



Hartman
Reading Group
Resources

Facilitator's Guide

The New Jewish Canon: Ideas and Debates 1980–2015

Edited by Yehuda Kurtzer & Claire E. Sufrin

Facilitator's Guide by **RABBI LAUREN BERKUN**



SHALOM HARTMAN מכון
INSTITUTE שלום הרטמן



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The New Jewish Canon

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WELCOME TO THE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

We are thrilled that you have chosen to offer a Reading Group program utilizing *The New Jewish Canon*, edited by Dr. Yehuda Kurtzer, President of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, and Dr. Claire E. Sufrin, Assistant Director of Jewish Studies at Northwestern University's Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies. This Facilitator's Guide is meant to serve as a resource and tool as you lead a Reading Group study and dialogue program. In addition to this written guide, the Shalom Hartman Institute has archived articles, podcasts, and video recordings to enrich your Reading Group program. These resources are located on the Shalom Hartman Institute website, shalomhartman.org/readingresources, and can be accessed by leaders and Reading Group participants.

The written facilitator's guide provides several suggestions for organizing a Reading Group program, based on different organizing principles. It also provides an extensive guide for one sample five-part series (Class Structure D), including summary outlines of recommended readings and video clips with reflection and discussion questions, as well as helpful PowerPoint files for teaching.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE READING GROUP PROGRAM

The Reading Group guide contains four sample syllabi with suggestions for selecting readings from *The New Jewish Canon* to facilitate a multi-part adult learning series. As the facilitator, you might choose to offer this program in as many or as few sessions as you decide for your community. Whether you are offering one class, a four-part series, or a yearlong course, we hope that this resource will provide you with support to achieve your educational goals.

READING GROUP FACILITATION

However you choose to organize your Reading Group, it is recommended that you prepare to facilitate in the following ways:

- Study the Book Introduction (*The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*) and decide if you would like to devote an entire first session to the introduction. This would give your group an opportunity to better understand the project of *The New Jewish Canon*, to discuss the meaning of “canon” in their own lives, and to get to know one another before diving into the topics of your Reading Group course. Alternatively, you might decide to devote the first 20 minutes of your first session to the Book Introduction.
- Study the selections that you have assigned to your group and note the main ideas and questions that are raised in each of the readings.
- Prepare a few reflection questions for each of the assigned readings.
- Prepare a few overall discussion questions that address the main theme of your session.
- Include questions that invite your participants to reflect on their own lives and experiences, and how these issues emerge in their own communities.

We hope this guide gives you further ideas for preparing whatever Reading Group structure you choose to lead, following written outlines and questions that support you in the room as you lead your discussion groups.

CONTACT US

We hope that these curricular materials will provide stimulating, meaningful, and relevant high-level Jewish learning for you and your community.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions related to this Reading Group Project and these resources.

May this learning help your community go from strength to strength,

Rabbi Lauren Berkun

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Four Suggested Structures & Sample Syllabi



Class Structure A

Overview of the Book

A Five-Part Series

Devote one-hour sessions to explore key excerpts from the four book sections.

- Session 1** Book Introduction
- Session 2** Jewish Politics and the Public Square
- Session 3** History, Memory, and Narrative
- Session 4** Religion and Religiosity
- Session 5** Identities and Communities

It is recommended that you assign three to five reading selections in advance of a reading group session, so that your participants are prepared to review and discuss the ideas.

Here is an example of a syllabus for this approach:

Session 1 Book Introduction

Reading Assignment

- Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire Sufrin, *Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*, pp. xvii–xxvii

Session 2 Jewish Politics and the Public Square

Reading Assignments

- Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (1985)
COMMENTARY BY WILLIAM GALSTON
pp. 3–9
- George Steiner, *Our Homeland, The Text* (1985)
Judith Butler, *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY JULIE COOPER
pp. 10–16
- Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (1986)
COMMENTARY BY SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN
pp. 17–23
- Peter Beinart, *The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment* (2010)
COMMENTARY BY SARA Yael HIRSCHHORN
pp. 108–112
- Daniel Gordis, *When Balance Becomes Betrayal* (2012)
Sharon Brous, *Lowering the Bar* (2012)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 113–117

Session 3 History, Memory, and Narrative

Reading Assignments

- David Hartman, *Auschwitz or Sinai?* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL SABATH BEIT-HALACHMI
pp. 125–129
- Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY ALEXANDER KAYE
pp. 130–134
- Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, *The Third Great Cycle of Jewish History* (1987)
COMMENTARY BY JOSHUA FEIGELSON
pp. 176–180
- Haym Soloveitchik, *Rupture and Reconstruction* (1994)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 189–193
- Ruth Wisse, *How Not to Remember and How Not to Forget* (2008)
COMMENTARY BY DARA HORN
pp. 215–220

Session 4 Religion and Religiosity

Reading Assignments

- Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (1983)
COMMENTARY BY SHLOMO ZUCKIER
pp. 229–233
- David Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (1985)
COMMENTARY BY DAVID ELLENSON
pp. 245–251
- Rachel Adler, *In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theological Purity* (1993)
COMMENTARY BY GAIL LABOVITZ
pp. 260–265
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, Susannah Heschel (ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1996)
COMMENTARY BY WILLIAM PLEVAN
pp. 277–282
- Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (1995)
pp. 271–276
COMMENTARY BY SHIRA HECHT-KOLLER

Session 5 Identities and Communities

Reading Assignments

- Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Letter to the Jewish Community of Teaneck* (1981)
COMMENTARY BY JONATHAN SARNA
pp. 321–325
- Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* (1991)
COMMENTARY BY ARIELLE LEVITES
pp. 357–362
- Yaakov Levado, *Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi* (1993)
COMMENTARY BY ZEV FARBER
pp. 381–386
- Ruth Calderon, Inaugural Knesset Speech, *The Heritage of All Israel* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI
pp. 427–431
- Rick Jacobs, *The Genesis of Our Future* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DAN FRIEDMAN
pp. 432–436

Class Structure B

Innovation and Change

A Four-Part Series

Devote one-hour sessions to explore important innovations and changes in this time period:

- Session 1** Book Introduction
- Session 2** Sociological Changes
- Session 3** Theological Changes
- Session 4** Gender and Sexuality

It is recommended that you assign three to five reading selections in advance of a reading group session, so that your participants are prepared to review and discuss the ideas.

Here is an example of a syllabus for this approach:

Session 1 Book Introduction

Reading Assignment

- Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire Sufrin, *Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*
pp. xvii-xxvii

Session 2 Sociological Changes

Reading Assignments

- Jonathan Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews* (1986)
COMMENTARY BY SYLVIA BARACK FISHMAN
pp. 17-23
- Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, *Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?* (2006)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 90-96
- Barry Kosmin, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (1991); *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center (2013)
COMMENTARY BY MIJAL BITTON
pp. 363-369

- Paul Cowan with Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks in an Interfaith Marriage* (1988)
COMMENTARY BY SAMIRA MEHTA
pp. 346–351
- Rick Jacobs, *The Genesis of Our Future* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DAN FRIEDMAN
pp. 432–436

Session 3 Theological Changes

Reading Assignments

- Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, *The Third Great Cycle of Jewish History* (1987)
COMMENTARY BY JOSHUA FEIGELSON
pp. 176–180
- David Hartman, *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism* (1985)
COMMENTARY BY DAVID ELLENSON
pp. 245–251
- Arthur Green, *Radical Judaism: Rethinking God and Tradition* (2010); Daniel Landes, *Hidden Master* (2010); Arthur Green and Daniel Landes, *God, Torah, and Israel: An Exchange* (2011)
COMMENTARY BY SAMUEL HAYIM BRODY
pp. 305–312
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, Susannah Heschel (ed.), *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity* (1996)
COMMENTARY BY WILLIAM PLEVAN
pp. 277–282
- Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990)
COMMENTARY BY JUDITH ROSENBAUM
pp. 352–356

Session 4 Gender and Sexuality

Reading Assignments

- Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (1981)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL GORDAN
pp. 326–329
- Evelyn Torton Beck (ed.), *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (1982); Susannah Heschel (ed.) *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1983)
COMMENTARY BY CLAIRE E. SUFRIN
pp. 337–345
- Yaakov Levado, *Gayness and God: Wrestlings of an Orthodox Rabbi* (1993)
COMMENTARY BY ZEV FARBER
pp. 381–386

- Elliot N. Dorff, Daniel S. Nevins, and Avram I. Reisner, *Homosexuality, Human Dignity, and Halakhah: A Combined Responsum for the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards* (2006)

COMMENTARY BY JANE KANAREK

pp. 404–408

- Tamar Biala and Nechama Weingarten-Mintz (eds.), *Dirshuni: Midrashei Nashim* (2009)

COMMENTARY BY SARAH MULHERN

pp. 415–420

Class Structure C

Key Events in Israel & Their Implications

A Four-Part Series

Devote one-hour sessions to explore critical events that shaped the Israel conversation in this time period:

- Session 1** Book Introduction
- Session 2** 1982 Lebanon War
- Session 3** The Murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, z"l
- Session 4** The Gaza Wars

It is recommended that you assign three to five reading selections in advance of a reading group session, so that your participants are prepared to review and discuss the ideas.

Here is an example of a syllabus for this approach:

Session 1 Book Introduction

Reading Assignment

- Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire Sufrin, *Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*
pp. xvii-xxvii

Session 2 1982 Lebanon War

Reading Assignments

- David Hartman, *Auschwitz or Sinai?* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL SABATH BEIT HALACHMI
pp. 125-129
- The Kahan Commission (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut) (1983)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 148-154
- Amos Oz, *In the Land of Israel* (1983)
COMMENTARY BY WENDY ZIERLER
pp. 155-159
- David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (1986)
COMMENTARY BY JUDAH BERNSTEIN
pp. 160-165

Session 3 The Murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

Reading Assignments

- Aharon Lichtenstein, *On the Murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin z"l* (1995)
COMMENTARY BY DAVID WOLKENFELD
pp. 57–62
- Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (1996)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA MAGID
pp. 63–69

Session 4 The Gaza Wars

Reading Assignments

- Moshe Halbertal, *The Goldstone Illusion* (2009)
COMMENTARY BY ELANA STEIN HAIN
pp. 103–107
- Peter Beinart, *The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment* (2010)
COMMENTARY BY SARA Yael HIRSCHHORN
pp. 108–112
- Daniel Gordis, *When Balance Becomes Betrayal* (2012); Sharon Brous, *Lowering the Bar* (2012)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 113–117
- Matti Friedman, *An Insider's Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth* (2014)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL FISH
pp. 118–122

Class Structure D

Thematic Reading Group

A Five-Part Series

Devote one-hour sessions to explore core themes that are important in this time period:

- Session 1** Book Introduction
- Session 2** Intermarriage
- Session 3** Feminism
- Session 4** Holocaust Memory
- Session 5** Israel and Jewish Power

It is recommended that you assign three to five reading selections in advance of a reading group session, so that your participants are prepared to review and discuss the ideas.

Here is an example of a syllabus for this approach:

Session 1 Book Introduction

Reading Assignment

- Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire Sufrin, *Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*
pp. xvii-xxvii

Session 2 Theme: Intermarriage

Reading Assignments

- Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, *Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?* (2006)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 90–96
- Paul Cowan with Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks in an Interfaith Marriage* (1988)
COMMENTARY BY SAMIRA MEHTA
pp. 346–351
- Barry Kosmin, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (1991) and *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center (2013)
COMMENTARY BY MIJAL BITTON
pp. 363–369

- Rick Jacobs, *The Genesis of Our Future* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DAN FRIEDMAN
pp. 432–436

*Suggested Video Clips**

- Samira Mehta, discussing *Mixed Blessings* (8-minute clip)
- Mijal Bitton, discussing the 1990 and 2013 population surveys (8-minute clip)

Session 3 Theme: Feminism

Reading Assignments

- Rachel Adler, *In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theological Purity* (1993)
COMMENTARY BY GAIL LABOVITZ
pp. 260–265
- Mendel Shapiro, *Qeri'at Ha-Torah by Women: A Halakhic Analysis* (2001)
COMMENTARY BY TOVA HARTMAN
pp. 289–294
- Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (1981)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL GORDAN
pp. 326–329
- Evelyn Torton Beck (ed.), *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (1982);
Susannah Heschel (ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1983)
COMMENTARY BY CLAIRE E. SUFRIN
pp. 337–345
- Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990)
COMMENTARY BY JUDITH ROSENBAUM
pp. 352–356

*Suggested Video Clips**

- Gail Labovitz, discussing *In Your Blood, Live* (7-minute clip)
- Claire E. Sufrin, excerpt from summer lecture on *Identities and Communities* (33-minute clip)

Session 4 Theme: Holocaust Memory

Reading Assignments

- David Hartman, *Auschwitz or Sinai?* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL SABATH BEIT-HALACHMI
pp. 125–129
- Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY ALEXANDER KAYE
pp. 130–134
- Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1986)
COMMENTARY BY CLAIRE E. SUFRIN
pp. 166–170

- Naomi Seidman, *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage* (1996)
COMMENTARY BY ERIN LEIB SMOKLER
pp. 194–198
- Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust* (1993); Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World* (1998)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 181–188

*Suggested Video Clips**

- Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, discussing *Auschwitz or Sinai* ([4-minute clip](#))
- Alexander Kaye, discussing *Zakhor* ([5-minute clip](#))
- Erin Leib Smokler, discussing *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage* ([6-minute clip](#))

Session 5 Theme: Israel and Jewish Power

Reading Assignments

- George Steiner, *Our Homeland, the Text* (1985); Judith Butler, *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY JULIE E. COOPER
pp. 10–16
- Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004); Ari Shavit, *Survival of the Fittest? An Interview with Benny Morris* (2004) and *Lydda, 1948* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DANIEL KURTZER
pp. 24–33
- Irving (Yitz) Greenberg vs. Meir Kahane, *Public Debate at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale* (1988)
COMMENTARY BY SHAUL MAGID
pp. 34–39
- Kahan Commission (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut) (1983)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 148–154
- Moshe Halbertal, *The Goldstone Illusion* (2009)
COMMENTARY BY ELANA STEIN HAIN
pp. 103–107

*Suggested Video Clips**

- Julie Cooper, discussing *Our Homeland the Text* (George Steiner) and *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (Judith Butler) ([5-minute clip](#))
- Shaul Magid, discussing *Irving (Yitz) Greenberg versus Meir Kahane* ([5-minute clip](#))
- Daniel Kurtzer, discussing *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Benny Morris), *Lydda 1948*, and *Survival of the Fittest?* (Ari Shavit) ([5-minute clip](#))

**Video excerpts from The New Jewish Canon 8-part seminar series during Hartman’s July 2020 virtual conference, “All Together Now.”*



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A Thematic Reading Group, In Detail

The following course follows the class structure and syllabus outlined on pp 14–16 (Class Structure D).



Session 1 Introduction

Reading Assignment

- Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire E. Sufrin, *Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon*
pp. xvii–xxvii

Introduction: The State of Jewish Ideas: Towards a New Jewish Canon

Description of Book

- ▶ Collection of primary sources from 1980–2015. Prose non-fiction writings chronicling the major ideas and debates that have shaped Jewish life in recent time.
- ▶ 70 contributors.
- ▶ 4 sections:
 - Jewish Politics in the Public Square
 - Religion and Religiosity
 - History, Memory, and Narrative
 - Identities and Communities
- ▶ Book was result of the editors' search for a language of meaning. What have Judaism and the Jewish people meant over past 30 years?

Time Period Preceding the New Jewish Canon (1950–80)

- ▶ 1950–80 was story of global post-war period of settling down. Jews in Israel engage in state building; and Jewish people in America engage in Americanizing in a deep way.
- ▶ Time of post-Holocaust Jewish thought (Fackenheim, Rubenstein, etc.) in which thinkers were processing the Shoah in real time through literature, law, philosophy.
- ▶ Zionism was adapting to new conditions, moving from an aspirational ideology to the work of nation building.
- ▶ Wholesale collapse of Jewish communities outside Israel or North America. Migration of Jews in Arab world. Collapse of European Jewry.
- ▶ This time period produced “Modern Jewish Thought.”

Importance of 1980–2015

- ▶ The continued production of Jewish thought from 1980–2015 is important too.
- ▶ This is a time of post-settling down entropy. Once Jewish people have located themselves in two poles (85–90% live in Israel or North America), leads to powerful entropy in both communities and tensions between the two communities.

Major Transformations in American Jewish community

1. **IDENTITY** – who are Jews; what are their choices? What are their beliefs and practices?
2. **IDEOLOGY** – what is Jewishness? what holds us together?
3. **INSTITUTIONS/INFRASTRUCTURE** – what are the institutions of Jewish life through which Judaism is lived, studied, and practiced? By mid-1980's, it was clear that there

were more Jewish dollars in private philanthropy than in the Federation system. Institutions that were built to cater to the identity and ideology of Jews in 1950's were not institutions that Jews necessarily needed in 1980's.

Period is marked by a wrestling with change and a resistance to change

- ▶ Two big stories in the time period:
 1. **THE DISTANCING PHENOMENON**
 - This is a time period of relative security. Israeli wars during this time are not existential, like they were between 1948–1973.
 - Tremendous domestic security in both Israel and North America.
 - Increasing awareness that these two Jewish communities, whose identities are so intertwined in 1950–80, are no longer interdependent and are actually creating inconvenience for one another.
 - The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict defines the relationship.
 2. **JEWISH IDENTITY IN MODERNITY**
 - This is also a time period in which Jewish identity is reshaped in relationship to identity trends.
 - What does it mean to be a modern person?
 - Gender and sexuality are central to the story: rethinking the role of women in Judaism; the question of gay ordination.
- ▶ Real prompt for *The New Jewish Canon* is the recognition that 1980–2015 constitutes its own story.
- ▶ 1980 is a good starting point for study, because it begins after the Mizrahi revolution in Israeli society and during the transformative moment of the Lebanon war in Israel.
- ▶ 2015 is a good endpoint for study, because the 2016 election in America will mark its own pivotal moment in Jewish American history. 2016 marks the time when domestic politics overtake Israel-Palestine as *the* divisive issue on American college campuses.

Intellectual History of Anthologies of Jewish Thought

- ▶ Why do anthologies of post-Holocaust theology end in the '70's? Because you had the benefit of passage of time to adjudicate what emerges and what doesn't.
- ▶ If you are going to preserve great ideas of the past, you have two tools:
 1. your own sensibility about what is important; and
 2. the advantage of the passage of time (things have curated themselves over time)
- ▶ Two approaches to anthologies:
 1. engaging in work of actively constructing memory;
 2. waiting to see how meaning unfolds.

Approach of The New Jewish Canon

- ▶ It is a *chutzpadik* book. Choosing to actively shape meaning of the recent past and adjudicating what is worth talking about and debating from our recent past.
- ▶ There are ideas and voices we want to put into conversation.

Risks involved in this type of anthology project:

- ▶ Risks include being in the business of evaluating our colleagues. We had to choose some pieces by people whom we know and respect, and we had to leave out pieces by people we know and respect.
- ▶ There are also difficult choices involved in preserving names and reputations of individuals associated with bad acts (i.e. Steven M. Cohen, Ari Shavit, Leon Wieseltier).
- ▶ We took for granted that we were not deciding that authors in our book were morally worthy of preservation. If we were going to tell the story of ideas, there were ideas that were significant because of popular reception or because of the way they shaped conversation. (For example, we also included Meir Kahane who advocated terrorism; and Yitzhak Shapira whose theology inspired Baruch Goldstein.)

“Canon” in its Secular Sense

- ▶ Canon as an exercise.
- ▶ It isn't about ascribing holiness.
- ▶ Canon means “important and worthy of reckoning.”

New Means and Modes of Ideas Production

- ▶ The book also takes seriously the change in means and modes of production.
- ▶ The ideas economy is not the same as it was from 1945–1980 (books, journals, newspapers).
- ▶ *The New Jewish Canon* includes video speeches, blog posts, etc.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1 The editors introduce two types of canon. In its religious meaning, canon ascribes holy status to the writings in the collection. How do you relate to sacred canon? Which writings are most holy to you? In its secular meaning, canon is an anthology of material that is important and worthy of reckoning. What writings have been canonical in your life in this way?**
- 2 Which books, articles, or videos have most shaped the way you think about your identity, your values, and your community?**
- 3 What do you think are the biggest changes in Jewish life in the last 40 years?**
- 4 What big question about Judaism, Jewish identity, or Jewish peoplehood is troubling you the most today?**
- 5 What aspect of Judaism or Jewishness excites you the most today?**

Session 2 Intermarriage

Reading Assignments

- Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, *Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?* (2006)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 90–96
- Paul Cowan with Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks in an Interfaith Marriage* (1988)
COMMENTARY BY SAMIRA MEHTA
pp. 346–351
- Barry Kosmin, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (1991) and A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center (2013)
COMMENTARY BY MIJAL BITTON
pp. 363–369
- Rick Jacobs, *The Genesis of Our Future* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DAN FRIEDMAN
pp. 432–436

I. Steven M. Cohen and Jack Wertheimer, *Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?* (2006)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ The contemporary redefinition of Jewry in terms of individuals rather than in terms of peoplehood represents a huge loss.
- ▶ *Essentialist argument*: Judaism has been defined as a people since its inception. Peoplehood is the core defining feature of Jewishness.
- ▶ Authentic Judaism is a Judaism in which Jews see one another as extended family and feel obligated to one another.
- ▶ The decline of Jewish peoplehood is symptomatic of a decline in morale and national self-respect.

Commentary by Yehuda Kurtzer

- ▶ *Whatever Happened to the Jewish People?* is a window into a huge set of questions facing the American Jewish community about power, priorities, and the business of “thought leadership.”
- ▶ In their article, Cohen and Wertheimer point to intermarriage and trends towards individualization as forces diminishing Jewish collective consciousness and endangering the Jewish community and the future of Jewish continuity.
- ▶ Cohen’s primary concern is intermarriage and its perceived impact on Jewish population growth and diminishment of Jewish institutions. He refers to intermarriage as a “cancer.”
- ▶ Cohen became the American Jewish community’s pre-eminent sociologist and the central voice of expertise in Jewish communal anxiety about demographic changes and their consequences.

- ▶ Wertheimer’s primary concern is the decline of the “center” of American Judaism. He believes that the top communal priority should be investing in an enthusiastic, engaged core population.
- ▶ Together, Cohen and Wertheimer believed that the behavioral trends and institutions of the mid-20th century were indispensable to American Jews living in the 21st century.
- ▶ American Judaism and its Jews are changing in their identities and choices faster than can be studied, and in ways that can vex both the business of description and the business of prescription. Cohen and Wertheimer in their writings – in rhetoric, in relationship to capital and power – represent the apex of these tensions.

Critiques of Cohen & Wertheimer

- ▶ Their argument is reactionary. They appeal to an imagined ideal past and measure the present based on markers drawn from the past.
- ▶ In treating evolving trends of American Jewish life – in the realms of identity, ideology, and infrastructure – as indicators of *failure* as opposed to indicators of *change*, they equate change with loss.
- ▶ They represented minority positions supported by elites in the Jewish community swimming against an overwhelming tide of American Jewish behavior.
- ▶ Conversations about intermarriage and continuity are inherently embodied and gendered. To “produce” more Jews requires Jewish bodies. In light of #metoo and allegations of Cohen’s misconduct, some interpret Cohen’s pro-endogamy, pro-natalist positions as inseparable from his pattern of abusive conduct.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **Who has the expertise and power to shape the Jewish communal agenda? Should sociology be the dominant industry of ideas in the Jewish community?**
- 2 **When is it legitimate for scholarly research to take normative or prescriptive moral stands about its subjects?**
- 3 **How does the interconnection between the research and the philanthropy that fuels it inform the value of the research itself? Where are the lines for the Jewish community between the patronage of scholarship, scholarship itself, and the communal policy agenda?**
- 4 **What happens when the age-old anxiety about Jewish continuity takes on the scientific tone of statistical language and moves into the heart of communal policy, fighting against the realities of a community in flux amidst rapidly changing social norms?**

II. Paul Cowan with Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks in an Interfaith Marriage* (1988)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ When Jews and Christians fall in love, they usually regard themselves as individualists. But that is difficult, because at a profound level of self and psyche, most will always be attached to the religious and ethnic tribes in which they were raised.
- ▶ Each spouse loves the cultural assumptions of their childhood homes, and if they don't acknowledge that interior unarticulated melody, they can damage the ecology of an intermarriage.
- ▶ If conflict arises, couples must learn to understand the distinct set of feelings shaped by their unique ethnic and religious context.
- ▶ When children ask questions about religious or ethnic identity, intermarried parents may feel anxious and dismiss or ignore them. Children are navigating their sense of belonging, and parents need to answer in a way that shows that children will be accepted in their own spiritual choices.
- ▶ Gentiles do not want to feel pressure to convert to Judaism as an obligation for their spouse or in-laws. They want to be treated as individuals with their own histories.
- ▶ Any conversion program should include intellectually stimulating study in a non-coercive environment, with exposure to meaningful ritual life and welcoming community.

Commentary by Samira K. Mehta

- ▶ When the book was published, Jewish leaders understood interfaith marriage to be *the* defining problem facing American Judaism.
- ▶ Reform movement policy from 1970's allowed Reform rabbis to officiate at intermarriages as long as the couple agreed to raise their children as Jews with formal Jewish education and without any non-Jewish religious symbols or celebrations in the home.
- ▶ To further attract interfaith families, the Reform movement recognized patrilineal descent in 1983.
- ▶ At same time, the Jewish Outreach Institute offered training to navigate interfaith life.
- ▶ In their book, the Cowans share their own family story of interfaith marriage and initial attempt to raise their children in two faith traditions. Through early childhood experiences, they came to the conclusion that this would be harmful to their children and decided to choose one faith, Judaism, in which to raise their family. Rachel later converted to Judaism and eventually became a rabbi.
- ▶ Their memoir shares the ongoing differences in emotional needs, communication styles, and cultural habits as "stumbling blocks" in their interfaith marriage, despite their choice to create a singular Jewish home.
- ▶ Their book was acclaimed as the "right book on the right subject by the right people," because it accorded with the understood best practices at that moment.

Critiques of Mixed Blessings

- ▶ The book was criticized for its implicit gender dynamics and perceived failure in understanding Christian identity. Their story models a trend in which ideal interfaith families involve a Christian woman who gives up her faith and culture to take on the responsibility of raising Jewish children and creating a Jewish home.
- ▶ The next generation's interfaith couples were looking for something more egalitarian.
- ▶ The Cowans' sense that one could not be "half-Jewish" was challenged by rising language of multiculturalism. Other books on interfaith marriages focused on the possibilities of multiple identities.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **What do the changing policies and strategies for outreach to interfaith families teach us about the shifting attitudes towards Jewish identity in America?**
- 2 **Do children need a home shaped by one religion to have a healthy sense of belonging and a rooted identity?**
- 3 **What are the gender implications for promoting a model of interfaith families in which Judaism is established as the sole religious practice and culture?**

III. Barry Kosmin, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (1991)* and *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*, Pew Research Center (2013)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Highlights of CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey

- ▶ The survey reports that over half of "Born Jews" who married in recent years chose a spouse who was born a Gentile and has remained so. Less than 5 percent of these marriages include a non-Jewish partner who became a "Jew by Choice."
- ▶ Since 1985, twice as many mixed-faith couples have been created as Jewish couples.
- ▶ An increase in general support and acceptance of intermarriage coincides with the rise in the incidence of intermarriage.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

A Portrait of Jewish Americans

- ▶ American Jews report the following as essential to what being Jewish means to them:
 - Remembering the Holocaust (73%)
 - Leading an ethical Jewish life (56%)
 - Working for justice and equality (56%)
 - Caring about Israel (43%)
 - Having a good sense of humor (42%)
 - Observing Jewish law (19%)

- ▶ Most Jews report that Shabbat observance and belief in God are not necessary to be Jewish, while 60% say that belief in Jesus-as-messiah is disqualifying.
- ▶ In 2001, 93% of Jews identified as Jews by religion and 7% as Jews of no religion. In 2013, 78% identify as Jews by religion and a full 22% as Jews of no religion.
- ▶ The increase in Jews of no religion is part of a broader trend in American life. In the U.S. public, the “nones” composes 20% of the adult population, and one-third of adults under the age of 30.
- ▶ Overwhelming majorities of “Jews by religion” (97%) and “Jews of no religion” (83%) say they are proud to be Jewish.
- ▶ “Jews by religion” report a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish people (85%), while far fewer “Jews of no religion” share this sense (52%).

Commentary by Mijal Bitton

- ▶ Both population studies tell a similar story in which non-Orthodox Jews exhibit a weakening of ethnic Jewish identity and a dissolution of previously normative communal boundaries.
- ▶ However, the studies were received in different ways. The “52% intermarriage rate” reported in the 1990 NJPS affected the policy of American Jewish institutions, with many promoting continuity initiatives including day schools, campus Jewish life, and Birthright Israel.
- ▶ On the other hand, the reaction to the 2013 Pew Survey reveals a lack of communal consensus. One school of thought read the Pew report as evidence that American Jews are falling short of the necessary standards of Judaism for a healthy Jewish demographic. The second school of thought rejects this pessimistic assessment and argues that the data simply shows that American Jewish life is different. This school suggests that the weakening of *traditional* modes of affiliation are a result of *new* ways Jews are enacting Judaism.
- ▶ How do we understand the polarized discourse regarding the sociology of Jews?
 1. **METHODOLOGICAL:** quantitative vs. qualitative
 2. **DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES:** descriptive vs. prescriptive
 3. **MORAL:** continuity vs. inclusivity
- ▶ Competing sets of communal values:
 1. *The moral imperative of Jewish continuity* – if continuity is the sacred goal, then forms of social life that help reproduce current community structures are idealized. Prioritizing the future over the present.
 2. *The moral imperative of Jewish inclusivity* – if inclusivity is the sacred goal, then the strategies to measure Jewish identity need to change. Emphasizing standards of behavior is morally problematic because norms produce boundaries which exclude others. Individuals who self-identify as Jews are the determiners of authentic Jewishness.
- ▶ The problem with much of the communal discourse around the sociology of American Jews is that the moral assumptions are not made explicit.
- ▶ Sociological data is invested with the emotional baggage of American dreams and nightmares.
- ▶ We need to elevate the discourse about Jewish sociology by distinguishing between describing data and assigning moral values and policy prescriptions from it.
- ▶ Moral lenses shape our collective self-understanding, and there are dangers in masking moral discourse in the discipline and authority of social science.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **What was the primary focus of the policy responses to the 1990 NJPS survey?**
- 2 **How did competing methodological approaches to the social scientific study of Jews impact the diverse reactions to the 2013 Pew Report?**
- 3 **What competing sets of moral values impact the diverse reactions to the 2013 Pew Report?**
- 4 **What did we learn about American Jewish identity from the 2013 Pew Report? What did we not learn from the report and would need to examine through other research methods?**
- 5 **In your own prioritization of values, what do you think should determine Jewish policies and priorities today, continuity or inclusivity? What are the implications of that moral imperative for you in your own life?**

IV. Rick Jacobs, *The Genesis of Our Future* (2013)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ In a Jewish world where many more Jews are outside than inside, we must practice audacious hospitality.
- ▶ Only by being inclusive can we be strong; only by being open can we be whole...
- ▶ Intermarriage is not a disease; it is a result of an open society, a decline in antisemitism, and full Jewish integration in North America.
- ▶ Being “against” intermarriage is like being “against” gravity.
- ▶ Yohanan ben Zakkai is role model for audacious hospitality.
- ▶ We have both a sociological and theological demand to welcome interfaith families. The unprecedented opportunity to grow progressive Judaism today is a gift from God.

Commentary by Dan Friedman

- ▶ The 2013 Pew Research report found that 72% of non-Orthodox couples who married between 2005–2013 were intermarried.
- ▶ For proponents of “in-marriage,” this set off an alarm bell that the community was in danger of complete assimilation.
- ▶ For proponents of inclusion, it was a reminder of how important it is to count interfaith couples as Jewish.
- ▶ Jacobs’ speech at the URJ Biennial was a clarion call for “Audacious Hospitality.”
- ▶ Jacobs emphasized that this was a time of opportunity, not obstacle.
- ▶ Critics like Gary Rosenblatt and Jane Eisner saw Jacobs’ approach as tantamount to admitting defeat in the face of assimilation.
- ▶ Jacobs invested institutional resources in creating tools and appointing leaders to help congregations become more welcoming.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Do you agree with Rick Jacobs' argument that "being against intermarriage is like being against gravity?"
- 2 What does "radical hospitality" mean to you, and what would it look like in your own community, organization, and/or family?
- 3 How do you respond to Rabbi Joy Levitt's comment:
"I'm not particularly interested in a food fight between people who think intermarriage is here to stay and we should embrace it and people who think intermarriage is a problem and we need to fight it. ... I'm interested in how we build a Jewish life that is attractive, engaging and deeply meaningful to the people who are in it."

SESSION 2 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How has the issue of intermarriage impacted your Jewish life, learning, and leadership in the past few decades? Do you see intermarriage as a threat to the future of American Jews? Why or why not?
- 2 Do you typically read reports or articles about Jewish sociological studies? How do they make you feel when you read them? Do sociological studies influence your personal choices about Jewish practice and commitments? Do they influence your leadership or philanthropic choices?
- 3 Should the reality of intermarriage for an overwhelming majority of American Jews change the way that we think about intermarriage and communal agendas regarding Jewish identity?
- 4 What does "Jewish continuity" mean to you? Is Jewish continuity a priority for you? If so, what do you think the Jewish community needs to do in order to ensure Jewish continuity?
- 5 Can you envision a vibrant Jewish future that takes intermarriage as a given? What does that look like to you?
- 6 Can you envision a vibrant Jewish future in which intermarriage is an opportunity and not an obstacle? Why or why not?
- 7 The conversation about intermarriage is a conversation about Jewish anxieties and communal priorities. How do the authors and commentators you have read help you understand your own Jewish anxieties? How do they help you think about your priorities as a Jewish leader?

Suggested Video Clips and PowerPoint for Teaching*

- Samira Mehta, discussing *Mixed Blessings* ([8-minute clip](#))
- Mijal Bitton, discussing the 1990 and 2013 population surveys ([8-minute clip](#))
- [PowerPoint for Teaching Sessions 1 and 2 \(Introduction and Intermarriage\)](#)

**video excerpts from The New Jewish Canon seminar during Hartman's July 2020 virtual conference, "All Together Now."*

Session 3 Feminism

Reading Assignments

- Rachel Adler, *In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theological Purity* (1993)
COMMENTARY BY GAIL LABOVITZ
pp. 260–265
 - Mendel Shapiro, *Qeri'at Ha-Torah by Women: A Halakhic Analysis* (2001)
COMMENTARY BY TOVA HARTMAN
pp. 289–294
 - Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (1981)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL GORDAN
pp. 326–329
 - Evelyn Torton Beck (ed.), *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (1982);
Susannah Heschel (ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1983)
COMMENTARY BY CLAIRE E. SUFRIN
pp. 337–345
 - Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*
(1990)
COMMENTARY BY JUDITH ROSENBAUM
pp. 352–356
-

I. Rachel Adler, *In Your Blood, Live: Re-visions of a Theological Purity* (1993)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ As an Orthodox woman, I tried to make a theology to uphold Torah as the inerrant divine truth, but it unfolded itself to me as a theology of lies.
- ▶ The rules of purity reflect a world that is unjust.
- ▶ We must keep asking the Torah to speak to us in human.
- ▶ Human is not whole. Human is full of holes. Human bleeds. Human births its worlds in agonies of blood.
- ▶ Human owns no perfect, timeless text because human inhabits no perfect, timeless context.

Commentary by Gail Labovitz

- ▶ In Adler's earlier article, *Tumah and Taharah: Ends and Beginnings* (1973), Adler created a meaningful interpretation of mikveh for a new generation of Jewish women. Two decades later she decided that she was wrong and needed to retract her original work.
- ▶ In her first article, Adler intended to break into the misogynistic discourse of regulating women's behavior and sexual availability during menstruation and to affirm ritual practices of menstrual impurity as embodied spiritual practices.

- ▶ She drew from the anthropological approach of Mary Douglas on concepts of purity and the phenomenological approach of Mircea Eliade on the symbolism of water. She argued that there is no gender stigma to menstrual impurity, because *tum'ah* arises for both men and women in the biblical tradition at the nexus point between life and death. It is not wrong or bad, but a natural and necessary part of human experience.
- ▶ In her later article, *In Your Blood, Live*, Adler argues that her earlier thesis was incomplete and inaccurate. Biblical literature includes gender assumptions about impurity and uses female impurity as a metaphor for moral and ethical impurity. In post-biblical and later rabbinic Judaism, *tum'ah* is gendered female while men experience themselves as pure at all times.
- ▶ In the rabbinic approach to menstruation, women function as instruments and as possible threats. At issue is men's sexual access to women and women's potentially polluting effect on men, not the embodied spiritual experience of women.
- ▶ She argues that her earlier stance fell into a gap between the theoretical and the actual. Because her original theory did not entail a change in practices or take societal context into account, it became "merely an effective apologia for getting educated women to use the mikveh."
- ▶ Adler was inspired by women who were creating new healing rituals for immersion, and she now holds that a new theological understanding must go hand in hand with new feminist ritual expressions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **What is a scholar's responsibility for the ongoing influence of an earlier work that she can no longer endorse in good conscience? Can an author continue to "own" something once it is out in the public domain?**
- 2 **What does Adler mean when she suggests that her original article "succeeded in creating a theology for the despised"?**
- 3 **In your opinion, is reinterpretation of traditional practices a sufficient and meaningful form of feminist revision, or is "rupture and transformation" necessary in both theory and practice?**

II. Mendel Shapiro, *Qeri'at Ha-Torah by Women: A Halakhic Analysis* (2001)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ While women's *aliyot* and Torah reading may be halakhically sanctioned, it would be wrong to create dissension in communities by challenging hallowed practices that are seen as the hallmark of Orthodox Judaism.
- ▶ At the same time, it is morally justified to allow women their halakhic privilege to read Torah in self-selected groups.
- ▶ The resistance to women's Torah reading is a result of ingrained conservatism, suspicion of change, and fear of assimilation.
- ▶ The reflexive opposition to women's Torah reading is not based on essential halakhah, but rather on ingrained *minhag* (custom).

Commentary by Tova Hartman

- ▶ Shapiro’s article reviews key halakhic issues regarding women’s ritual participation:
 - *Qeri’at ha-Torah* (chanting from the Torah)
 - *Birkhot ha-Torah* (blessing the Torah before and after chanting)
 - *Kevod ha-tzibbur* (the dignity of the congregation)
 - *Qol ishah* (women’s voices)
 - *Mechitzah* (separation of men and women for prayer)
 - *Minhag* (custom)
 - *Poretz geder* (not breaking boundaries by violating customs)
 - *Lo titgodedu* (not creating factions)
- ▶ Shapiro importantly demonstrates that *kevod ha-tzibbur* can be waived today when everyone is literate. Since the Talmud cites *kevod ha-tzibbur* as the reason why women may not read Torah in public, Shapiro’s ruling is a crucial halakhic defense of women’s Torah reading.
- ▶ Nevertheless, Shapiro ends his article with a claim that women’s reading of Torah “should not be introduced in a way that directly challenges existing practice or causes dissension within established synagogues, whose *minhagim* should be respected.”
- ▶ He argues that women’s Torah reading ought to be limited to “self-selected groups.”
- ▶ Yehuda Herzl Henkin (a modern *posek*) writes that despite Shapiro’s impressive halakhic argument, women’s *aliyot* remain outside the consensus. Any congregation that institutes them is no longer Orthodox in name and will not long remain Orthodox in practice.
- ▶ Henkin uses rhetoric of the “slippery slope” and “go away and change.”
- ▶ Daniel Sperber turns Henkin’s slippery-slope argument on its head and argues that women’s spiritual yearnings and exclusion from synagogue ritual cause great distress. The halakhic value of *kevod ha-briyot* mandates that the distress be alleviated.
- ▶ Viewing women’s Torah reading through the lens of *kevod ha-briyot* (rather than *kevod ha-tzibbur*) gives halakhic weight to the subjective experience of women.
- ▶ 2002 marked the first Partnership minyan. Leaders no longer accepted the divide between advanced women’s Torah learning and women’s participation in public ritual.
- ▶ Without asking rabbinic authorities for confirmation, a grassroots movement came together to announce that times had changed.
- ▶ Tova Hartman’s Partnership minyan, Shira Hadasha, was concerned with creating “an ongoing, living *community* of prayer” and not merely an “occasional refuge” for women’s Torah reading.
- ▶ The success of Partnership minyan disproves the slippery slope argument. Members of Partnership minyan did not renounce their commitment to traditional Judaism, nor did they fear a conflation with Reform and Conservative Judaism.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What were the halakhic sensibilities that motivated the founders of Partnership minyanim?
- 2 How and why are Orthodox feminists challenging the traditional notions of who should be the “gatekeepers” to Orthodoxy?

III. Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (1981)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ Feminism is a revolution. Judaism is the rock-bottom source of a Jew’s values, thoughts, feelings, actions, mores, laws, and loves. The encounter between the two should be filled with ambivalence and caution, “one step forward and half a step backward.”
- ▶ Women can think about the traditional sources without knowing them exhaustively.
- ▶ Women can bring to bear their own interpretative keys without diminishing the divinity and authority of Halakhah and tradition.
- ▶ “Transition women” are stretching our minds, talents and sights, and they are taking everything less for granted.

Commentary by Rachel Gordan

- ▶ Through her writings and lectures, Greenberg brought Orthodox feminism into the foreground and became an agent of change.
- ▶ *On Women and Judaism* provided readers with a template for confronting Orthodox Judaism with the questions of feminism.
- ▶ Greenberg modeled a questioning posture toward Judaism and a lifelong process of transformation, while simultaneously expressing commitment to Orthodoxy and her enthusiastic embrace of the role of *rebbetzin*.
- ▶ Readers witnessed Greenberg’s feminist awakening in her reaction to certain precepts and gender norms emanating from Orthodoxy in the 70’s, like *kol islah*.
- ▶ She recognized that reconciling Judaism and feminism for “people like her” would involve a great deal of tension, however she portrayed the engagement of Judaism and feminism as irresistible to those who cared about religion.
- ▶ In her famous dictum, “Where there’s a rabbinic will, there’s a *halakhic* way,” Greenberg expressed the conviction that Judaism includes a tradition of change and the profound ability to assimilate new ideas.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 How did Greenberg help Orthodox Jews overcome the idea that “feminist” was a dirty word?
- 2 Gordan characterizes Greenberg’s narrative of change as “subtly inspirational”? How is this approach to Judaism and feminism central to Greenberg’s influence and impact?

IV. Evelyn Torton Beck (ed.), *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (1982); Susannah Heschel (ed.), *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1983)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Nice Jewish Girls

- ▶ Pauline Bart shares her painful experience with a traditional Jewish girlfriend who cannot reconcile traditional Judaism with homosexuality. It is like “she keeps her life in separate kitchen cabinets.”
- ▶ Her encounter with Holocaust survivors in Paris and Amsterdam resonates with her and her struggle to feel at home as a Jew, a feminist, and a lesbian.
- ▶ She meets a lesbian survivor who shares her feeling of being doubly exiled: “in Israel she was in *galut* because she was a lesbian and in Amsterdam she is in *galut* because she is a Jew.”

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

On Being a Jewish Feminist

- ▶ Sara Reguer shares her experience in reciting Kaddish in Orthodox synagogues and her anger at being “caged” behind a *mehitzah*.
- ▶ Reguer insisted on reciting the Kaddish out loud, even when facing resistance.
- ▶ She documents the varied reactions by men and women to her practice over the year and her hesitancy to be a public role model for women’s recitation of Kaddish.

Commentary by Claire E. Sufrin

- ▶ Heschel’s anthology privileges contemporary women and their understanding of Judaism over the inherited tradition.
- ▶ Jewish women asserting themselves as critics of and contributors to Judaism was a direct outgrowth of Second-Wave Feminism.
- ▶ Within mainstream feminism, religion was often dismissed as irredeemably patriarchal.
- ▶ Jewish feminism was both a critique of Judaism and a defense of Judaism.
- ▶ The anthology is divided into three sections, focusing on (1) positive and negative images of Jewish women inherited from the past; (2) women’s presence and power within the Jewish community; and (3) feminist theology.
- ▶ Judith Plaskow’s essay argues that despite educational and sociological advancements, until the language for God draws upon women’s experiences, women will always remain the Other to the male Jew and stand further from the Divine.
- ▶ *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* emphasizes that Jewish lesbians have intertwined identities as lesbians and as Jews that make them doubly outside the American mainstream. From this place of double outsidership, they are ready to speak and want to be heard.
- ▶ We can quantify important changes in the Jewish community in response to these types of books and activism, including ordination of openly gay and lesbian Jews and same-sex wedding ceremonies.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What are the signals of “outsiderhood” that these writers experience?
- 2 In what ways do the writings in these anthologies reflect your own ongoing experiences?
- 3 In what ways do you feel that we have come to a different stage in navigating feminism, egalitarianism, and inclusion in the Jewish community today?

v. Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ Women are part of the Jewish tradition without its sources and structures reflecting our experience.
- ▶ The central Jewish categories of Torah, Israel, and God all are constructed from male perspectives.
- ▶ Torah is revelation as men perceive it. God is named in the male image.
- ▶ Feminism demands a new understanding of Torah, Israel, and God. It demands an acknowledgement of the injustice of Torah and a creation of a Torah that is whole.
- ▶ The silence of women distorts the Jewish narrative and skews the content of Jewish law.
- ▶ We must deliberately recover women’s hidden voices.
- ▶ Jewish feminism is a reform movement rooted in deeply felt experiences and a powerful image of religious change. Feminist theology reanimates the connection between practice and belief.

Commentary by Judith Rosenbaum

- ▶ Though written thirty years ago, *Standing Again at Sinai* continues to be radical and relevant.
- ▶ Plaskow’s book is, at once, an argument of unwavering commitment and criticism.
- ▶ She asserts her entitlement to Jewish tradition and practice, even as she delineates the invisibility of women and their non-normative status within Jewish tradition.
- ▶ Plaskow’s bold claims:
 - Historic exclusion of women is a form of violence that continues to harm women and the Jewish community.
 - The inclusion of women is a transformative process.
 - Feminism necessitates a radical reinterpretation of Judaism.
 - This reinterpretation is an opportunity for Jewish renewal and is an authentic expression of the Jewish practice of ongoing interpretation and adaptation.
- ▶ Plaskow demands her right to an integrated identity as Jew and feminist.

- ▶ The otherness of women at the center of Jewish experience is not a closed door, but an invitation to engage in the powerful work of reinterpretation.
- ▶ Plaskow insists that women belong to the tradition and have a right to shape it, while also recognizing the existing structures may be insufficient to the task.
- ▶ Plaskow is less interested in dismantling than in renovating.
- ▶ She is optimistic about the productive nature of Jewish feminist theology and created this new field, addressing broad questions about the conceptions of God, authority, law, and chosenness.
- ▶ Plaskow's feminist theology is a collective ongoing project.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **How do Jewish feminists experience double outsidership today?**
- 2 **Why is theology essential to meaningful change in order to advance egalitarianism?**
- 3 **According to Plaskow, feminism aims to create "a society that no longer construes difference in terms of superiority and subordination." Do you think feminism has achieved its goals? What are the most pressing "feminist" issues of today?**
- 4 **Who needs to "stand again at Sinai" today as inheritors with the right to be interpreters of the tradition?**

SESSION TWO SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 **What were the most important changes in theory and in practice that Jewish feminism introduced during this time period?**
- 2 **What have Jewish feminists taught us about integrated identities, and how does this change both Judaism and the Jewish community?**
- 3 **In your own approach to Judaism and feminism, are you more inclined toward dismantling or renovating?**
- 4 **In your community, how are women's experiences influencing Jewish practice?**
- 5 **In your community, how are women's experiences influence Jewish theology?**

Suggested Video Clips and PowerPoint for Teaching*

- Gail Labovitz, discussing *In Your Blood, Live* ([7-minute clip](#))
- Claire E. Sufrin, excerpt from summer lecture on The New Jewish Canon, discussing the section on *Identities and Communities* ([33-minute clip](#))
- [PowerPoint for Teaching Session 3 \(Feminism\)](#)

**video excerpts from The New Jewish Canon seminar during Hartman's July 2020 virtual conference, "All Together Now."*

Session 4 Holocaust Memory

Reading Assignments

- David Hartman, *Auschwitz or Sinai?* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY RACHEL SABATH BEIT-HALACHMI
pp. 125–129
 - Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982)
COMMENTARY BY ALEXANDER KAYE
pp. 130–134
 - Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1986)
COMMENTARY BY CLAIRE E. SUFRIN
pp. 166–170
 - Naomi Seidman, *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage* (1996)
COMMENTARY BY ERIN LEIB SMOKLER
pp. 194–198
 - Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust* (1993); Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World* (1998)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 181–188
-

I. David Hartman, *Auschwitz or Sinai?* (1982)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ Should Auschwitz or Sinai be the orienting category shaping our understanding of the rebirth of the State of Israel?
- ▶ Many justifiably interpret the significance of Israel’s rebirth in terms of Jewish suffering and persecution. “Never again” will we be vulnerable and powerless.
- ▶ It is destructive to make the Holocaust the dominant organizing category of national renewal and rebirth.
- ▶ It is politically and morally dangerous, because it leads to arrogance and self-righteousness about the uniqueness of Jewish suffering.
- ▶ Those obsessed with the trauma of the Holocaust argue that we do not need to take world criticism seriously. “No one has the right to judge us.”
- ▶ This violates a basic Judaic principle: no one may judge if he refuses to be judged himself.

Commentary by Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi

- ▶ Hartman’s short essay raised theological and political dilemmas that continue to be at the center of Jewish religious and political discourse:
 1. The role of the Holocaust in the Israeli and Jewish collective consciousness
 2. The challenges of the sovereign State of Israel and its unprecedented military power
 3. The centrality of universal ethics in Jewish life and thought

- ▶ In 1982, Hartman was a renegade in challenging the meaning of the Holocaust for an Israeli society that increasingly felt isolated in response to world criticism over its use of power and treatment of Palestinians.
- ▶ The massacre at Sabra and Shatila thrust the State of Israel and World Jewry onto an international stage of judgement and moral questioning.
- ▶ Hartman sought to respond to the moral challenge and theological urgency of the moment.
- ▶ Hartman argues that Israel must take responsibility for the “unintended consequences” of its actions.
- ▶ Hartman was also concerned with the pervasive narrative of the IDF and Israeli society. Should Israeli Jews continue to see themselves as eternal victims of the Nazis and thus beyond moral reproach?
- ▶ He argues, rather, that Israel should be founded on the ideals of a new ethical society based on the biblical revelation of morality at Sinai, which awakens the Jewish people to the awesome responsibility of becoming a holy people.
- ▶ He presents a stark dichotomy: Auschwitz or Sinai? The choice of the orienting category bears profound implications.
- ▶ He argues that our historical suffering should not lead to self-righteous postures, but to an increased sensitivity about all human suffering.
- ▶ Challenging the sacred narrative of Auschwitz was considered deeply offensive. Critics questioned his loyalty and his Orthodoxy.
- ▶ The Kahan Commission report (February 1983) concluded that Israeli leaders were “indirectly responsible” for the massacre, and cited biblical text to demonstrate Israel’s moral obligations. The report gave credence to the questions raised in Hartman’s essay.
- ▶ Hartman’s “heretical imperative” opened the possibility for rabbis, educators and leaders to rethink pedagogy around Israel as a response to the Holocaust and empowered them to be critical of Israel’s use of military power.
- ▶ Hartman roots his questioning in the theme of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*, self-critique.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **Hartman argues that there are important differences resulting from the emphasis on the category of Auschwitz or the category of Sinai. In your opinion, what are the consequences today for embracing one or the other of these orienting categories?**
- 2 **How can Israeli society balance between the ethical demands of Sinai and the lessons of the Holocaust?**

II. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*: *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ The rabbinic acceptance of the Hanukkah miracle was a reaffirmation of faith in the continuing intervention of God in history.
- ▶ For rabbinic Judaism, historiography came to a long halt even while belief in the meaning of history remained.
- ▶ We need different language for thinking about the transmission of the past. The term “history” is not sufficient.

Commentary by Alexander Kaye

- ▶ The main contribution of *Zakhor* is to distinguish between Jewish history and Jewish memory.
- ▶ History, in Yerushalmi’s definition, is a record of things that happened and presupposes both contingency and human agency in its account of the world.
- ▶ Memory, by contrast, is an understanding of events through the lens of mythical narratives.
- ▶ History asserts facts, memory asserts meaning.
- ▶ History is preserved in works of scholarship; memory is transmitted by ritual.
- ▶ Yerushalmi argues that starting with the Bible, Jews were “fathers of meaning in history” but they were not historians.
- ▶ For nearly two millennia Jews interpreted events around them exclusively in terms of the mythical patterns of divine intervention and particularly in terms of the typology of sin-exile-repentance-punishment that had been established by the Bible.
- ▶ *Zakhor* launched an entire academic field around the historical study of memory.
- ▶ It also had special resonance with wide readership, because it is a meditation on how it is possible for a Jew to maintain a sense of connection to the past without denying the ruptures of the modern age.
- ▶ No modern Jew can avoid historical consciousness and the question of how to balance history with memory, scientific observation of evidence with the power of collective myth.
- ▶ Yerushalmi diagnoses the “decay of memory” as “a symptom of the unraveling of that common network of belief and praxis through whose mechanisms... the past was once made present.”
- ▶ Jews explain their lives through myths. Yerushalmi notes that “There are myths that are life-sustaining and deserve to be reinterpreted for our age. There are some that lead astray and must be redefined. Others are dangerous and must be exposed.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 How is modernity a “mixed blessing” for Jews today when it comes to memory of our past?
- 2 In your opinion, which Jewish myths are life-sustaining, and which are dangerous and must be exposed?
- 3 How important is it to you that stories of the Jewish past, like the Exodus from Egypt, are historically accurate?
- 4 Can you imagine the Holocaust as memory rather than history? What is different about the two approaches?

III. Elie Wiesel, *Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech (1986)*

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ I have tried to keep memory alive. If we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices.
- ▶ The world knew and remained silent. I swore never to be silent when humans endure suffering.
- ▶ Neutrality helps the oppressor. We must interfere.
- ▶ Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe.
- ▶ While it is natural for Jews to prioritize Jewish needs, human rights throughout the world must remain priorities as well.

Commentary by Claire E. Sufrin

- ▶ The Nobel Peace Prize cemented Wiesel’s career as spokesperson for the victims of the Holocaust. He became the symbol of the survivor.
- ▶ By naming survivors to the role of representing world Jewry, Wiesel places the Holocaust at the center of collective Jewish identity.
- ▶ His speech points to a tension inherent in the Peace Prize. On the one hand, the award is given for specific work located in a particular place and targeting a particular need. On the other hand, the prize points towards something universal and redemptive.
- ▶ Wiesel underscores the need for Jews to care for one another before they care for anyone else in need.
- ▶ Wiesel ends his speech by addressing the despair of the Palestinians, and insisting that if the Palestinians stop hating Israel, it will be possible for Israel to make peace.
- ▶ Throughout his life, Wiesel refrained from condemning the Jewish state in its treatment of Palestinians.
- ▶ His determination to protect Jews and then all others facing genocide brought him the Nobel Prize; the Prize in turn enabled him to do more good for humanity.
- ▶ He spoke to the world from an invisible pedestal, and his audience looked to him as a moral compass. His blind spot, so to speak, is a reminder that he was, after all, still human.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **Should we understand the Holocaust as an event of the most extreme antisemitism? Or is its meaning more universal about a universal human capacity for hate of the other?**
- 2 **In your opinion, how important is it to commemorate the suffering of non-Jews in the Holocaust? Or was the Jewish suffering so unique that it warrants its own undivided attention in museums and the like?**
- 3 **How did you react to Wiesel's list of world injustices that are "as abhorrent as antisemitism" to him? How did you react to Wiesel's treatment of the Palestinian plight?**

IV. Naomi Seidman, *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage* (1996)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ What happened in the transformation of Wiesel's account (from the Yiddish version *Un di velt hot heshvign* (1956) into the French version *La Nuit* (1958)), from the survivor's political rage into his existential doubt?
- ▶ The survivor's first concession was to relinquish all talk of Jewish revenge so as not to alienate a Christian audience.
- ▶ In later writings, Wiesel makes a further move to see the failure to take revenge as a sign of Jewish moral triumph.
- ▶ Wiesel compares the Jewish response to their victimization with that of the Palestinians.
- ▶ There is something disingenuous about Wiesel's description of the Jews as having "sublimated their mandate for revenge" since this sublimation was his ticket into the literature of non-Jews.
- ▶ Was it worth translating *Night* into a language that Christians could accept, the emblem of suffering silence rather than living rage?

Commentary by Erin Leib Smokler

- ▶ In 1996, Professor Naomi Seidman took a risk to pry open a work of canonical importance. *Night* had been translated into thirty languages and would sell more than six million copies in the United States alone.
- ▶ Wiesel's eye-witness testimony was beyond criticism to most.
- ▶ He famously said, "Auschwitz is as important as Sinai." Wiesel was the Moses who transmitted the revelatory message of the Holocaust.
- ▶ Seidman's essay removed *Night* from its sacred perch. It asked readers to consider Wiesel's book as a constructed work of art, and a deliberate act of memory-making.
- ▶ From Yiddish to French, Wiesel's book moved from an act of detailed reportage, full of anger and calls for vengeance, to a more sanitized, sacralized work.
- ▶ It moved from a piece of testimony and political outrage to one of existential and theological reflection.

- ▶ Seidman argues that the meek Jew portrayed in *Night*, haunted by death and overwhelmed by silence, could live on because he is less threatening, less angry, and less empowered. *The Survivor* is a character of cultivated quietism.
- ▶ Seidman was branded a traitor by some. To turn a critical lens on the voice of the Holocaust was a “brand of Holocaust revisionism.”
- ▶ Seidman has been cited by Holocaust deniers as proof of Wiesel’s unreliability as a witness.
- ▶ Seidman’s article opened up a thirst to question the facticity of the Holocaust memoir.
- ▶ But Seidman’s contribution lays in understanding Holocaust memoir as art, as “fictional-autographical memoir.”
- ▶ Her article provoked anger against Wiesel for “gentrifying the Holocaust” and making Jewish rage unseemly.
- ▶ She called attention to the grand implications of storytelling on our own self-understanding.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **What is Seidman’s critique of *Night*, and how did this impact the way that scholars approach Holocaust memoirs and Elie Wiesel himself?**
- 2 **Wiesel emphasized the impossibility of representing the Holocaust, “the ultimate event, the ultimate mystery, never to be comprehended or transmitted.” How do you feel about Wiesel’s approach to Holocaust memory?**
- 3 **Does Seidman’s critique of Wiesel change your perspective on *Night* and on Holocaust memoir as a form of memory-making?**
- 4 **Is it important to you that Holocaust memoirs are accurate testimonies to historical events? Why or why not?**

v. Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust* (1993); Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World* (1998)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Denying the Holocaust

- ▶ David Irving is one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial.
- ▶ He applies a double standard to evidence, demanding “absolute documentary proof” when it comes to proving the Germans guilty, but relying on highly circumstantial evidence to condemn the Allies.
- ▶ Some argue that the best tactic is to ignore deniers, lest you provide them with the publicity they crave.
- ▶ When I started the book, I was beset by fear that I would inadvertently enhance their credibility by responding to their fantasies. I am now convinced that ignoring them is no longer an option.
- ▶ Not ignoring the deniers does not mean engaging them in discussion or debate.

- ▶ Though we cannot directly engage them, we must function as canaries in the coalmine to guard against the spread of noxious fumes.
- ▶ Our response must be strong though neither polemical or emotional.
- ▶ We must remain ever vigilant so that the most precious tools of our trade and society – truth and reason – can prevail.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

There Once Was a World

- ▶ Among the older people in Eishyshok, there was annoyance with what they regarded as the alarmism of their sons and daughters.
- ▶ They viewed the rising tide of antisemitism in their own country as nothing more than a passing phase. Many resisted emigrating from Poland, and carried on with life “as normal.”
- ▶ Younger people tried to find news of world events and understand how they would affect them.

Commentary by Yehuda Kurtzer

- ▶ The specter of the loss of Holocaust memory inspired an industry of cultural production to enshrine as fact, in monument or on paper, what might otherwise disappear.
- ▶ 1993 marked the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the publication of Lipstadt’s *Denying the Holocaust*. In both monumental architecture and in scholarship, American Jews were crafting the counterclaim to an insurgent culture of Holocaust denial whether in its passive form of forgetting or in the active forms of revisionism.
- ▶ The book juxtaposes the agendas of understanding and documenting Holocaust denial together with mounting a response to it.
- ▶ Eliach’s work chronicles the destroyed shtetl of Eishyshok over a 900-year period, and was twinned to “The Tower of Life” vertical spiral of 1,500 photographs of Eishyshok residents. Together, the projects blur the line between the rigor of historical scholarship, the memory-preservation culture of museums, and experiential elements of how memory is formed through image and pilgrimage.
- ▶ Eliach’s work also constitutes a re-awakening of the genre of *yizker bikher*, collections of stories, maps, names, and remembered histories of shtetls that were compiled by small groups of survivors in the first two decades after the war.
- ▶ Lipstadt and Eliach’s contributions to the literature of Jewish memory surface a paradox inherent in Holocaust preservation. Memory thrives in mimesis and in narrative transmission, which are vulnerable to “mistakes.” Codification to preserve authentic history shifts the focus to public record and invites litigation.
- ▶ Commanding stories have moral meanings, and their facts are flexible.
- ▶ Canonized history may be more accurate, but it can be depersonalized.
- ▶ Lipstadt and Eliach and their work is the generation-long bridge between those who remember the Shoah and those that are bidden to become the custodians of memory with no personal access to the stories except that which they have received.

- ▶ American Jewish memorial culture includes both efforts to preserve the richness and complexity of what was lost (Eliach) and the necessity to stave off the naysayers of the historical record (Lipstadt).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **What does it mean to be a custodian of memory?**
- 2 **What are the limitations of the *yizker bikher* to transmit Holocaust memory to the next generation, and how does Eliach's version attempt to overcome those limitations?**
- 3 **What tools of memory transmission are most important to you in your commemoration of the Holocaust: museums, monuments, memoirs, historical scholarship, or others?**

SESSION 3 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 **How does the memory of the Holocaust influence your Jewish self-understanding? Your theology? Your moral and political commitments?**
- 2 **Do you side more with Hartman or with Wiesel on the orienting category of Auschwitz? Why?**
- 3 **Should there be a distinction between Holocaust memory and Holocaust history? What do you think is most important for the next generation, an accurate historical record of the Holocaust or meaning-making from the memory of the Holocaust?**
- 4 **What books, museums, or other cultural products have most influenced your understanding of the Holocaust? Would you say that these influences focus more on Holocaust memory or Holocaust history?**

Suggested Video Clips and PowerPoint for Teaching*

- Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi, discussing *Auschwitz or Sinai* ([4-minute clip](#))
- Alexander Kaye, discussing *Zakhor* ([5-minute clip](#))
- Erin Leib Smokler, discussing *Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage* ([6-minute clip](#))
- [PowerPoint for Teaching Session 4 \(Holocaust Memory\)](#)

**video excerpts from The New Jewish Canon seminar during Hartman's July 2020 virtual conference, "All Together Now."*

Session 5 Israel and Jewish Power

Reading Assignments

- George Steiner, *Our Homeland, the Text* (1985); Judith Butler, *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY JULIE E. COOPER
pp. 10–16
- Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004); Ari Shavit, *Survival of the Fittest? An Interview with Benny Morris* (2004) and *Lydda, 1948* (2013)
COMMENTARY BY DANIEL KURTZER
pp. 24–33
- Irving (Yitz) Greenberg vs. Meir Kahane, *Public Debate at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale* (1988)
COMMENTARY BY SHAUL MAGID
pp. 34–39
- Kahan Commission (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut) (1983)
COMMENTARY BY YEHUDA KURTZER
pp. 148–154
- Moshe Halbertal, *The Goldstone Illusion* (2009)
COMMENTARY BY ELANA STEIN HAIN
pp. 103–107

I. George Steiner, *Our Homeland, the Text* (1985); Judith Butler, *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (2013)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt: *Our Homeland, the Text*

- ▶ It is implausible that the establishment of the nation state of Israel, with its corrupt politics and parochialism, should be the end of the Jewish journey.
- ▶ Jewish nationalism eradicates the deeper truth of unhousedness, of an at-homeness in the world.
- ▶ Locked in a material homeland, Jewish text (the essence of Judaism) may lose its vitality and values.
- ▶ The best homeland for the Jews is the text.
- ▶ Text can survive all the wanderings of the Jews throughout history and can never be extinguished.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt: *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS*

- ▶ BDS is understood as a movement against the Jewish people only if we understand Israel as co-extensive with the Jewish people.
- ▶ However, the state of Israel does not represent all Jews.
- ▶ The Jewish people extend beyond the state of Israel and the ideology of political Zionism. The two cannot be equated.

- ▶ Jews represent a vast spectrum of political views, and we should remain critical of any attempt to impose a single norm regarding Jewish identity and Zionist ideology.
- ▶ The accusation of antisemitism has become a tool to discredit the legitimate bid for Palestinian self-determination.
- ▶ When Zionism becomes co-extensive with Jewishness, Jewishness is pitted against the diversity that defines democracy and betrays the diasporic Jewish tradition of alliances in the struggle for social justice.

Commentary by Julie E. Cooper

- ▶ Ahad Ha'am's distinction between "the problem of the Jews" and "the problem of Judaism" provides a helpful rubric for understanding contemporary debates surrounding Israel and Zionism.
- ▶ The academic debate focuses primarily on the "problem of Judaism," with Steiner and Butler warning that the State of Israel poses a grave threat to *Judaism*: to ethical traditions of co-existence developed in diaspora.
- ▶ While Ahad Ha'Am was concerned with the *collective* predicament arising from modernity, Steiner and Butler are concerned with the moral integrity of Jewish *individuals* who refuse to be conscripted for national projects.
- ▶ Steiner mobilizes a romanticized vision of diasporic Judaism in which Jews sought shelter in the text and cultivated a devotion to truth.
- ▶ Steiner's moral vision is one of extreme individualism, and he neglects to address the communal structures of diaspora and the role of text in sustaining collective identity.
- ▶ Steiner celebrates diasporic culture for its ability to produce exceptional individuals (the gadfly, the heretic, the "conscientious objector").
- ▶ In Butler's address, individual ethical dilemmas also overshadow collective Jewish projects. Self-determination plays a central role in her appeal.
- ▶ It is not clear if she supports Jewish self-determination as a positive value or aspiration for Jews.
- ▶ The challenge for Jews is to exercise autonomous judgment without fear of exclusion.
- ▶ Butler argues against suppressing "the complexity of the category of 'Jewish'" in an attempt "to yoke a cultural identity to a specific Zionist position."
- ▶ For Butler, the diasporic traditions cultivate political values of openness to diversity, critical judgment, and suspicion of reigning norms and should be exercised to protest injustice.
- ▶ Steiner's and Butler's concern for moral integrity displays a limitation in the discourse of the academic Jewish left. The culture of dissent does not provide a compelling positive vision that addresses both the "problem of the Jews" and the "problem of Judaism."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 What is Steiner's concern regarding the shift from "unhousedness" to national statehood? How does at-homeness in the State of Israel impact Jewish truth-values?
- 2 What do you think about the idea that "the text" is our homeland? What is meaningful to you about this idea? What is problematic about this idea?
- 3 Do you agree with Butler that Jewishness and Zionism have become conflated in American Jewish identity politics? Where do you see this playing out in your community?
- 4 What are the values of diasporic Judaism that Steiner and Butler celebrate? What is compelling in their arguments, and what is missing?
- 5 How do you address the "problem of the Jews" and the "problem of Judaism" in your own vision of Judaism and Israel politics?

II. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (2004); Ari Shavit, *Survival of the Fittest? An Interview with Benny Morris* (2004) and *Lydda, 1948* (2013)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited

- ▶ The Arab exodus from Palestine over 1947–1949 occurred in stages and causation was multi-layered.
- ▶ Arabs left because of an accumulation of factors including the elite's departure, snipings, bombings, material privations, unemployment, collapse of law and order, local orders, Haganah activities, and the prospect of life under Jewish rule.
- ▶ A single-cause explanation from most sites is untenable.
- ▶ Certain causes were important in certain areas at certain times.
- ▶ There was a general shift in spring 1948 from cumulative internal Arab factors to external, compulsive causes.
- ▶ The Arab settlement to end the war was directly inspired by the mounting refugee problem and was contingent on a solution of the problem by repatriation.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Survival of the Fittest? An Interview with Benny Morris

- ▶ Ben Gurion made a serious historical mistake in 1948. He should have done a more complete job of expulsion.
- ▶ Israel would know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all.
- ▶ If the story turns out to be gloomy for the Jews, it will be because Ben Gurion did not complete the transfer in 1948, but rather left a large, volatile demographic reserve in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel itself.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Lydda, 1948

- ▶ In thirty minutes, two hundred and fifty Palestinians were killed. Zionism had carried out a massacre in the city of Lydda.
- ▶ Approximately thirty-five thousand Palestinian Arabs left Lydda in a long column... Zionism had obliterated the city of Lydda.
- ▶ Lydda is the black box of Zionism. If Zionism was to exist, Lydda could not exist.

Commentary by Daniel Kurtzer

- ▶ Everything about the Palestinian refugee issue is a source of deep and emotional conflict.
- ▶ The dispute over the origins of the problem has impacted the narratives of both Palestinians and the State of Israel. They dispute everything related to the issue:
 - The number of refugees displaced?
 - The definition of who is a refugee?
 - Whether the refugees should remain on the international agenda after so many years?
 - Who was and is responsible for creating and resolving the problem?
- ▶ Israel believes acceptance of responsibility for the refugee problem would be tantamount to agreeing that its state was born in sin.
- ▶ They also differ fundamentally about what to do to resolve the issue.
- ▶ Palestinian scholars have never challenged the prevailing Palestinian narrative, constrained both by national emotions and lack of archived evidence.
- ▶ Israeli scholars started researching in the 1980's when state archives began declassifying relevant material.
- ▶ Benny Morris was first scholar to mine the archives, and his study was the first detailed account of Israeli policy and actions that contributed to the refugee problem.
- ▶ Morris was attacked for being anti-Zionist and historians, like Ephraim Karsh, disputed his findings as erroneous.
- ▶ Over the next twenty-five years, additional scholarly work created a more nuanced narrative of mixed responsibility.
- ▶ Morris recently stunned the academic and political communities by sharing his belief that Israel had been justified in expelling the Palestinians.
- ▶ Ari Shavit came along and published "Lydda, 1948," showing that the ethnic cleansing of the Arab town of Lydda was a conscious act undertaken by Israeli commanders.
- ▶ In an echo of Morris, Shavit wrote: "From the very beginning, there was a substantial contradiction between Zionism and Lydda. If Zionism was to exist, Lydda could not exist."
- ▶ The peace process assumed that it was possible to bridge differences and find compromises. After many failed attempts, think tanks and academics continue to develop formulas to try to fix this problem.
- ▶ The diplomatic activities have not addressed the underlying moral and ethical issues in relation to political imperatives.
- ▶ The selections from Morris and Shavit expose some of the ways Israelis are grappling with the most contentious issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Why are the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem so important to both Israelis and to Palestinians?
- 2 What changed in the Israeli narrative about the Palestinian refugee problem in light of historical scholarship?
- 3 How do you react to Morris' claim that Israel was justified in expelling Palestinians and should have gone even further in finishing that process completely? Do you agree or disagree with his assertion that "there are cases in which the overall, final good justifies harsh and cruel acts that are committed in the course of history"?
- 4 How do you understand Lydda as the "black box of Zionism"? Can you think of examples of the "black box of American nationalism"? What does it mean for a nation to admit wrongdoing in the course of its founding?
- 5 Reflecting on Kurtzer's summary of the various attempts to solve the Palestinian refugee problem, what are some of the political, moral, and narrative tools and obstacles for the resolution of this intractable dilemma?

III. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg vs. Meir Kahane, Public Debate at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale (1988)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Meir Kahane

- ▶ Halakhah is clear that the non-Jew does not have the status of a Jew.
- ▶ Democracy is not Judaism.
- ▶ Arabs pose a demographic existential threat to the Jewish state.
- ▶ Jews who are pursuing peace with the Palestinians are delusional and are a threat to the existence of Israel.

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt:

Yitz Greenberg

- ▶ The halakhic laws that Kahane cites do not apply to Arabs, because those laws were dealing with idolaters.
- ▶ Democracy is the best fulfillment of the vision of the Jewish covenant.
- ▶ The Palestinians pose no real demographic threat to Israel.
- ▶ Palestinians are human beings with roots, attachments, hopes, and lives. We should make room for their dignity, through self-rule and self-responsibility.
- ▶ However, our commitment to Palestinian freedom cannot be to commit suicide. We will wait for a convincing peace partner.

Commentary by Shaul Magid

- ▶ 1988 was a year that presaged the coming of a storm in Israel and thus a year of anxiety for many American Jews.
- ▶ Kahane's political ascendancy made the political establishment realize something had gone terribly wrong in Israeli society.

- ▶ The debate between Kahane and Greenberg took place at the modern Orthodox Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, moderated by Rabbi Avi Weiss.
- ▶ Debates are won on performance and persuasion, and Kahane was better suited for the task.
- ▶ Greenberg thought that the facts would make his case. Kahane spoke with passion and conviction.
- ▶ Greenberg argued that we have to take risks for peace. Kahane claimed there can be no peace, and Jew after the Holocaust cannot afford to take a risk for anything.
- ▶ Three points of contention in the debate:
 1. Halakhah as a justification for Israeli policy
 2. Jewish survival vs. peace
 3. The status of non-Orthodox rabbis in Israel
- ▶ Greenberg should have stressed the secular nature of the Jewish state as a democracy and Kahane's attempts to turn the Zionist project into a theocracy.
- ▶ The debate illustrates how much the Orthodox community in America was naïve in its understanding of Israel's political reality as a secular state with the responsibility of being part of the community of nations.
- ▶ Kahane appealed to the halakhic sensibilities of the Orthodox audience, their fears for Jewish safety, and their fears of religious liberalism.
- ▶ Date of debate was significant, because Kahane was subsequently ousted from Knesset after the 1988 Racism Law, and he became more apocalyptic and frightening. This was one of the last times he would speak in America as a Knesset member.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Why was Kahane's speech more compelling to his audience than Greenberg's?**
- 2 How would you respond to halakhic claims for Israeli policies related to the treatment of Palestinians? How do you understand the role of Jewish law in the State of Israel?**
- 3 A core argument between Kahane and Greenberg revolved around the question of taking risks for peace. Can you make a compelling case for Kahane's argument that the Jewish people should not take risks for peace after the Holocaust? Can you make a compelling case for Greenberg's argument that Jewish values require us to take measured risks for peace, without sacrificing our survival?**
- 4 What does this debate, and its audience reception at the time, teach us about the modern Orthodox community in America and its relationship with Israel? How have things changed since 1988, and how have they remained the same?**

IV. Kahan Commission (Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut) (1983)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ As far as the obligations applying to every civilized nation and the ethical rules accepted by civilized peoples go, the problem of indirect responsibility cannot be disregarded.

- ▶ A basis for the notion of indirect responsibility can also be found in the outlook of our ancestors concerning the “beheaded heifer” (Deuteronomy 21:1–9).
- ▶ Jews should not forget the suffering from pogroms under foreign rule, in which we always asserted that responsibility fell not only with rioters but also with leaders responsible for maintaining public order.
- ▶ Development of ethical norms in the world public requires that the approach to this issue be universally shared. Responsibility should be placed not only on the perpetrators, but also on those who could and should have prevented the commission of those deeds.

Commentary by Yehuda Kurtzer

- ▶ The Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, chaired by Israeli Supreme Court President Yitzhak Kahan, represented an effort by Israel to hold political and military leaders accountable for the Sabra and Shatilla massacre.
- ▶ The UN had its own commission which found Israel, as the occupying power, directly responsible for the massacre.
- ▶ The Kahan Commission held the Israeli military leadership only “indirectly responsible.”
- ▶ The Commission’s enduring legacy for Israel:
 - It tells a story of Israel’s attempts to navigate its moral aspirations during its prolonged conflicts.
 - It represents a pivot in the use of Jewish tradition in the Israeli legal system.
 - It constitutes a turning point in Israel’s concern for its international reputation.
- ▶ The report criticized Israel’s leaders for not supervising the Phalange militia more closely, given everything that it knew about them.
- ▶ Indirect responsibility stems from “ethical rules accepted by civilized people.” This language reflects Israel’s desire to belong to the family of civilized nations and hold itself to a higher moral standard than the letter of the law.
- ▶ The Commission also roots its claim in the Israeli “Foundations of Jurisprudence Law” (passed in 1980) which stipulates that where the court finds no answer “in statute law or case-law or by analogy, it shall decide it in the light of the principles of freedom, justice, equity and peace of Israel’s heritage.”
- ▶ The court marshals Jewish “principles” as legal precedent.
- ▶ The findings invite critics who do not want Israel to hold itself accountable more than is legally necessary, and also those who believe that Israel is crossing over in its legal code towards an antidemocratic preferential particularism.
- ▶ The Commission also argues for indirect responsibility based on Jewish history. As Israel shifts from an identity as a vulnerable minority to a powerful majority, will it act in ways that it always sought from others in the diaspora?
- ▶ Amos Oz, and others, criticized Israel’s response as letting itself off the hook too easily.
- ▶ Can moral conscientiousness ever fully restrain the nationalist ethos in its desire for self-preservation?
- ▶ Were the lessons of Sabra and Shatilla fully internalized, or was it all theater?
- ▶ The likelihood that Israel would produce such a candid report today is very low. The Kahan Commission showcases a moment in Israeli self-awareness as to its evolving role in the family of nations.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **Of the three main arguments in the Commission report, which one do you find most compelling as a case for Israel's indirect responsibility for the massacre in Sabra and Shatilla? 1) the moral standards of civilized nations to go above and beyond the letter of the law; 2) Jewish biblical and rabbinic heritage; or 3) the Jewish historical experience of suffering in exile?**
- 2 **How does this Commission reflect the evolving struggle for Israel to grapple with its use of military power as a modern sovereign state, and why would this report be unlikely for Israel to publish today?**

v. Moshe Halbertal, *The Goldstone Illusion* (2009)

Summary of Primary Source Excerpt

- ▶ Two extreme positions have emerged in Israel.
- ▶ The radical left claims there is no justifiable way of fighting if it necessarily involves the death of innocent civilians, and Israel's only option is to end the occupation.
- ▶ But Israel has an obligation to protect its citizens, and security is necessary for peace.
- ▶ The radical right claims the responsibility for harming Palestinian civilians falls solely with Hamas and Hezbollah who initiated hostilities.
- ▶ But the killing of our civilians does not justify the killing of their civilians.
- ▶ This is an issue of deep moral struggle, not reflected in the Goldstone Report.
- ▶ In this new kind of micro-war, every soldier is a kind of commanding officer, a full moral and strategic agent.

Commentary by Elana Stein Hain

- ▶ *The Goldstone Illusion* is a scathing rebuttal of the Goldstone Report, prepared for the UN and finding both the IDF and Hamas guilty of war crimes in the 2008–9 Gaza War.
- ▶ Halbertal argues that the Goldstone Report ignores the realities of asymmetrical warfare and neglects to mention the IDF Code of Ethics.
- ▶ Halbertal's article asserts Israel's right to defend itself despite the realities of asymmetric warfare, by exercising morality *in* war.
- ▶ He examines the principle of avoidance: what degree of risk need Israeli soldiers assume to protect the lives of enemy civilians? This is the question that Israel answered inconsistently in the Gaza War.
- ▶ Halbertal's position reflects a debate between the moral philosophers who shaped the IDF Code of Ethics. The two versions of the Purity of Arms section (in 1994 and 2000) reflect differences of opinions about the rights of soldiers in comparison with the rights of civilians. In the newer version, soldiers must take risks to their own lives to protect enemy civilians.
- ▶ However, the critics of this version (Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin) argue that Israeli combatants are citizens in uniform and "his blood is as red as that of

the citizens who are not in uniform.” Furthermore, the state must prioritize the protection of its own citizens.

- ▶ Professors Avishai Margalit and Michael Walzer advocate the logic of the later code: the rights of soldiers and civilians are distinct. Terror, in its essence, is an evil attempt to blur this distinction and turn civilians into a legitimate target. “When fighting against terror, one must not imitate it.”
- ▶ They argue, “in an area where there are civilians, they should battle with the same level of concern and consideration as if the civilians on the other side were Israeli civilians.”
- ▶ Halbertal’s article illustrates the elevated and ethically infused debate of the IDF, and positions the newer edition of the IDF Spirit as the decisive guide for Israel’s war on terror.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 **How does the reality of asymmetrical warfare against a terrorist enemy embedded in a civilian population challenge Israel’s military ethics in new ways?**
- 2 **Why do you think that the “avoidance principle” is the source of such heated debate in Israeli society?**
- 3 **Do you agree with the ethical argument that “civilians are civilians are civilians”?**
- 4 **In your opinion, which version of the Purity of Arms is most moral and reasonable?**

SESSION 5 SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 **The return to Jewish sovereignty means the return to the exercise of military power. How do you understand the sources we have studied as a debate about the morally corrupting force of power?**
- 2 **Do you tend to believe that Israel uses power excessively in its engagement with terrorist enemies, or that Israel is overly restrained?**
- 3 **Does Israeli power require an extra measure of moral responsibility, risk-taking, and sacrifice to safeguard Palestinian civilians and achieve peace, even if it is not reciprocated? Why or why not?**

Suggested Video Clips and PowerPoint for Teaching*

- Julie Cooper, discussing *Our Homeland the Text* (George Steiner) and *Remarks to Brooklyn College on BDS* (Judith Butler) ([5-minute clip](#))
- Shaul Magid, discussing “Irving (Yitz) Greenberg versus Meir Kahane” ([5-minute clip](#))
- Daniel Kurtzer, discussing *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Benny Morris), “Lydda 1948,” and “Survival of the Fittest?” (Ari Shavit) ([5-minute clip](#))
- [PowerPoint for Teaching Session 5 \(Israel and Jewish Power\)](#)

**video excerpts from The New Jewish Canon seminar during Hartman’s July 2020 virtual conference, “All Together Now.”*