

CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

1. Describe positive historical Judaism, the philosophic system of Dr. Zecharias Frankel. How did it differ from the traditional view of Judaism?
2. Describe the difference between Dr. Abraham Geiger's vision of reform and that of Dr. Frankel.
3. Why did Dr. Frankel leave the reform rabbinic assembly of Frankfurt?
4. Describe Dr. Frankel's influence upon German Jewry.
5. Describe Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's opinion of Dr. Frankel.

This and much more will be addressed in the second lecture of this series:
"Zacharias Frankel and the Foundations of Conservative Judaism."

To derive maximum benefit from this lecture, keep these questions in mind as you listen to the lecture and read through the outline. Go back to these questions once again at the end of the lecture and see how well you answer them.

PLEASE NOTE: This outline and source book were designed as a powerful tool to help you appreciate and understand the basis of Jewish History. Although the lectures can be listened to without the use of the outline, we advise you to read the outline to enhance your comprehension. Use it, as well, as a handy reference guide and for quick review.

This lecture is dedicated to the memory and *Li-ilui Nishmos*
Mr. Herbert Hillman יוסף בן יוסף, **Mr. Elie Maimaran** בן חיים
and Mrs. Angele Maimaran בת יוסף
of blessed memory.

THE EPIC OF THE ETERNAL PEOPLE
Presented by Rabbi Shmuel Irons

Series XIX Lecture #2

ZACHARIAS FRANKEL AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

I. Progress and Reform

For us, the term synagogue does not mean the agglomeration of all the teachers of the synagogue, but the concrete understanding of Jewish teaching, whose progressive nature can be proved and which knows how to preserve the divine spirit of the Jewish religion through the course of the ages. The Synagogue of the Spirit follows principles different from those of a formal and fixed rabbinism which, happily, forms only a small fraction of our Judaism. In such rabbis we see a hierarchical authority which we reject as error. Hence we must hold up to obloquy all these apostles of regression. *Progress!*-that is our slogan. In Judaism, we distinguish between the kernel and shell, matter and form, the lasting and the ephemeral, the eternal and the temporal manifestation. This distinction is in the spirit of the synagogue, which disputes ceremonial law with Hillel but agrees with him that the whole law rests on *one* essential point. Israel needs more such teachers, and more and more of them do appear; for our time provides a natural school for such men, and in them we see the possibility and hope of complete Jewish regeneration. . . . But you men of regression! You who are kept in bonds by the spirit of the dark ages; you who misjudge the rights of the present and who can see in us nothing but frivolous iconoclasts, in vain do you battle against the necessity of change in religious life. . . . Learn wisdom from the sages of former centuries who paid attention to the heartbeat of the times. But if you reject organic change of ritual as heresy and apostasy, and declare its followers as non-Jews simply because they do not recognize all of the phrases of the old rite as obligatory prayers, then, as before, you will further hasten the ruin of our fathers' religion and will force the supporters of change to abandon you altogether. . . . Every attempt to stand in the way of, or even to suppress progress will be no more successful than Balaam's attempt to ban and curse, which turned into blessing. In the same way the latest reaction against the temple became helpful rather than harmful, especially since the enlightened teachers in Israel had an opportunity to express themselves in favor of progress. . . . We, therefore, offer these pages of rabbinic opinions to our contemporaries and posterity as a true *monument of progress* and confidently look to the future of which it is written (Jeremiah 31:33), "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the L-rd, I will put My Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts . . . for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." . . . Hamburg, April 1842. Dr. M. Frankel, for the editorial board of the Temple Prayer Book. **Introduction to Theological Gutachten, the Collection of Approbations to the Revised Hamburg Temple Prayer Book**

II. Rabbi Zacharias Frankel, Champion of Moderate Reform

A. In these pages we shall emphasize the progress of Judaism. We shall conceive it to be our task to avoid the kind of negative reform which leads to complete dissolution, but instead, to show how the teachings of Judaism itself contain the possibility of progress. We need to talk and counsel together, because we share the deep sorrow over the threatening destruction of the synagogue and the undermining of its foundations. We have the sad conviction that, in

dispensing with the unnecessary parts, we are also giving up too much of that which is necessary. Meanwhile, many people display nothing but a dull indifference instead of the deep religiosity of former days, and we notice that there are many who, misunderstanding the depths of Judaism, wish to dissolve it in the general mood of the modern age. The synagogue faces a crisis, but this must not dishearten us nor must we give way to doubts that it can be victorious, for the innermost content of Judaism is guaranteed both in its continued existence as well as in **its latent possibilities of self-development**. How such development shall take place must be determined by **scientific research based on positive historical foundations**. Not every point of view can predominate, not every hypothesis can succeed, but this must not discourage us from undertaking our investigations, and as long as they are begun with sincerity and dignity and are continued in a scientific manner, we may give room to the hope that even our weak attempts may lead to more mature studies and finally to results of practical utility.

For we must understand that there is nothing but disaster in that kind of absence of motion and deed behind which one looks in vain for certainties, or in that hesitance which fears to awaken new doubts or to provoke attacks upon traditions which heretofore have not been challenged. Such silence without defense encourages its opponents to make further attacks, and in its apathy there is admission of obvious weakness, which arouses doubts even amongst the neutrals.

We aim to secure that which can be maintained in our tradition, as well as **to eliminate that which disfigures the purity of our faith**. We want to oppose unworthy tampering with our tradition and at the same time eliminate all reasons for doing so. We want to reconfirm and reinforce; we want to alleviate all doubts. In order to do this it is our inescapable task to speak publicly, through worthy scientific study, about the nature, the eternity, and **the progress of Judaism** and to offer a guide for learning and further study.

Motivated by such thoughts, the editor, in cooperation with other theologians who share these convictions, has founded this monthly *Journal for the Religious Interests of Judaism*. **Zacharias Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Dresden, Prospectus for his publication, "Zeitschrift für die religiösen Interessen des Judenthums" (Journal for the Religious Interests of Judaism) (the Rise of Reform Judaism, W. Gunther Plaut, p. 23)**

B. Time hurries onward and radical reforms are demanded, but we do not want to forget that not all demands of our time are justified. But on the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that the long-standing immobility of the past needs rectification. Until a few decades ago, Judaism had for a long period been in a state of total immobility. It satisfied the people and, therefore, their teachers **did not have the right to introduce reforms** even if they had been able to transcend their age. The great gap between yesterday and today has still not been bridged, and **the will of our people is still firmly rooted in the past**. - As long as this will still pulsates strongly, we **cannot** and will not touch it; rather, it must be the desire of our teachers to gain the confidence of the people by leading them gently, so that ultimately they may be granted **the right to reform**.

Will these reforms then be valid? **When the will of the people is expressed through these teachers, when they make reforms in full knowledge of their time and in the spirit of the people what dictum, what authority could deny them this right?** The will of the people, this strong power which Judaism recognizes, this will be validated by **history and science** and represented by teachers of truth and loyalty to our faith would not these be valid? For some time now it has been suggested that a Synod be called where theologians would agree on reforms. But

a time for such a realization has not come as yet. **The theologians do not express the will of the people**, for they have not gained their general confidence, partly through their own fault, and partly because the popular will cannot be expressed as long as there is inner strife and as long as the struggle between the old and the new is fought so fervently. But time will heal and help to fill the gap between yesterday and today. The teachers will find in their own lack of success a new challenge to fulfil the duties which their position imposes upon them. Thus, they will become conscious of the will of the people and will become truly living representatives, and reforms will come, not out of the people's illness, but grow from living principles.

Representation of the total popular will and of science these are the two main conditions for a reform of Judaism. **Next to faith, the Jew puts his confidence in science**. His whole past history of study and mental orientation guarantees that, without a genuine science of Judaism, our theologians will never have any influence upon the people. In such a science, history too will find its just tribute and due recognition.

It would be too bold to anticipate the shape of a future which perhaps is not far away, and to determine whether it will find a common way for both faith and life. But at the same time it would be a total misreading of the great ferment of our time if on one hand one criticizes the status quo and on the other the lack of definitive reform. The opposites do not as yet permit of a compromise. Either reform will break itself on the wall of opposition, or it will dissolve tradition without displacing it and will destroy it without maintaining it through progress. - **We aim at a worthy representation of the total will of the people and at a science of Judaism**. These will lead us to our goal and aid us to find that measure for reforms which live not only in abstraction but can be translated into reality. Our slogan is *Moderate Reform* which, properly understood, will be Judaism's saving force and will contribute to its eternal continuity. **Zacharias Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Dresden, "Moderate Reform", *Journal for the Religious Interests of Judaism Vol. I (the Rise of Reform Judaism, W. Gunther Plaut, p. 24)***

C. I have just come across the eighth issue of Dr. Frankel's *Zeitschrift (Journal for the Religious Interests of Judaism)* in which the editor denounces the Rabbinical Conference (which took place in June (1844) in Brunswick), with a bitterness which was painfully noticeable. Dr. Frankel announces to the world, at the end of his essay, that the Conference was a failure, and though he pretends to be greatly pained, one cannot avoid detecting a certain malicious gloating on his part. . . . And why did these men make an appearance? Only because they believed, by the mere fact that this Conference would come into being and reconvene annually, that the illnesses of Judaism might be healed. These men laid themselves open to public embarrassment, conscious of exposing their good name to criticism. . . . According to Dr. Frankel's utterances about the people, its sound mind and deep religiosity, it might almost seem as though pure wantonness had brought these men together, as though levity was the order of the day, something not to be forgiven a layman, much less so a group of rabbis. But has Dr. Frankel never been to Leipzig during the Fair? Has he never walked through the streets on a Sabbath or a holiday? Has he never seen a table d'hote or a similarly appointed place for eating and drinking? And he presumes to brag about the religious sense of the people! I do not exaggerate when I say that seven-eighths of our German youth are completely estranged from any and all meaning of Jewish religious feelings; I claim that this cancer advances daily. And Dr. Frankel could not find the smallest word of praise, of love and encouragement, if not for the men of that Assembly, at least for an institution that has taken upon itself the task of finding a solution to this dilemma! I shall now proceed to discuss Dr. Frankel's accusations one by one. . . . Considering the cultural level

of today's Jewry, how long do you believe people will continue to submit to a ceremony like that of Halitza (חליצה), how long do you think they will acquiesce to rules governing marital unions prohibited to a "Cohen"? If anywhere at all, it is right here where the damage ought to be repaired before it spreads too far. . . . Instead of helping this institution, which could be so beneficial to Judaism, to remain in existence, he chose to nip it in the bud. . . . **Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889), Chief Rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg** (*the Rise of Reform Judaism, W. Gunther Plaut, p. 80-85*)

D. . . . The reform of Judaism, furthermore, is not a reform of faith but of practices demanded by law. These still live within the people and exercise their power. It is not our task to weaken this influence but rather to strengthen it as much as possible. We need pay no attention to those individual few who do not practice the customs; we are not a party, but ours is the task to care for the needs of the whole people. We must maintain their true sanctuary and prevent any schism in Israel; we must not bring new parties into existence but rather must reconcile those which exist already.

There is yet another principle to which we must hold and that is that of science, which must be the foundation, for this alone offers a secure path for progress. There are men in Israel who are not present at this Assembly, who do not belong to the circle of religious officials, yet whose presence is desirable because they possess the equipment for the science of Judaism. If that which will be decided here is to have validity, then those men, too, ought to be asked as was customary with *sh'elot uteshuvot* (Rabbinic responsa). The decisions of the Rabbinical Conference will in any case be weighed and examined outside of Conference and must make their way first by gaining the support of the experts. Only then will they achieve validity. It would be advisable, therefore, if, prior to voting on a subject, the matter would already be published in print.

Finally, says the speaker, he believes the Rabbinical Conference to be a very useful institution. However, he wishes to state that he will be able to approve of its meetings only as long as these will always keep in mind the whole of positive Judaism. . . . **Zacharias Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Dresden, Address to the Rabbinical Conference of Frankfurt on July 16, 1845**

E. . . . To be sure, it is urgently necessary that a part of the service be held in German. However, I believe that Hebrew must predominate, for it carries with it the sentimental elements of edification and stimulation which otherwise are missing in our service. This edification and stimulation which otherwise is provided [for] by Hebrew, because we are thereby reminded that it is the language of revelation in which G-d spoke to Moses. For us, Hebrew in the worship service is necessary and it should be perhaps have been so ordered by law. Indeed, this would have been the case had our forefathers been able to imagine that we would ever attempt to forsake Hebrew. The old teachers who did permit another language at prayer only had weaklings in mind, who without such permission would not have found themselves at ease with a non-Hebrew prayer. But they never thought that Hebrew would be eliminated from the house of G-d. **Zacharias Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Dresden, Address to the Rabbinical Conference of Frankfurt on July 18, 1845**

F. To the honorable officers of the Second Rabbinical Conference in Frankfurt: The maintenance of Judaism is the basic aim of my life and the goal of all my efforts for which I in my turn am prepared to bring every sacrifice. Hence, I find myself in irreconcilable opposition to contrary tendencies. Already at the second session of the Conference (July 16), I brought up the

question of principle, so that we could understand each other and be entirely clear about the spirit of the Conference. However, this point was not treated any further. Yesterday's session had a result of which I can think only with sorrow. . . . In vain, finally, were the devotion, the religious force and sanctity of Hebrew prayer and its edifying powers stressed. In vain - the majority of the Rabbinical Conference decided that Hebrew prayer was only *advisable* and that it would be the task of the rabbis to eliminate it gradually altogether.

I disagree with such a decision, not only because I have a different point of view, but also because I disagree with the tendency of the decision. For this spirit leaves unheeded so many important elements and eliminates the historical element which has weight and power in every religion. In my opinion this is not the spirit of preserving but of destroying positive historical Judaism, which I declared distinctly before the Assembly was my point of view. This spirit of the Assembly deprives all its further decisions of any validity in the eyes of those who adhere to positive historical position. As I explained to the Assembly, not only voting is important, but also motivation. Only those who have already made up their mind and merely want a formal approval for their position can find a superficial satisfaction in general voting procedures. . . . **Zacharias Frankel, Chief Rabbi of Dresden, Letter of resignation from the Rabbinical Conference of Frankfort, July 18, 1845**

G. The Second Rabbinical Assembly has received with great astonishment a letter from Chief Rabbi Dr. Frankel, of July eighteenth, which states that he resigned because of the debates of the seventeenth concerning the objective necessity of Hebrew in our prayers. In the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* of last year, No. 26, Dr. Frankel declared that he would appear in this year's Rabbinical Conference if the moderate views were represented by a number of men. He did appear. The result of the vote on the seventeenth was that thirteen members declared themselves for the objective necessity of Hebrew in prayer, three abstained, while fifteen declared themselves for the non-existence of such a necessity. The vote showed that in this respect Dr. Frankel did not at all stand alone and, therefore, if he wanted to follow his published declaration, he had the obligation to remain further in the Assembly. On the other hand, the Conference vehemently denies that, through the vote of the majority, it has forsaken the view of a positive historical Judaism, which it had made its own on the sixteenth, by acclamation, together with Dr. Frankel. - Yet Dr. Frankel in his letter suggests that the Assembly had done the opposite. But the majority did not fail to recognize the high significance of the Hebrew language for the Israelites and the necessity of learning it in the schools; only it did not hold that it was unconditionally necessary for the worship service. On the other hand, the minority which held the latter view, did not in any wise claim that its opponents had left the positive historical point of view. Different points of view were involved here, not different tendencies. The positive historical point of view desires progress out of that which exists. It does not desire haphazard creation without limits and without foundation. Therefore, our prayers shall be built on existing prayers and as much as possible develop in form and content out of tradition. . . . The Assembly, therefore, believes that Dr. Frankel made this question forcibly into one of tendential import, and when he left the Assembly, he left also his own point of view and its consequences. **Declaration of the Rabbinical Conference of Frankfort regarding the letter of Dr. Frankel**