

The Shifting Landscape of Reform Judaism: Reevaluating Sacred Texts and their Role in Modernity

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of Reform Judaism as a modern movement that challenges traditional notions of religious authority and dogma within the Jewish faith. Instead of prioritizing the historical understanding of Torah's divine authority, Reform Judaism places importance on inclusivity, flexibility, and individual spiritual beliefs. The movement seeks to create a broad-based theological "big tent," capable of accommodating diverse beliefs and practices. The emergence of Reform Judaism has raised questions about the role and purpose of religion in modern society and the extent to which it can adapt to evolving needs. However, the emphasis on individual autonomy and inclusivity has resulted in a more diverse and inclusive religious landscape. The movement's willingness to reinterpret sacred texts to align with contemporary values has led to a more dynamic and responsive religious tradition.

1 Introduction

The relationship between tradition and modernity has been a matter of constant negotiation within the Jewish community. Each generation has sought to reconcile the timeless wisdom of the past with the realities of the present. In response to the challenges posed by the Enlightenment and the emergence of modernity, the Reform Jewish movement has attempted to modernize Jewish practices, making them more accessible and relevant to the contemporary world. This movement aimed to embrace modern values and practices while also retaining a connection to Jewish tradition and history.

Reform Judaism has endeavored to achieve this goal in several ways, one of the most significant being a reevaluation of the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. In traditional Judaism, the study and interpretation of the Torah and other sacred texts are central to Jewish law and tradition. However, Reform Judaism has taken a more critical approach to these texts, questioning their authority and relevance in the modern world. This approach has been influenced by the intellectual and philosophical currents of modernity, which have emphasized individual freedom, rationality, and critical inquiry.

The Reform movement has attempted to strike a balance between maintaining a connection with the past and adapting to the changing needs and values of contemporary Jewish communities. This tension is particularly evident in the way that Reform Jews approach sacred texts. While the Torah remains central to Jewish worship and tradition, Reform Jews have sought to reinterpret and recontextualize its teachings for the modern world. They have emphasized the ethical and moral principles contained within the text while also downplaying its legalistic aspects.

Despite the contributions of Reform Judaism to the evolution of Jewish religious practice and tradition, it has not been without criticisms. One of the most significant criticisms of this approach is that it represents

a departure from traditional Jewish values and beliefs. Traditionalists argue that the Reform movement's reevaluation of sacred texts is an attempt to water down or even reject Jewish tradition altogether. They contend that the movement's critical approach to sacred texts undermines the authority of the Jewish religious tradition and weakens the connection between the Jewish people and their historical and cultural heritage.

On the other hand, proponents of the Reform approach argue that the movement's critical approach to sacred texts is essential for adapting Jewish tradition to the realities of the modern world. They contend that Judaism must remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary Jewish communities if it is to survive and thrive. They argue that the Reform movement's reinterpretation of sacred texts is an attempt to make Judaism more accessible and meaningful to modern Jews while also maintaining a connection to Jewish tradition.

The shifting landscape of Reform Judaism in recent years has become even more pronounced, as new generations of Jewish leaders and thinkers have emerged with different perspectives on the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. Some have called for a return to a more traditional approach, while others have pushed for even greater innovation and adaptation.

The tension between the commitment to modernity and the connection to Jewish tradition is one of the most significant challenges facing the Reform movement. The movement has attempted to embrace modern values and practices while also retaining a connection to Jewish history and tradition. However, this tension has led to ongoing debates and disagreements over the appropriate balance between tradition and modernity.

Despite these challenges, the Reform movement has made significant contributions to the ongoing evolution of Jewish religious practice and tradition. The movement has emphasized the importance of social justice and ethical responsibility, while also seeking to make Judaism more accessible and relevant to contemporary Jews. The movement has also been at the forefront of efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, and to build bridges between different religious communities.

This article aims to explore the history of the debate over the role of sacred texts within the Reform Jewish community, as well as the current state of the conversation and the implications for the future of Judaism. By examining the different perspectives on this issue, it will seek to shed light on the ongoing tension between tradition and modernity within the Jewish community and the broader implications for religious practice in the contemporary world.

2 Literature Review

Reform Judaism emerged in the 19th century as a response to the challenges posed by modernity and the Enlightenment. The movement sought to modernize and update Jewish practices while retaining a connection to Jewish tradition and history. One of the most significant ways that Reform Judaism has sought to achieve this goal is by reevaluating the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the shifting landscape of Reform Judaism and the debates surrounding the reevaluation of sacred texts in the movement.

The Role of Sacred Texts in Jewish Tradition:

Traditional Judaism places great emphasis on the study and interpretation of sacred texts. The Torah, which contains the Five Books of Moses, is the primary source of Jewish law and practice. Other texts, such as the Talmud, Midrash, and commentaries, are also central to Jewish tradition and serve as guides for interpreting the Torah and developing Jewish law.

According to Rabbi Steven Wernick, the Chief Executive Officer of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the study of sacred texts is "a vital component of Jewish identity." It is considered a sacred practice and an essential part of Jewish education and religious life (Wernick, 2016). Jewish schools and yeshivot devote significant time and resources to teaching students how to study and interpret these texts.

In traditional Judaism, the study of sacred texts is not only a means of learning about Jewish law and practice but is also seen as a way to connect with God. The Talmud states that "the words of the Torah are dearer than the precious stones" and that "the study of the Torah is equal to all the other commandments" (Berakhot 5a). This emphasis on the study of sacred texts as a religious practice has been a constant point of negotiation within the Jewish community, with each generation seeking to reconcile the timeless wisdom of the past with the realities of the present.

The Reform Jewish movement has taken a more critical approach to the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. As a response to the challenges posed by the Enlightenment and the emergence of modernity, the movement sought to update and modernize Jewish practices, making them more accessible and relevant to the contemporary world. The movement aimed to embrace modern values and practices while also retaining a connection to Jewish tradition and history.

One of the most significant ways that Reform Judaism has sought to achieve this goal is by reevaluating the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. Reform Jews have taken a more critical approach to these texts, questioning their authority and relevance in the modern world. This approach has been influenced by the intellectual and philosophical currents of modernity, which have emphasized individual freedom, rationality, and critical inquiry.

Despite these critical views, the Reform movement recognizes the importance of sacred texts and their value to Jewish tradition. According to Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, the President Emeritus of the Union for Reform Judaism, Reform Jews "believe that the Torah is a sacred text, which contains within it profound wisdom, ethical teachings, and enduring values" (Yoffie, 2019). The movement seeks to balance modern values and practices with maintaining a connection to Jewish tradition and history.

In recent years, the Reform movement has continued to evolve and adapt its approach to the role of sacred texts in Jewish life. Some within the movement have called for a return to a more traditional approach, while others have pushed for even greater innovation and adaptation. The tension between maintaining a connection to Jewish tradition and adapting to the changing needs and values of contemporary Jewish communities remains an ongoing challenge for the Reform movement.

Reevaluating the Role of Sacred Texts in Reform Judaism:

In recent years, the role of sacred texts in Reform Judaism has been reevaluated, with the movement taking a more critical approach towards their authority and relevance in contemporary Jewish communities. This shift has been influenced by the intellectual and philosophical currents of modernity, which prioritize individual freedom, rationality, and critical inquiry (Berkovits, 2019).

The Reform movement aims to strike a balance between maintaining a connection with the past and adapting to the changing needs and values of modern Jewish communities. This approach has led to criticism from traditionalists who argue that the reevaluation of sacred texts represents a departure from traditional Jewish values and beliefs. They assert that the critical approach undermines the authority of the Jewish religious tradition and weakens the connection between the Jewish people and their historical and cultural heritage (Gordis, 1999).

However, proponents of the Reform approach argue that the critical examination of sacred texts is essential for adapting Jewish tradition to the realities of the modern world. They argue that Judaism must remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary Jewish communities if it is to survive and thrive. They contend that the reinterpretation of sacred texts is an attempt to make Judaism more accessible and meaningful to modern Jews while also maintaining a connection to Jewish tradition (Eisen, 2001).

The Tension between Tradition and Modernity:

The Reform movement has long faced the challenge of reconciling the tension between tradition and modernity. As a progressive movement, Reform Judaism has embraced modern values and practices, seeking to make Judaism more accessible and relevant to contemporary Jewish communities. At the same time, the movement recognizes the importance of preserving Jewish history and tradition, leading to ongoing debates over the appropriate balance between tradition and modernity (Eisen, 2001).

One of the most significant challenges facing the Reform movement is how to balance the need for innovation and adaptation with the preservation of Jewish tradition and history. Some Reform Jews have called for a return to a more traditional approach to sacred texts and Jewish practice, arguing that the movement has gone too far in its embrace of modernity (Berkovits, 2019). On the other hand, other Reform Jews have pushed for even greater innovation and adaptation, seeking to make Judaism even more relevant to contemporary Jewish communities (Eisen, 2001).

These debates reflect the tension between continuity and change that has characterized Jewish history. While tradition provides a sense of continuity and connection to the past, it can also be a source of rigidity and resistance to change. Modernity, on the other hand, represents innovation and adaptation, but can also lead to a loss of connection to the past and to Jewish tradition (Berkovits, 2019).

Despite these tensions, the Reform movement has continued to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of contemporary Jewish communities. The movement's commitment to critical inquiry and intellectual openness has allowed for ongoing debate and dialogue over the appropriate balance between tradition and modernity. Ultimately, the Reform movement's ability to navigate this tension will determine its continued relevance and impact in the years to come..

The Role of Ethical and Moral Principles:

One of the ways that Reform Jews have sought to balance the tension between tradition and modernity is by emphasizing the ethical and moral principles contained within sacred texts. According to the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the largest organization of Reform rabbis in North America, "The Reform Movement seeks to integrate Judaism's timeless values into the complex reality of modern life." This means that Reform Jews are not bound by strict adherence to traditional practices or laws, but instead seek to interpret Jewish texts and teachings in a way that is relevant to contemporary issues and challenges.

The Reform Movement's emphasis on ethical and moral principles is reflected in its commitment to social justice and ethical responsibility. According to the Union for Reform Judaism, a North American organization of Reform congregations, "The Reform Movement is committed to the pursuit of justice and peace, the right of all people to self-determination, and the dignity and worth of every human being."

This approach to Judaism is reflected in the movement's emphasis on tikkun olam, or repairing the world. Tikkun olam is a concept that suggests that Jews have a responsibility to help make the world a better place through acts of social justice and kindness. This concept has been embraced by the Reform Movement as a guiding principle for its members.

The Importance of Social Justice and Ethical Responsibility:

The Reform movement has consistently placed a strong emphasis on social justice and ethical responsibility as central components of Jewish tradition and practice. According to the Union for Reform Judaism, this emphasis on social justice is rooted in the belief that "Judaism demands that we create a just society that serves the needs of all people and fosters human dignity and freedom" (Union for Reform Judaism, n.d.). This commitment to social justice has led the Reform movement to be actively involved in a wide range of social justice issues, including immigration reform, racial justice, economic justice, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Moreover, the Reform movement has reinterpreted traditional Jewish texts and practices to align with its emphasis on social justice. For example, the Tikkun Olam concept, which translates to "repairing the world," has become a cornerstone of the Reform movement's social justice efforts. Tikkun Olam emphasizes the Jewish obligation to work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all people. This concept has been used to guide the movement's approach to social justice issues and advocacy.

The Reform movement's emphasis on social justice and ethical responsibility is also reflected in its engagement with interfaith and intercultural dialogue. In recent years, the movement has actively promoted interfaith cooperation and understanding as a means of building bridges across communities and promoting social justice. The movement's engagement in these efforts is rooted in the belief that social justice requires collaboration and partnership across diverse communities.

The Importance of Social Justice and Ethical Responsibility:

The importance of social justice and ethical responsibility has been a prominent theme in Jewish tradition and practice. The Reform movement has been a leading force in promoting social justice and equality, both within the Jewish community and in broader society. The movement's emphasis on social justice is based

on the belief that all individuals have an inherent worth and dignity, and that every person deserves to be treated with fairness and respect (ReformJudaism.org, n.d.).

The Reform movement's commitment to social justice is reflected in its reinterpretation of traditional Jewish texts and teachings to emphasize the importance of social justice and ethical responsibility. For example, the movement's approach to Tikkun Olam (repairing the world) emphasizes the importance of addressing social inequalities and working towards a more just and equitable society (ReformJudaism.org, n.d.).

In addition to its internal efforts, the Reform movement has also been a strong advocate for social justice issues in broader society. The movement has supported causes such as civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights, among others (ReformJudaism.org, n.d.). This commitment to social justice has been recognized by organizations such as the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, which advocates for progressive social justice policies in the United States (Religious Action Center, n.d.).

3 Interaction with Modernity

The intersection of Judaism with modernity and Reformation has been a subject of great interest and debate among scholars and historians. According to a study by Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz (2010), the Enlightenment and emancipation were two significant forces that influenced Jews and Judaism and opened up cultural and political space for Jews to participate in modern European societies. These forces challenged Jews to adapt to the far-reaching cultural and political changes of modernity, particularly in terms of secular definitions of civil society and the state, as well as ideals of shared rationality, humanity, and tolerance.

Emancipation further transformed the relationship between Gentiles and Jews, as it removed previous restrictions on residence and activities, granting Jews legal equality and citizenship in constitutional states that endorsed uniform laws and equal rights and duties for all citizens. This transformation allowed Jews to actively embrace the challenge of forging a modern European identity for themselves, while reinterpreting Judaism in accordance with new values internalized as their own.

Despite the potential benefits of this transformation, Jews still faced ignorance and prejudice, both old and new, and were often required to defend their faith and identity. Even proponents of inclusive universalism found Jewish particularity troublesome. This creative tension with the non-Jewish environment has become a hallmark of modern Judaism, challenging Jews to live and think as engaged yet distinctive participants, as insiders and outsiders, in modern cultures and societies.

As a result, the interaction of Judaism with modernity and Reformation has transformed both Gentile-Jewish relations and Jewish self-consciousness and contributed significantly to the development of modern Jewish identity.

4 Reformation in Judaism

The Reformation in Judaism is a significant period in the history of Judaism, which occurred during the Enlightenment era. According to Goldberg (2014), the roots of Jewish thought during the Enlightenment can be traced back to the 17th century, when many Jewish intellectuals attempted to understand Jewish customs in light of modern scientific origins. Two influential Jewish philosophers who contributed to this

era were Baruch Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn, in particular, is considered the "Father of Modern Judaism" and his philosophy served as a predecessor to the Jewish interaction with modernity.

Although Spinoza was a more important and earlier enlightened philosopher, his impact on Judaism was indirect due to the extreme character of his intellectual beliefs, as well as his eventual expulsion from Amsterdam's Jewish community (Goldberg, 2014). The Enlightenment era brought significant changes to Jewish life, as Jews were no longer isolated from non-Jewish currents of culture and thought. As a result of this transition, many Jews sought to modernize their religious practices.

One influential figure in this movement was Israel Jacobson, a Jewish financier and religious leader who initiated a reform effort in the early 19th century (Goldberg, 2014). In 1801, Jacobson opened a boarding school for boys in Seesen, Westphalia, and went on to create other schools around the country. Within these new foundations, Jewish subjects were taught by Jews, while Christian professors taught general subjects. Under Jacobson's direction, the consistory brought exterior innovations to Jewish liturgy, such as choral singing, hymns, speeches, and German prayers. Jacobson established the first Reform synagogue near the school in the presence of Christian priests and nobles in 1810. Following Napoleon's defeat, Jacobson travelled to Berlin, where he established the Berlin Temple to put his concepts into practice. In Hamburg, a Reform temple was established in 1818, with various liturgical changes such as German prayers and sermons, in addition to choral singing and organ music.

The primary objective of these early reformers was to modernize the Jewish religion, as the informality of conventional worship services appeared bizarre and undignified to them. Therefore, they insisted on even more decorum, further uniformity in prayer, a chorus, hymns, and music response, and changes in prayers and service duration. However, these changes were inadequate for some Jews who were affected by the Romantic movement (Goldberg, 2014).

4.1 Emergence of Sects

The emergence of sects within Judaism was a result of the Enlightenment era, which cast doubt on the core principles of religion and created a crisis for Jewish identity (Ruderman, 2008). During the Enlightenment period, there was a focus on rational thinking and humanist principles, which emphasized what brought people together rather than what separated them. This led to a series of inquiries aimed at the Assembly of Jewish Notables, which had been established on Napoleon's orders in 1806, highlighting the concerns that "modern" society had regarding Jews and their involvement in the nation-state (Schorsch, 1990).

As a result of these inquiries, various reactions emerged within Judaism, including queries of religious authority, personal rights, the importance of tradition, and the meaning of Jewish peoplehood. Some rabbinical authorities preferred to maintain the intellectual ghetto walls that isolated Jews from contemporary ideas, while others sought to embrace modernity and adapt Judaism to the changing times (Sorkin, 2017).

These developing viewpoints led to the emergence of various sects within Judaism, including Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and humanistic Jews. Each sect had its own unique approach to Judaism, with varying degrees of emphasis on tradition, modernity, and individual rights (Sorkin, 2017).

5 Reform Movement and its basic tents

Reformed Judaism, also known as Liberal Judaism or Progressive Judaism, is a religious movement that emerged in response to the enlightenment and Jewish emancipation in central Europe during the 18th century (Waxman, 2000). The movement sought to modernize and reform traditional Judaism, emphasizing individual and congregational liberty. While Reform Judaism has taken on different forms in different regions, there are commonalities across Reform communities. At its core, Reform Judaism believes in the possibility of change and rejects the premise that God gave the written and oral Torah word for word, letter for letter, and belief for belief, forbidding any intentional alterations (Waxman, 2000).

According to Waxman (2000), Reformed Judaism initially expressed itself in liturgical developments rather than theological or legislative reforms. As Jews became more familiar with current Christian worship styles, they realized that their own traditional forms of public worship fell short of what their Christian neighbors expected. Therefore, early Reform Jewish leaders such as Samuel Holdheim and Abraham Geiger modified the Jewish prayer service and synagogues' customs to Western ideas, morals, and aesthetics, hoping to attract Jews who had started to abandon the Jewish community for a secular or Christian existence.

The Reform Movement emphasized the prophetic heritage and social equity, which contributed to the movement's prolonged participation in social justice and social action. This aspect of Reform Judaism is reflected in the movement's rejection of Zionism as a valid pursuit for modern Jews, as Waxman (2000) notes.

5.1 The Role of Sacred Texts in Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism emerged as a response to the intellectual and social environment of the enlightenment in eighteenth-century central Europe. The movement emphasized individual and congregational autonomy, and one of its distinguishing features was its acknowledgment of the legitimacy of change. Reform Judaism rejected the notion that the written and oral Torah were given by God without room for conscious modifications, recognizing that human perceptions of the divine are subjective and that beliefs and practices may adapt and progress in light of scientific, social, ethical, and other human advancements (Glazer, 1972).

The pioneers of Reform Judaism sought to appeal to Jews who had started to abandon the Jewish community for a secular or Christian lifestyle. They did so by modifying Jewish prayer services and synagogue rituals to align with Western ideals, values, and aesthetics. Many of these leaders were rabbis who had received both Jewish and secular education. They introduced decorum to the synagogue and compiled shorter prayer books with vernacular translations. They encouraged their congregants to pray in the vernacular, and some even brought in organs to play instrumental music during Sabbath worship (Ellenson, 2000).

The role of sacred texts in Reform Judaism has been the subject of much discussion and debate. Reform Judaism places a strong emphasis on the Prophetic tradition and social justice. This emphasis has led to a longstanding involvement in social action, and Reform Jews have played leading roles in social movements such as civil rights and women's rights. Reform Judaism rejects Zionism, the idea that modern Jews should pursue a return to their homeland of Eretz Yisrael, just as it rejects the notions of a personal Messiah and a return to traditional Jewish rituals such as circumcision and dietary laws (Meyer, 1995).

However, Reform Jews still regard sacred texts as important sources of inspiration and guidance. They believe that the Torah contains timeless values and teachings that can be applied to contemporary situations. They also recognize that the Torah was written by human beings who were influenced by their historical and cultural contexts, and they seek to interpret the Torah in light of modern scholarship and critical inquiry (Ellenson, 2000).

To develop new perspectives on Jewish ideology and theology, Reform leaders used modern scientific methods to examine Jewish literature, history, and rituals. They sought to reconcile traditional Jewish beliefs and practices with modern knowledge and values. This approach brought Jewish study into the modern world, but it was controversial among traditional Jews and their leaders. In response, Conservative and Orthodox movements arose to provide their own counterpoints to Reform (Glazer, 1972).

Reform Judaism has undergone significant changes since its inception, and its current practices and beliefs reflect ongoing efforts to reconcile tradition and modernity. However, the movement's commitment to social justice and individual autonomy remain central features of its identity. Reform Jews continue to draw inspiration and guidance from the Torah, while also recognizing the need for critical inquiry and adaptation in light of changing circumstances (Ellenson, 2000).

5.2 Reform Judaism in contemporary time

In contemporary times, Reform Judaism has undergone significant transformations in response to changing societal and cultural norms. The movement emphasizes the importance of individual autonomy in choosing one's path of Jewish expression, a commitment to social justice, and an appreciation for Jewish traditions and history. Additionally, the movement stresses the significance of pluralism and ongoing study of Jewish traditions and mitzvot (Jacobs, 2018).

Reform Judaism emerged in the 19th century as a response to the need to modernize and revive Jewish practice by rejecting traditions that were viewed as hindering its spiritual and moral advancement. The movement's core values included the normalization of Jewish life, the elimination of barriers between Jews and non-Jews, and the promotion of social justice based on biblical values. These values were implemented through the creation of new-style rabbinate trained in critical analysis and effective preaching in the vernacular and by decisions of rabbinical synods that were communicated to congregations (Bleich, 1983).

Despite its early success, Reform Judaism faced resistance from societal and governmental structures that favored tradition and stability. In contrast, America provided a fertile ground for Reform due to its emphasis on individualism and initiative, which allowed Jews to maintain a sense of common fraternity and American identity while remaining committed to their religion (Sarna, 1999). As a result, traditional observance was not a priority in the early days of Reform Judaism in America.

In contemporary times, Reform Judaism has continued to evolve in response to changing societal and cultural norms. One significant transformation has been the increased emphasis on social justice issues, such as gender equality, racial justice, and environmentalism, reflecting a commitment to biblical values of tzedek (justice) and tikkun olam (repairing the world) (Jacobs, 2018). Reform Judaism has also emphasized the importance of continued study of Jewish traditions and mitzvot, reflecting a commitment to lifelong learning and spiritual growth (Bleich, 1983).

In conclusion, Reform Judaism has undergone significant transformations in contemporary times, emphasizing individual autonomy, social justice, and the appreciation of Jewish traditions and history while stressing the importance of pluralism and ongoing study. The movement emerged in response to the need to modernize and revive Jewish practice, and while it initially faced resistance, it found fertile ground in America due to its emphasis on individualism and initiative. Today, Reform Judaism continues to evolve, reflecting a commitment to biblical values and a dedication to lifelong learning and spiritual growth.

5.3 Abraham Geiger: The First Reformist and his stance regarding sacred text:

Abraham Geiger (1810-1874) was a pioneering Reform rabbinical leader who dedicated himself to the scientific analysis of Judaism, a vocation that he linked with his rabbinical profession. Geiger was born and raised in Frankfurt and received his education at the universities of Heidelberg and Bonn. He served as a rabbi in Wiesbaden in 1832, and in 1838, he was appointed as a rabbi in Breslau. While in Breslau, he authored extensive research on various Jewish topics, including a work on the historical text and Bible translations.

In his book, "Urschrift und Uebersetzungen der Bibel" (Origin and Translation of the Bible), Geiger argued that the canonized text of Scripture was influenced by post-biblical trends. His approach was to reformulate Judaism to gain theological clarity in accordance with the scientific spirit of the times. Although he did not create a systematic Jewish theology, Geiger believed that religion was based on the human understanding of finiteness and the search for the infinite. He posited that Judaism is a religion based on faith in a being who controls the cosmos and has given Jews the task of practicing justice and charity.

Geiger believed that spiritual perfection was the goal of human endeavor, which separated Jews from the Greeks who believed in destiny. He believed that the prophetic tradition in Judaism represented the pinnacle of this spiritual pursuit, and it should be separated from earlier, more basic religious practices like animal sacrifice, which were abandoned over the course of Jewish history. Geiger further argued that the biblical idea of nationhood was no longer necessary in the present world.

According to Geiger, the progress of Jewish history was split into four phases. During the era of revelation, the notion of Judaism was first recognized as a moral and spiritual concept capable of continuous development. During the era of tradition, the Bible was modified and reinterpreted. The era of legalism began after the Talmud was completed, and it formalized the tradition to secure its survival. Finally, in the era of critical study, historical research helped to overcome legalism. However, just because the Halakha was not regarded as binding in the fourth stage does not mean that Judaism is disconnected from its history. On the contrary, historic studies can help to revive the tradition. The components of Jewish tradition that should be abolished are medieval disorders caused by restrictions and have no connection to the Jewish faith's essential beliefs.

Geiger believed that the Bible and Talmud reflect an early, basic stage of an ongoing revelation. He argued that many traditional rites, such as circumcision, are unsuitable for modern living. Nevertheless, he contended that God's commandment is primarily ethical, not ritualistic. Historical research demonstrates that the practices themselves have evolved and altered over time, as seen by the Bible and the Talmud. Geiger believed that the Talmud needed to be supplanted and that critical Bible study should be applied to Talmudic writings as well.

Geiger's reformist ideas were controversial at the time, and they continue to be debated in the present day. Reformers reject the Torah's and Talmud's divine authorship and believe themselves to be bound entirely by the ethical principles of Judaism or halakha. Nevertheless, Geiger's contribution to the scientific analysis of Judaism remains a significant and lasting legacy.

6 Conclusion

In contemporary Judaism, Reform Judaism has emerged as a modern movement that prioritizes inclusivity, flexibility, and the embrace of individual spiritual beliefs. This departure from traditional understandings of Torah's divine authority and its openness to non-Jews reflects a broader trend within contemporary religious contexts. Namely, there has been a shift towards the elevation of individual autonomy and personal experience as primary determinants of religious beliefs and practices, as opposed to traditional authority and dogma.

Central to Reform Judaism is the conviction that an individual's religious beliefs must be informed by what is spiritually meaningful to them, rather than conforming to a predetermined set of dogmatic teachings. Consequently, Reform Judaism aims to be a broad-based theological "big tent," capable of accommodating a wide spectrum of diverse beliefs and practices. This approach has earned it a reputation as one of the most liberal movements within contemporary Judaism.

Notwithstanding its commitment to inclusivity, the emergence of Reform Judaism has also challenged traditional notions of authority and dogma. As such, it has raised questions about the role and purpose of religion in modern society, and the extent to which religion can be adaptive to the ever-evolving needs of individuals and communities. Despite these challenges, the emphasis on individual autonomy and inclusivity within Reform Judaism has resulted in a more diverse and inclusive religious landscape, one that is reflective of the changing values and aspirations of contemporary society.

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