

THE REVISED EDITION

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE KEY SPIRITUAL
WRITINGS OF THE JEWISH TRADITION

JUDAISM

THE CLASSIC INTRODUCTION
TO ONE OF THE GREAT RELIGIONS
OF THE MODERN WORLD

EDITED AND INTERPRETED BY

ARTHUR HERTZBERG

示

Also by Arthur Hertzberg

The Jews in America

The Zionist Idea

The Outbursts That Await Us (coauthor)

The French Enlightenment and the Jews

Being Jewish in America

JUDAISM

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of the
Jewish Tradition



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(continued at the back of the book)

לזכר נשמות הורי
א"מ הרב צבי אלימלך זצ"ל
בן הרב אברהם זצ"ל
א"מ נחמה שפרה נ"ע
בת הקדוש משולם שו"ב מלמברג הי"ד
צדיקים במיתתם קרואים חיים

IN MEMORY OF MY PARENTS

Rabbi Zvi Elimelech
and Rebbetzin Nechama Shifra

WHOSE LIVES REMAIN A LESSON

IN THE WAY OF JEWISH FAITH

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Acknowledgments

In the early months of 1960 my friend, the late George Brantl, who was then editor of Braziller Books, proposed an idea—to publish together six books of text and commentary that would summarize and explain “the great religions of modern man.” He defined the format of these volumes very rigorously: they were to consist of original texts through which the reader, with the help of commentary, would come into direct contact with the spirit and values of each of the great religious traditions. Brantl invited me to do the volume on Judaism. I accepted on the understanding that I would need the help of a young scholar in finding appropriate texts from a vast literature. Jules Harlow, who had very recently been ordained a rabbi, worked hard with me then on the first edition of this book, choosing and translating the texts.

Thirty years later, another editor who has become a friend, Carole Hall of Touchstone Books, encouraged a revised edition of this book to take account of the new questions which have been debated within Judaism in recent decades. Fortunately, I could again turn to Rabbi Harlow, who unhesitatingly agreed to resume the collaboration. We defined the new issues, read in the literature of all the elements within Jewry, and added roughly a third to the earlier book—and we made many corrections in the text of 1961. Rabbi Harlow’s energy has not lessened with the passing of time, and his wisdom and insight have increased. Working together with him for the second time has been an even

greater joy than the remembered pleasure of thirty years ago.

On the technical side of typing and assembling the manuscript, I am very grateful to two diligent and devoted students of mine at Dartmouth College, Meredith Katz, who gave up a term at school to work with me full-time on this revised edition, and Joshua Wesoky, who helped between and after classes. Near the end of the task, a former student of mine at Dartmouth, Edward Nelson, volunteered to help tie up all the loose ends. Sandra Curtis, the administrative assistant who runs the Department of Religion at Dartmouth, and her staff were unfailingly kind as this manuscript, in all of its revisions, kept turning up on the machines in their domain. My colleagues in Thornton Hall were, without exception, supportive of one of their own who was coping this spring with teaching and finishing this work.

Looking at this book, both in its original version and in this expanded and radically revised second edition, I am even more grateful than I was thirty years ago for the unstinting labors of Jules Harlow. My gratitude to the memory of George Brantl has increased, and my sorrow at his untimely death is greater. When this book was first done, it was my second published work, and I did not yet really know how much the labor on a book takes away from the family of the author. Since then, Phyllis, my wife of more than forty years, has seen me through a number of books and hundreds of essays. None of these tasks could have been completed without her support and patience. As first reader, she continues to make each page better.

To the degree to which it is possible, this work, both text and commentary, takes no sides. Original sources, from ancient to contemporary, are presented and explained in their own terms. The basic texts, with some necessary explanations, are here for the reader to contemplate. They will add to knowledge, or perhaps even serve as markers on the path of a journey of the spirit.

—Arthur Hertzberg
June 9, 1991

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

This book was finished once in quiet times; it has now been redone, three turbulent decades later. Many of the answers to questions of values and of life and death are different now than they were thirty years ago. The easy conclusion would be the cliché that religion changes with changing times, as indeed it does—and that the believers themselves change, as I know I have in the years between my fortieth birthday, when I signed the preface to the first edition, and my seventieth birthday, when I signed the present text. What seems more remarkable is that even in very stressful times, in the recent years of often angry sectarianism, Judaism has remained very much a unity. The hundred pages or so of new material in this revised edition are culled from clashing, but basically not discordant, discussions of all the major new issues of the last three decades.

The foundations of the world seemed secure in the late 1950s. America was at the zenith of its influence as the preeminent power in the world. The five million Jews within its borders were less persecuted and excluded than Jews had ever been in the many centuries of their wanderings among the gentiles. Judaism could be described as a confident religion, the faith of a community which no longer had much to fear from the hand of man. American Jews could, so I hoped, begin to find their way back to the inherited religious tradition. To be sure, the faithful, those in each of the several denominations who lived by the rules, were a minority. Most Jews were impressionistic in their beliefs and

practices, but what Judaism taught seemed clear. The maleness of God, or at least of His authorized representatives, was hardly in question, even though more and more women, in Judaism as in all the major biblical faiths, had begun to demand equality.

In the late 1950s fundamentalism had not yet risen to major power in America. The religious scene was still dominated by theological and social moderates who wanted to dampen conflicts and accommodate differences. The major religious groups did differ, as they always had, on such issues as abortion or state aid to parochial education, but they were perceived to be moving away from their quarrels and towards pragmatic entente. To be sure, there was deep division within American society on the question of race. Large groups among the Christians of the South fought actively to retain segregation, and some of the synagogue congregations in the region did not speak above a whisper—but the overwhelming bulk of the organized religious community, both Jewish and Christian, joined in active commitment to the cause of civil rights. It was widely believed that this unity would lead to an era of peace and cooperation among the faiths; they were perceived to be working together towards a more just and peaceful society in the near future.

Looking inward, most Jews believed that the future would be more peaceful. They thought that harmony would be growing within their community. The Orthodox were led then by moderates who cooperated easily with the more liberal wings, the Conservative and the Reform. To be sure, the atmosphere was beginning to change in the late 1950s. Some forces among the Orthodox were becoming assertive. More fundamentalist elements were insisting on erecting barriers to keep the true believers inside their own fold. The Reform and the Conservative were moving towards gender equality, and thus the more liberal denominations were fashioning themselves to be ever less like the Orthodox. Within the Jewish community, as among both the Protestants and the Catholics, the religious moderates had begun to be challenged by confrontationists, but few thought that the future would bring a sometimes embittered polarization.

Perhaps most important of all, Judaism in America, and even in Israel, thought of itself as a Western religion, primarily in dialogue with Christianity. The Jews in America were still fighting

for complete social equality in an overwhelmingly Christian society. In Israel the bid of the Jews from Islamic lands for equal respect for their cultural heritage was in its early stages. Culture and society were dominated, seemingly permanently, by earlier immigrants who had come from Europe.

The relationship between religion and the West has changed, fundamentally, in the last three decades. Christianity itself, in both its Catholic and Protestant versions, has been working to break the connection between the Christian faith and Western culture. The new thinking asserts that the civilizations of Asia and Africa must have an equal stake in the Christian message, lest Christianity be regarded as merely an agent of colonial oppression. In the West itself, religion is no longer only either Christian or Jewish. The wars and political turmoil of the last three decades have propelled millions of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus to all the major European countries and to the United States. In every major city west of the Elbe river, the boundary of West Germany before the reunification, there is a marked and growing presence of mosques, Buddhist temples, and ashrams. In the ten largest cities of the United States, taken together, white Europeans are now the minority. To be sure, Blacks and Hispanics are generally Christians, but even among them, third-world religions are growing.

In this ever more complicated society, Jews are well on the way to defining themselves, and their religion, independent of supposed Western norms. The re-creation of a Jewish State in Asia is a strong force moving the Jewish community, and Judaism, away from its Western presumptions of three decades ago. One of the deepest themes in Zionism is the quest for a redefinition of the Jewish soul through reencounter with the ambiance in which Judaism was first defined. Judaism was distorted, so this argument goes, by its life in the Exile, under unremitting pressure of various majority cultures. The authentic Jewish spirit belongs not to the West, to which Jews were once sent in slavery, but to the Middle East, where this people was born. The religious dialogue with the West has become less important in recent years for immediate political reasons as well. Arabs have challenged the Zionists with the argument that Jews returning to the Land of Israel are Western interlopers who had long since become

alien to the region. Jewish thinkers have replied by insisting on the Middle Eastern character which had been stamped on Judaism when it began, and which it had retained even during the long centuries of the exile of the Jews to alien lands. Quite apart from Zionist ideology, a fundamental demographic and cultural change has taken place in Israel in the last thirty years. Jews of European origin are now a minority, and some of its most distinguished religious authorities are people for whom Islam and not Christianity is the point of reference.

The religious experience of Jews is indissolubly linked to what happens to the Jewish people in history. Both the Holocaust, the unprecedented murder of six million Jews by the Nazis for the “crime” of being born Jews, and the creation of the State of Israel, a Jewish commonwealth reestablished nearly nineteen centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, had occurred in the 1940s. Obviously, Jewish thought and feeling in the 1950s were deeply affected by these seminal events, but it is clear now, thirty years later, that the transforming impact of the Holocaust and of the State of Israel on Jewish spirituality had just begun to be felt. In the last three decades the murder of European Jewry has become more than a memory of the ultimate pogrom. The Holocaust cannot be discussed without raising the question of God’s justice. The religious significance of the State of Israel was transformed even more dramatically. Since 1967, the State of Israel has controlled all the territory west of the Jordan river, including, for the first time, a very large Arab minority within the borders of the “undivided Land of Israel.” Very soon after the victory an explosive issue developed: on national and religious grounds, is it permissible to give back even one inch of the land that “God gave to the Jews”? More generally, what moral responsibilities come with power?

On rereading the new material, after this revised edition was finished, I was astonished to find that on most issues—old and new—the combatting views belonged together.

One source of coherence is the method of argument. It has remained the same for many centuries. Biblical and rabbinic precedents are invariably cited today as in the past. In most cases, it is argued that Talmudic norms can be stretched to apply to situations that the ancient rabbis could not possibly have imag-