Jew? The answer to that question, according to Jewish law as codified in the Torah as interpreted by the Talmud and defined by rabbis from late antiquity to the present day, is this: a Jew is a person who was born of a Jewish mother or who has been converted to Judaism. (Reform Judaism now recognizes as a born Jew the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother.) But not all Jews practice Judaism, and, moreover, those Jews who do practice Judaism interpret in diverse ways the beliefs and requirements of their version of Judaism.