Leadership and Community in Judaism

Reuven Kimelman

The history of Judaism is as much a history of leadership as a history of ideas. As Jewish life in antiquity affirmed the primacy of Torah over Temple, priestly leadership gave way to rabbinic. In modern times, since the synagogue functions both as school and temple, its leadership is bound to reflect both priestly and rabbinic patterns. Which pattern is likely to predominate and the effect on the nature of Judaism is the subject of this inquiry.

From Priest to Rabbi

The fall of Judea and the destruction of the Temple by Babylon in 586 B.C.E. were watersheds in biblical religion. No other ancient culture survived the destruction of its temple, the devastation of its capital, and the exile of its leadership. If Judaism were to weather the Babylonian exile, an explanation had to be forthcoming. According to the prophets, these disasters were a consequence of divine punishment or at least a suspension of divine protection. It is probable that the Jews in Babylon who reconstituted themselves as a religious community accepted their exile as a punishment and believed that they were in need of expiation and atonement.

The exile, however, presented unprecedented problems for the penitent community. Initially, the priest sought to maintain his dominance over religious life. Lacking authority to offer sacrifices on foreign soil, however, the priest’s special status and authority weakened. Since priestly mediated atonement was no longer available, alternative schemes for reinstatement into God’s good grace could make headway.

The major alternative was that of the prophets and teachers. They had not only an explanation for the tragedies but a tradition and a literature from which to ferret out ways of reconciliation. Thus, the quest for atonement and expiation led to the study of sacred teachings as the indispensable religious activity. As religious authority became associated with knowledge of sacred literature, books tended to displace the cult as the source of the sacred for the people. As long as the Temple was standing the priest was perceived as indispensable. Once the necessary link between the cult and the sacred was sundered, the idea that the link between the divine and the human was a sacred book could be entertained. Mastery of the book then established a new status in the religious hierarchy. As temple-centered communities generated authorities who were adept at the cult, book-centered communities generated authorities who were skilled at interpretation.

Similarly, as intrinsic holy space was no longer available, intrinsic holy time gained in prominence. Thus, it is of no surprise that the Sabbath as holiness in time assumed greater significance than it had before the exile. It is Isaiah of the Exile who associates the Sabbath with maintaining the covenant. Even the foreigner who attaches himself to the Lord shall be welcome in God’s house of prayer by virtue of Sabbath observance (Isa. 56). It is also not accidental that the importance of the Sabbath as the cornerstone of the covenant is underscored by the prophet of the Exile, Ezekiel: “Hallow My Sabbaths, that they may be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I, the Lord, am your God” (Ezek. 20:20). Indeed, this very prophet who unremittingly calls the exilic community to repentance is the one most rooted in Torah literature.

The new factor in the social impact of the Sabbath in Babylon lies in its distinguishing Jews from their gentile neighbors and uniting them with their Jewish compatriots, albeit not their neighbors. The Sabbath, especially in exile, superimposes a spiritual neighborhood on the physical one. The result is that common ideology and practice become as significant as common geography in the generation of community. Although the Sabbath is designated the sign of the covenant, sociologically it serves as the seal of the covenant. It is the day that the exiles become confirmed as the people of God.

In sum, the experience of the exile sowed the seed which allows Judaism to germinate into a book-teacher-Sabbath-community-centered religion in contrast to a sacrifice-priest-temple-land-centered religion. Through this development a territory-limited national religious culture was transmuted into a world-portable religious community.

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem these differences in religious thought and practice caused conflict between the returnees and the Jews who remained in the
land and who are referred to as the high priestly group. The bone of contention was the locus of the sacred. For the high priestly group the sacred was restricted to the Temple cult; for the returnees, the sacred was to be found also in the newly covenanted life of the community. The high priestly group strove to keep the cult within the confines of the Temple and the priesthood. The returnees endeavored to diffuse the sacred throughout the community. They were accordingly overjoyed at reviving the practice of setting up booths for each household for the Festival of Tabernacles. At the same time, they tried to elevate personal religious behavior to cultic status. Moreover, the returnees obliged all in the community. They were accordingly overjoyed at reviving the practice of setting up booths for each household for the Festival of Tabernacles. At the same time, they tried to elevate personal religious behavior to cultic status. Moreover, the returnees obliged all in the community to the sacred need not be exclusive, the path leading to its obsolescence was embarked upon. Isaiah of the Exile foresaw the day when the people would be called "priests of the Lord" and termed "servants of our God" (Isa. 61:6).

The public reading of the Torah in, most likely, 444 B.C.E. marks the transformation of a religious innovation from the exilic period into a permanent theological reality. The critical stages of this change are documented in three chapters of the Book of Nehemiah. Chapter eight reports that care was taken to render the Torah comprehensible to all the people. Chapter nine describes the ceremony of atonement. Besides a public expression of penitence, the ceremony contained a prophetic review of biblical history. It climaxied in a solemn act of renewing the covenant, but no priestly confirmation was required. The people confessed their sins and pledged allegiance to God by committing themselves to follow His Torah. The confession made mention not only of personal unfaithfulness but also of "our kings, our rulers, and our priests who have been unmindful of the commandments" (Neh. 9:32, 34). It is noteworthy that of all the sacred days in the Torah only the Sabbath is mentioned, indeed highlighted. Chapter ten emphasizes that, besides the priests and levites, all the rest of the people undertook to walk according to the Law of God and to observe and practice all His commandments.

These three chapters encapsulate the lessons the community learned in exile. They admit to being punished for being unworthy of divine favor. They affirm the centrality of the Sabbath and the Torah. And they accept the prophetic position that the ruling powers of Jerusalem had not been conduits, but obstructors of divine grace. The covenantal ceremony adds to biblical religion the insights gained from the experience of the exile. From then on they became an integral part of the covenantal experience of Israel.

From Priesthood to Kingdom of Priests

The experience of the exile enabled the community to perceive the contingent nature of the priesthood. Once it became apparent that the priesthood’s access to the sacred need not be exclusive, the path leading to its obsolescence was embarked upon. Isaiah of the Exile foresaw the day when the people would be called “priests of the Lord” and termed “servants of our God” (Isa. 61:6).

Israel was now in both the social and theological position to take up the original divine charge to become a kingdom of priests. According to Exodus Chapter nineteen, this signifies not only that Israel is God’s own people, set apart from the rest of the nations, but that, since the whole world is God’s, Israel is to be dedicated to God’s service among the nations as priests serve within a society. Moreover, the life of Israel is to be commensurate with the holiness of the covenant of God. This covenant encompasses her whole life, defining her relation to God, to her neighbors, and to herself.

The Birth of Rabbinic Judaism

The ceremony of renewing the covenant, as it has been described in Nehemiah, leads directly to the study of Torah and then to Rabbinic Judaism. Through this ceremony, the public recitation of the Torah achieved the cultic status of a convocation, thereby transforming the general exhortations to study in Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19 and Joshua 1:8 into structured acts. From that time forward, the history of Judaism becomes the history of the interpretation and application of Torah. What began with Moses was consummated under Ezra. That Ezra, the prototypical rabbinic Jew, was considered heir to the whole biblical heritage (and, by association, his successors the rabbis) lies in the fact that...
rabbinitic tradition considered him to be a second founder of the Torah, greater than the High Priest, and a prophet. Indeed, if Moses had not preceded him, Ezra would have received the Torah (B. Sukkah 20a, Kobelet Rabbah 1.4, B. Megilloth 15a, B. Sanhedrin 21b).

Although it is true that Rabbinic Judaism emerges full-blown only centuries later by virtue of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., its seeds were already sown by the prophets in the First Temple period. What becomes the Rabbinic way of thinking can trace its roots back as far as Jeremiah. He comes close to speaking of the Torah and the word of God as parallel to the scheme of biblical religion by proclaiming that God had not originally intended to require the sacrificial system (Jer. 7:22, cp. Lev. 23:37). Instead, Jeremiah held to the position, as did others, that Israel's adherence to God's word and covenant suffices for them to become His people (Jer. 7:23, 11:4; cf. Exod. 19:5).

It should therefore be of no surprise that it was Jeremiah who envisioned a future in which men shall no longer speak of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, nor shall it come to mind. They shall not mention it, or miss it, or make another. At that time they shall call Jerusalem "throne of the Lord" and all nations shall assemble there, in the name of the Lord, at Jerusalem (Jer. 3:16f).

According to some commentators, Rashi and Abarbanel, for example, Jeremiah looks forward to a time when the locus of the sacred will be transferred from the Ark of the Covenant to the community of the covenant, making it unnecessary to construct another ark. So successful would the replacement be that the old forms will not even be missed. Still, Jerusalem will retain its importance as the city of God. The prophet realized that for God's presence to be everywhere, it first must be somewhere.

Rabbinic leaders established Judaism on the foundations of study of Torah, prayer, fasting, practice of the commandments, and acts of loving-kindness, all of which claimed to be in one way or another surrogates for the cult. The genius of Rabbinic Judaism expressed itself in presenting innovation as renovation. The new meanings, it must be emphasized, were not put forth as something new but rather as emphatic realizations of something very old. The rabbis claimed to be doing nothing more than raising to the explicit what had been implicit. Their plan consisted of fully endowing all, so that the biblical ideal of creating a priestlike holy people could be attained. They were so successful at connecting the old with the new that discontinuities were almost imperceptible to future generations.

The rabbis used the language of the past, especially familiar terms with exquisite associations, only to endow them with new meaning. The language of the Temple cult was enlisted in the service of the rabbinitic programs of piety, which dared nothing less than the sanctification of a whole people. In this way, the rabbis turned the world into the Temple by making all of life a religious experience. They hammered this idea into Jewish consciousness by formulating new blessings. These blessings were for the performance of mitzvot, the enjoyment of the world, the washing of the hands, and the study of Torah.

**Performance of Mitzvot**

The rabbis did not confine their discussion of the Temple's destruction to the departure of the divine; for them, the removal of the walls of the Temple could show as well that the divine could not be delimited spatially. Razing the Temple walls liberated the sacred and allowed the concentrated holiness to pervade the world, just as shattering a bottle of scent perfumes a room. If the psalmist had rhapsodized that "the earth is the Lord's," then the next step was to see the world as the Temple. For the rabbis, all of Israel was obligated to take this step and assume heretofore priestly roles. All of Israel could participate in this mitzvah-centered life, which was to be patterned after Temple ritual and punctuated with periods of holiness. Temple drama was relocated onto the stage of life. Thus, the daily regimen prescribed by the rabbis was comparable to that of a religious order. "Holiness was not given to the priests alone," the rabbis believe, "but to the priests, to the levites, and to the rest of Israel, as it says in Leviticus 19:1, 'Speak to the whole community of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy'" (Seder Elihu Rabbah 16, ed. Friedmann p. 72). Hence, when fulfilling a mitzvah which enhances the distinctive character of the people of God, the rabbis ordained that the words "Who have sanctified us by His commandments" be incorporated into the accompanying blessing.

**The Enjoyment of the World**

The rabbis most frequently chose to evoke the divine by focusing on natural pleasures, be they aesthetic or sensual. As a result, aspects of life which are normally impervious to the sacred become infused with holiness because of blessing-recitations.

These blessings stir our eyes to see the world as God's temple. Through them we recognize "How great ... God's dwelling-place is; how vast His domain" (Baruch 3:24). For "in the truest sense the holy temple of God is the whole universe" (Philo, The Special Laws of God)
1:66; cf. Mekhibta b. 16, ed. Horovitz-Rabin, p. 58). “See and thou shalt praise” was the leitmotif of the blessings. As Isaiah urged us, “lift high your eyes and see who created these” (Isa. 40:26). Is not the divine handiwork recognizable everywhere if one would but lift the eyes? Does not all creation rhapsodize its Maker? Through blessings, the rabbis understood, creation is both noticed and exalted. Indeed, it is sanctified, for sanctification comes through perceiving the connection with the divine.

Since it is sacrilegious to appropriate objects from the Temple for personal use, viewing the whole world as a Temple might render everything off limits. By reciting a blessing, however, we become denizens of the Temple, and everything comes within our reach. The rabbis also viewed blessings as helping us to see ourselves as guardians rather than as landlords of the universe. Reaping benefits from the world without proper acknowledgment verges on brigandage. Acknowledging God’s lordship, however, grants entrance into His whole domain (B. Berakhot 55b).

Much of modern Judaism, because it has neglected the study of Torah and a way of life which is responsible to the sacred, has felt the need to remodel the rabbi into a priestly figure.

The rabbis did not rest until they had filled the day with one hundred blessings to satisfy minimum adult spiritual requirements. After all, if one hundred sockets are required to hold the tabernacle together, then one hundred blessings are needed to make the spiritual structure of creation apparent. These blessings take note of good smell and taste, rising up and lying down, the intake of food, and the elimination of waste. Blessings celebrate the spectacle of lightning, falling stars, majestic mountains, and stretches of wilderness. The roar of thunder has its praise, the sight of the sea and rainbow its response. Beautiful animals and even beautiful people, according to some, are praised, as are trees in blossom, the new moon, new clothing, new houses, and even, according to others, the first legitimate taste of sexual delight. Indeed, man will be held accountable for foregoing those legitimate pleasures that God would have him relish.

Domestic life, according to the rabbis, should take on the importance of the Temple cult. Just as the Temple served as the locus of the indwelling presence of God and a place of atonement, domestic peace, according to the Talmud (B. Sotah 14a), draws in the divine presence, and the table functions as an altar: “As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a man’s table atones for him.”

This quotation appears in two contexts. One context mentions feeding the poor (B. Berakhot 55a). Here the table serves as a source of atonement apparently because of the many good deeds occasioned by its use in showing hospitality to the poor. The rabbis held that hospitality to wayfarers is greater than greeting the divine presence (B. Shabbat 127a); indeed, extending hospitality could be on a par with the daily sacrifice (B. Berakhot 10b). Such is the significance of the table that it was a medieval practice to bury the benevolent rich in coffins made out of their own tables. The expiation of the table was added to the expiation of death.

The Washing of Hands

Once the Passover Seder replaced the paschal offering and attendant ritual in the Temple, it became acceptable to endow eating with cultic associations. Dining took its cultic cues from sacrificing, and the diner was viewed as a priest. Washing before eating became a requirement just as priests “washed upon entering the tabernacle and upon approaching the altar” (Exod. 40:32, see 30:19). Thus, the biblical word “to wash” is rendered in the rabbinic Aramaic translation as “to sanctify.” This parallels the rabbinic ruling that the blessing over bread should immediately follow the washing because Psalm 134:2 is interpreted to mean “Sanctify your hands and bless the Lord.”

So they taught, “Sanctify yourselves” to refer to preprandial washing and “And be ye holy” to refer to postprandial washing (Lev. 11:44). And what if they are not washed? “Just as soiled hands render one unfit for the Temple service, so do they render one unfit for meal-related blessings” (B. Berakhot 51b). And what if they are not wiped? “Whoever eats bread without first wiping his hands is as though he eats impure food” (B. Sotah 4b). Elevating dining to a cultic level allowed it to be perceived on a par with acts of divine worship in the Temple (Bahya Ibn Asher, Bahya’s Writings, ed. Chavel, p. 496).

The hand-washing ceremony upon arising in the morning also referred to priestly service (Rashi in Beit Yosef at Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayyim 4); indeed, it was deemed to be a miniature immersion (Rashi at B. Berakhot 16b-top). In fact, ancient Jews were praised as “a sacred race of pious men [who] at dawn lift up holy arms toward heaven from their beds, always sanctifying their hands with water” (Sibylline Oracles 3:573, 391-93 as in The Old Testament.
The blessing recited upon such washing is "Praised are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us by His commandments and commanded us regarding washing the hands." But the biblical commandment for the ritual washing of the hands is directed at the priesthood. Precisely, priestly holiness has become the model for all of Israel (Seder Elihu Rabbah 16). The idea of Israel as a priest-people so captivated the imagination of the rabbis that they considered the priestly washing of the hands outside of the Temple to be incumbent upon all. The practice encapsulated the biblical ideal so well that it was deemed ordained by God (Sifre Numbers 116).

**The Study of Torah**

The rabbis were uncharacteristically unrestrained in ascribing cultic significance to the study of Torah. It was considered tantamount to participation in the Temple cult, and it was considered equivalent to the daily sacrifice. Studying the biblically ordained laws of the sin-offering was accredited as if one had actually offered the required sacrifice. And studying the laws of the cult was as if the Temple were then being rebuilt. If the study of Torah conferred priestly prerogatives, then it is no wonder that "a sage's public exposition of Torah was as if he had offered fat and blood [of the biblically prescribed animal sacrifice] on the altar" (Avot DeRabb Natn 4). Indeed, the study of the Torah could elevate one to the level of High Priest. Finally, one rabbi went so far as to assert that "one who occupies himself with the study of Torah has no need of the burnt offering, the sin-offering, the meal-offering, or the guilt-offering" (B. Menabot 110a). The rabbis resolved the problem of the absence of the Temple by proclaiming the expiatory power of study of Torah, Judaism's portable temple (Midrash Tanhuma, abarei 10). In the eyes of some, the expiation of Torah study exceeded that of prayer, fasts, good deeds, and, as we have seen, even sacrifices.

The development of this understanding of Torah highlights the distinctiveness of Rabbinic Judaism. Other groups laying claim to the Bible also had to come up with replacements for the Temple cult for either geographical or ideological reasons. Those succeeding laid claim to creating a purer cult or offering a more perfect sacrifice. This approach clung to cultic imagery. The best-known example held that sacrifice-expiation required death, whereas the remission of sins required the shedding of blood. Only one

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**Years**

Anna Margolin

*Translated from the Yiddish by Kathryn Hellerstein*

Like women, much loved yet never sated,
Who stroll through life with laughter and with anger
In their eyes of fire and agate—
So are the years.

And they were also like actors
Who mouth Hamlet half-heartedly for the market,
Like noblemen in a proud country
Who seize rebellion by the nape.

And see, how demure they are now, my God,
And mute as a crushed clavier.
They grasp at just anybody's impulse and mockery as at love
And seek you, not believing in you.

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(Continued from p. 30)

victim could become the lamb of God, and the high priesthood was limited to a singular victim. Locked into a biblical cultic imagery, it was impossible to go beyond the assumption that mediation is required to approach the divine. It rested its claim only on the superiority of the mediation.

The rabbis, however, transcended cultic imagery by promoting the centrality of Torah study. For them, language and thought serve as the equivalents of altar and sacrifice. Once logology replaces ontology, Torah study can be substituted for the sacrificial cult. By transforming language and thought into portals of the sacred, Torah study opens up the high priesthood of learning.

What is the biblical basis for the cult of Torah replacing that of the sacrifice? There are no pertinent prophetic passages comparable to those which extol the value of obedience and heartfelt prayer. The answer lies in the capacity of Torah study to obviate the need for mediation by recreating the presanctuary reality of Sinai. As poetry reading, Torah study can reproduce the generative experience of Sinai (Midrash Tanhuma, kee tavo 1). Being the holy of holies, the Torah enables the shimmerings of the divine to be refracted through the human mind. Since transcendence is glimpsed through its lens, it is not surprising that it was accorded the wherewithal “to apprehend the divine will” (Avot DeRabbi Natan 4).

You shall be holy, “for I the Lord your God am holy” suggests not only that God is the model but that the entrée to the holy is by becoming holy. Through Torah, holiness is added to Israel. Indeed, its study reveals the architect’s plan and thus the purpose of creation (Genesis Rabbah 1.2).

Such learning is not conceived primarily as memorization and erudition but rather as a response to the divine imperative to be involved with wisdom day in and day out (Midrash Tanhumah, re’eh, 1). The blessing associated with Torah study praised God for having sanctified us through commanding us to be preoccupied with Torah.

Unsurprisingly, the rabbinic doctrine of life doubles as its doctrine of salvation (Mishnah Avot 2:8, 6:9).
Thus, “Whoever reviews the halakhot may be assured of inclusion in the World to Come” (B. Megillah, 28b). Moreover, “Whoever teaches Torah in this world will get to teach it in the next” (B. Sanhedrin 92a). For “Just as there are halachic deliberations below so are there halachic deliberations above” (Midrash Tenhuma, shmot 18). Indeed, “Not a day passes without the holy one, blessed be He, innovating halacha in the Court on high” (Genesis, Rebbah 49.3). Since everything in this world is experienced on a grander scale in the next, the future life can be envisioned as a vast academy for the study of Torah with God Himself overseeing the deliberations (Seder Eilahtu Rabbah 3).

That this vision fired the imagination indicates the success of Rabbinic Judaism. It transformed a people into either eternal students or dreamers. Continuing education was taken literally, for Rabbinic Judaism aimed at nothing less than to rabbinize all of Israel.

The rabbinic program did not so much as make Judaism democratic as it made Jewry aristocratic. If all Jews are descendants of kings, as the rabbis never tire of telling us, then they merit access to the royal way. The biblical ideal may be understood as a “kingship of priests” or as a “regal priesthood.” Whatever the case, when Yannai asks God to “make all of them kings, all of them priests” (The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai, ed. Rabinowitz, I., p. 320) he is spelling out in full the implications of the aristocratization of Jewry.

By expanding access to the once-exclusive priestly prerogatives, all were becoming religiously enfranchised. The result was the transformation of all of Israel into the equivalent of a religious order. The Bible had already laid the groundwork for this idea by enjoining circumcision for even nonpriests (compare Lev. 21:5-6 and Deut. 14:1-2), and by mandating the donning of a fringed tallit which with its cord of blue calls to mind priestly garments (Exod. 28:28,37).

ThePassover ceremony, as mentioned above, played a pivotal role in extending the aura of the priesthood to the whole people. As Philo noted, the universal offering on this day raised all “to the dignity of the priesthood ... [for] on this occasion the whole nation performs the sacred rites and acts as priest ... [indeed] every dwelling house is invested with the outward semblance and dignity of a temple” (The Special Laws 2:145, 148).

The rabbis furthered this tendency by ordaining the universal recital of the Hallel Psalms on festivals and by transferring the daily recital of levitical songs to individual Jews. Moreover, just as the times of statutory prayer correspond to the timing of the daily sacrifices, so, some held, proper posture during such prayers should emulate that of priestly worship (J. Berakhot 1.1). Hai Gaon even proposed that the introductory and concluding three steps forward and backward of the prayer are modeled after the priestly pattern of approaching and leaving the altar (in Beit Yosef at Tur Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayyim 123).

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imply put, Rabbinic Judaism aimed at eliminating the laity by incorporating it into a priestlike order. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that traditional priests continued to merit deference at certain ceremonies. Nonetheless, their specific duties, however on the decline, were carried out under rabbinic aegis. Power did not follow patterns of deference.

Ways to sense the holiness of the high priesthood
were opened up. One way, as we have discussed, consisted of being as attentive, preoccupied, and meticulous with regard to Torah as the High Priest was with regard to the cult.

The second way concerned liturgy. The Yom Kippur liturgy confers on each worshipper the honorary degree of High Priest. The high point of the Yom Kippur service is introduced by a detailed description of the Temple service on the Day of Atonement. We follow the prescribed procedure of the High Priest's baths and ablutions, the selection of the various offerings, the High Priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies amid a cloud of incense to cleanse it of the sins of the people, and his symbolic purification of the outer altar and the rest of the sanctuary. In a dramatic climax, worshippers in the synagogue prostrate themselves, as the people and the High Priest did in the Temple, and each worshipper repeats word for word the ancient confession that the High Priest uttered for himself and his household. At that moment, the liturgy transfigures all worshippers into high priests confessing directly to God and praying for themselves and their households. All become committed to purging themselves of any impurity and to purging their homes of all that mars their sanctity. Once a year, the rabbis afford us a taste of the high priesthood. By aiming for the high priesthood, the candidate, as it were, says, "As a Jew, I am commanded, therefore I am." Insofar as modern Judaism regresses from the rabbinic pattern, it believes that one is "bar mitzvahed," implying something that a rabbi does to you. Strangely, for many it implies that the rabbi performed a sacred act which is seen as exempting the young adult from further study of Torah.

The practice of some modern synagogues on Yom Kippur is just as instructive. Rather than all bowing down during the reenactment of the ancient Temple rite as if they were high priests, many a contemporary worshipper, in the name of modernity, chooses to remain a spectator observing the rabbi and cantor perform it for them. Those of such a mind find no difficulty in preferring the rabbi to offer prayers on their behalf rather than praying on their own.

On the other hand, the more rabbis relish the priestly role, the more likely they are to monopolize the pulpit as if they had an exclusive claim on instruction. In such cases, prominence given to the sermon frequently eclipses the significance of the reading of the weekly portion of the Torah. Indeed, the more priestlike the preacher, the less Torah-centered the sermon. Nothing underscores disparities like condescension. Although the modern expression of surrogate Judaism results from the collusion of both laity and rabbinate, it still seems paradoxical to find Jews vehemently opposed to the ancient priestly sacrificial cult slavishly adhering to its contemporary psychological counterpart.

**Modern Judaism**

Much of modern Judaism, because it has neglected the study of Torah and a way of life which is responsive to the sacred, has felt the need to remodel the rabbi into a priestly figure. The transfiguration of the rabbi not only led to donning special rabbinic vestments and preaching down from a raised platform, but also to endowing rabbinic presence with cultic significance. Ceremonial efficacy became dependent on rabbinic presence. An outstanding example is marriage. According to Jewish law, there is no ceremony which can bind a Jew and gentile in sacred matrimony. Yet, many modern Jews are of the opinion that the presence of a "rabbi" can render the illegal legal. Through the magic of cultic power rabbinic presence transforms the profane into the sacred. Is it not paradoxical that some Jews of rational bent are most susceptible to magical appeals?

*Bar Mitzvah* is another case in point. In Rabbinic Judaism religious majority is attained by entering into a life of obedience and commitment to the Commandments. This is the literal implication of the term bar mitzvah. The candidate, as it were, says, "As a Jew, I am commanded, therefore I am." Insofar as modern Judaism regresses from the rabbinic pattern, it believes that one is "bar mitzvahed," implying something that a rabbi does to you. Strangely, for many it implies that the rabbi performed a sacred act which is seen as exempting the young adult from further study of Torah.

The success of the rabbinic program depends upon the community involving itself in intensive Torah study and the interweaving of its private and social life into a sacred whole. The rabbinic assumption is that the religious life is made up of individual and communal obligations as opposed to clerical and institutional ones. A community not meeting these qualifications would slip back into making hard distinctions between clergy and laity. There are signs that the modern period has witnessed precisely this backsliding to the natural religious situation. Forgetting one's nobility is the greatest of temptations.

**Post-Modern Judaism**

Fortunately, as Jews move into the post-modern period, they liberate themselves from the tyranny of mod-
ern categories. Our post-modern age is witnessing an increasing number of rabbis setting “priestly” department aside in order to enhance congregational participation in the religious life.

Disenchanted with the role of surrogate Jew, such rabbis seek to extricate constituents from debilitating dependencies and set them on the path of study and practice for a maturer religiosity. Rejecting the priestly role which allocates them power at the expense of the laity they aim to reinstate the rabbinic model of empowerment. The most tangible sign of this shift is the spread of interactive teaching of Torah from the pulpit. Such congregations are perceived to be Jewish growth centers as much as cult centers. It takes the rare teacher to understand that effective pedagogy is the art of making oneself dispensable.

Such pedagogy must be all too rare. Most of the modern period has witnessed not only reliance on rabbis for vicarious observance, but dependence on “the great authorities” for vicarious decision making. The pervasive fear of qualified personnel to assume responsibility for decision making indicates a similar lack of faith in the rabbinic program. Rabbinic Judaism is not just the displacing of priestly authority by rabbinic authority, but a reconceptualization of the nature of religious authority.

The Maharal of Prague, unlike his contemporaries, perceived the real logic of the rabbinization of Torah study. In describing “the path of Torah,” he writes:

It is more fitting and more correct that one should determine the law for himself directly on the basis of the Talmud, even though there is danger that he will not follow the true path and not decide the law as it should be in truth. Notwithstanding, the sage has only to consider what his intellect apprehends and understands from the Talmud and if his understanding and wisdom mislead him, he is nevertheless believed by the Lord when he decides in accordance with his mind’s dictates ... and he is superior to one who rules from a later prepared code without knowing the reasons which are the ground of the decision. Such a one walks like a blind man on the way. (Netivot Olam, Nettiv Hatorah 15)

Similarly, when the Talmud (B. Hullin 44b with Maharsha ad loc) points out that only by engaging in independent halakhic analysis does one deserve to eat the fruit of one’s labor, it underscores the implicit goals of rabbinizing Jews, namely, to empower them to study, to weigh opinions, and to come to conclusions. The individual’s informed struggle for truth is at least on a par with its compliance. For the mind steeped in Torah there can be no exemption from conscientious struggle. Authentic Rabbinic Judaism has little tolerance for
surrogates. The goal of rabbinization aims at nothing less than making the decision makers coextensive with the intellectually empowered.

Nonetheless, the return of the post-modern rabbinate to the classic ideal cannot be reduced to a function of the rabbinate. Rabbinic initiative alone is inadequate to the task. Laity needs to shed its defensive cloak of passivity and assume responsibility for its growth in Jewish learning and living. If all Jews were learning Jews, surrogate Judaism would go the way of the sacrificial system. In the interim, the rabbi will have to serve as *primus inter pares*, not a far enough cry from the rabbi-priest of the modern era, but a step closer to the role model teacher of Rabbinic Judaism. □