Robert Charles Ash

‘What Can We Say Before You?’
Sincerity in Liberal Jewish Worship

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Abstract

Before 1800, all sections of the Jewish community used fixed traditional liturgies in synagogue worship. From the beginning of the nineteenth century radical liturgical reforms were implemented. A key question in this process of reform has been whether worshippers should believe what they say when reciting a liturgy. If they do not believe what they recite, does this render their prayer insincere?

Liberal Judaism holds that sincerity in worship is of paramount importance. This thesis explores the effects of an overriding commitment to sincerity in worship upon four iterations of Liberal Jewish liturgy published between 1902 and 1995. The background against which liturgical change took place is provided by analysis of the concept of sincerity, in particular its place in Protestant thought, the response of Jewish communities to the challenges of modernity, and biographies of the leaders of the denomination who influenced the editorial choices in Liberal Judaism’s liturgical publications. A parallel view of the articulation and development of Liberal Jewish thought concerning the expression of beliefs in liturgy is provided by analysis of ‘platform’ publications setting out Liberal Judaism’s beliefs and practices.

Liberal Judaism’s commitment to sincerity of worship has remained a touchstone in implementing liturgical change. Editors of Liberal Jewish liturgy have recognised that a desire for sincerity in worship poses significant challenges. Some of these are inherent in adapting a liturgical tradition of great antiquity, while others relate to issues of the language of prayer and comprehension by worshippers. These challenges have not been fully resolved. Sincerity is not the sole consideration in editorial decisions. Balancing a commitment to sincerity against a commitment to Hebrew as a language of prayer for a congregation largely made up of non-Hebrew speakers means that the beliefs expressed by the liturgy may be confused, even contradictory.

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To any whom I have omitted to thank by name, I extend both my apologies and my gratitude.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere,

This thesis is not the result of joint research.

The main text of this thesis is 76,808 words and does not exceed the permitted maximum.

Robert Charles Ash

Chapter 1

Sincerity in Liberal Jewish Worship

Setting the scene

In October 1913 an intellectually brilliant young German Jew, Franz Rosenzweig, entered a small traditional synagogue in Berlin to attend, for the last time, he thought, the services for *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. He had resolved to carry through to its logical conclusion his situation as a Jew thoroughly assimilated to the Christian culture around him: he would convert to the dominant religion. The experience of the synagogue services turned out not to be a farewell to his Jewish heritage but, rather, the beginning of a journey to rediscover and recover it. What was it that persuaded him to change his resolve? We will never know for certain what happened that day, but the story is often repeated as an example of the affective possibilities which may be found in a community at prayer.[1] In that Berlin synagogue, Rosenzweig experienced something profound and transformative, which he characterised as an authentically Jewish 'lived experience' (Batnitzky 2010: 431-3; see also Frank and Leaman 1997: 802).

Prior to his synagogue experience, Rosenzweig was intellectually persuaded that 'it seemed more honest to become a Christian and throw off the pretense of maintaining a nominal Judaism' (Leaman 1997: 800). To be sincere in his conversion to Christianity, he felt that he first had 'to become a Jew in a real sense' so that his act of conversion would have 'an aspect of authenticity' (*ibid.*). Through his study of Judaism, he became aware for the first time of a community which had no difficulty in finding spiritual meaning in the practice of their tradition. The encounter in the Berlin synagogue may not have been quite as dramatic as some accounts suggest, but it was sufficiently significant to set the seal on his decision to abandon conversion and to seek a way to something more than a nominal Judaism. Nominal adherence to Judaism—the lack of significant overt adherence to ostensibly religious activity, as opposed to identifying as Jewish—was widespread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and remains so today. Rosenzweig's account of his experience suggests that this lack of participation in organised Jewish religious activity may have something to do with the character or qualities of the 'lived experience' of some synagogue services. Eight

[1] Gordis (1995: 37-8); Schonfield (2006: 10); Batnitzky (2010: 432); Biale (2011: x).

decades after Rozenzweig's decisive change of direction, American Conservative Rabbi Daniel Gordis, reflecting on Rosenzweig's experience, asked (Gordis 1995: 38):

> Would the same have happened had he stepped into a typical modern American service? Would he have felt that power? Would he have sensed the intensity of passionate dialogue with God? Would the experience have been powerful enough to change his life? Is it powerful enough to influence ours?

The account of Rosenzweig's rediscovery of Judaism is, admittedly, somewhat romanticised. It would be interesting to know more fully what it was that influenced Rosenzweig to stay within the tradition into which he had been born, and—especially interesting—whether it was something in the wording of the liturgy used in the services. For present purposes, the story of Rosenzweig's search for authenticity in his religion offers us an apt introduction to the concept which this thesis has at its heart: sincerity in worship.

What may we say in prayer?

All conventional Jewish congregations use prayer books with a relatively fixed core liturgy which draws on a long, well-established and stable textual tradition.[2] Liberal Judaism[3] currently offers a prayer book for use on Shabbat and non-festival weekdays, published in 1995, titled *Siddur Lev Chadash*. The Hebrew word *siddur* means 'ordered' and is the term used to describe Jewish prayer books used for Shabbat and daily prayers. *Lev Chadash* means 'new heart' and the phrase is taken from Ezekiel 36: 26 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you'. The title of the *siddur* reflects a liberal attitude over the past two centuries or so in part of the Jewish communities of many countries which has favoured periodic revisions of long-established liturgy. There are several reasons why Liberals would wish to revise their liturgy. Liberal Jews are likely to be more familiar with prayer books than with

[2] The texts of that long-established tradition are in mainly Hebrew. A small number of important prayers in the traditional liturgy are in Aramaic. For a review of traditions regarding the special nature and sanctity of the Hebrew language, see Glinert (1987). As for the term 'liturgy', it has a range of meanings but, in this thesis, when applied to Liberal Judaism, the term 'liturgy' will be used only to mean the Hebrew and English texts used by Liberal Jewish communities in synagogue services. Although Liberal Judaism and other denominations use prayer books for services, private prayer is not in any way discouraged.

[3] The term 'Liberal Judaism' with a capitalised 'L' in the word 'Liberal' will be used in this thesis to refer to the British Jewish denomination. Elsewhere 'liberal Judaism' will be used as a generic term for radical versions of Judaism which may also be referred to as 'Reform' or 'Progressive'. The exception to this is British Reform Judaism which, as will be shown, was reluctant to implement radical change until well into the 20th century.

Rabbinic literature or with law codes. The prayer books act as a 'shop window' for the movement's ideas and values and may contribute to the retention and recruitment of members. This latter point is significant as, with the notable exception of observant Orthodox Jewish communities, membership of British synagogues—and the overall numbers participating in worship—has been in steady decline since at least the 1990s (Mashiah and Boyd 2017).

Liturgical change has raised questions around, *inter alia*, the notion of authenticity in the light of the significant changes made to the historic textual inheritance, and how one can be sincere when saying the words of prayers which are not one's own words. Regarding the second of these questions, Gordis asked what we should do when faced with ideas in our prayer texts with which we feel ill at ease. 'If our tradition believes that words are important, why does *it* tell *us* what to say? … Should we say the things in the prayer book that disturb us, or does intellectual honesty demand that we omit them?' (Gordis 1995: 167, emphasis in the original). As this thesis will show, 'intellectual honesty' is a characteristic phrase used when sincerity in worship is discussed in the writings of Liberal Judaism's leaders.

Does it really matter very much which words are said in prayers? Liberal Judaism's *Siddur Lev Chadash* includes a traditional prayer which, at first reading, seems to pose a similar question: 'What can we say in Your presence, Eternal God?'[4] Liberal Judaism has offered a statement, not prompted by this question, but seeming to answer it:

> We affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship: we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts. To that end, though we retain much of the traditional liturgy, we have revised it, with some omissions and modifications, and many amplifications. For the same reason, we use English as well as Hebrew in our services.
>
> (*Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* 2006)[5]

Taking Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation* as a starting point, the main question which this thesis seeks to answer might be stated as: If sincerity in worship is of paramount

[4] Page 123.

[5] Although Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation* uses the term 'worship', prayer is clearly the substantive meaning of 'worship' in the *Affirmation*. The *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* booklet may be accessed online at: https://www.liberaljudaism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Affirmations-of-Liberal-Judaism-Booklet-MAR-2020.pdf

importance what effect will applying Liberal Judaism's understanding of sincerity have upon liturgy? The thesis will explore (i) how the situation arose that sincerity in worship became something akin to a shibboleth for Liberal Judaism and (ii) what consequential outcomes we can see in the development of Liberal Judaism's liturgy since the early years of the twentieth century.[6]

Methodology of this thesis: Sources

This research explores the presence and impact of the concept of sincerity—or the 'trope' of that concept—in Liberal Judaism's liturgy through the twentieth century. It concentrates upon analysis of two key types of documentary source material: primary material such as liturgy and 'statements', and secondary publications. The primary sources include Liberal Judaism's liturgy for daily and Shabbat use. Four 'generations' of such liturgy were published by Liberal Judaism or its forerunner, the Jewish Religious Union (JRU), between 1902 and 1995. The second category of primary documentary source material is Liberal Judaism's sponsored publications concerning itself as an organisation and setting forth its beliefs. One leaflet and three book-length publications came out between 1906 and 2007.[7] The writings of the founders and of later prominent leaders of Liberal Judaism, including published sermons, will be important secondary sources as will substantial biographies of each of the founders.[8]

[6] That sincerity occupies a prominent place in Liberal Judaism's self-understanding can be illustrated by a passage from the 'Introduction' to *A Rabbinic Anthology*, a volume co-authored by Claude Montefiore and Herbert Loewe. It was noted there that Liberal Jews had been regarded as being 'sincere' to the extent that by the late 1930s, when speaking of the Jewish community, people identified 'sincere' as a synonym for 'Liberal', just as 'Orthodox' and 'religious' were often used as if they were interchangeable terms (Montefiore and Loewe 1938: lx).

[7] In 1906, the JRU in London published a leaflet setting out ten basic beliefs held by its members. The text is available in Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) pp. 308-10. LJ has sponsored three books explaining Liberal Judaism. They are *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism* by Rabbi Israel Mattuck (1947); *Judaism for Today* by Rabbis Bernard Hooker and John Rayner (1978) and *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* by Rabbi Pete Tobias (2007). The latter is a series of essays on each of the 42 *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism.*

[8] Except Israel Abrahams. No substantial critical biography has yet been published.

Methodology: Research Approach

It is a feature of the interdisciplinary nature of the study of religion that insights from a variety of contemporary perspectives may be needed to help analyse research topics. Typically, research in the humanities—in philosophical, literary, artistic and historical studies—focuses more on language and ideas, on culture and human motivation, than is usual in the natural and social sciences, though there is a degree of overlap with the latter. In that vein, this thesis focuses more on raising and 'unpacking' questions and on exploring concepts and ideologies, and less upon producing hard and fast, definitive answers.

In seeking to understand why sincerity is so important to Liberal Judaism, this thesis includes some work which reflects a 'history of ideas' methodology. It examines concepts and intellectual developments over time in the context of the thought specific to and typical of periods and locales, such as late nineteenth and early twentieth century England. While the ideas under scrutiny will, in this instance, be largely religious and philosophical, they will be influenced also by scientific, social and political thought, such as the sometime problematic idea of 'progress' which pervaded the intellectual milieu at the time Liberal Judaism was founded and persisted well into the twentieth century.[9]

Aspects of the intellectual context which are particularly relevant to the methodology of this thesis concern what is understood by 'tradition' and 'change'. These appear as contested notions throughout the period in which Jews have instituted religious reforms which—in Western and Central Europe at least—coincides with the period of Jewish 'modernity'. There is debate over when Jews in Europe entered the modern world, though there is a consensus that for most Jews the transformation began in the eighteenth century and that its effects accelerated from the early years of the nineteenth century (Meyer 1988 and 1992; Rozenblit 2010; Freud-Kandel 2005).

Modernity eroded and disrupted the web of laws, customs and practices which had been passed from one generation of Jews to the next for over a thousand years of the period of Jewish life and practice characterised as 'Rabbinic'. Individualism, critical thought and modern historical research challenged the authority of the received traditions. Meyer characterised the modernity which emerged following the intellectual

[9] Take, for example, Rabbi Mattuck's statement (1947: 24): 'The civilization which separates us from primitive man means more knowledge, finer arts, and, above all, a higher sense of goodness, with an increased ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Compare the white man who lives in the western and northern parts of the world with the Fiji Islanders'.

changes wrought by the Enlightenment as dissolving the links of the chain of tradition and he pictured modernity and tradition as metaphorical ‘poles in a magnetic field’ (1992: 467). Though Jewish tradition was not a rigid body of beliefs and practices, but had changed over the centuries, to live as a traditional Jew conscious of the modern world all around differed significantly from living immersed in a traditional society. The ‘cement’ which held the Jewish people together and enabled them to create and sustain a unique identity was *halakhah* (Cohen 2010: 18). In modernity, Jews live in a post-halakhic age (to borrow from the title of Cohen’s book) and choosing a ‘traditional’ Jewish lifestyle is a conscious act of ‘reappropriation’ a self-chosen recovery of practice which, only if passed on, may become a tradition. (Meyer 1992: 468).

It is not only the various ‘generations’ of English Liberal Judaism’s liturgy which exhibit the influence of distinct social and intellectual contexts. Jacob Petuchowski (1998: 169) observed that in nineteenth-century Germany some Jews had ‘an aesthetic sense that could no longer tolerate the manner in which Jewish worship in Germany had come to be conducted’. If the aesthetics of synagogue services and what is said in the liturgy have contributed significantly to the perceived alienation from traditional forms of worship, then the wording of the prayers and the language of prayer are important issues for Liberal Judaism to address.

The first liturgy, published in the very early years of the twentieth century, reflects a Victorian intellectual milieu and the religious and aesthetic attitudes of the liberals among Anglo-Jews. The second generation reflects the contribution of strong intellectual and communal leadership by an American Rabbi, Israel Mattuck, who was trained within a specific religious and intellectual context, that of ‘classical’ Reform Judaism. The liturgies of 1967 and 1995 both reflect the milieu of a post-*Shoah* world in which the State of Israel had been established, have common features in respect of the structure of services and share a significant common editorial influence.[10]

This research will attempt to uncover and identify the reasons why editors considered that some texts needed to be revised. This is important because it helps to clarify what sincerity meant, at least in the thought of the editors. Liberal Jewish editors have read and (re)interpreted an inheritance of traditional liturgical texts, consciously and explicitly creating new meanings. Sometimes they have spelled out the reasoning

[10] The Hebrew word *Shoah* denotes ‘disaster’ or ‘ruin’ and is preferred in many Jewish circles to ‘Holocaust’.

behind their interpretations, at other times not, and at times have seemed to make decisions inconsistent with their own reasoning.

The revision of liturgical texts raises questions of belief since liturgy reflects 'theology' (Gillman 2008: 32). In Liberal Judaism's liturgy and 'platforms' we see the influence of the modern intellectual milieu reflected in its attitude to issues of knowledge and belief:

> Liberal Judaism confronts the challenges of our time, welcomes gladly all advances in human knowledge, and responds constructively to changing circumstances.
>
> Liberal Judaism values truth above tradition, sincerity above conformity and human needs above legal technicalities.
>
> (*Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* 2006: 4)

Despite this rational self-image, as early as the 1920s Reform/Liberal Judaism was accused by a committed liberal Jew of being 'unconscionably dogmatic' and of affirming 'much theological dogma…[specifically] the ultra-positive assertion of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul' (Wise 1924: 47-8).[11]

[11] Wise's critique of liberal (American Reform) Judaism's 'dogmas' is explored at length in chapter 7.

The structure of this thesis

In the remainder of this Introduction to the thesis, I will describe the sequence of the thesis chapters and briefly outline the content of each.

Chapter 2 explores how the concept of sincerity has been understood. I say 'how it has been understood' rather than 'what it means' because what sincerity may mean, both generally and in its use in the *Affirmation*, has taken a series of turns over time and in different contexts, and also because sincerity is sometimes confused with related ideas such as telling the truth. Hence, the analysis of the concept of sincerity will include historical and philosophical perspectives. Of the relatively small number of studies dedicated wholly, or mainly, to the concept of sincerity, none makes a sustained attempt to trace the genealogy of the concept of sincerity beyond its appearance as a word in modern languages such as French or English. In part, this seems to reflect a general consensus that the concept of sincerity was not known before the modern period, a position taken by the influential literary critic, Lionel Trilling.

The chapter is concerned with analysing the meanings of sincerity, especially as these may illuminate Liberal Judaism's understanding of sincerity in prayer. The chapter explores the key themes underpinning the idea of sincerity in Protestant religion. These include an aesthetic of simplicity, an antipathy towards accretions and elaborations (and perceived irrationality) in ritual and practice, a view of 'true religion' as 'inner', a modern view of the 'self' and a privileged role for individual consciousness and conscience in religion. Carruthers (2011) identifies 'simplicity' as an important element of contemporary secularised culture, an element which took on a changed significance at the time of the Reformation and which endures still in secular narratives which are constitutive of ideas of nation and identity in English society.[12] A characteristic of Reformed and Protestant ideas within society was an anti-ritual stance against the practices of the Catholic Church. In England this aesthetic of simplicity was particularly strong and became linked to belief, morality, and notions of 'true religion', accompanied by an emphasis on subjectivity and individualism. This thesis aims to

[12] As typified in the words of a senior member of the judiciary, Lord Knight-Bruce, in the mid-nineteenth century: 'And both on principle and authority the important point next for decision may properly, I conceive, be thus put: ought this inconvenience to be considered in fact as more than fanciful, more than one of mere delicacy or fastidiousness, as an inconvenience materially interfering with the ordinary comfort physically of human existence, not merely according to elegant or dainty modes and habits of living, but according to plain and sober and simple notions among the English people.' *Walter v Selfe* (1851) 64 ER 849 at [852].

identify these themes in contexts which influenced Liberal Judaism in England and to trace their presence and consequences within Liberal Judaism.

Chapter 3 undertakes an examination of 'classical' Jewish texts which contain the foundational ideas of Judaism. Liberal Judaism claims to draw its distinctive emphasis on ethics from prophetic teachings, elements of which are claimed to be identical to Liberal Judaism's ideas about sincerity in worship. In the liturgy of Liberal Judaism, that thought is present in an English prayer by Rabbi Mattuck which quotes almost verbatim from prophetic texts but interpolates the word 'sincerity', thereby linking the concept directly with prophetic teachings:

> Our God, thou desirest the worship of the pure heart, wherein abide sincerity, truth and humility. Thou desirest love and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings[.]
>
> (*Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* 1937: 35):

No less a Biblical scholar than Professor Moshe Greenberg (1983) has argued that sincerity was a significant part of the message of the 'classical' prophets of the eighth century B.C.E. If there is such a long legacy of sincerity, as Greenberg suggests, it supports Liberal Judaism's argument that their emphasis on sincerity in worship is not merely or solely the inevitable outworking of modern values.[13] However, problems of language, translation and historical and social context will need to be borne in mind when assessing the validity and extent of such claims including whether the claims might be anachronistic.

Traditional Jewish writings, such as *Mishnah* and *Talmud*, contain extensive discussions on prayer in general and about attitudes and behaviour during prayer.[14] They provide a perspective on how Jewish practices and attitudes to prayer developed and on

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[13] I am grateful to Dr Jo Carruthers for articulating this implication so clearly.

[14] References to 'the Rabbis' and 'Rabbinic texts' in this thesis means to the scholars whose deliberations are recorded in texts such as the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta* and *Talmud*. The work of editing the most significant of these texts, the (Babylonian) *Talmud* was completed sometime around the seventh century of the present era. *Mishnah* is a Hebrew noun meaning 'repetition', referring to a mode of teaching and learning, and so might be understood as 'teaching'. It is an extensive compilation of Jewish traditions edited in its final form around 200 C.E. It is mainly legal in nature and was written in the land of Israel in Hebrew. The *Talmud*, a name also deriving from a root meaning 'learn' and 'teach', combines the *Mishnah* with *Gemara* (lit. 'completion') an extensive set of discussions and commentary on the material in the *Mishnah*. Two versions exist, one produced in the land of Israel known as the *Yerushalmi*, the Jerusalem *Talmud*, the other known as the *Bavli*, the Babylonian *Talmud*, which was edited in what is present-day Iraq around the year 600 C.E. The latter is the more authoritative of the two versions and is what is generally meant when the term *Talmud* is used. Much of the *Talmud* is written in Aramaic, the lingua franca of the region at the time.

the related question of the desirable states of mind and desirable and necessary attitudes for prayer. Two key Hebrew terms will figure in any analysis of prayer in Rabbinic literature. The first is *keva*. This word has a sense of 'fixedness', or 'routine' and is used in contrast to the concept of *kavvanah*. The latter is a key term for the analysis of sincerity in worship in that it has sometimes been translated into English as 'sincerity'. However, as will be made clear in the chapter, that is not its usual primary sense, which is closer to 'intention'. In the light of Trilling's claim about the modern origin of the concept of sincerity, the chapter will analyse the use of this Hebrew word in Rabbinic literature to determine the degree to which *kavvanah* resembles the concept of sincerity.

Chapter 4 of the thesis seeks to give a broad but relevant historical context for the exploration of sincerity in the thesis. Having examined the concept of sincerity in detail in chapter 2 and then in chapter 3 taken up the question of whether sincerity—or concepts similar to sincerity—are present within older Jewish sources, in chapter 4 the thesis follows a chronological sequence to the modern period, tracing the intellectual origins of liberal developments in Judaism in Western Europe, North America and England.

Germany was where both the intellectual and institutional development of liberal Judaism began. An influential figure in the encounter of traditional Judaism with modernity and the post-Reformation, post-Enlightenment ideas of European Christianity was Moses Mendelssohn. In his work, he claims to blend the best of Judaism, at least as understood by him, and the ideas of the *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment). One of the best of Moses Mendelssohn's biographers, Alexander Altmann, identified characteristic Enlightenment ideas and influences in Mendelssohn's writings including (a) the idea of 'true' or 'natural' religion, a form of religion which needed to be stripped of superstitious accretions, (b) the supremacy of reason as arbiter of belief and (c) an individualism which was expressed as human happiness being the ultimate goal of philosophy. All of these were prominent aspects of the worldview of the founders of Liberal Judaism. The second part of chapter 4 sets the scene for tracing the origins of British Liberal Judaism as a radical religious movement. Liberal Judaism arose in the unique social, religious and intellectual context of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which the trope of sincerity had a significant presence.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn the focus of attention onto the founders of the Liberal Jewish movement, seeking the presence of the concept of sincerity in their ideas through analysis of their biographies and as expressed in their writings. Their writings

are diverse, embracing history, theology, liturgy and even novels, and this range offers an opportunity to gauge the extent of the significance of sincerity for them. The founders encountered in these chapters were 'Jews whose sense of belonging was very much challenged by their growing attachment to the majority culture' (Cohen 2002: 50). The religious milieu of the Jewish community in England from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries will be relevant to understanding what motivated the founders of Liberal Judaism.

Chapter 5 introduces Israel Abrahams and Claude Montefiore, both of whom were immersed in the mainstream of Jewish community life and the modern intellectual environment of the universities. Their intellectual collaborations, especially their publications, contributed significantly to the fostering of liberal ideas in English Jewish circles. Claude Montefiore himself identified significant intellectual influences which played a role in developing his worldview. Foremost among these were certain radical features in the ideology of some nineteenth-century Anglicans, features embodied in the figure of his Oxford mentor Benjamin Jowett. In contrast, Israel Abrahams' views on tradition and liberal ideas were more enigmatic. We still await a critical intellectual biography of this now rather overlooked figure.

In Chapter 6 attention turns to the concept of sincerity in the writings of the other two founders, Lily Montagu and (Rabbi) Israel Mattuck. Each made a profound impact through their contribution to the organisation and development of Liberal Judaism. Their roles in creating what became the largest synagogue in England and in developing a broader movement were central to the Liberal enterprise. Lily Montagu was a tireless worker for the organisation and, though she did not consider herself an intellectual or academically inclined person like her co-founders, she left a considerable volume of writings, including two novels, *Naomi's Exodus* and *Broken Stalks*, which describe the spiritual journeys of young women and reflect Montagu's own religious searching. Both her youthful and mature religious views come through in her writing. Rabbi Israel Mattuck provided the formal religious leadership of the Liberals. His writings are largely educational and liturgical.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the four 'generations' of liturgy produced by the Jewish Religious Union and Liberal Judaism from 1902 to 1995, looking in particular at how the motif of sincerity is reflected there. How sincerity is present—and presented—is important to identify from these texts because, to cite just one example here, in the 1920s a highly controversial book which critiqued liberal Judaism as 'dogmatic' and

insufficiently radical, and *insincere*, played a part in Liberal–Orthodox communal polemics throughout the decade.

Chapter 7 covers the early years when the liberals in Anglo-Jewry struggled to influence the community through the creation and activities of the JRU. With the decision in 1909 to commit the JRU to the creation of a liberal synagogue, a new denomination emerged in Anglo-Jewry. Early in his tenure as Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, Mattuck created prayer books which were not significantly different from the publications of the JRU in their editors' readiness to deviate from the traditional structure of services. The so-called 'Mattuck prayer books' were to remain in use for around half a century. His creations were a blend of American Reform radicalism tempered with English Liberal moderation. The radical aspect of Mattuck's liturgical compositions reflected an outlook and aspirations, known in retrospect as 'Classical Reform Judaism', which by the early decades of the twentieth century was already in decline. The choices he made reflect his own background, education and training, married with his experience of what was desirable and possible as Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. The chapter looks in detail at the liturgy Rabbi Mattuck produced and draws from it examples of the persistent underlying importance of sincerity for his community.

Chapter 8 takes up developments in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1967 Liberal Judaism published a new *siddur*, the successor to Mattuck's prayer books. The first Liberal Jewish prayer book to move in the direction of tradition with regard to the structure of services, *Service of the Heart* (*SOH*) served Liberal Jewish communities as their Shabbat and daily prayer resource for nearly 30 years. Its structure may have been different from the prayer books of the Mattuck era but its ideology continued in a number of ways to reflect a concern with sincerity. This is not surprising, since the cohort of Liberal leadership was small and tight-knit. The British member of SOH's editorial duo was German-born refugee Rabbi Dr John Rayner, who knew Israel Mattuck and was one of his successors as senior Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. Educated at Cambridge University and at America's Hebrew Union College, Israel Mattuck's alma mater, Rabbi Rayner worked on liturgies in partnership with American Rabbi Chaim Stern. Rabbi Rayner was the author of the *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* and co-editor, with Chaim Stern, of Liberal Judaism's present *Siddur Lev Chadash* which replaced *SOH* in 1995. Thus, just two Rabbis, Israel Mattuck and John Rayner, have been key figures at the helm of Liberal Judaism's liturgical output

for almost a century. It is little wonder that the prayer books should maintain a broad, though not wholly consistent, ideological outlook. As the chapter demonstrates, sincerity is at the very heart of that ideology as expressed through the liturgies.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, draws together ‘threads’ of evidence and presents a ‘view’ rather than an ‘answer’ to the question of whether ‘sincerity in worship’, meaning sincerity in prayer, is of *paramount* importance to Liberal Judaism. I will argue that it has been of significant importance, but that it appears to have been applied inconsistently, though not so as to detract from sincerity. A more serious challenge came from the charge by a liberal Jewish writer in the 1920s that liberal Judaism held beliefs in a dogmatic fashion. I try to articulate how this issue of unquestionable beliefs undermines the commitment to sincerity. In attempting to do so, however, it is well to recall Lionel Trilling’s recognition of the limitations of certain of our intellectual endeavours:

> When we attempt to trace the history of the self, we of course know that we are dealing with shadows in a dark land. Our predictions must be diffident, our conclusions can only be speculative.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 54)

Chapter 2

Exploring the Concept of Sincerity

'Sophisticated thinkers have long vacillated between ridiculing sincerity…and complaining that others don't take the virtue quite seriously enough' (Magill 2012: 16). Liberal Judaism has taken sincerity seriously *and* considers it a virtue. In the opening of the *Affirmation* which is the starting point of this thesis, Liberal Judaism spells out the importance of this virtue in prayer: 'We affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship: we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts'.[15] In what follows in this and subsequent chapters, it should be kept in mind that the word sincerity and the concept of sincerity may not always coincide. That is to say, the word sincerity may be used, but misapplied, or the 'trope' of sincerity may be expressed without using the word 'sincerity'. Sincerity has been used with a range of meanings, only some of which correspond to what seems to be meant by sincerity as used in Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*.[16]

In this chapter I will trace some of the history of the concept of sincerity, beginning with the earliest recorded appearances of the word 'sincere' in the English language. It may be the case that sincerity or, at the very least, elements of the concept existed as an idea before the word 'sincerity' was coined for it. The origins of the concept of sincerity may lie much further back in history than is suggested by the first uses in English of 'sincere' and 'sincerity'.[17] In the course of the chapter, I will examine a significant consensus among literary scholars that the concept of sincerity is but a few centuries old. A key part of our understanding of sincerity, in English at least, is that sincerity concerns the outward or external showing—by means of speech, bodily gestures or visual indicators such as facial expressions—of our inward or interior feelings. This in turn raises questions of how we are to judge sincerity: do our bodies give reliable testimony of our feelings? Judging sincerity arises as an issue in politics and other spheres of public life, for example in the law, where sincerity may be—quite literally—judged. How these areas of communal life deal with the challenges posed by

[15] The *Affirmations of Liberal* Judaism booklet is available online at: https://www.liberaljudaism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Affirmations-of-Liberal-Judaism-Booklet-MAR-2020.pdf

[16] Cf. Boddice's observation: 'A fifth-century scholastic might use the term *perturbationes animi,* and an eighteenth-century churchman might talk of the passions of the soul, but, according to these scholars, what they meant is 'emotions' and we can think of these things as emotions without worrying too much about what we are doing to the analysis in the act of translation' (Boddice 2018: 41-2).

[17] Evidence and argument that sincerity may be a pre-modern concept is explored further in chapter 3.

sincerity will be considered in some detail, as will sincerity in another communal sphere, religion. For some Christian, especially Protestant, groups, a hallmark of sincerity is spontaneity, particularly as exhibited in extemporaneous prayer. This raises once more the issue identified in the questions posed by Rabbi Daniel Gordis in the *Introduction*: how can we sincerely pray other people's words?

A starting point: defining the concept of sincerity

I consider it will be helpful to set out an understanding, or 'definition', of sincerity at an early stage.[18] The researchers at the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED)*[19] focused on the historical literary record of the word sincerity. The dictionary gives the etymology of the English word sincerity as deriving from the Latin 'sincērus' meaning clean, pure, or sound. The earliest recorded uses of sincere in English applied to things rather than to persons, for example, it was used in reference to texts and to doctrines where it had the meaning 'not falsified or perverted in any way'. Other meanings of sincerity included 'true, veracious; correct, exact' and 'containing no element of dissimulation or deception; not feigned or pretended; real, true' and 'characterized by the absence of all dissimulation or pretence; honest, straightforward'. I take the contemporary common sense understanding of 'sincere' to be: without dissimulation or deception; not pretended; honest, straightforward and, furthermore, I take this to be part of the meaning of 'sincerity' in the *Affirmation*. However, there is more to be considered around what sincerity means than is to be gleaned from even the most comprehensive of surveys of dictionary etymologies. This preliminary working definition should not be taken to be exhaustive of the range of meanings of sincerity, even in the narrow context of Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*.

[18] Philosopher Robert Solomon suggests otherwise: [I]n philosophy, the definition of controversial terms comes at the *end* of the discussion, not at the beginning. The "dialectic" of opposing views, even if presented by a champion of one of those views, produces a much more considered and inclusive definition than the usual stipulative definition. (Solomon 2007: 7, emphasis in original). Another philosopher Charles Guignon, whose work is referred to below, made a similar point. He suggested that his exploration of the concept of authenticity might not yield an 'answer' [definition]. However, he anticipated that 'in the course of the journey [dialectic]…we will gain a deeper understanding of what insights such an answer may embrace…' (Guignon 2004: 10-11)

[19] https://www.oed.com. I consulted the *OED* online version for the purpose of this chapter. It is complete, that is, it has everything which appears in the printed edition, and represents the third edition of the dictionary. According to the website, it is updated quarterly.

The origins of the concept of sincerity

Literary scholars have also sought to trace the origin of the word 'sincerity'. There is a broad, though not complete, consensus among scholars that sincerity is a modern concept: the term seems to have been used first in English texts in the sixteenth century. Thus, its appearance post-dates the Reformation.[20] It is a part of the aforementioned broad consensus that the origins of the concept of sincerity lie in Protestant thought. In *Sincerity and Authenticity* Lionel Trilling admitted to some degree of ambivalence on the question of sincerity as a purely modern concept, though he quickly overcame it (Trilling 1972: 2-3). The context of Trilling's analysis of sincerity is the study of literature, and the assessments he makes concern characters created by the authors of works of literature largely from the sixteenth century onward. He begins his analysis of sincerity by positing that 'we' (he and his contemporaries) do not believe that the values of one epoch are the same as those of another and, consequently, reject notions of 'an essential human nature'. The recognition of this, he tells us on the very first page, is 'implicit in our modern way of thinking about literature'. Yet, Trilling admits, when we read classical literature such as the *Iliad* or Sophocles' plays, we may recognize in them things which speak to our hearts and minds and lead us to the contrary conclusion – that 'human nature never varies' (p. 2). Trilling's ambivalence moves between these two poles. He comes down firmly on the side of the former, rejecting the idea of an enduring essence in our nature and, along with that, rejecting the idea of sincerity as a concept found earlier than modernity. Trilling chose several exemplars from the ancient past of characters who *could not have been* sincere. These included the Biblical patriarch

[20] Hale (1993) gives a clear account of the key reformist ideas emanating from Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and their effects, including their effect upon attitudes in the Catholic Church; see pp. 112-127. Armstrong (2000) explores the reformers' innovative ideas set in the context of developments in scientific and political thought. On the Protestant attitude to prayer see Thomas (1971), chapter 3, 'The Impact of the Reformation', where he quotes Tyndale's characterisation of Catholic prayer as 'a false kind of praying, wherein the tongue and lips labour, …but the heart talketh not' (p. 61). Accusations of insincerity in Protestant circles is to be found in the polemic of Catholic writers who pointed to 'the "pretended Reformation" of the Protestants (Marshall 2009: 570). Witvliet (2018), writing in the Catholic journal *Worship*, challenges the Western Protestant concept of sincerity, citing anthropological and historical studies to broaden appreciation of sincerity beyond normative individualistic and solipsistic understandings, allowing sincere liturgical participation.

In his study of the concept of sincerity Magill declared that 'The paper trail back to original Protestantism is difficult to miss' (2012: 150) Magill went on to quote Ambrose Bierce's words in *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911) defining the term 'rite': 'a religious or semi-religious ceremony fixed by law, precept, or custom with the essential oil of sincerity carefully squeezed out of it'(*ibid*.). This satirical definition reflects a Protestant view that certain 'external' things, such as 'showy clothing, the forms of etiquette, liturgical rites, architectural ornaments, or religious icons', have a propensity to be insincere. In such thinking, the sincere is associated with the inner thoughts and feelings of the individual, and the unmediated expression of such inwardness is taken to be a virtue.

Abraham, Achilles and Beowulf all of whom equally 'neither have nor lack sincerity' (p. 2). Trilling defined sincerity as 'the congruence between feeling and avowal' (p. 4) and he notes that in the sixteenth century it had also acquired the meaning of 'the absence of dissimulation or feigning or pretence' (p. 13). He concluded the opening of his argument by asserting that:

> [A]t a certain point in history certain men and classes of men conceived that the making of this effort was of supreme importance in the moral life, and the value they attached to the enterprise of sincerity became a salient, perhaps a definitive, characteristic of Western culture for some four hundred years.
>
> (Trilling 1972: 6)

In *Sincerity and Authenticity,* Trilling uses the term 'sincerity' with the meaning cited above. 'Authenticity' refers to a state of being. The authentic self is explored at length in chapter V of *Sincerity and Authenticity* which, however, also includes a survey of sincerity as a particular characteristic of the English. Trilling uses nineteenth-century English society and authors as exemplars of his argument. He referred to 'the trait on which the English most prided themselves, their sincerity…' (p. 111). He cited Emerson's *English Traits*, published in 1856, as an illustration of how the Americans viewed sincerity as 'the basis of the English national moral style.' (p. 112). According to Emerson, Trilling tells his readers, the English 'are blunt in expressing what they think and they expect others to be no less so[.]' (*ibid*.)

Philosopher Charles Guignon in *On Being Authentic* (2004) engages with the question of the origin and history of authenticity. He takes as his starting point Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1971), stating (p. 10) that he wanted 'to return to a project Lionel Trilling undertook'. Guignon referred to authenticity and its 'correlates', one of which is surely sincerity. In his 'journey' in search of insights into authenticity, he refers to 'biblical time' during which, he asserts:

> [I]t was possible to have a fairly strong sense of life's meaning… In such a worldview, you just *are* what you *do*. A person just is what he or she does in performing socially established roles… There is no way to draw a sharp distinction between an inner "real me" and what is seen as merely external show.
>
> (Guignon 2004: 24)

Chapter 3 of Guignon's book is titled 'The Modern Worldview'. He begins his analysis, following Trilling, taking *Hamlet* as the first modern literary work to be discussed. The

particular lines selected by Guignon, as by Trilling, are from a speech by the character Polonius (Act 1, Scene 3):

This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it doth follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

In his comments on the passage, Guignon distinguishes between authenticity and sincerity, suggesting that sincerity is a social virtue, that is, it is located in relations between persons, and that authenticity, at least as understood today, is an aspect of the individual's self-realisation, an internal and private matter:

> When we look at Polonius' words, however, we see that he is thinking of being true to yourself not as an end in itself, but as a means to some other end… we should be true to ourselves *in order thereby* to be true to others… what is at stake here is not yet authenticity as we now understand it, but rather the virtue of *sincerity.*
>
> (Guignon 2004: 26-27 emphasis in the original)[21]

This echoes Trilling's opinion that 'If sincerity is the avoidance of being false to any man through being true to one's own self', then, Trilling recommends, one should make the effort to reveal one's true self. As revealing the worst of oneself is the more difficult, but probably the more sincere choice, that is what one must chose to do: 'So Hawthorne thought: "Be True! Be True! Be True! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait by which the worst may be inferred"' (Trilling 1975: 5). Guignon agrees with Trilling's view that authenticity and sincerity were not pre-modern virtues.[22]

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[21] In the rest of his third chapter, Guignon set out an outline of the development of the modern self from the sixteenth century onwards, which resulted from three pivotal events or processes culminating in 'radical transformations in Western civilization' (p. 27). These were the Protestant Reformation, modern science, and a new sense of society as a human creation (Guignon 2004: 28-35).

[22] The conclusion that sincerity is a concept which arose, or coalesced, in the early modern period is supported by Martin (1997): 'this shift in moral vocabulary played a significant role in the construction of new notions of individualism in the Renaissance' (p. 1312). Mascuch (1996) described the individualism evident in 17th century English literary works as the outcome of long-term social, economic, political and intellectual influences which had acted to shape the development and define the contours of the self. Such transformations of the sense of the individual self were a prerequisite of the Protestant concept of sincerity.

Dissent from the scholarly consensus on sincerity as 'modern'

Some dissent from the view that sincerity is a modern concept deriving from Protestant origins is found in Seligman *et al* (2008), a study of ritual which has the sub-title *An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity.* While acknowledging 'the importance of sincerity within Protestantism' as 'a commonplace' and 'the strong role of Protestant Christianity in the making of our modern world and of contemporary culture' (p. 9), the authors argue that sincerity has been 'pervasive in human cultures'. They suggest that something close to the concept of sincerity was present, for example, among Chinese Mohists about two thousand years ago (p. 119). The 'trope of sincerity' is 'quite modernist', though not uniquely so (p. 131) and '[w]hat we usually call the "modern," therefore, should instead be understood in part as a period in which sincerity claims have been given a rare institutional and cultural emphasis' (p. 181).[23] Historian John Martin, in his paper *Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence,* takes a similar view: '[T]he struggle for the sincere ideal began earlier, among the Italian humanists, though it was the early Protestant reformers who elevated sincerity to a defining virtue' (Martin 1997: 1327). In short, the modern period has emphasized, even if not originated, the sincere person.

Seligman and his co-authors cite as an example of pre-modern sincerity[24] a passage from the *Gospel of Mark* (7: 14-15)[25] in which they state that Jesus 'places sincere expression above following ritual dietary laws: "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile"' (p. 131). It is interesting that the authors did not quote from earlier verses in the chapter. Verses 6-7, for example, contain referents which seem germane to sincerity—and to sincerity in worship as in Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*—in particular in the reference in the verses to speech ('with their lips'):

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[23] In a discussion of secularism, Seligman claims that 'secularism as unbelief is the complement of tradition understood primarily in terms of belief rather than practice' and that 'the privileging of belief over practice, of faith over works and of *Innerlichkeit* over external practice that has been part of Christianity from its origins which received particular emphasis during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century' (Seligman 2015: 3).

[24] Seligman *et al* cite other examples of historical episodes of sincerity as 'the Christian break with Judaism, the Buddhist break with Hinduism, the Protestant revolution, and so on. Reform movements seem to have an "elective affinity" (to use a Weberian term) with sincerity' (pp.131-132).

[25] Klawans' essay *The Law* in Levine and Brettler (2017) describes the statement of vv. 14-15 as 'enigmatic', but makes clear that he understands 'the things that come out' to be 'sinful words and deeds' (p. 656).

> He [Jesus] said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines’…”

It is a challenge for scholars in any discipline to achieve insight into the understanding and ‘worldview’ of another who lived at a significant historical remove. The best we can hope for is a well-reasoned presentation of possibilities. Had Seligman and his co-authors drawn attention to Mark 7: 6-7, I would agree with them that, on the surface, the English translation of the verses cited above does sound like the trope of sincerity. However, those authors chose to draw attention to Mark 7: 14-15, ‘Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile’. I cannot accept the authors’ judgment that these words attributed to Jesus represent his placing ‘sincere expression above following ritual dietary laws’. In addition, regardless of which of the two Biblical texts one chooses to focus on, I am well aware that there are many issues around language, translation, and the challenges of the historical imagination which may lead to anachronism, surely a key issue in any debate about sincerity as a purely modern concept.[26]

Protestantism, the individual and sincerity

An important dimension of the modern self and a characteristic of sincerity is a focus on the individual and on ‘interiority’, a distinctive element in Protestant thought which has exerted a wide influence beyond its origin. Historian John Hale succinctly described this view of the fundamental role of interiority to Protestant theology:

> For Luther, God was moved to offer his grace, his forgiveness to a man born to sin only in response to the *intensity of individual faith* in his mercy. Man’s justification of a wish to be saved at the Day of Judgement was *reliant on what he had offered to God in his heart*.
>
> (Hale 1993: 117, emphasis added)

Hale’s identification of intense individual faith and the offering of the heart in Luther’s thought is echoed in Keane (2002), a study of Dutch Protestant missionary activity in Indonesia. Keane drew attention to three features of modernity which have striking overtones of the individualism and interiority of Protestant religious thought:

[26] For introductions to methodological and hermeneutic issues in Biblical studies see Shillington (2002) and Brettler (2005).

> These are, first, the privilege accorded the individual's agency, inwardness, and freedom; second, the expanded vision of the possibilities for individual self-creation (for *everyone*, not just elites); and third, the historical self-consciousness that places a high value on social as well as individual change, in contrast to a relatively devalued "tradition".
>
> Keane (2002: 68)

The idea that individualism is a necessary element of the trope of sincerity as a moral concept finds support also from Martin: 'The discovery of the individual was to a large degree, therefore, the result of fundamental shifts in the ethical visions of Renaissance humanists and Protestant reformers' (Martin 1997: 1333).

The high regard accorded to individual agency and responsibility had come to prominence in the thought of English radical Protestants by the 1640s. They saw the Reformation as incomplete and, as a remedy, sought to remove the last vestiges of ecclesiastical control over individual believers, thereby ridding society of a 'devalued tradition'. This mention of control by the established church, the exercise of institutional social control, should alert us to dimensions of the connection being made by radical Protestants between sincerity and moral life. If this were a sociological study, it would be incomplete without an analysis of the roles of class, gender and power in society. As will become clear when discussing the challenges faced by Lily Montagu, who played a part in the establishment of Liberal Judaism, gender roles were and are very contested. Montagu, like Montefiore, was able to have access to, and to wield influence among the wealthy and powerful of Anglo-Jewry because she came from a very socially and economically privileged background: in terms of class, she and Montefiore were 'insiders' of the most powerful class of both Anglo-Jewish and non-Jewish society. Israel Abrahams and Israel Mattuck achieved forms of privilege and status through their intellectual abilities coupled with the good fortune of gaining access to privileged education at élite institutions. Unlike many actors in the radical Protestant revolution of the seventeenth century, none of the founders of Liberal Judaism were 'ordinary' folk.

To return to consideration of the challenge to the control of established churches, such radical views remain a feature of some present-day Protestant churches. At the close of the twentieth century a church in the United Kingdom contrasted the inward 'worship of the heart' with the outward, sometimes beautiful, 'elaborate worship',

echoing both the evaluative component identified by Winchester and Guhin above, as well as Puritan themes of sincerity as simplicity:

> From earliest times, the people of God knew that worship was something at two levels: the part you could see… and the part you could not, the worship of the heart that only God could see.
>
> Today also, the beauty of outward things does not necessarily mean that true worship is going on. Some elaborate worship can be spiritually dead, and a simple meeting in an ugly hall or humble sitting room can be truly alive…
>
> (Congregational Federation 1998: 8)

Within English Protestantism, Puritanism was a movement which arose in the reign of Elizabeth I amid controversy over liturgical reform. Puritan thought embraced the Calvinist teaching that only a numerically small 'elect' had been chosen by God for salvation and that salvation could not be achieved through one's deeds. How, then, could anyone know that they were saved? This theological dilemma was solved for some by invoking an idea which includes aspects of the trope of sincerity. Salvation could be available to those who passionately desired to be saved. Their individual, inner commitment would be sufficient of itself for God to count them among the elect destined for salvation:

> God would accept the will for the deed… 'The Lord accepteth the affection and the endeavour for the thing done.' 'He who desires to be righteous, is righteous,' declared John Downame; 'he that would repent, doth repent … If there be a willing mind it is accepted.'
>
> Hill (1972: 159-60)

This Puritan view was a new and radical endorsement of interiority, undermining established ecclesiastical authority, privileging the individual and removing the resolution of human sin from the realm of the established church. If it were true that 'Sin was… the internal problem of each believer' (Hill 1972: 161), then what of the sacraments of the Church? As noted above, Hale described the situation seen through Protestant eyes as one in which God offered grace and mercy to humanity in response to an individual's intensity of faith and what individuals offered to God in their heart. The consequence of this line of reasoning was momentous: '[T]he whole Catholic hierarchy, from pope to barefoot friar, became unnecessary' (Hale 1993: 117).

In chapter 7 I will explore the Orthodox–Liberal polemic which was a significant feature of Anglo-Jewish communal life in the 1920s. The 'fault lines' of the disagreement are, I would argue, not dissimilar to the Catholic-Protestant divide characterised in the preceding paragraph. Liberal Judaism's Rabbi Mattuck championed its 'Protestant' view of sincerity as the hallmark of true prayer, in contrast to those who erred in 'mistaking ritual for holiness'.[27] For Rabbi Mattuck, what Liberal Judaism sought was to rid religion of 'intellectual dishonesty which destroyed spiritual life' (Rich 2014: 37). I would argue that Liberal Judaism's commitment to sincerity in worship only makes sense if the evaluation of sincerity is possible. Therefore, at this juncture, the discussion turns to considerations of (i) the possibility of judging or evaluating sincerity and (ii) criteria of evaluation of sincerity.

[27] A phrase taken from a passage by Philo of Alexandria and used by Rabbi Mattuck in *The Liberal Jewish Prayerbook* (1927 and 1937) as a meditation before prayer.

Judging sincerity

Eriksson (2011) begins an analysis of sincerity by reiterating a widely held view that sincerity is a significant matter in our lives.[28] He states that 'We want words to reflect what is in the speaker's heart and mind' (2011: 213-4). This view of what sincerity means is of particular relevance to this thesis because of the identity of his definition of the concept with the concept of sincerity central to Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*, that we must 'not say with our lips what we do not believe in our heart'.

The following extract from an interview with 'Mrs Brown', an evangelical Protestant, brings out a salient feature of a widespread common-sense understanding of sincerity. Mrs Brown is describing her impressions of hearing a young boy pray. In her response we find neatly encapsulated one of the conundrums of sincerity: how can Mrs Brown know that the boy's performance of prayer was sincere, that is, that the boy's words genuinely reflected his interior state?

> When I hear this boy pray I am like right before the throne [of God]. I could cry. He is just – *and it's not put on…*– like you feel like you stepped into this intimate time between him and the Lord. It invokes that kind of a sense of, "Wow you've got it. You definitely talk to the Lord a lot" *and you can hear it*. It's intimate, it's personal, you know me and *you get to see a little window [into] that* and he's just a kid.
>
> (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 39 emphasis in original)

Evaluating sincerity is a challenge. If sincerity is understood to be an aspect of our interiority, it remains unknowable and unrealised until some event with an external aspect occurs. In the case of prayer which we are considering here, the external event is the act of uttering the words of prayer. What would be valid criteria for the evaluation of sincerity?[29] Mrs Brown believed that she could evaluate the sincerity of the boy when he prayed. Winchester and Guhin were satisfied that the Evangelicals they interviewed considered evaluation to be possible. Their respondents:

[28] See, for example, Runciman (2008) which examines 'an ongoing struggle within the English-speaking tradition of liberal political thought to escape…our current anxieties about sincerity, hypocrisy, and lies in politics [which] have deep roots in the liberal tradition' (p. 194). Such anxieties have arisen frequently in recent years in the USA in the realm of constitutional law (see, e.g., Golemboski 2020).

[29] Similarly, what would be valid criteria of the efficacy of prayer?

claimed there were no formal requirements for apt prayer performance beyond a sincere heart, it was also clear that this made the perceived sincerity of an individual's prayer an object of collective evaluation.

(Winchester and Guhin 2019: 39)

Interiority, self-presentation and external aspects of sincerity

As noted above, what is contained in a person's 'mind', 'heart', or 'soul' is generally taken to be unavailable to the scrutiny of others. A person whose thoughts, feelings and words are difficult or impossible to understand or interpret is often described as 'inscrutable'. Despite Mrs Brown's evaluation that 'It's intimate, it's personal, you know me and *you get to see a little window [into] that*' (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 39), in the absence of an ability to make 'windows' into the interior, non-physical aspects of other persons (and even into our own 'self'), we rely on external indications to help us.[30] We habitually interpret speech in concert with our observation of the speaker's behaviour. Eriksson uses the examples of how we interpret tone of voice in judging whether someone is feeling anger or how a red face, 'blushing', suggests embarrassment.[31] The challenge of the concept of sincerity is to know when the concept might be applicable to a speech act. As Eriksson had pointed out, that is dependent upon the interpretation of the words uttered and *how* they were uttered.

Sincerity in the public realm

Moving away from scrutinising religious situations such as praying, the operation of certain aspects of politics and law can help us in clarifying how sincerity is understood generally.[32] Golemboski (2020), writing in an American legal context, described sincerity as a neglected but fundamental concept in assessing religious claims before courts. Before going on to analyse the concept of sincerity, he discussed judicial tests which have been applied in evaluating sincerity. No single factor dominated such decisions, but matters such as the coherence of beliefs, inconsistency between belief and conduct, and ulterior motives, had all figured in judicial reasoning on sincerity

[30] My use of the term 'non-physical' here does not indicate any particular view on philosophical issues surrounding the 'mind-body' question.

[31] However, psychological studies have shown that these external physical signs and behavioural indicators, such as facial expression, are not simple to interpret and may be significantly affected by a range of factors including context, age, physical illness and personality disorders. See, e.g. Aviezer *et al.* (2008).

[32] On sincerity as an issue in politics see Runciman (2008).

(Golemboski 2020: 866). An important distinction was made in a 1944 case, *United States v Ballard*, in which the Supreme Court decided that it could not presume to evaluate the truth of religious beliefs but could evaluate the sincerity, or otherwise, of the profession of beliefs.[33] Golemboski argues in support of the notion that a distinction between religious sincerity and religious truth was tenable (Golemboski 2020: 867-8) and I am also persuaded that this is so.

However, Golemboski noted that among those factors which had figured in judicial decisions on the sincerity of religious beliefs was the coherence of beliefs. For religious beliefs to be regarded by a court as—in some minimally recognizable sense—coherent, Golemboski writes that they need to 'be reliably engaged on the terms of ordinary propositional logic' (Golemboski (2020: 871). This presupposes that there are some beliefs with which a court could not engage in terms of propositional logic, beliefs which exhibited some lack of internal coherence, which would lead a court to cast doubt on the sincerity of their profession. As noted above, in *United States v Ballard*, the court decided that it could not presume to evaluate the truth of religious beliefs. Golemboski comments:

> In a famous dissent in that case, Justice Robert Jackson warned against evaluating sincerity, suggesting that judges would find it difficult entirely to sideline their assumptions about religious truth when doing so.
>
> (Golemboski 2020: 868)

It is difficult to see how a sufficiently clear distinction can be made in every possible case between the truth of religious beliefs and the coherence of those beliefs, such that Justice Jackson's caveat would always be avoided. Some historical religious traditions maintain beliefs which could be judged as not systematically ordered and their internal coherence of beliefs in terms of propositional logic may be questionable. As Jacobs argued (1973: 10), Judaism is such a case:

> Jewish thinking in its classical and formative periods—those of the Bible and Rabbinic literature—was "organic" rather than systematic, a response to particular concrete situations rather than a comprehensive account of what religious belief entails.

[33] A celebrated 'sincerity' case from a non-Western jurisdiction is that of *Bijoe Emmanuel & Others vs State of Kerala & Others* (1986), in which the Supreme Court of India ruled that a belief which is genuinely and conscientiously held as part of the profession or practice of religion, attracts the protection of law, regardless of whether a particular religious belief or practice appeals to our reason or sentiment.

Furthermore, there are religious traditions which, as Golemboski acknowledges, 'emphasise the absolute subjectivity and ineffability of religious experience' (Golemboski 2008: 871). How, in such an instance would believers expect others to evaluate a religious claim arising solely from personal experience?

To have beliefs and to hold beliefs

The inaccessibility of personal experience to scrutiny by others is not the only problem facing those who believe sincerity of religious beliefs can be evaluated. Lionel Trilling had identified sincerity very pithily as 'congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (Trilling 1972: 2), that is, a sincere religious belief or claim corresponds to beliefs which a person actually holds. But what is it to 'have' or to 'hold' a belief? Golemboski asks a question which goes directly to the heart of the *Affirmation*, what of those cases in which people hold beliefs:

> with less than perfect certainty, or even with appreciable doubt. The experience of religious faith, for many, involves doubt and questioning even of beliefs that one might continue to profess publicly. How confidently must the belief be held for the profession of such belief to qualify as genuine?
>
> (Golemboski 2020: 869)

Liberal Judaism would endorse the view that beliefs may be held with varying degrees of certainty or doubt, and that Liberal Jews might not always agree in their religious beliefs. An illustration of just that point is found in a reported conversation between Lily Montagu and Claude Montefiore, two of Liberal Judaism's founders. Lily Montagu was someone who certainly held firm convictions but she also knew that they were not always shared wholeheartedly by others. When she mentioned one of her beliefs to Montefiore in a rather dogmatic tone, he replied: 'Possibly, possibly', and, as she reported, 'when I looked a little disappointed, he added, "Far be it from me, dear friend, to say it is not so"' (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 15).

The second 'test' of (in)sincerity identified by Golemboski as used in judicial contexts was 'inconsistency between belief and conduct'. I would argue that this standard involves significant challenges in that it requires:

1. the court to have a correct understanding of a person's belief(s);
2. the court to be impartial towards the truth claims of such belief(s);
3. the court to understand the nature of the conduct attributed to the individual;

4. the court to correctly identify the nature of the inconsistency.

Regarding these challenges, it has already been noted above that there are significant problems for any person in trying to understand beliefs expressed by another and in having to decide how strongly a belief must be held for it to even count as a belief 'held' by someone. Analogous to the issue of the degree to which a belief is held, is the problem of the changing nature of beliefs and how people regard beliefs as being 'held' by them. Golemboski characterises holding beliefs as a process which 'involves the imperfect, inconstant process of moral discernment and striving' and that individuals will typically 'engage, over time, in the process of affirming, renouncing, testing, and trying on beliefs' (Golemboski 2020: 875). Liberal Judaism has done precisely this and, through the wording of the *Affirmation,* has signalled that it has done so in pursuit of sincerity, revising the traditional liturgy and making, as the *Affirmation* puts it, 'some omissions and modifications, and many amplifications'.

In respect of consistency between beliefs held and one's conduct, the example of the contemporary Jewish world is instructive. It is replete with differences of opinion about what conduct is required in the light of a belief or, as it is more commonly expressed, a *mitzvah*, a commandment.[34] Different interpretative communities apply varying standards of observance and stringency. In the light of these well-known facts, for which examples could be given from many religions, Justice Jackson's warning that, in judging the sincerity of religious beliefs, 'judges would find it difficult entirely to sideline their assumptions about religious truth when doing so', seems entirely warranted.

Is sincerity unattainable?

Returning to Eriksson's work, there are additional issues raised there which illustrate the complexity of the question of sincerity in speech. Just as we cannot see internal mental states or psychological processes in others, we may not be in a position to judge our own thoughts and feelings or to express them clearly to others. We may speak with full confidence that what we say is entirely true or that what we say is an outright falsehood, but do most speech acts correspond to these polar extremes? Or do the

[34] Clearly, a belief and a *mitzvah* are not the same. I intend my meaning to reflect the type of thought expressed by Louis Jacobs when he wrote: 'Can Judaism afford to encourage religious behaviourism by implying that it is right to practise Judaism but not to consider the beliefs which endow the observances with their significance? [There are] many sensitive Jews who wish to know not alone what Judaism would have them do but what Judaism would have them believe' (Jacobs 1973: 6).

majority of our utterances fall somewhere between? We may cleverly dissemble while consciously avoiding telling a lie, or lie but persuade ourselves it is the right thing to do. In addition, there is the significant matter of delusion, and degrees of delusion, in which 'subjects…have false second-order beliefs, that is, false beliefs about what they believe. Typically, such subjects are self-deceived' (Stokke 2014: 500). Clearly, there are significant issues concerning what we say, how we say things and the degree to which speech is sincere and can be judged as being sincere.

In the conclusion of his paper (p. 232), Eriksson is careful to distinguish the different discourses in which one finds sincerity and which give the term multifaceted meanings, and cultural and linguistic contexts will matter in these discourses. In the case of relationships between persons (intimate, romantic, contractual, political and so on) we desire that sincerity be present and we value it. In private life, relationships may end when sincerity is doubted and trust breaks down; in public life, politicians who come to be regarded as insincere may lose support.

> Sincerity, in its…everyday sense…requires that people *try* to get things right, i.e., that the speaker (thinks her words) functions to express a state of mind that she thinks she has.
>
> (Eriksson 2014: 232; words in parentheses appear in the original.)

These 'everyday senses' of sincerity are not necessarily the same senses which are the focus of philosophical debates in which sincerity 'is not always used as a term warranting praise' (Eriksson 2011: 233). Philosophical debates, for example in political philosophy, often question whether sincerity is a desirable quality.[35]

It is clear from these examples that the inner dynamics of issues around sincerity are complex. In respect of speech acts by other persons, these may or may not be sincere. The important question is, how is another person to judge the sincerity of those speech acts? We commonly try to interpret other people's external expressions of inner psychological states, attitudes or intentions. We do so by using what we take to be 'cues' such as facial expression, vocal intonation or bodily movements. Yet we recognize that we cannot do so reliably. Human beings commonly misinterpret what they see and hear.

[35] See, e.g. Runciman (2008) who concludes in his final chapter *Sincerity and Hypocrisy in Democratic Politics*: 'Armed with a sense of historical perspective, we can see that many forms of political hypocrisy are unavoidable, and therefore not worth worrying about, and that some others are even desirable in a democratic setting, and therefore worth encouraging' (p. 226).

The important point is one of general principle. If what persons say, their speech acts, *cannot be reliably known* to be consistent with their mental attitudes or beliefs, because they may possess an unconscious attitude or belief which is, in some sense, the 'true' one, then sincerity is radically unobtainable. We can never claim it with certainty. This renders the *Affirmation* problematic. If we assert that 'we affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship: we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts', we may be asking the impossible. For how can persons know that a belief or attitude they express as a prayer is sincerely held by them, since the true belief or attitude may be inaccessible through being unconscious?

Yet, in the spirit of the *Affirmation*, we generally accept the concept of sincerity as meaningful and important and continue to behave as if we can judge sincerity in other persons by, as it were, taking sincerity on trust. The type of problem which the existence of 'the unconscious' as a feature of human mental life poses for sincerity has analogies in areas of philosophy such as the epistemological problem of knowledge of other minds.[36] How can we know, or at least claim some justification for believing that other human beings have sensations, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and attitudes like our own? Unless one embraces a radical epistemological skepticism, the best explanation is that other persons share the same type of inner experiences as oneself, that to have such thoughts, beliefs and attitudes is a trait common to humanity. In a similar vein we accept that, by and large, we are aware of our true attitudes and that we do believe what we consider ourselves to believe, since the unconscious is, by definition, inaccessible to our normal awareness.

Spontaneity and sincerity

Eriksson identified spontaneity as a necessary condition of sincerity, citing as support Bernard Williams' definition that, '[s]incerity at the most basic level is simply openness, a lack of inhibition' (Williams 2002: 75).[37] A lack of inhibition means that hesitation—during which speakers might censor their words—is absent, allowing spontaneous speech which is likely to be a sincere reflection of opinion or feeling:

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[36] I make no claim in this thesis regarding the existence or otherwise of 'the unconscious' or the identity or form of an unconscious aspect of human being.

[37] Spontaneity is a key idea in Moshe Greenberg's study *Biblical Prose Prayer* (1983), discussed in chapter 3.

> As should be evident, this kind of censorship and adjustment will often prevent us from giving expression to what we really think and feel. This suggests that our true selves are revealed in our spontaneous verbal behavior. If we do not censure ourselves, what we really believe or feel is what we will give voice to.
>
> (Eriksson 2011: 223-4)

Winchester and Guhin's (2019) ethnographic study of two American Evangelical Christian communities, cited above, looked closely at Evangelicals' expectation that prayer be sincere, defined by the authors as 'an honest reflection of the praying subject's true thoughts, feelings, and desires…' (p. 33). The authors argued that the Evangelical Christians whose prayer practices they studied entertained 'cultural expectations regarding how actors ought (and ought not) to perform and experience a particular practice' (*ibid*.). It is also interesting to note that Winchester and Guhin employed the term 'anxiety' to describe the feeling of the worshippers. The anxiety is explicitly about sincerity in prayer: 'troubling anxieties surrounding the practice itself, particularly about the alignment (or lack thereof) between "outer" forms and "inner" selves' (*ibid*.).[38] The researchers identified 'expectations for how a practice ought to be performed, subjectively experienced, and evaluated (by oneself and others)' (p. 34) leading to the conclusion and attendant anxiety that prayer may be ineffective if not performed appropriately.[39] From their observations and interviews they elicited evidence that for many, if not all, of the Evangelicals,

> [E]xpressions of prayer that do not completely align with one's true desires, feelings, and intentions are in some sense not really prayers at all. These normative standards do not emerge out of nowhere, spontaneously from each situation. They are instead relatively consistent parts of Evangelical culture's focus on sincerity.
>
> (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 36)

Performance, experience and evaluation of the efficacy of prayer were issues identified by Winchester and Guhin's study. Regarding performance, they referred to Keane (2002), based upon which they argue that:

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[38] See also Haeri (2017: 124 ff): this anxiety is found not only in Protestantism but in many religious traditions.

[39] As we shall see in the next chapter, issues around efficacy are to be found in Rabbinic discussions of prayer.

> personal, private, and subjective "inner states" still must be expressed through some kind of external form, if nothing else through language and the body… even sincere and spontaneous expressions of "the heart" could ultimately become "empty," ritualized forms of speech and behavior…[40]
>
> (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 38)

Other People's Words

Thus far, we can see that a very substantial and significant part of the meaning of sincerity, if not quite the entire meaning, has to do with an individual's inner world of thoughts, feelings and beliefs and that the concept of sincerity requires that the outward expression of them should be honest.

For at least a thousand years most Jews have been reciting prayers according to liturgies structured according to *halakhah*. In practice, the use of spontaneous prayer spoken aloud is almost unknown in Jewish services, though in periods of quiet, private prayer and meditation may take place. I have drawn attention in this chapter to important characteristics of sincerity which include a significant focus on the individual and on 'interiority', as identified in the excerpts from seventeenth century Protestant writings in Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*. It is the correspondence of exterior expressions to interior mental states, such as thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs which constitutes sincerity. It follows then that the words which are expressed, for example in prayer, should articulate a person's interior mental states, if the words are to be counted as sincere. The requirement for such correspondence of exterior with interior raises a question for worshippers: can prayer be sincere if the words of the prayer are not one's own? Liberal Jews may answer that question very differently from some Protestant Christians.

Haeri identifies sincerity as being present when 'feelings, thought, and intentions are matched by exterior, spontaneous speech that expresses that interiority without the mediation of persons, things, and *other people's words*' (Haeri 2017: 123-4, emphasis added). He claims that beyond Protestant Christianity there is found an 'anxiety over the quality of believers' relationship with the divine—that it be unmediated, or mediated by

[40] Some of the language recorded by the researchers of the Evangelical worshippers' reflections on their prayer practices resembles very closely the language found in traditional Jewish sources concerning prayer: 'intention' (*kavvanah*); 'routine' (*keva*) 'heart' (*lev; levav*). The meaning and significance of these Hebrew terms will be explored further in the next chapter of the thesis.

the appropriate, sanctioned speech, ritual, person or thing… in many religious traditions' (2017: 124-5).

The problem of mediation and the use of 'sanctioned speech' or 'other people's words' is an issue for Judaism as it is a tradition in which one finds 'sanctioned' prayers to be the norm. The issue of what prayer is considered to be in Jewish traditions and the understandings of the place and value of spontaneous personal prayer and sanctioned words is examined in chapter 3. It will be helpful in shedding light on this question to look at Christian views, as Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism have developed more or less in parallel and each has influenced the other in many ways. In addition, many of the attitudes found in liberal Jewish circles find counterparts in liberal Anglicanism.

The Church of England has a long tradition of publishing authorised prayers, the definitive example being *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662). Contemporary prayers are today made available to the prospective worshippers in forms such as *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* and through the Church of England website; the Church has even created a prayer 'app' available for download. There is, of course, a difference between the legal force of the sanction of *The Book of Common Prayer* in the early centuries following its first publication and the offering of the present-day website. Yet both constitute sanctioned words, albeit with differing degrees of sanction. The Church of England's history has been as a national church, intentionally broad. For all Christian churches who have the practice of using formally sanctioned prayers, the sanctions are twofold: scripture and the tradition of their church. While many Anglicans are content to employ sanctioned texts as part of their prayer practice, the diverse nature of Protestant expressions produces a wide spectrum of practice in which one can identify also a clear emphasis on spontaneity in prayer and an absence of formulaic prayer texts.

Probably the best-known sanctioned prayer is the Lord's Prayer. The text occurs in two versions in the Gospels with minor differences: Matthew 6: 9–13 and Luke 11: 1–4. Even reciting the Lord's Prayer may be disqualified by some Evangelicals on the grounds that to use these words is to display a lack of spontaneity:

> God doesn't want your dusty old 'religious prayers', Pastor Kyle says… As an example of these kinds of 'dusty prayers', he recites the beginning of the Lord's prayer… 'No formulas,' he says, 'just open and honest talk. God wants to hear about what's on [*sic*] your heart'.
>
> (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 36)

Pastor Kyle's preaching raises its own challenges around sincerity in the practice of prayer. Winchester and Guhin's research among Evangelicals identified 'conundrums' for the worshippers: 'Am I saying my prayers with the right intentions? What if my seemingly spontaneous prayers are really routinized habits? How do I make sure my prayers are truly "from the heart" and not "empty rituals"?' (p. 32). As noted above, Haeri, as well as Winchester and Guhin, characterised this issue as creating an 'anxiety' for worshippers. Can spontaneity in prayer give way, albeit unintentionally, to a gradual shading into a habitual routine? Haeri asked (2017: 128):

> If the words of others, so to speak, continue to be used in church services, if members of congregations are reciting prayers from prayer books, and if their major religious activity is organized by the church each week,[41] then the Protestant subject does appear to be less autonomous than has been argued. Such worshippers' interiorities are therefore formed by both spontaneous and formulaic language.

Leaving aside the question of the extent to which a 'Protestant subject' may exist and be identified, what does it mean to assert that a worshipper's interiority is 'formed by both spontaneous and formulaic language'? Haeri suggests 'while the former [spontaneity] may figure in notions of agency, the latter [formulaity] does so as well, albeit in more complex and invisible ways' (p. 129). Thus, using words devised by others which sum up our feelings and thoughts does not invalidate sincerity. He concludes: 'So we can be sincere without being spontaneous' (p. 129). With regard to the 'Protestant ideal', if spontaneity is a sign of the interiority characteristic of some Protestants, it is also sometimes absent.

From individual sincerity to communal sincerity

In the exploration of sincerity so far, it has been shown that what constitutes sincerity has been taken by many to be the correspondence of exterior expressions to interior mental states, such as thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs. The first sentence in Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation* contains the phrase 'believe in our hearts': the inescapable implication is that liturgy expresses beliefs. It follows then that the words which are expressed, for example in prayer, should articulate a person's beliefs, if the

[41] The parallel of this description of the church's ways to the practice of synagogues is such that one may merely substitute the word 'synagogue' in place of 'church' to have a completely accurate description of English mainstream synagogue forms.

words are to be counted as sincere. If sincerity, or intellectual integrity, demands that those who recite liturgy only say what they honestly believe, then the theology of the liturgy and the belief of worshippers must be, at least, substantially congruent.

Given all that has been discussed above, it is clear that many, probably most, Western people continue to look for and evaluate sincerity in individual persons in a variety of situations. Examples which have been noted include when politicians address the public or when people give evidence in court, despite the caveats around such evaluations. The *Affirmation* declares that Liberal Judaism takes sincerity seriously and considers it a virtue. Liberal Judaism expects that its membership can recite its liturgy and be sincere in doing so and—unless the *Affirmation* is to be regarded as nonsensical—worshippers can pray sincerely when the words of their prayers are not their own. What is also clear is the *Affirmation* is understood to apply (i.e. to make sense) not only with regard to the sincerity of an individual worshipper, but to the sincerity of a collective group, the worshippers reciting Liberal Judaism's liturgies.

Summary

This chapter opened by tracing the historical occurrence of the word 'sincere' in English and moved from there to examine the history of the concept of sincerity. As Trilling memorably expressed it, sincerity is today widely understood to be: 'a congruence between avowal and actual feeling' (Trilling 1971: 2), the outward expression of our true inner feelings. For some religious groups sincerity is not just a desirable feature of prayer, it is a *sine qua non*, an indispensable requirement for effective prayer. The groups who have been identified as most likely to espouse this view—certain evangelical Christians—are not the type of religious groups one would imagine share much of their religious outlook in common with liberal Jews. This raises a question about why Liberal Judaism also regards sincerity as of paramount importance in worship, a question which will be examined further in the next chapter.

This chapter also examined the issue of judging sincerity; this is not simply a matter of measuring a 'congruence'. Several areas of communal life—including religion, politics and law—recognise that sincerity poses challenges. In religion these are especially prominent in debates around spontaneity and sincerity in prayer. The challenge for Liberal Jews may be summed up in the question: how can congregations pray fixed texts—and, in doing so, use other people's words—and yet pray sincerely as a community using a liturgy?

This chapter identified a significant scholarly consensus that the origins of the concept of sincerity are to be found in recent centuries. Yet, there is also dissent from that view in some disciplines. The next chapter examines the argument that sincerity is a pre-modern concept—and a component of Jewish thought—with a history stretching back at least to the prophets of the eighth century B.C.E., a source with which modern Jewish reforming movements have identified and from which they have drawn ideas.

Chapter 3

Traditional Context: Sincerity in Biblical and Rabbinic Texts

A major historian of Jewish religious change in the modern period, Michael Meyer, has noted that reforming movements like Liberal Judaism '…seek precedents. […] they tend to stress continuity, links with the past rather than radical departures from it' (Meyer 1988: 3).[42] In its early decades, Liberal Judaism engaged in fierce communal polemic in which opponents of Liberal Judaism's reforms challenged the movement's authenticity and legitimacy as Jewish. Liberal Judaism sees itself as the inheritor and champion of a prophetic tradition which prioritises moral conduct over observance of ritual actions, a feature of the trope of sincerity in Protestant thought. It would be logical to ask, therefore, if the commitment to sincerity is an aspect of Liberal Judaism's 'revisioning' of ancient antecedent Jewish attitudes for contemporary Jews? What, then, would be the implications for Liberal Judaism if there is no support in Biblical and Rabbinic texts—the foundational texts of Judaism—for a requirement to pray with sincerity, as 'sincerity' is understood by Liberal Judaism? In the context of communal polemic, it would be helpful to Liberal Judaism if the prominence of its affirmation of sincerity in worship appeared to be an affirmation of, for example, a Biblical antecedent. This chapter critically examines the case for sincerity as a pre-modern concept and component of Jewish thought. It will examine texts concerning worship and prayer to see whether:

i. we find in Biblical and Rabbinic texts something similar to the idea of 'sincerity in worship' affirmed by contemporary Liberal Judaism, and
ii. whether in Biblical and Rabbinic texts a particular mental attitude or state of mind at least akin to sincerity is understood to be necessary for worship and prayer to 'work'?

Keeping in mind Trilling's characterisation of sincerity as a 'state or quality of the self', I shall look for evidence in ancient texts of the presence of a 'state of self', expressed as a particular mental attitude or state of mind indicative of sincerity. This touches upon a related question: what is it that makes sincerity of paramount importance in prayer? Is

[42] 'Even when Protestants insist they are only returning to the original church, in historical context their actions are commonly understood to institute a new beginning' (Keane 2002: 66-7). At this point, it is sufficient to note a characteristic of liberal versions of Judaism that they identify themselves with the ethical message of the prophets of ancient Israel while putting some distance between themselves and Jewish 'legalism'.

sincerity, understood as a state of the self or of the mind, *necessary* in order for a prayer – or other form of worship – to be effective and valid, that is, for prayer to 'work'?

Turning first to the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*), we find sufficient instances of texts which yield data about sacrificial worship and prayer as practiced and understood in ancient Israel to enable a critical assessment of characteristic concepts. There are texts which purport to record the actual words of people's prayers.[43] The critique of the sacrificial system made by prophets of the eighth century B.C.E., such as Amos and Isaiah, represents a view which, in broad terms, seems close to the modern idea of sincerity.[44] With that in mind, we turn to a fundamental question.

What is Prayer?

As was shown in chapter 2, there are disagreements over what counts as 'sincere' prayer. Evangelical Christian Pastor Kyle insisted upon: 'just open and honest talk. God wants to hear about what's on [*sic*] your heart' (Winchester and Guhin 2019: 36). The traditional Jewish liturgy would not count as prayer in Pastor Kyle's view. Its texts draw heavily upon Biblical verses, often paraphrased and altered. Liberal Judaism defers to the Bible as a human document of immense historical and cultural importance, but not as an unimpeachable authority for contemporary Jews with regard to belief and conduct. Liberal Judaism's views on what may be said in formal liturgical prayer is affected by its own history and influences from the modern cultural milieu. Those influences and their effects are discussed in subsequent chapters. In this chapter I want to establish, at least in outline, what pre-modern Jewish traditions consider prayer to be. This is of direct interest to the thesis question because, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, what Liberal Judaism considers prayer to be has departed from traditional understandings and has also changed over the course of its own history.[45]

It is clear from both Biblical and later Jewish texts, to pray is to address God. Furthermore, Israelites/Jews were *commanded* to 'call upon God's Name' in those

[43] There are around 150 such passages in the Hebrew Bible (see Greenberg 1983: 59-60 note 3 (A) and (B)).

[44] Amos 5: 21 ff; Isaiah 1: 11 ff; I Samuel 7: 3. All are cited by Greenberg (1983) as examples of a demand for sincerity in prayer.

[45] Seen from a denominational perspective, Orthodox Judaism has changed the traditional liturgy the least, though the British Chief Rabbinate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries permitted minor changes. Conservative Judaism, a large American denomination, has allowed some changes to liturgy while retaining a recognisably traditional offering. American Reform Judaism, the closest denomination to British Liberal Judaism, has instituted a diverse range of liturgical reforms sometimes in co-operation with Liberal Judaism.

locations which God chose for them to do this.[46] The phrase 'call upon God's name' is somewhat ambiguous, but it is clear that, whatever this act involved, it was *required* of worshippers. There is some debate in the Talmud about the source of the accepted notion that prayer is commanded or obligatory. The consensus of the Talmud and later authorities is that prayer is obligatory, though the obligation is of Rabbinic origin rather than from the Torah (Jacobs 1995: 381; Fishbane 1987: 724).

Modern academic scholars such as Weinberg (1972) and Fishbane (1987) analyse Jewish prayer in terms which are consistent with the classical Jewish sources to be examined below in this chapter.

> Whatever else prayer may be, it is minimally *what a man does when he recognizes that he stands in the presence of God*… I mean the immediately experienced reality of our own position in the presence of God. … How utterly appropriate is the inscription so frequently inscribed over the ark in our synagogues: *Da lifne mee attah omed*—"Know before Whom you stand."[47] Without this recognition prayer can never occur…
>
> (Weinberg 1972: 124) *emphasis in the original*).

Michael Fishbane characterises prayer as: 'verbal expression before God'; 'the cry for God's Presence'; 'the solitary self before God' (1987: 724). Rueven Hammer, a Conservative Rabbi who has written extensively on liturgy, agrees with Weinberg and Fishbane: 'Ultimately, prayer is a way of experiencing the reality of God in the world and of relating to that reality' (1994: 7). Similar descriptions of Jewish prayer having an essential feature of 'standing before' or 'being in the presence of' God are found in the work of Rabbi and major Reform Jewish theologian Eugene Borowitz who, in reference to the Talmudic obligation cited above, points out that an equivalent phrase is often found framed and hanging on the walls of a Jewish home: *Shiviti Adonai lenegdi tamid*, 'I always set Adonai [God] before me' (Psalm 16: 8).[48]

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[46] It was understood that the divine was present everywhere, so much so that one appellation for God was *ha-makom*, literally 'the place', indicating omnipresence. Therefore, prayer could take place anywhere. Even so, certain places came to be viewed as 'holy'. In these places God's presence was thought to be particularly available or more intense. Early in the reign of king Hezekiah, who came to the throne of Judah in 715 B.C.E., local shrines were suppressed and sacrificial worship was authorised only in the Jerusalem Temple (Anderson 1988: 341; Seltzer 1980: 97; *II Chronicles* 29-32).

[47] The phrase is taken from the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Berakhot* 28b, it is not Biblical.

[48] A framed text or plaque bearing these words is typically placed in a Jewish home on the wall approximating most to the direction of prayer, that is toward Jerusalem. The plaque or framed text would be known as a 'Shiviti'.

> The psalmist's counsel to "set Adonai before" us is not meant spatially, as if we need to make a niche or altar in order to pray. Rather, it is about our consciousness. … To follow the psalmist's guidance, we must first regulate all the non-gods of daily life to the back of our consciousness. Then we can "set God before us," attend to God's presence and availability.
>
> (Borowitz 2007: 41)

Mental attitude in prayer: Biblical texts

The texts cited conceive of Jewish prayer as possible only when the individual pray-er has an appropriate attitude to be in the presence of God. In the *Tanakh* we encounter prose prayer texts and poetic prayer texts, the latter most notably in the Psalms. However, the Psalms will not be the main focus of interest as, while there is material in the Psalms which is of relevance for the study of liturgy, most of it is not helpful in answering the present question. We know little about the historical development of Psalms. Geller (2014: 1992) described their history and development as 'complex and poorly understood…' and concluded that 'the only liturgical situation that can definitely be reconstructed for Israelite-Judean religion is the one associated with the large genre of the "petitions of the individual"'. Since this thesis will seek to show, and to analyse, how Liberal Judaism has adopted a distinctly non-traditional understanding of the nature of Jewish prayer, it is particular interesting that Geller comments that '…as is often the case with liturgical texts, actual usage and inner meaning are not always apparent from the bare text, because the same words can be applied to many, and ever-changing, circumstances' (Geller 2014: 1993). Despite these caveats, the Book of Psalms includes a passage which seems, on the face of it, to be about sincerity in worship. The closing verse of Psalm 19 reads:'May the words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.'[49] This verse, the plea of a human being that the 'words of my mouth and the prayer of my heart'[50] should reach God and be accepted, is very well known to anyone familiar with

[49] Psalm 19: 15; Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation 1999.

[50] The Hebrew term *'hegyon libi'* is translated by the JPS as 'prayer of my heart' and by Magonet (1994) as 'thoughts within my heart/mind'. Alter (2007: 64) translates it as 'my heart's stirring' and notes that 'the root of the noun *higayon* suggests murmuring (the same verb prominently used in Psalm 1), but that English term is avoided here because of the unfortunate suggestion of cardiac irregularity'. (Rabbi Professor) Magonet is a Bible Scholar and editor of the current *siddur* used by the British Reform synagogues, *Forms of Prayer* (2008). In a footnote commenting on the phrase 'with all your heart' is the comment 'The *leiv*, 'heart' is understood in the Bible and rabbinic sources as the centre of the mind and intellect, our conscious way of viewing and understanding the world' (*FOP* p.213). The editors of the

Jewish liturgy. It has been incorporated (as an introduction or preamble) into the central prayer of Jewish services, the *Amidah*, which observant Orthodox Jews are required to recite three times every day while other Jews may encounter and recite these words on fewer occasions, depending on personal practice. In his commentary on the psalm, Magonet says of this verse:

> Now the Psalmist prays that the 'speech' of my lips and the thoughts within my heart/mind may be acceptable to God. That is to say that there be an integrity between his inner and outer world – the silent unfathomable worlds within him and their external expression.
>
> (Magonet 1994: 96)

Magonet recognises that there is a difference between the words one speaks and the thoughts one may harbour in one's heart or mind. Yet he goes a step further. When he writes 'that is to say', he is interpreting the verse from the psalm as telling readers that the words spoken and the inner thoughts should have an integrity, so that the words uttered externally are a true reflection of one's inner thought, that is, the words are sincere. Which brings us directly to the central question this thesis addresses: when people pray, is integrity of speech and thought (i.e. sincerity) necessary, even of paramount importance? In this instance, does the text unambiguously indicate this, or is Magonet choosing to read/interpret it that way? The text in the original Hebrew certainly indicates that both 'speech' and 'thoughts' are desired by the pray-er to be acceptable to God, but not that it is *necessary* for them to be true reflections each of the other, in order that they may be acceptable. This may seem to be splitting hairs, but one of the challenges in dealing critically with the concept of sincerity is that it has become deeply embedded in Western culture and thought to the extent that we are not always conscious of its presence and influence. Since it is pervasive, some artifice is needed, as it were, to 'stand back' and look for the concept of sincerity operating in, and colouring, to use Magonet's own words: 'our way of viewing and understanding the world' and, perhaps, how we read and interpret texts.

That God should be approached only when human beings are in certain acceptable states – both bodily and mental/emotional – is an idea with a long history. Scholars such

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Jewish Study Bible (2014) agree, reading 'heart' as encompassing character traits such as courage and even one's entire personality (see p. 508; 565; 595). The use of anatomical referents when describing what we would term 'mental' or 'psychological' activity or dispositions is discussed further below in this chapter.

as Magonet and Geller argue that there are verses in the *Tanakh* (examples are reviewed below) which unambiguously prescribe states in which individuals should be when they pray. These states include states of ritual purity and moral purity as well as having mentally appropriate ('acceptable') attitudes. The key question for this thesis is whether these verses require sincerity, or something closely approximating to it, in worship.

An example of such a text is Psalm 15. The *Jewish Study Bible* (2014: 1281) comments: 'Many modern scholars take v. 1 [of Ps. 15] literally, and suggest that the psalm functioned as an entrance liturgy for the Temple, where *who may sojourn in your tent, / who may dwell on your holy mountain* is the beginning of a dialogue between the priest and the worshipper who wishes to enter the Temple precincts, and vv. 2–5 are a type of liturgical password recited by the worshipper. The recital of moral virtues in these verses includes: 'his heart acknowledges the truth', [his] 'tongue is not given to evil' and 'stands by his oath'. There is, at the least, a 'family resemblance' to the concept of sincerity here.

When Geller characterizes the most dominant theology of the Bible, the covenant theology found expressed most clearly in what are termed the 'Deuteronomic' writings, he describes the 'states' in which the human worshippers are expected to be, including inner, psychological states: '…Deut. places great emphasis on mind and inner thought. …Israel is enjoined not only to fear and obey, but also to love God, with total singular inner devotion' (2014: 1989-90).

In the encounter between Hannah and the priest Eli at the shrine of Shiloh (I Samuel, chapter 1) we see reflected both (a) the idea that prayer should be a pouring out of the heart before God, a very inward and private process, and (b) a concern for propriety in regard to the sanctity of the place and the outward state or behaviour of the worshipper. In this case, Eli the priest suspected Hannah, a worshipper at the shrine, of being intoxicated. From the response of the priest Eli to Hannah's description of what she has been doing ('pouring out my heart to the LORD') we detect approval for her act: she had prayed as she should and deserved an 'answer':

> After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose. – The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. – In her wretchedness, she prayed to the LORD, weeping all the while. […] As she kept on praying before the LORD, Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard, So Eli thought she was drunk. Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself?

Sober up!” And Hannah replied, “Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman, I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to the LORD. […] “Then go in peace,” said Eli, “and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him.”

Prophetic antecedents

As noted in the *Introduction*, Liberal Judaism has consistently identified itself with the prophetic strand of religion.[51] Of particular interest to the search for the trope of sincerity in the *Tanakh* are the classical prophets of the eighth century B.C.E. Robert Seltzer suggested that the prophets imagined Israel’s patriarchal period as a time characterised by an ‘intimacy with God’. The prophets were ‘formulating a call to “return”, but were not ‘conservatives, [rather they] were actually radical simplifiers, seeking to apply a clarified set of old values to the changed situation of their time’. He concludes that the prophets’ ‘emphasis on self-transformation’ and their demand for ‘absolute faithfulness … marked the beginnings of a change in the nature of religion that would have potent long-range consequences’ (Seltzer 1980: 93). The writings of the eighth-century prophets show a concern with how people should approach God to offer sacrifice and prayer. In the verse which follows, it is striking that the falling short of expectations of the harmony of the heart with the speech of the lips, mirror both the vocabulary and sentiments expressed in Liberal Judaism’s *Affirmation* 31.[52]

My Lord said: Because that people has approached [Me] with its mouth and honoured Me with its lips, but has kept its heart far from Me, and its worship of Me has been a commandment of men, learned by rote… (Isaiah 29: 13).

[51] See e.g. Mattuck 1947: 114; Rayner and Hooker 1978: 65; Tobias 2013: 215.

[52] Another verse conveying the same attitude is Hosea 7: 14, ‘But they did not cry out to Me sincerely as they lay wailing’ (JPS translation). The term translated as ‘sincerely’ is in Hebrew ‘in their hearts’.

Physical referents and mental states

That the *Tanakh* frequently resorts to the language of body parts should not *necessarily* be taken to indicate that successful performance of prayer involves *physical* states. The language of the Hebrew Bible has a number of characteristic features. It is concrete rather than abstract. It is almost always anthropomorphic in its references to God. It reflects a particular view of the relationship between the parts of the body and phenomena such as thought and emotion. It uses metaphors involving the bodily faculties and body parts: mouths, lips, heart, fasting, face, hands, eyesight, hearing, and even organs such as the kidneys.[53] In particular, the *Tanakh* uses words such as 'heart' to indicate what modern translators render as 'mind',[54] references generally understood as non-literal.[55]

Arguing for sincerity in Biblical texts

Moshe Greenberg's *Biblical Prose Prayer as a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel,* published in 1983, is an important study for this thesis as Greenberg explicitly makes a case for sincerity as a feature of Biblical prayer. In building his case, Greenberg argues that the language used in instances of prose prayer throughout the Hebrew Bible exhibits three consistent, identifiable features. The first of these features is that, in contrast to the structured, poetic language of the Psalms, most prose prayers in the Hebrew Bible correspond to the context in which they are uttered. Moses' prayer for Miriam: 'O God, pray heal her' (Numbers 12: 13) is Moses' response to Miriam's being struck (by God) with a skin ailment (p. 9-11). A second feature in Greenberg's account

[53] Proverbs 23: 15-16 in the JPS translation reads: 'My son, if your mind gets wisdom, my mind, too, will be gladdened / I shall rejoice with all my heart, when your lips speak right things. In the Hebrew text, 'mind' is literally 'heart', but 'heart' in the second verse is literally 'kidneys' as the translators point out in a footnote.

[54] 'Classical Hebrew has no parallel to the later Western dichotomy between the "heart" as the seat of the emotions and the "mind" as the seat of thought. For the biblical authors, sentiments are part of the process of human thought and reason, and not something separate from it. And when human beings are thinking, or reasoning, or believing, they do so within their *lev*, which is most directly translated as *mind'* (Hazony 2012: 171). See Hazony's broader discussion (p.170-2) of *lev* and *shrirut lev*, which he translates as 'arbitrariness of mind'. Israel Abrahams also commented on this lack of a dichotomy; 'the heart was regarded by Jews as the seat both of the intellect and the feelings, of all mental and spiritual functions, indeed.' (Abrahams 1889: 221)

[55] This is not out of keeping with present-day non-literal usages in everyday speech. The translation of 'kidneys' as 'heart' is an example of what one might describe as a double non-literal translation. It reflects a recognisable practice in English usage of attributing non-physical activities to internal organs, such as knowing something in one's guts, having a gut feeling about something, feeling fear in the pit of one's stomach or describing an emotion as bringing a lump to one's throat or a tear to one's eye.

is that in these prose prayers we find that the language used is the same type of speech used in exchanges between human persons (p. 37).[56]

If the language of the prose prayers in the *Tanakh* is concrete (a feature of Hebrew), natural (found in contexts of everyday experience of human interactions) and plain (rather than crafted words of poetry or rhetoric) do such features indicate the trope of sincerity? To understand this question more clearly, we should take a look at a third characteristic of the language of Biblical prose prayers which Greenberg claimed to have identified: spontaneity. Greenberg draws attention to aspects of the academic study of prayer among four scholars who were influential in the twentieth century.[57] He points to what he regards as two significant flaws in their assertions about 'Biblical' prayer: that there was 'a linear development of prayer from one stage to another' and that they 'take seriously only two types of prayer… the spontaneous "outpouring of the heart," and… the studied composition of the expert…' (Greenberg 1983: 43). Greenberg argues very persuasively that the presence of spontaneity and fixed formulaic speech are a feature of prayer, *because* they are a feature of everyday social interactions. Furthermore, the type of speech found in prayer and other social activities is not limited to these polar extremes. There are intermediate levels of speech which exhibit varying degrees both of spontaneity and conventional styles. While it would be difficult to gainsay Greenberg on those points, I would suggest that he is too confident in his assertions that there is 'biblical evidence for the contemporaneity of all stages of prayer' (p. 43). The historical development of ideas in Biblical texts is as difficult to trace with certainty as is the history of the composition and transmission of the texts themselves.

The crux of Greenberg's argument that sincerity is to be found in Biblical prose prayers is his suggestion that, as the wording of prayers is not fixed, it follows that:

> the effectiveness of prayer was not primarily conditioned by wording but on the total configuration of interpersonal factors. Among these, the moral status of the speaker in the estimate of the one addressed, and his sincerity, play a crucial role.
>
> (Greenberg 1983: 48)

Greenberg's argument is that Hebrew employs the term 'heart' (used figuratively) when the intention is to express sincerity. He proposes that sincerity is a condition of the worship of the God of the Bible and that 'the requirement of sincerity in prayer derives

[56] The choice of the term 'persons' is deliberate since a characteristic aspect of Hebrew anthropomorphism is that it endows God with human-like personality.

[57] The four are: Heiler, Mowinckel, Gerstenberger, Haran.

from its social nature as a transaction between persons'. The same idea can be found in the writings of Liberal Rabbi Israel Mattuck: 'Those who worship together bring God into their mutual relations.' Originally published in the Liberal Jewish Synagogue magazine in 1943, the passage from which this sentence is taken was reproduced both in the 1967 prayer book *Service of the Heart* (p. 11) and in *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995, pp. 6–7; see also n.6, p. 662). On page 50 we find the culmination of Greenberg's case:

> One of Job's friends, Zophar, commends righteous conduct to him; among its elements is a sincere disposition of the heart before prayer: "If you have directed your heart [*h^akinota libbeka*], then outspread your hands to him [in prayer]…" Since extemporized prayer puts no store by a prescribed wording, the basis of its acceptance by God—of God's being touched by it—must be the sincerity of the professions made by the pray-er.

Greenberg draws attention to the importance in human interactions of 'the moral status of the speaker in the estimate of the one addressed'. In the case of two people speaking together, each person can only make a judgement about the moral status, or interior motives, feelings and beliefs, of the other. Yet, we can never be sure if a person telling us something is sincere. Greenberg goes to considerable length to convince his readers that prayer—communication with God—has significant parallels with human interpersonal reactions, both in content (language) and context (situation). However, there is an important difference between these two apparently parallel activities, addressing God and addressing other people. Indeed, the Jewish tradition avers that God (and only God) 'sees into the heart' (I Samuel 16: 7), a belief spelt out also in the book of Jeremiah (17: 9-10): 'Most devious is the heart. It is perverse—who can fathom it? I the LORD probe the heart, search the mind—to repay every man according to his ways, with the proper fruit of his deeds'.[58] The attitudes and conduct of those offering sacrifices or uttering prayers, the sincerity or insincerity of people making offerings of material or words to God, *is known to God.* That is a crucial distinction, and it raises a question: why is there a concern, for example, on the part of the prophets (assuming, for the sake of argument, that Greenberg is correct), regarding sincerity in worship, since any dissembling or disguising of one's attitudes and motives *cannot* be successfully concealed from God? If God cannot be deceived because God is omniscient, knowing *everything*, even the innermost thoughts of human beings, why pray (since God knows

[58] The Hebrew word translated as 'mind' in this verse (as elsewhere) literally means kidneys.

our situation, needs and thoughts before we pray) and, more pertinent still, why worry about sincerity in prayer?

Greenberg leaves his readers with an unresolved question posed earlier in the chapter: does the text unambiguously indicate that sincerity is a fundamental aspect of prayer in the *Tanakh*, or is Greenberg choosing to read/interpret it that way?

Mental attitude in prayer: Rabbinic texts

With regard to Jewish prayer in general, Hammer (1994: 104) comments that 'There has always been much controversy over exactly what was to be said, what was actually required and what was not'. However, regarding 'what was to be said', Hammer did not mean that early Rabbis had a habit of stipulating the wording of prayers; they sometimes discussed wording, but such instances are few. A concern over the wording of individual prayers came to be an issue only in modern times when a mature liturgy had been in use for centuries. Resistance to the changing of the words in liturgies was present only after prayer books 'fixed' the wording of prayers. This fixedness arose from a consensus in communities accustomed to a particular usage over generations. What mainly concerned the Rabbis of the Talmudic period in their discussions was to stipulate the general theme of prayers and *how* they were to be said. This is helpful to the questions raised in this thesis as the discussions contain explicit statements regarding the desirable inner dispositions of pray-ers.[59] In contrast, there is but a small amount of such material in Biblical sources. Moreover, the data to be gleaned from the rabbinic sources offers us insights into an important period in the development of Jewish religious practice in which prayer became of greater importance. The rabbinic debates included discussions about motivations for prayer and reflected beliefs and attitudes about prayer. A text from the fourth or fifth century, sums up in a short story the essence of the project of Rabbinic Judaism:

> Once, when Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was coming forth from Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed after him and beheld the Temple in ruins.

[59] Yet there are indications in some of their sayings that the earlier generations of Rabbis ranked certain physical postures and gestures above internal dispositions. These texts are identified and discussed by Dalia Marx in an essay in which she highlights the privileging of 'the mental-cognitive aspects of prayer' over 'the corporeal' and challenges the primacy given to *kavvanah* over behavioural aspects of prayer, which she suggests is a 'bias influenced by medieval sources'. (Marx 2019: 285). Her conclusion is that *kavvanah*, deep concentration in prayer, is only one of several equally valid modes of prayer recommended by the early Rabbis and that their sayings show a regard for the 'performative and physical' aspects of prayer as meriting the attention of the worshipper (p. 295-6).

> "Woe unto us," Rabbi Joshua cried, "that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!"
> "My son," Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "be not grieved. We have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving-kindness, as it is said, For I desire mercy and not sacrifice" [Hos 6:6]. (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, chap. 6).

As this transition was accomplished, home and synagogue—and communal prayer in the synagogue—increased in importance and became the twin foci of Jewish religious life. As part of that development, study, service and good deeds became the three things upon which Judaism, if not the entire world, stood. These values are quoted in a saying ascribed to Sim(e)on the Just (Hebrew: *Shimon ha-tzaddik*). He was, most probably, Simeon II, High Priest around 200 B.C.E. Tradition quotes him as saying: 'By three things the world exists: by the Torah, by the [Temple] service, and by deeds of lovingkindness.' (*Pirke Avot* 1: 2). 'Service' (Hebrew: *avodah*) had previously referred to the Temple sacrificial cult, now it referred to prayer. Given the importance which was attached to the correct conduct of the sacrificial rituals, a similar concern developed about how prayer should be offered since atonement was deemed to be dependent upon prayer. For prayer to have been accepted as effective in facilitating atonement, there had to be a concept of how such efficacy operated. Was sincerity, or something very like it, part of that concept, as Greenberg had argued for in the case of prayer as represented in Biblical texts? To answer that question it is necessary to survey what the records of Rabbinic debates indicate were the main issues around prayer for the early Sages and Rabbis.

The liturgies of contemporary Judaism are all built upon foundations established by the early Rabbis in the several centuries after 135 C.E. The literature produced in rabbinic circles included analysis and discussion of prayers. Most of the relevant material is in the tractate known as *Berakhot* ('blessings').[60] Many of the discussions concern aspects of the rituals around prayer, the preference for communal over individual recitation of obligatory prayers, and the timing of prayer. There were discussions among scholars of the dilemma of:

(i) requiring a fixed routine and formula for community prayer, and

[60] The term 'blessings' is often used to describe Jewish prayers since so many of them begin or end (or both) with the phrase 'Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God…'

(ii) the desirability of unpremeditated expression by individuals of an impulse to speak to God.

The notion of prayer being something that should be 'fixed' is represented by the Hebrew word *keva.* It reflects, in part, a belief that the origin of prayer lies in a command by God that humans should engage in worship. In addition, liturgy may be considered as giving worshippers a voice, supplying them with appropriate words by which they may address God in a range of situations throughout the cycle of each year and in the major events of each life. The form of prayer is determined by communal consensus, which became part of *halakhah*. Orthodox Rabbi Dr Joseph Tabory wrote an article to which he gave the title *The Conflict of Halakhah and Prayer* because it was, he wrote, 'a title which implies some sort of equality between them, in order to emphasize the inherent conflict between the two concepts' (Tabory 1989: 17). Noting that great Orthodox figures, such as Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, had acknowledged that the essence of prayer is that it arises 'from the heart', Tabory identified 'a central problem of our facing God in prayer: How can we have a regulated, organized prayer which will, at the same time, preserve the freedom of a personal relationship with our Creator?' (*ibid*.). This is a traditional view of the issue of *keva* versus *kavvanah*, but does not explain how these two 'equal' terms differ, for instance, does each represent some sort of 'opposite' to the other? If they are oppositional notions, are they irreconcilable?

According to Jastrow's Dictionary[61] *kavvanah* is a noun derived from a verb root *k–v–n* with a probable meaning of 'arrange' or 'direct' or 'aim'[62] and, when used with *lev* ('heart'), of: 'to direct or prepare one's mind, to pay attention, to do a thing with an intention'.[63] Langer (2015: 242) offers three meanings of *kavvanah* which are not identical, but also not incompatible, explaining it thus: 'as applied to liturgy, [*kavvanah*] refers to reciting prayers with intentionality or attention to the meaning or effect of their

[61] *A Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Talmud Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature.* Originally published in 1903, this dictionary remains a standard reference work.

[62] In Hebrew meaning is conveyed by a sequence of (most commonly) three consonants. For example, k-t-v carries the basic meaning of 'write'. By adding prefixes, suffixes and a small variety of patterns of vowels, meanings are differentiated. Cf. English 'write', wrote' written' writing', unwritten' in which the sequence of consonants w-r-t is similarly modified.

[63] Examples with this meaning are found in *Berakhot* 13a: 'One who was reading [sections of] the Torah…if he focused his heart…' Jastrow states that this means if 'he read with attention (to the sense, not merely like one going over the text for correction)'. In *Berakhot* 13b we read 'One who recites Shema must focus his heart'.

words or the divine command being fulfilled by the act of prayer'. Greenberg (1983: 64 n.3) referred to the meaning of *kavvanah*, using the verse 'If you have directed your heart [*h^{a}kinota libbeka*]' (Job 11: 13):

> Later Mishnaic Hebrew *Kiwwen* (*'et halleb*) and its cognate noun *Kawwana*(*t halleb*)—technical terms for devout intention and attention in the performance of religious duties—are descended both etymologically (from the root *kwn*) and semantically from the biblical term *hekin leb* (*nakon leb*), "direct the heart" (have one's heart directed, devoted)…

Greenberg links the term *hekin leb*, meaning 'direct [the] heart' to the cognate noun *Kawwana* (pronounced *kavvanah* in modern Hebrew). *Kavvanah* is a key term in Rabbinic literature which has been translated into English as 'intention', 'concentration' and even 'sincerity' (e.g. by Hammer 1994: 36).

The debates recorded in the *Talmud* and in other rabbinic literature, dating from the early centuries C.E., showed extensive interest in the matter of *how* a person should pray, including an individual's attitude or state of mind. There is a well-known passage in *Pirke Avot*,[64] a discrete section of the *Mishnah*,[65] which offers an insight into the meaning of the 'equal' but different ideas of *keva* and *kavvanah*:

> Rabbi Simeon said: "Be careful in the recitation of the *Shema* and in the Prayer; and, when you pray, do not make your Prayer a matter of fixed routine (*keva*), but an entreaty for mercy and grace before the Omnipresent One, praised be He."[66]

For Rabbi Simeon, the *keva* is the fixed text, such as *Shema* or the Prayer, and the use of a fixed text is approved by him.[67] It is *how* one prays the words that is represented by the term *kavvanah*, the 'care' that one should take is *kavvanah*, 'intentionality'.

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[64] Literally: 'Chapters of the Fathers'; Liberal Judaism's *Siddur Lev Chadash* renders it in a more gender neutral and, in a certain respect, more accurate translation as 'Sayings of the Sages'.

[65] The terminology of the reference system is potentially confusing. The term *Mishnah* is used both to indicate the large collection of traditions edited by Yehuda Ha-Nasi around 200 C.E. (*the Mishnah*) and an individual unit, passage or 'saying' (*a mishnah*). *Mishnah Avot* 2: 13 means the tractate *Avot* of *the Mishnah*, chapter 2, number 13 of the individual 'sayings'. Just as verse references in Bibles may vary slightly, editions of *Pirke Avot* may enumerate the individual *mishnayot* (plural of *mishnah*) differently.

[66] The *Shema* comprises three selections from the *Torah*: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; 11: 13-21 and Numbers 15: 37-41. It takes its name from the opening word of the first section. In Rabbi Simeon's statement, 'Prayer' (capitalized) refers to a particular prayer, known by three names. One is *tefilah*, the Hebrew word for prayer in general, hence in reference to the particular signifying 'the prayer *par excellence*'; another is *shemoneh esreh*, meaning 'eighteen' as the prayer originally consisted of eighteen blessings (the daily form now comprises nineteen); a third is *amidah*, meaning 'standing' as the prayer is conventionally recited standing. The *Shema*, with accompanying blessings before and after it, and the *Amidah* form two of the core 'building blocks' of most services and are therefore of great significance.

Summary

While chapter 2 showed that many consider sincerity to be a concept which is thoroughly modern, chapter 3 has offered examples of scholarly dissent from that view. The challenge for Liberal Judaism's prayer book editors dealing with traditional liturgical expressions is, in some respects, the same challenge recognised in Rabbinic literature, i.e. how to balance *keva* and *kavvanah*. One the one hand, *keva* 'fixes' the subject, if not the precise wording of prayers, but many of the traditional texts are powerfully evocative and inspiring, aesthetically pleasing and conducive to a positive psychological state for prayer and contemplation. In contrast, *kavvanah*, 'directing one's heart' (meaning mind), suggests some freedom from rigid fixed forms, in order to facilitate an attitude of mind most appropriate for prayer. Though it claims that some of its ideas have ancient Jewish antecedents, Liberal Judaism is unashamedly modern. Spontaneity and prayer in one's own words is linked very firmly in modern understandings with sincerity in worship and yet Liberal Judaism has continued the practice of using a published liturgy, though significantly modified from that retained by Orthodox Jewish communities. A review of the influences which have contributed to the formation of Liberal Judaism's intellectual and cultural world will help us understand Liberal Judaism's response to tradition and modernity in its liturgy. This is the focus of chapter 4.

[67] The conventions of prayer include the use of prayer which is 'set'. Does that mean that the words are specified? The Bible does contain a few instances of set words which are to be recited. These include the formula found in Deuteronomy 26: 3: 'You shall go to the priest in charge and say to him, "I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have entered the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to assign us."' So, too, verse 5 instructs the worshipper: 'You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean [etc.]". Generally, the words of prayers are not specified.

Chapter 4

Historical Context: Precursors of British Liberal Judaism

This chapter seeks to explore the context of ideas which form the intellectual origins of modern Jewish religious reform movements, including British Liberal Judaism, in order to further 'tease out' why Liberal Judaism formed such a strong commitment to the idea of sincerity in worship. I do not propose to trace here in detail the well-documented story of the institutional rise of Reform Judaism in Germany, its leading figures, the synods and disputes, and the establishment of denominational divisions.[68] My interest in this thesis is in the ideas which emerged for the first time within the ranks of what British Jews refer to as 'Anglo-Jewry', and which supply a context for the challenge by a liberal religious ideology to a long-established British Jewish religious outlook and related practices. Understanding this history will enable us to understand why sincerity in worship is integral to Liberal Judaism and why it remains an important part of the self-understanding of the movement.[69]

Jewish religious reform was initiated within a broader Jewish experience of admission to citizenship of European societies significantly shaped by Protestant and Enlightenment thought. Liberal Judaism, unlike the Reform synagogues in the United Kingdom, represented the first conscious attempt at reform in the sense of a thoroughgoing institutional and ideological innovation in British Judaism. Langton (2004) shows how British Reform Judaism in the nineteenth century, from its beginnings in the establishment of the West London Synagogue of British Jews in 1840, implemented moderate reform in order to *pre-empt* more radical innovation which the founders believed might be schismatic (p. 4, emphasis added). As Langton shows, British Reform Judaism's ideological links with the more radical Reform movement in Europe and the U.S.A. were tenuous at best. A component of that ideology was, and remains, sincerity. The Jewish experience in the United Kingdom can be differentiated from that of countries in continental Europe in several important respects. As Jacob Katz expressed the situation: 'The presentation of Jewish Emancipation in the West as a

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[68] For historical overviews of Reform Judaism in Germany see Plaut (1963); Katz (1978); Meyer (1967; 1988); Cohen (2002); Rozenblit (2010). Fishman (2006) includes an accessible introduction to Jewish denominations.

[69] As in previous chapters, when I use the term 'Liberal Judaism' with a capitalised 'L', I am referring specifically to British Liberal Judaism, otherwise I use 'liberal' as a generic adjective. Other authors whose work I cite may use 'Liberal' with a capital to mean the movements variously described as 'Reform', 'Liberal' or 'Progressive'.

meaningful whole is legitimate'. Even so, he issues a caveat: 'Still, the actual course of events and their results were different in the respective countries' (Katz 1978: 4).

The Beginnings of Jewish Religious Reform in Europe

Up to and throughout most of the eighteenth century the great majority of Europe's Jews lived in what we may term 'traditional' communities. Traditional Jewish communities exhibited many of the features of the traditional European Christian communities among whom they lived, and which are described by Hamilton (1992: 29-30):

> Until the eighteenth century, what passed in Europe for knowledge … was dominated by the Christian churches. Knowledge was continually referred to scriptural sources in the Bible, and was transmitted through the religious institutions of universities, colleges, religious orders, schools and churches.

This situation represented what Somerville termed 'a religious culture' in which religious ideas and practices are integral to all aspects of everyday existence of the members of that culture. These 'religious' aspects are so much embedded that they appear to people 'so woven into the fabric of their life that they could not separate religion from the rest of their activities' (1992: 4). Traditional Jewish life represented just such a phenomenon.

> Prior to modernity…for Jews, Judaism was not a religion, and Jewishness was not a matter of culture or nationality. Rather, Judaism and Jewishness were all these at once: religion, culture and nationality.
>
> (Batnitzky 2011: 2)

Katz (1959; 1973: 20 ff.) describes how Jewish communal life was experienced within a confined social and economic sphere. Excluded from participation in many areas of the wider non-Jewish society, Jews lived their lives within the boundaries—certainly social and religious, often also geographical—of a *kehillah* structure.[70] This regulated many aspects of the lives of its members, including establishing cultural and religious norms. The *kehillah* operated as a state within the state and had the support of the secular non-Jewish authorities (Mosse 1995: 67). The *kehillah* collected taxes, enforced order and ran institutions such as schools and charity and welfare provision. Status and power

[70] Hebrew: 'community'.

were attained in the main through wealth and traditional Talmudic learning. Rabbinic academies, *yeshivot*, flourished, directed by Talmudic scholars often only indirectly aware of emerging modern ways of thinking.[71] In the early modern period, the new science and philosophy touched upon the life and thought of only a small proportion of European Jews.

Moses Mendelssohn and the invention of 'the Jewish religion'

Mendelssohn played a key role in shaping modern Jewish views of Judaism, in particular, the Protestant-influenced idea that Judaism is 'a religion'. Protestantism had provided a theoretical foundation on which an emerging modern concept of religion would be based but, as Batnitsky (2011; see below) argues, it was a view of religion with which traditional Jewish views of the world could not be reconciled. Reform in Jewish religious practice happened only after Mendelssohn and the later reformers had succeeded in adjusting Jewish religious thought to the ideas and values found in Christian society and particularly in some forms of Protestant Christianity; a process of acculturation and internalisation of those values.[72] Mendelssohn's writings on Judaism provided much of the foundation upon which the ideology of Jewish religious reform in Germany and beyond rested. Mendelssohn's effort to create a synthesis of Jewish tradition and modern knowledge reflected the changed political and cultural environment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, described by Meyer (1988: 10-25). Internalisation of values from the wider social milieu and a growing self-awareness of a need for religious reform were key requisites for change. As Meyer sums it up:

> The self-aware movement for religious reform, which emerged in the nineteenth century, appeared only after profound changes had taken place in the external situation of the Jews and in their understanding of themselves. It arose in response to historical trends that gained momentum during preceding generations, their

[71] There were, of course, exceptions to this pattern of communal and personal life in England, in Amsterdam, in some northern Italian cities, and in the Prague of Rudolph II.

[72] It should be noted that the hope of both German reformers and their English reform counterparts in the early part of the nineteenth century was that the initially modest reforms they proposed would eventually be widely, if not universally, adopted. Langton (2004) draws attention to an example of internalisation which, perhaps understandably, many Jewish commentators have ignored or played down: 'the Christian criticism of Judaism' (pp. 36-46). Among the founders of Liberal Judaism, Claude Montefiore was the main object of criticism for this type of thinking though, as will become clear, Lily Montagu exhibited a similar inclination. Montefiore regarded Rabbi Israel Mattuck as unreasonably hostile to Christianity.

> combined impetus eventually producing a concerted effort to create new modes of religious thought and practice.
>
> (Meyer 1988: 10)

Among Jews, a shift in attitudes towards their tradition developed in Germany in the last decades of the eighteenth century. According to Meyer (1988: 17-18) they reflected specific patterns in Christian thought. Early Lutheranism had taught that the overriding duty of a Christian was to obey God's will. Likewise, traditional Judaism understood the ultimate duty of the individual to lie in fulfilment of *mitzvot*. Observance of tradition as detailed in the *Shulchan Aruch*[73] and local custom was all that was required of a good Jew. What changed was that the focus of questioning shifted towards consideration of what the individual Christian or Jew gained from religious observance. From the Jewish perspective, as Meyer puts it: '…individual Jews began to ask themselves a novel question: Did the practice of their religion indeed provide spiritual fulfilment? …a religious mentality emerged which made it requisite to measure traditions against a new standard located in the subjective consciousness of the individual' (1988: 18). Posing such questions is indicative of the broad acceptance by many German Jews of ideas reflecting a Protestant worldview in which 'true religion' is 'inner' and the conscience of the individual is accorded a privileged role in religion.

The questions over spiritual matters prompted by the awakening of 'the subjective consciousness of the individual' to new levels of activity were not the only evidence of tension between the pre-modern Jewish self and the new Jewish individual. There was a political dimension of great import. Before Jewish Emancipation,

> [A] Jew's religious life was defined by, though not limited to, Jewish law, which was simultaneously religious, political, and cultural in nature. Jewish modernity most simply defined represents the dissolution of the political agency of the corporate Jewish community and the concurrent shift of political agency to the individual Jew who became a citizen of the modern nation-state.
>
> (Batnitzky 2011: 4)

Batnitsky argued that the concept of religion which arose with Protestant Christianity and developed further in the eighteenth century 'places overriding value on…rational religion rooted in the autonomous self' as well as on 'the pure feeling of the individual

[73] A sixteenth-century codification of Jewish law and practice which is a key text for Orthodoxy.

self'[74] (Batnitsky 2011: 26) and included a concept of the nation-state in which autonomous religious communities, able to exercise any kind of coercive political authority over members, had no place. Turner (1990) supports this view:

> The effect of Protestant doctrine was to create a private sphere (of devotional religious practice, the subjectivity of the individual conscience, the privatised confessional and familial practices) in which the moral education of the individual was to be achieved, and a public world of the state and the market place, which was the realm of necessity.
>
> (Turner 1990: 197–8)

Cohen (2002) identified Moses Mendelssohn as one of a particular 'type' of German Jew who was a genuinely novel development of modernity and which had become widespread by the nineteenth century: 'Jews whose sense of belonging was very much challenged by their growing attachment to the majority culture' (p. 50). Cohen attributed this characteristic also to Claude Montefiore, the key architect of the philosophy underpinning what was to emerge as British Liberal Judaism.[75] The public debates which arose among nineteenth-century German Jews were fiercely contested and created lasting entrenched divisions. The disputes were characterised by Meyer as 'ideological ferment'[76] and contrast, as we shall see, with a lack of ideological ferment among the majority of the Jews of England until the following century.

English Jewry in the Eighteenth Century

By the eighteenth century, modernity in a liberal English society led to a 'de-sacralisation' of everyday life. Somerville describes how over the course of two centuries key aspects of social life including space (land), time, language, politics,

[74] Batnitsky cites Schleiermacher's words: 'Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.' (p. 27). This idea is a pronounced feature of Lily Montagu's *Thoughts on Judaism* (1904) which she acknowledged 'owes a great deal to Mr Montefiore's essay on "Liberal Judaism"' (p. 1). An extended survey of historical analysis of the emergence of the modern sense of self is found in Martin (1997).

[75] I would remark at this point that while the founders of Liberal Judaism in England were certainly influenced by the experience of European Jews, the influence was largely indirect. The two societies experienced some shared developments in their respective intellectual and social milieux, but not the *direct* influence such as that which German Jews had on the development of American Reform Judaism which, in time, influenced British Liberal Judaism. Having said that, it could be argued that Claude Montefiore was influenced by the degree to which he was at ease with German language and culture and his experience of liberal German Jewish institutions and intellectual outlook.

[76] Meyer used this phrase as the title of his book's second chapter.

scholarship and persons had become progressively secularised. In the sphere of personal relations, the Reformation led to 'the secularization of all the bonds that united English men and women' (Somerville 1992: 129). As the presence of shrines, saints, pilgrims, monks, nuns and even priests diminished, 'English society was greatly simplified'. However, 'the individual soul became more complex. Religious salvation itself changed from a collective to a more individual matter' (*ibid*.). This milieu influenced how many Jews viewed Judaism.[77] From being an all-embracing way of living it was reduced to 'merely' a private and personal choice of confession – one element, among many competing elements, of identity.[78]

The English state took less and less interest in the small Jewish minority under its jurisdiction. The few legal disabilities which remained caused little concern to most Jews. Being Jewish in England throughout the modern period had been a voluntary matter with few or no communal religious sanctions available to enforce conformity. Endelman judged this to be the first instance in the history of the Jewish diaspora in which this had been true (1990: 57). This freedom, allowing a high degree of political, social and economic integration to Jews, together with a 'lack of connection with German Jewish culture' were features which distinguished the Jewish experience in England from that on the continent of Europe (Ruderman 2000: 8-10).

In Endelman's view of the eighteenth century, ideology was never prominent on the agenda of Anglo-Jewry. There was no strong Jewish intellectual current in England comparable either to the traditional Jewish learning of Eastern Europe or the modernist philosophical movement in Germany. Anglo-Jewry viewed as a whole was never characterised by its piety or its learning (Endelman 1999: 121). This situation contributed to the departure from England of the respected Rabbi Zevi Herschell in the 1760s after eight years as 'Chief Rabbi'.[79] His son, Rabbi Solomon Hirschell, was

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[77] Critical sources for Anglo-Jewish history in the eighteenth century include Endelman (1999), Katz (1994), and Ruderman (1995; 2000).

[78] As Professor Knott reminded me, this form of secularisation, however, needs to be distinguished from later manifestations of secularisation, such as in the twentieth century. In the latter case, non-religion and secularism were important elements in what had come to be viewed at the time as questions of individual choice. In the public sphere, religion had declined significantly as a social force.

[79] The Rabbi of the Great Synagogue in London from 1756 to 1764 (referred to as 'Chief Rabbi') was the scholarly Rabbi Zevi Herschell. He left London in large part because he 'did not consider his flock to have any interest in Judaism apart from synagogal attendance' (Simons 1980: 12-13). Berlin, of course, was the home of Moses Mendelssohn and Jewish Enlightenment. A century and a half later Solomon Schechter wrote a valedictory *Four Epistles to the Jews of England*. In it he chided the community: 'Occasionally rumour spreads anent* some minister that he neglects his duty to his congregation through

appointed to the same leadership position in 1802 and found the intellectual milieu unchanged (Simons 1980: 24-25)

Ruderman (2000), in contrasting the English Jewish experience with that of German Jews, highlighted a second key difference: language. England in the eighteenth century was a comparatively monolingual society and the proportion of Jews who were native born was rising as immigration was curtailed by the wars with Napoleonic France.

> By the end of the eighteenth century, most English Jews thought about their identity almost exclusively in non-Hebraic, English terms. And through the medium of English translation, their religious attitudes and behaviour resembled to an unparalleled degree those of their English Protestant neighbours. Judaism as translated, modified, and glossed in English came to signify something quite different from that experienced by German or eastern European Jewries.
>
> (Ruderman 2000: 7).[80]

In this intellectual and social environment borrowing from German sources was unnecessary for English Jews to contemplate, understand and negotiate their identities and outlooks.

The Nineteenth Century

England's Jewish communities developed structures to govern themselves (or perhaps, more accurately, they established élites to govern them) through patronage. Authority tended to be hereditary. Jewish leadership anglicised in its own ways, developing attitudes and practices which mirrored the English society around them (Gartner 1973; Cheyette 1990; Williams 1990; Englander 1994; Alderman 1998). Among those structural developments which reflected an anglicising trend was the office of Chief Rabbi, briefly alluded to above. It had evolved from the influence of the Rabbi of the largest London synagogue, the Great Synagogue, into a more widely recognised, and eventually institutionalised role.[81] The man regarded as the first Chief Rabbi, Solomon

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his being secretly addicted to Jewish learning. But such rumours often turn out to be sheer malice and form in the worst case only the exception to the rule' (Schechter 1908: 196; originally, the *Four Epistles* were published in *The Jewish Chronicle* newspaper in 1901). *Anent: an archaic Scottish usage meaning 'concerning'.

[80] See also Somerville (1992), especially chapters 11 to 13, on the religious attitudes and outlook of Christians in England.

[81] Among the histories of Anglo-Jewry in the nineteenth century, detailed accounts of the religious issues and Chief Rabbinate are Elton (2009) and Persoff (2008).

Hirschell, was in office from 1802 to 1842 and during his long 'reign' he consolidated an almost complete monopoly over Jewish marriage and divorce, *kashrut* (kosher food), synagogue practices, and the appointment of clergy. In theory, the most dreadful weapon in the hands of a Chief Rabbi was to pronounce a *cherem*, a ban, upon individuals or groups who transgressed the bounds of *halakhah* (Jewish law, but also well-established custom). In 1842 Hirschell pronounced a ban on the recently-founded West London Synagogue. The Western Synagogue in London and the Jewish communities of Liverpool and Manchester rejected the ban and the affair portrayed the Jewish community as intolerant and obscurantist.

The Anglicisation of England's Jewish population in the middle of the nineteenth century is perhaps nowhere better seen than in the institutions which they began to create. An impressive range of welfare, religious and 'political' or representative (i.e. to the gentile authorities) institutions, characterised particularly by strong centralisation, were firmly in place shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century (Black 1988; Alderman 1998).

While the synagogue remained the form of communal organisation, for the majority of Jews, membership was more important than actual attendance. Contemporary evidence from the mid-nineteenth century suggests that a high proportion of the Jewish population refrained from attending their employment on the Sabbath (Saturday) but were inclined to pursue their 'rest' in saloons, theatres, concerts, racecourses and similar places of amusement, rather than in houses of study or worship (Singer 1986: 120).

English Judaism retained a good deal of traditional content but was suitably modified (emphatically *not* reformed) to reflect the contemporary self-image of the acculturated lay leadership: a shortened and simplified version of Orthodox synagogue rituals, stressing decorum over devotion, and reflecting contemporary class divisions in its seating arrangements and pricing.[82] Its religious contours were embodied in the 1890

[82] Synagogues have been financed through a variety of methods: endowments, gifts and bequests, seat rentals, and the auctioning of honours (such as being 'called up' to the reading of the Torah). The practice of selling honours gradually became discredited (probably due, in large part, to the internalisation by synagogue members of the disapproving views of Christian society) but persisted for a long time. Seat rentals eventually gave way to a standardised system of membership fees. On the discrediting of auctions of honours see Simons (1980: 93) where the author quotes at length from a pamphlet published anonymously by a member of the Great Synagogue in 1790 describing, and decrying, the practice. Katz (1994: 298-90) quotes the same source, part of 'a somewhat uncomplimentary picture of Anglo-Jewry' at the time and notes that the auctioning of honours 'continues in some synagogues today, albeit with a considerably increased sensitivity to public decency…' Regarding the less controversial topic of seat rentals, there are both parallels and contrasts with the practice of pew rentals in the Anglican church (see

‘Singer’s’ Prayer Book (Alderman 1992: 106-9).[83] It may seem strikingly odd that a Jewish population should be, on the one hand, extensively neglectful of even basic religious requirements while, on the other hand, adhering to forms and institutions which were recognisably traditional, despite modest modifications. These adjustments had not encouraged higher rates of attendance at services which, in north and west London in 1886, was estimated at between 10 and 15 per cent of the local Jewish population (Alderman 1992: 106). By the end of the 1870s stability and prosperity reigned among a Jewish community in which the number of poor had declined to less than half the population and the middle and upper classes were the majority (Alderman 1992: 103).

Religious dissatisfaction and pressure for liberalisation

Religious malaise in Anglo-Jewry underwent a lengthy gestation before it triggered significant change. As early as the 1830s declining attendance at services characterised London synagogues, both Spanish and Portuguese (Sephardi) and Polish and German (Ashkenazi). Requests for changes to services, such as later start times on Shabbat morning, shorter duration of services and sermons delivered in English, were turned down by synagogue authorities. The declaration which heralded the first secession from Orthodoxy in England, signed at a meeting in West London in April 1840, cited the problems in some detail. The services in synagogues were infrequently attended by members as a result of ‘the length and imperfections of the order of service’ and ‘the inconvenient hours [and] … the unimpressive manner in which it is performed’.[84] The solution to this unfortunate situation was spelled out immediately following the diagnosis of the problem. It involved the ‘establishment of a Synagogue in the Western part of the Metropolis’. This became the West London Synagogue ‘under the denomination of British Jews’ as opposed to the former division between Ashkenazi and Sephardi.[85] In this proposed synagogue ‘a Revised Service may be performed at hours more suited to our habits, and in a manner more calculated to inspire feelings of

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Bennett 2011).

[83] According to Cohen (1940: 29), the production of Singer’s Prayer Book was supported by Claude Montefiore’s mother who ‘defrayed the greater part of the cost of the prayer-book’. Rev. Singer is described by Cohen as ‘an enlightened minister belonging to the Orthodox Synagogue’ (*ibid*.) Singer was a tutor to Lily Montagu in her teens and was the father-in-law of Israel Abrahams. In the preface to *A Companion to the Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (1914) Abrahams credits Claude Montefiore as ‘being of assistance’ in ‘making useful suggestions’ as well as ‘making the publication of this edition possible by a generous contribution to its cost’.

[84] Kershen and Romain 1988; text p. 3, photographs of original manuscript following p. 48.

Devotion' (Kershen and Romain 1995: 3). During the nineteenth century, the West London Synagogue of British Jews enjoyed—admittedly short—periods in which it was successful in attracting high levels of attendance at services.[86] However, its foundation did not launch a Reform movement in Britain. It was not a catalyst for widespread change, nor did its existence as an alternative religious choice bring about more than cosmetic changes in Orthodox synagogue life (Black 1988: 67; Kershen and Romain 1995: 132-3). It remained a congregation characterised by only very mild reforms; 'in 1880, the differences between the Reform and Orthodox services in London were slight' (Sharot 1979: 213). West London Synagogue's leadership remained conservative to the extent that towards the end of the nineteenth century a *modus vivendi* had been worked out with Orthodoxy, amounting at times to an almost full rapprochement (Kershen and Romain 1995: 94-99). In particular, it failed in the long term to address low attendance rates (Sharot 1979: 216). Even though by the end of the century cordial relations were established between the dominant Orthodoxy and the bare handful of Reform Synagogues, this was due less to the magnanimous sentiments of the two parties than to their recognition of a shared crisis: 'a common concern over the religious apathy manifest among late-nineteenth-century Jewry. …It was an environment ripe for the emergence of a form of Judaism suited to the intellectual demands of certain late Victorian English Jews' (Kershen and Romain 1995: 99).

Although the existence of a deep-seated and enduring dissatisfaction with synagogue ritual cannot be denied, it must also be recognised that the intellectual and moral scene was not entirely bleak. Though the paradoxical attitude of the 'nonobservant orthodox'[87] might be viewed as the very epitome of insincerity, a commitment to sincerity within religious practice was expressed by prominent and active members of the Jewish community in the early nineteenth who were not numbered among those who became involved in the West London Synagogue. One such was surgeon and social activist Joshua Van Oven, a founder of the Jews Free School in London's East End. In his *Manual of Judaism, Detailed in a Conversation Between a Rabbi and His Pupil: Being an Introduction Into the Knowledge of the Principles of the Jewish Faith*, published in 1835, we find an expression of religion

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[85] Ashkenaz was a medieval Hebrew term for the German-speaking Rhineland area, Sepharad a Hebrew term for the Iberian peninsula.

[86] In a census of synagogue attendance taken in 1886, West London Synagogue recorded the *lowest* proportion of seatholders present at worship of any synagogue in the survey (Sharot 1979: 215).

[87] A characterisation employed by historian Todd Endelman, see Endelman (1999: 154)

which bears a remarkable similarity to that of the founders of Liberal Judaism. Both Ovens and the later liberal Jews viewed religion as inner and spiritual, requiring sensitive nurturing to evoke a heartfelt devotion to God and were opposed to dogma.[88] The religious malaise in Anglo-Jewry had been clear for all to see by the 1830s. Requests for shorter services, later starting times and sermons in English were refused by synagogue leaders. The majority of Anglo-Jews seemed unconcerned about the situation and did not care to support reforms. As Endelman (1999: 154) observed:

> Most Jews…maintained a nominal allegiance to the ideas and the institutions of orthodoxy and simply ignored those elements that were an obstacle to their enjoyment of life in this world. They were, to use a paradoxical phrase, nonobservant orthodox Jews.

He compares them to their non-Jewish counterparts who, content to retain membership of the established church—with all the attendant advantages that conferred—rarely gave serious thought to the tenets of that body or the conduct required to abide by those tenets. Endelman enters a caveat: 'How they felt about their ambiguous, somewhat paradoxical position … is impossible to know' (1999: 154). The secession from Orthodoxy accomplished by the founding of West London Synagogue in 1840 bore meagre fruit in terms of bringing substantial religious change: the reforms promulgated at West London were too limited. Like his predecessors, Orthodox Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, who took office in 1891, had come under pressure to modify the synagogue services so that they might attract more attendance from the acculturated Jewish population. He succeeded in resisting calls for changes to the content of the liturgy, while permitting aesthetic changes in such matters as choirs and music (Elton 2009: 114-6).[89]

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[88] In the *Preface* to the book, Van Oven characterises the religious instruction of youth in his day as 'stale, flat and unprofitable' (p. x) and proposes that 'the listless mechanical mode in which religious instruction is at present conducted, be considerably altered' so that 'the vivid sensation of a divinity, inherent in the human soul, may be roused into a sacred feeling, and the pupil gradually impressed with a full and proper sense of devotion' (p. ix). For Van Oven, religion is '[more a] sense or inherent feeling than the usual dry dogma of formal expression' (*ibid.*). As a comparison of attitudes, see, in particular, examples from Lily Montagu's *Thoughts on Judaism* cited below in chapter 5.

[89] In 1892 West London's minister, Rev. D.W. Marks could comment positively on the movement of Orthodox Synagogues 'on the lines of progress' in that their services, like West London's, were characterised by 'decorum and reverence', included sermons in the vernacular and were presided over by 'a cultured and superior clergy'. The reverend gentleman could observe that the modifications by his own congregation 'may be considered as final' (Persoff 2008: 87).

By 1892 a rapprochement had been brought about which was sufficient to permit representatives of the United Synagogue to attend the golden jubilee celebrations of the West London Synagogue. Just weeks later, a delegation from West London Synagogue was welcomed to the ceremony to lay the foundation stone of the Hampstead Synagogue, a newly-admitted constituent member of the United Synagogue (Persoff 2008: 89). More than the story of the West London secession, the story of the founding of the Hampstead Synagogue—a decade before the Jewish Religious Union was formed, and two decades before the setting up of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue—offers us a window through which to observe the highly nuanced interplay of religious thought and practice in Anglo-Jewry as the nineteenth century came to a close.

According to a memoir of the Bentwich family (Davis nd.: 17), in the late 1880s, 'a group of young Jews in London met regularly to dine together and discuss Jewish topics. They were looking for fresh interpretations of Judaism, and they called themselves "The Wanderers"'. Daniel Langton characterised the group as an 'avant-garde scholarly society' (2014: 39).[90] Israel Abrahams was a member.[91] In May 1889, Herbert Bentwich, a member of the Wanderers, had a letter published in the Jewish Chronicle inviting interest in establishing a new synagogue which would be neither Reform nor Orthodox, but somewhere between. The main thrust of the proposal arose from the desire to establish a synagogue with a modified traditional service: repetition of prayers was to be avoided, some English was to be used in part of the service, the Ten Commandments were to be read.[92] The committee which had been formed to steer the project debated the issues and voted in July 1889 on a proposal to align itself with the West London Synagogue in the Reform camp. The proposal to identify as a Reform synagogue attracted five votes; the votes to align with Orthodoxy and seek to join the United Synagogue numbered nine.[93] The Chief Rabbi declined to agree to the changes proposed to the synagogue services. Eventually, the more traditionally-minded members

[90] For a comprehensive account of the Wanderers, see Langton (2021).

[91] Other members included Solomon Schechter (later to be Cambridge University Reader in Rabbinic Literature), Rev. Simeon Singer (editor of the United Synagogue's *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* and Abrahams' father-in-law), Asher Myers (editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*), Lucien Wolf (a founder of the Jewish Historical Society of England), and the writer Israel Zangwill (author of *Children of the Ghetto*). Davis' memoir also contains the following passage which indicates Solomon Schechter's assessment of the English character: 'On his way back from Egypt Schechter stopped to visit his twin brother Jacob who had migrated from Rumania to Palestine… and had settled as a colonist in the village of Zikhron Ya'akov. From there, Schechter wrote to Bentwich (Feb 22 1897): "What we want here are English men and women. They alone with their missionary spirit and sincerity, could educate a generation"' (Davis nd.: 19).

[92] On the issue of the Ten Commandments in synagogue services, see below in chapter 5.

of the original committee came to terms with the Chief Rabbi and compromised their demands.

Sharot (1979) describes other services of a ‘progressive’ nature held by London Jews in the late 1800s. Shabbat afternoon services were organised at West Hampstead Town Hall in 1890. In 1892 a request by the committee responsible for running these services to hold services at the St. John's Wood Synagogue foundered as the synagogue imposed unacceptable ‘traditionalist’ conditions. In 1899, a Sunday service, wholly in English and including a hymn written by Wesley, was held at the Cavendish rooms, Oxford Street. No head coverings were required and men and women sat together. Music was played on a harmonium and there was a ladies’ choir. It seems that the service was conceived, in part, as a ‘mission’ to non-Jews. It proved very controversial and was not repeated (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 8). The organiser and service leader was Oswald Simon who later joined the committee of the Jewish Religious Union (Sharot 1979: 227 n. 50).

Perceptions of Hebrew as the language of prayer

The Sunday service held in 1899 was almost certainly the first Jewish public service to have been held entirely in English. However, there had been earlier calls for changes to the language of Jewish public prayer sufficient for the (future Chief) Rabbi Hermann Adler to have felt the necessity of preaching against the use of the vernacular in public services.[94] I will pay some attention to Adler’s sermon here as it touches directly upon a key issue around Liberal Judaism’s commitment to sincerity in worship, namely, whether understanding the prayers one utters is *necessary* for sincerity.[95]

Adler began by reminding his congregation that, following the circulation of an anonymous pamphlet, ‘discussion has been going on for some weeks past in one of our communal organs as to the expediency of introducing the English language into the service of our Synagogues’. He described as ‘an inestimable boon’ the fact that Hebrew was the universal language of Jewish prayer, so that wherever Jews travel in the world,

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[93] Dalin (1985) incorrectly identifies the Hampstead Synagogue as Reform. The thinking of those behind the scheme is more comparable to Conservative Judaism as it later emerged in the U.K., see Elton (2009 and 2012).

[94] Adler’s sermon was entitled *Hebrew, the Language of our Prayers*, and was published in 1885 and reproduced in several places thereafter, including *The Jewish Voice* of 1 September 1905 (all citations which follow are from this version, pages 5 or 6 of the newspaper, hereafter Adler (1905).

[95] More than 90 years after this sermon, Liberal Judaism argued in support of the use of Hebrew in services offering several justifications similar to those put forward by Adler. See below chapter 8.

they may enter a synagogue, hear prayers they have heard from infancy and no longer feel like strangers, but as being surrounded by brethren.

Yet, the familiarity of Hebrew is not the most important reason for praying in that language: '[I]t is the Holy Language, the language in which the Lord revealed His will to man, the language in which the Bible, our most sacred possession on earth, is written'. He considers the argument that 'when our liturgy was instituted Hebrew was the mother tongue, and that therefore the introduction of the vernacular would simply be a return to ancient precedent'. But he rejects this argument, correctly pointing out that after the return of some Jews from Babylonian captivity, Hebrew had largely been replaced as the 'mother tongue' of most Jews.[96] Even so, liturgical composition continued to be largely in Hebrew, since the Biblical source material of the prayers was in Hebrew. Adler then comes directly to a point forcefully argued by liberal (and Liberal) Jews: 'But it is pleaded, of what avail is the sublimity of our prayers to us, if we cannot understand them, if they leave the heart cold and unimpressed!' He appreciates the force of the argument that 'the mechanical utterance of a series of passages that are unintelligible cannot be dignified with the name of prayer' and confirms that Jewish tradition permits prayer in a language intelligible to the worshipper. '[P]rayer is to be the outflow of the feelings that move the heart; that therefore it is meet to use that language in which one is enabled to approach… [God] with devotion and in sincerity'.

Despite the foregoing, Adler did not accept that lack of knowledge of Hebrew is a valid reason for discontinuing its use. He challenged those in favour of the introduction of vernacular prayer, asking: 'Are there any advocates of this innovation who can seriously plead, that the introduction of the vernacular will infuse into Synagogue worship a new spirit of fervor [sic] and devotion, that it will attract to the house of God throngs of fervent worshippers?' Finally, he exhorted his congregation not to give up Hebrew as the language of prayer, since this will diminish 'one main inducement' to learn Hebrew which is 'the Sacred Language!'. It is striking that, though Chief Rabbi Adler acknowledges that mechanical utterance of unintelligible words cannot be dignified by the epithet 'prayer', he maintains that what happens when the traditional Hebrew liturgy is recited by a pray-er who does not understand the meaning, the result

[96] By Aramaic.

remains a prayer, a valid and effective discharge of one's obligation, as Orthodox Jews would understand the requirement to pray.

Hermann Adler's doubt that the use of the vernacular could infuse new life into Synagogue worship reflected just one aspect of a widespread concern over religious apathy in the Jewish community. 'Every leading voice in Judaism felt a pressing need for a revival, not simply of Jewish faith but of Jewish culture' (Black 1988: 70). The Jewish Religious Union (JRU) hoped to provide that revival, and not just through the use of English in prayers. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, the JRU did achieve a revival of sorts, providing a connection to the ancestral religion which, for many English Jews, had become precarious. Yet, as the twentieth century developed, the JRU's successor, Liberal Judaism, found itself wrestling with the question of prayer in Hebrew, a language which most of its members understood little, if at all. Liberal Jewish leaders, while openly acknowledging that for many Jews, praying in Hebrew was to pray without understanding, continued to defend the retention, even expansion, of prayer in Hebrew. Their arguments in support of that position are no more coherent or substantive than those advanced by Adler. If the Liberal position on this question is sincere, then so is Adler's Othodox defence of Hebrew as the language of prayer. I would offer the suggestion that perhaps the language of prayer 'problem' reflects issues which are less about sincerity and more about identity.

The JRU becomes Liberal Judaism

The aspirations of the JRU initially garnered cross-communal support from Askenazi and Sephardi Orthodoxy and from the Reform congregations. As far as communal institutions were concerned, leaders of the established Orthodox and Reform congregations saw the activities of the JRU as posing no threat to their dominant position, viewing it as: 'merely an élitist intellectual movement which was retaining the interest of Jews who might otherwise have eschewed religion or defected to Christianity' (Kershen and Romain 1995: 105). This assessment is broadly correct. In 1905, three years after it began holding its innovative services, largely in English and with the active participation of women, publishing edifying tracts and giving lectures, the JRU had attracted relatively few people. Even Montefiore, the JRU President, recognised the uphill struggle in his address to the 1905 Annual Meeting: 'We must go forth and try and create a desire for public worship. We must reason, argue, urge, and

induce, and it comes to meaning *a good deal more work than we had originally supposed*' (Black 1988: 70, emphasis added).

The JRU valiantly soldiered on, but the internal tensions and contradictions of its attempt to be innovative and yet retain the (admittedly Anglicised) Orthodox within a cross-communal endeavour contributed to the eventual defection of the traditionalists. Meyer noted a sociologically significant feature of the impact of modern thought on Jewish life and practice with respect to religious change: 'It is a characteristic of reforming movements that they seek precedents. Unlike revolutions, they tend to stress continuity, links with the past rather than radical departures from it' (Meyer 1988: 3).[97] The attempt to stay within the bounds of Orthodox-dominated Anglo-Jewry's traditionalism failed. By 1909 a distinct liberal ideology had crystallised sufficiently that the JRU membership agreed to add the words 'For the Achievement of Liberal Judaism' to its title. This signalled the emergence of a new entity in Anglo-Jewry and a clear break with the former traditionalism of Anglo-Jewish synagogue practice.

Summary

As this chapter has outlined, by the eighteenth century, in the political and social realms, English society was relatively liberal. The steady 'de-sacralisation' of everyday life over several centuries had prepared the ground for a decline in traditional forms of religious commitment among both Christians and Jews. As early as the 1830s London synagogues experienced a decline in numbers attending services, while requests to the authorities for changes to services were resisted. Many of these requests for changes to the timing, duration and language of services have been interpreted by historians as reflecting the attitudes of the greater part of the economically secure Jewish middle-class and their desire for a more 'convenient' religious observance.

By 1880 the Jews of England were a highly acculturated population of around 60,000 persons. Outwardly prosperous and content, there were tensions within the (nominally) Orthodox Jewish community over religious attitudes and practices which had been present since before Joshua Van Ovens wrote his *Manual*. The reforms instituted by the founders of the West London Synagogue had satisfied some of the

[97] 'Even when Protestants insist they are only returning to the original church, in historical context their actions are commonly understood to institute a new beginning' (Keane 2002: 66-7). At this point, it is sufficient to note a characteristic of liberal versions of Judaism that they identify themselves with the ethical message of the prophets of ancient Israel while putting some distance between themselves and Jewish 'legalism'.

demands of those who sought greater convenience, making services ‘more decorous rather than more rational, more genteel rather than more theologically correct’ (Endelman 1999: 159). The desire for deeper changes in practice and attitude sought by people like Van Ovens persisted unaddressed.

What this history illustrates is the particular trajectory of the response of Anglo-Jews to their political emancipation and gradually increasing social acceptance in a relatively liberal society. While there was social pressure to conform in order to achieve a degree of social acceptance, when that pressure diminished, conformity could diminish. Anglo-Jews shared some of the same experience in English society as Christian non-conformists. There was a degree of tolerance for them by the established church and society which increased during the nineteenth century. Anglo-Jews were concerned about ‘appearances’, especially following the influx of large numbers of foreign Jews from the 1880s. For some of the long-settled Jewish population such concerns had not been profound. They felt secure. It was no co-incidence that the founders of the JRU and Liberal Judaism included a nephew of Sir Moses Montefiore and the daughter of a wealthy financier who became a baronet. Non-conformity within the already non-conformist context of being Jewish no longer led to concerns about loss of social standing.

With the founding of Liberal Judaism as a separate synagogal body, free of the oversight of the existing Orthodox and Reform institutions, those who felt the dissatisfaction voiced by Van Ovens, those who *did* concern themselves with the tenets of their faith, and those who no longer wished passively to accept tensions and ambiguity in their religious life, could now find a home. For Liberal Judaism, sincerity in worship as a requisite of true religious expression became an idea which distinguished them from those who allowed rationality and theology to impinge very little, if at all, on their worship. How Liberal Judaism’s understanding of a prophetic ideal became expressed in their liturgy and public platforms is explored further in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5

Personal Context: Sincerity in the Writings of Liberal Judaism's Founders: the 'theologians'

Who were the 'founders'?

This chapter and the following chapter will include a survey of the presence of sincerity in the lives as well as in the writings of the founders of Liberal Judaism. Four people are generally recognized as 'founders' of Liberal Judaism in Britain: Israel Abrahams, Claude Montefiore, Lily Montagu and Rabbi Israel Mattuck. It was Abrahams and Montefiore who shaped the 'theology'[98] of Liberal Judaism, while Lily Montagu and Israel Mattuck were responsible for much of Liberal Judaism's institutional success.[99] I will argue that the biographies of the founders, as well as at the attitudes expressed in their writings, help us to understand why Liberal Judaism ascribes such importance to sincerity, both generally and in prayer and liturgy. The personal biographies and the careers of the founders reflect a practical operation of the concept of sincerity which found expression in their conduct and decisions, as well as in their speeches, sermons and publications. In short, the founders acquired a reputation as sincere persons.[100] 'Sincerity' includes those related concepts and attitudes identified as forming the 'trope of sincerity' that I identified in chapter 2: an aesthetic of simplicity, an antipathy towards accretions and elaborations in ritual and practice, a view of 'true' religion as 'inner', a modern view of the 'self', and a privileged role for individual consciousness and conscience in religion.[101]One of the arguments put forward by this thesis is that there has been significant influence by Protestant Christian thought on Liberal Jewish thought. The concept of something identified as 'Judaism' existing as a 'religion' has been unmasked as a modern Western invention (Batnitsky 2011). As part of that

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[98] Jacobs (1973: 10) notes that: 'It has been argued, however, that Judaism is opposed to theology on two grounds. The first of these is because Jewish thinking in its classical and formative periods—those of the Bible and Rabbinic literature—was "organic" rather than systematic, a response to particular concrete situations rather than a comprehensive account of what religious belief entails. Secondly, the emphasis in Judaism is on action, on doing the will of God not on defining it. There is truth in both these contentions but it is far from the whole truth'.

[99] Mattuck contributed to the development of Liberal Jewish 'theology' through his work on liturgies.

[100] An example of personal sincerity can be seen in the refusal of Lily Montagu to give up her commitment to Liberal Judaism when her father attempted to coerce her to do so by threatening to reduce his financial support for her.

[101] This list of the characteristics of sincerity is not exhaustive.

Western Protestant conceptualising process, religion is identified with belief and faith. Practice, especially elaborate ritual practice, is of lesser, or no, significance and may be viewed as insincere. So too, the individual is privileged over the communal. This creates a tension for contemporary Jews who, like other religious groups, are often credited (or denigrated) for what non-Jewish Westerners perceive as their strong commitment to community life. Many Jews' understanding of their culture is influenced by Western thought and their thinking reflects a commitment to individual autonomy. Yet the vestiges of the pre-modern Jewish community, the *kehillah*, exert a fascination and produce a longing for the communal. This tension between individual and communal persists and makes an appearance in debates over the use of Hebrew in prayer when it is argued that the common language unites Jews in a 'bond'.

The Liberal synagogues the founders created were to become identified in public discourse as exhibiting the 'virtue' of sincerity. In chapter 2 it was noted that a number of studies of sincerity had argued that this concept had become pervasive in Western culture. The two chapters on the founders will offer illustrations of that pervasive influence at work in their biographies and writings, for example, in their commitment to Enlightenment rationality and individual conscience and autonomy. This chapter deals with Abrahams and Montefiore, the next chapter with Montagu and Mattuck.

Israel Abrahams [102]

Of the four founders of Liberal Judaism, Abrahams, like Montefiore was academically trained in England and was a recognised scholar of international repute in Jewish history and thought. Israel Abrahams is often overlooked in accounts of Liberal Judaism's origins in favour of the 'Three Ms', Montefiore, Montagu and Mattuck. Examples include Rich (2014) which specifies the 'Three Ms' as 'founding ancestors of Liberal Judaism' (p. 1) and Tobias (2007), the latter a work based upon the *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* published by Liberal Judaism. In chapter 26, Tobias deals with 'pioneers' of liberal Judaism in Europe and the USA. When British pioneers are named, Abrahams is not among them. This is, at first sight, a surprising omission since Abrahams made a significant contribution to establishing and developing both Liberal Judaism and its forerunner the Jewish Religious Union (JRU). [103] He was also a key figure in developing the liturgy used by the JRU and the first generation of liturgical

[102] Kessler (2004) offers a succinct account of Abrahams' contribution (pp. 9-11) and the volume includes nine extracts from Abraham's writings. Other recent studies of Abrahams and Liberal Judaism include Dalin (1985) on Abrahams as a liturgist and Meirovich (2001).

output of Liberal Judaism. His involvement lent the JRU (though emphatically not Liberal Judaism) a degree of respectability in the eyes of the Jewish public and among some traditionalists. Though both Abrahams and Montefiore were persons of great intellectual ability, it is worth noting at the outset that Montefiore regarded Abrahams as his mentor in Liberal Judaism (Meirovich 2001: 13).[104] Kessler's outline biography of Abrahams described him as 'the foremost Anglo-Jewish scholar of his day' and indicates that, in the case of the 'three Ms', 'all were dependent upon the scholarship of Israel Abrahams' (2004: 9).

Abrahams avoided much of the hostility shown to Liberals by the Orthodox establishment. Bowler (1988: 71) described Abrahams' situation thus: 'There is conflicting testimony about Abrahams' place in the Jewish religious spectrum', while noting that 'Abrahams threw himself enthusiastically into the launching of the Jewish Religious Union (1902) which was the forerunner of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue'. In part, Abraham's unique position may be accounted for by the fact that for the first seven years or so of the JRU's existence it was by no means clear, or inevitable, that the activities of the JRU would lead to the formation of a new synagogue movement and, as some saw it, schism.

Israel Abrahams' education and career

Israel Abrahams was born in 1858, the same year as Montefiore. Abrahams was the son of an established Jewish scholar, Barnett Abrahams, Principal of Jews' College in London, an Orthodox Jewish institution. He was, in addition, honorary *Haham* (literally 'wise' [man]), a religious authority of the (Orthodox) Spanish and Portuguese congregation. Barnett Abrahams died when his son was only five years old. Israel Abrahams received his schooling at Jews' College and his academic abilities enabled

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[103] Abraham's omission from the list of founders may be explained, though not justified. Montefiore and Montagu both came from very wealthy 'Cousinhood' families and had no need to support themselves through paid work. Abrahams' position as a tutor at Jews College and later as Reader at Cambridge University necessarily made considerable demands upon him. Quite probably, Abrahams could not devote the same time and energy to the *public* aspects of the Liberal cause as his co-founders. Abrahams shared with Rabbi Mattuck a reliance on paid work, but Mattuck was employed by the Liberal Jewish Synagogue as a full-time Rabbi promoting the development of Liberal Judaism. Perhaps of more significance is that the 'three Ms' survived Abrahams by 13 years (Montefiore), 29 years (Mattuck) and 38 years (Montagu) respectively. They were, therefore, present much longer in the Liberal Jewish community.

[104] An earlier reference is found in Bowyer (1988: 67): 'But when we consider Montefiore in his role of would-be "prophet" to Anglo-Jewry, a personified "Guide to the Perplexed" to the Jews of post-Emancipation England, the formative factors which went to make him what he was, must largely be traced to three Jewish scholars, Solomon Schechter, Israel Abrahams and Herbert Loewe'.

him to earn an M.A. from London University. He became a tutor at Jews' College in 1881 and remained on the staff for over 20 years.[105] In 1902 he succeeded Solomon Schechter as Reader in Rabbinic and Talmudic Literature at Cambridge University. Abrahams remained in his post at Cambridge until his death in 1925 at the age of 67.

Abrahams was undoubtedly, and publicly, committed to the cause of Liberal Judaism, yet he was not distanced from tradition or from Orthodoxy in the same way as can be said of the 'three Ms'. His family background, education and outlook allowed him to avoid some of the unpleasant communal polemic between Orthodox and Liberal groups. For instance, while Abrahams believed deeply in religious freedom of conscience and in religious pluralism—a sound liberal trait—he parted company with many iconoclastic radicals over certain issues. Given Abrahams' espousal of liberal attitudes, coupled with his impeccably 'Orthodox' family background and education at Jews College, it would not be entirely unreasonable for his attitudes to Jewish traditions, including those regarding ritual practice, to be nuanced, even ambivalent. His involvement with the JRU was not regarded as a negation of his traditionalist credentials, since, as noted in chapter 4, leaders of both the Orthodox and Reform congregations saw the JRU as no threat to their dominance. It was 'merely an élitist intellectual movement which was retaining the interest of Jews who might otherwise have eschewed religion or defected to Christianity'.[106] Only in 1909 did the JRU redefine its mission as being 'For the Achievement of Liberal Judaism' and thus signal its dissent and ultimate break with the communal status quo.

Abrahams' Scholarship, a 'Liberal Agenda' and Sincerity

Abrahams had an extensive knowledge of the history of Jewish communal life and religious practices. In 1896 he published what is generally regarded as his major work, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (*JLMA*). His presentation of the world of medieval Jews has not escaped criticism. It may indeed be the case that Abrahams' historical study was not intended by him to be in any way consciously polemic but he has been accused of

[105] Accounts vary regarding the dates and some other details of Abrahams' career at Jews College. For example, there are discrepancies between Dalin (1988: 69-70) and Meirovich (2001: 4). None of these is particularly significant to the issues raised in this thesis. For most of his years at Jews College Abrahams taught Mathematics and English. This reflected his wide range of abilities and interests. Jews College taught religious and secular subjects to lay persons and candidates for the 'ministry' and did not develop into an institution aimed primarily at producing fully-qualified Rabbis until the twentieth century. The first two Rabbinic graduates received ordination in 1899, close to the end of Abrahams' time there (Elton 2009: 130). On the struggles between liberals and traditionalists over the College's curriculum and the levels of knowledge and ritual observance of ministers who graduated from it, see Elton (2009: 130-2).

[106] Kershen and Romain 1995: 105

using his historical writing to pursue a liberal agenda. Historians may use research—or the findings of research may be used by others—to support a particular perspective or programme. Alternatively, historical research can be subversive and unwelcome in some quarters without there being any intention to pursue one cause or another.[107] One such disagreement over historical writing arose from an assessment of Abrahams' work by Steven Bayme (1979 in an article on the founders of the Jewish Religious Union (JRU)). Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) interpreted Bayme's views as an unwarranted attack on Abrahams' scholarly integrity. They understood Bayme to be accusing Abrahams *qua* historian of something very like professional insincerity. Bayme had referred to Abrahams' work *JLMA*, writing: 'Israel Abrahams, for instance, viewed historical learning as a tool for religious reform, arguing that prayer without a head-covering or separate seating for the sexes[108] could be perfectly legitimized by critical study of the past' (Bayme 1979: 62 and n.15 p. 68).

Regarding praying without a head-covering, Abrahams devotes several pages of *JLMA* to 'covering the head in prayer', part of a chapter entitled 'Costume in Law and Fashion'.[109] His citations are wide ranging and the sources in Rabbinic literature are fully referenced. The overall impression which *JLMA* gives on this issue is that covering one's head for prayer was not the universal historical practice. 'In the early Rabbinical literature there is no trace, that such a custom was crystallized into a legal precept' (p. 300).

> It is not easy to explain how the medieval Jews came to intensify and stereotype the custom of covering their heads, not only in worship, but when engaged on secular employments. Anciently, the habit was at most a piece of occasional etiquette, though it afterwards became a strict and general ordinance.
>
> (Abrahams 1932: 300)

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[107] A good example of this outcome is found in Mundill (1998). In his analysis of late medieval English Jewry, Mundhill set forth clear evidence that some Jews lived in small numbers in rural English locations. Commenting on the reception of the evidence, he noted: 'Naturally, some modern orthodox Jews have found it hard, on religious grounds, to accept that their forebears could have lived, without a synagogue, in the countryside. They would claim that a Jew must, of necessity, live close to a synagogue and that, to have a synagogue, a large distinctive urban community is implied. However, medieval Judaism must have been flexible and no doubt it was acceptable and possible for Jews to live in rural areas…' (p. 21).

[108] In *JLMA* Abrahams says little on this point other than that separation of the sexes in the synagogue 'only reflected their isolation in the social life outside. The sexes were separated at Jewish banquets and home feasts not less than in the synagogue. If they did not pray together neither did they play together. The rigid separation of the sexes in prayer seems not to have been earlier, however, than the thirteenth century' (*JLMA*: 39)

[109] Page references are to the 1932 enlarged and revised edition of *JLMA* by Cecil Roth. Original and new materials are distinguished, allowing clear identification of Abrahams' original text.

While in some Rabbinic sources there is a recognition that the practice of covering one's head 'came to be a sign of respectful greeting' (*ibid.*), on the question of covering the head in prayer authorities were not consistent. Some scholars including Maimonides (12th century) supported covering, but French Jews and famous *halakhist* Solomon Luria (16th century), 'did not regard praying with covered heads as an essential part of the synagogue rites' (p. 302). Bayme offers no Rabbinic sources which Abrahams failed to cite on this topic though, to be fair to Bayme, the purpose of his article was not to mount a sustained critique of Abrahams' work as a historian or to identify him as a polemicist.

Rigal and Rosenberg (2004: 51 n.33) defended Abrahams vigorously:

> It was in no sense a polemic. At the time of writing, Dr Abrahams was a lecturer at Jews' College, and the JRU had not even been thought of.[110] In fact, Abrahams took the opposite point of view concerning hats. Thirteen years later [1909?]… Abrahams recommended that in the new Synagogue all males should have their heads covered.

In his article, Bayme had argued that the Orthodox Chief Rabbi Dr Joseph Hertz,[111] representing a moderate traditionalist view, 'sought to refute the essential challenge of modern criticism while accepting certain of its detailed findings' by, *inter alia*, 'limiting it to a purely scholarly role and excluding it from popular education, such as the pulpit and the Hebrew schools' (Bayme 1979: 62). Bayme did not offer specific instances to show how Chief Rabbi Hertz used the finding of modern criticism to further his aims. Even so, Bayme's point is clear, and hardly novel: research findings can be used for purposes other than the furtherance of disinterested academic learning, such as to support partisan agendas, covert or otherwise. Bayme continued: 'Others advocated wider utilization of the new methods' (*ibid.*). The key word here is 'utilization'. What other 'wider' purposes could the new methods be used for? Bayme suggested that they could be used to justify change. Of the 'others' who advocated this deployment of modern criticism Bayme had named Israel Abrahams.

[110] The point made concerning the time when *JLMA* was first published, i.e. before the JRU was conceived, is not a refutation of Bayme's argument since Abrahams' espousal of liberal thought was clear at least as early as 1890 as evidenced by his public activity, such as his involvement with the Hampstead services (see below in this chapter), and sermons he preached and published.

[111] In office 1913 to 1946.

Bayme's paper had contained only incidental, passing references to the work of Israel Abrahams in *JLMA* and to his use of historical research to pursue a Liberal agenda of religious reform, yet it had sufficed to provoke ire in Liberal circles. In contrast, Meirovich's 2001 paper—published in a volume of a Progressive Jewish journal dedicated to 'Great Teachers'—provoked no such clamour despite containing a thoroughgoing analysis and extensive critique highlighting Abrahams' Liberal agenda.[112] It contained an unequivocal verdict: 'His panoramic historical reconstruction carried a subtle, and at times, veiled agenda: to validate the cause of the Liberal Jewish religious ethos'.[113]

Early in chapter 2 an important characteristic of sincerity was identified as 'a significant focus on the individual and on interiority'. In common with other founders of Liberal Judaism, Israel Abrahams believed that if one obeyed a religious precept, one should do so not because it was prescribed by some law or the accumulated weight of tradition, but 'on human intuition; of its being good and true' (Meirovich 2001: 13). Within every human being resided the core of all religion, the soul which could be stirred to a consciousness of the divine. Because it was the possession of all humanity, it transcended all particular expressions and forms of religion. True religion was, ultimately, personal religion. Meirovich says of Abrahams that, like many reformist-minded British Jews, Abrahams was motivated by the desire to kindle a new spirit in communal life.[114] In Abrahams' view, a key element in achieving this aim 'was safeguarding the freedom of the individual, sidestepping clerical arrogance and legitimating the co-existence of disparate groups within the body politic of Judaism' (p. 10). Meirovich accuses Abrahams of being disingenuous when he 'claimed that Liberal Jews imitated the right of *individual judgement* exercised by the Rabbis' (p. 13*,* emphasis in the original). 'Hoisting the Liberal flag', Abrahams was selecting a 'minor

[112] Meirovich's article was published before Rigal and Rosenberg's history of Liberal Judaism's first century appeared. The article was in a Reform/Liberal journal *European Judaism*, which is, in all practical respects, the 'in-house' journal of Leo Baeck College, Rigal's *alma mater*. Even so, the article appears to have gone unnoticed by them.

[113] Meirovich is a careful historian, but his capitalisation of 'Liberal' is potentially misleading since Abrahams' *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* was published in 1896, six years before the founding of the JRU and more than fifteen years before the institutional launch of Liberal Judaism. I take his comment to refer, therefore, to a generic 'liberal' Jewish religious ethos, such as prevailed among those involved in the Hampstead services in the 1890s.

[114] This is in no way to deny that those who held more conservative views did not also wish to revitalise Jewish communal life.

motif' of rabbinic thought, 'a readiness to pit individual conscience against collective authority', thereby misrepresenting the Rabbis as 'closet-minded' Liberals (*ibid.*).

Abrahams: Character, Integrity and Sincerity

Israel Abrahams was willing to argue publicly for change to Jewish practice and synagogue services, but his aim was not to undermine tradition but to add to its future. Bayme notes that Abrahams 'refrained from attacks upon Orthodoxy in his sermons and privately lamented Orthodoxy's failure to succeed in Britain' (Bayme 1979: 65). Before moving on to look further at Abrahams' writings, such as the sermons he published, it will be helpful in understanding his place in the Anglo-Jewish community to pick up the point made early in this chapter that some attention would be given to the personality and character of the founders of Liberal Judaism, and explain how this is relevant to the issue of sincerity.

If one wants to understand how by the late 1930s people identified 'sincere' as a synonym for 'Liberal' when speaking of the Jewish community, one might consider Israel Abrahams' personal example. What is clear from the spirited defence of Israel Abrahams' integrity by Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) is the high esteem in which he had been held by Liberal Jews, despite their occasional omissions of his name when referring to the 'three Ms' as the founding figures. That esteem was not limited to Liberals. Respect was accorded to Abrahams across the spectrum of Anglo-Jewry, without distinction of denomination or social class, and by many Christians too, especially among the educated elite. Abrahams held the Readership in Rabbinic Literature at Cambridge and was seen as an important Jewish 'ambassador' to non-Jewish society. Both sides of the Orthodox-Liberal divide, which pre-dated the founding of the JRU in 1902 by many decades, were able to view Abrahams as one of their own. This, I would argue, was the result of his personal integrity, his sincerity in stating his case. Abrahams' writings show the complex nature of his relationship to Judaism. Abrahams recognised the important function which religious rituals served as 'potent forces in moulding the life of the spirit' and the contrasting 'barrenness' which purely rational, abstract or decorous forms of religion could foster (Meirovich 2001: 13). Abrahams' attitude to ritual observances and the 'life of the spirit' is seen in his

comment on the words recited as the straps of the *tefillin*[115] are wound around the middle finger of the hand:

> And I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, with love and mercy; I will betroth you to Me with faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.
>
> (English translation in *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* 1992 edition p. 8)[116]

Abrahams remarks that the use of these words at that moment of concrete ritual action 'is a fine instance of the power of Judaism to spiritualise ceremonial'.[117] I read this idea of spiritualising ceremonies to be a reflection of Abrahams' understanding of sincerity, that not only should one's words reflect genuinely held beliefs, but that ritual actions too may be regarded as sincere if they are imbued by those practising them with spiritual significance.

Another instance of Abrahams' idea that ritual actions may be linked to the life of the spirit is found in Abrahams' *Festival Studies,* published in 1906.[118] Abrahams begins by telling his readers that several synagogues in London[119] had restored the Ten Commandments to 'their place in the service of the synagogue' where they are 'recited from the pulpit every week' (Abrahams 1906: 87).[120] Abrahams points out that the Ten

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[115] *Tefillin* are small cubic black leather boxes worn on the head and on one arm during weekday morning prayer, held in place by the use of leather straps. *Tefillin* contain small pieces of parchment on which are four texts from the *Torah.* hand-written by a *sofer* (scribe): Exodus 13:1-10, 13:11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:12-21. Each of the texts commands, *inter alia*, that 'these words' be 'bound' or 'written' on the arm/hand and between one's eyes. Reform and Liberal Jews have generally not worn *tefillin* as they have interpreted the command figuratively, in particular taking note that both texts in Deuternomy refer to putting the words on/in the heart.

[116] The text is Hosea 2: 21-22 (Christian Bibles may reference the text as Hosea 2: 19-20).

[117] Abrahams (1914, this citation from revised edition 1922: 27).

[118] Reprinted in Kessler 2004: 87-89; the extract is entitled *The Decalogue and Jewish Liturgy.* References are to the pages in Kessler's anthology.

[119] It is not clear which synagogues are meant. In 1889 Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler had refused a request for the Ten Commandments to be read in adult synagogue services, but permitted it in children's services 'for instruction purposes' (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 6). Elton (2009: 118-19) states that 'Adler' approved the reading of the Ten Commandments and does not refer to a limitation to children's services. This apparent discrepancy arises from the change of holder of the office of Chief Rabbi from Nathan Marcus Adler to his son Hermann Adler which took place in 1891. Abrahams may have had the different responses to this request for liturgical change in mind when he wrote: 'A reference has been made, or rather a hint given, to certain modern controversies regarding the re-introduction of the Decalogue into the regular liturgy (1906: 89).

[120] The Ten Commandments were recited as part of the Temple service. They became part of the Synagogue service, but as Abrahams curiously describes it, they were 'discharged from the liturgy' (p. 87). On the long-running controversies surrounding the exclusion of the Ten Commandments from most of the traditional liturgy, see Reif (1993: 85, 96, 130, 144, 203).

Commandments contain concrete demands concerning behaviour, both moral and ritual *mitzvot*. Abrahams poses two brief questions in which we can see that he regards concrete demands for action in the commandments as being spiritualising by the principles behind them: 'Have the Ten Commandments become obsolete? Are not the great principles 'Love God', 'Love man', enough?' (p. 88). He is clear that 'principles' do not negate the need for clear *mitzvot,* 'plain, simple, distinct laws such as we meet with in the Ten Commandments', to spell out how Jews are to act: 'of not one of the Commandments can it be said that a mere general profession of love to God and man can be substituted for it' (p. 89). The context of his essay is that he is commending a change to synagogue liturgy which had been historically controversial, as he writes: 'All honour, then, to those who strove in the past and strive in the present to make the Decalogue a living force in the liturgy of the synagogue' (p. 89). To bolster his case, he cites Elizabeth Wordsworth, a non-Jewish pioneer of women's higher education, which seems to be a good example of Abrahams' 'hoisting the Liberal flag'.

> Let me answer in the words of Miss Wordsworth, taken from her excellent little book on the Decalogue:[121] 'No doubt, any one (*sic*) who truly loved God and loved his neighbour would abstain from the acts forbidden in these Commandments; but, on the other hand, how easy it is to profess religious feelings in the abstract and never to bring our acceptance of a general principle to bear on the particular instances at all? (p. 88)

Abrahams' defence of specific and concrete *mitzvot*, including those which are ceremonial, as important for religion is echoed in the final sentence 'never to bring our acceptance of a general principle to bear on the particular instances at all'. The motif of sincerity is evident in the phrase 'No doubt, any one who *truly* loved God…'. Yet it is what follows Miss Wordsworth's words that is most striking and pertinent. In a passage which constitutes a definitive statement of the nature of *in*sincerity, Abrahams describes the human propensity to dissemble. There could not be a clearer formulation of antipathy towards insincerity:

> The ingenuity which the human mind displays, the sophistries which it employs in order to make what is supposed to be expedient seem right, the delicate shading by which it veils a disgraceful or undutiful act, the artifices to which it

[121] Elizabeth Wordsworth (1893) *The Decalogue* New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

condescends, the self-flatteries which it is capable of where conscience is concerned… (p. 89)

Abraham's idea of insincerity expressed in this passage maps very closely, in a negative formulation, to the contemporary common sense understanding of 'sincere' which was put forward in chapter 2:

- without dissimulation ('sophistries')
- or deception (making the expedient appear to be what is right, not deceiving oneself through 'self-flatteries')
- honest, straightforward (not 'delicate shading' and 'veiling', and not resorting to 'artifices').

Abrahams' Sermons: Aspects of Judaism

In 1895 Abrahams and Montefiore published *Aspects of Judaism*, a collection of eighteen sermons, all but three of which were preached by them at synagogue services. An unequivocal statement of their commitment to sincerity appears as early as the *Preface* (p. vii) where they told their readers: 'We have written honestly and without reserve. We have expressed our full selves and extenuated nothing'.

The theme of honesty and sincerity appears in the very first of his sermons, *On Friendship*. Abrahams writes: "A friend", says Emerson, "is a person with whom I may be sincere; before him I may think aloud … To a friend you reveal your entire self …" (p. 3). Abrahams develops his theme by linking it to the synagogue, lamenting the loss in that place of some cherished virtues of Jewish congregations—a loss occasioned by the effects of the modern world—within which loss is found the diminution of friendship. He attributes this to 'our interest in one another' being 'simulated; the genuine friendliness has been killed…' (p. 4). The lack of warmth discerned by Abrahams belonged to the synagogues of the 1890s, but had been present for a prolonged period in both Orthodox synagogues and at the West London Synagogue (Elton 2009: 28 and 114 ff.). For Abrahams, lack of sincerity leads to less connection.

In the sermon, *Angels*, Abrahams touches upon the theme of simplicity, identified in earlier chapters as part of the 'trope' of sincerity. The idea he asserts is that *simple* forms reflect the true and the essential characteristics, in this case, of Judaism: simple forms are more sincere. The reference to the skill of painters displayed in Catholic

churches reflects the underlying influence of Prophetic and Protestant ideas in Abrahams' thinking, in which 'externals' are of less import than 'internals':

> Less beautiful than it might otherwise have been in externals, Judaism has remained simpler and truer in essence. Our religion has not altogether lost by the absence of the glowing ornaments which the skill of painters has devised to beautify so many Catholic places of worship. (p. 16)

The sermon entitled *The Open Door* was delivered, according to a footnote, during 'Passover (April), 1890, when there was much discussion in the Anglo-Jewish community concerning some necessary ritual reforms' (p. 29).[122] In this sermon, Abrahams gives his views on Jewish tradition: 'If we are to go forward – it is on the basis of the past, by seeking to understand the real meaning of the Jewish tradition, to get at its essence…' (p. 38). In this view, there is religion and there is 'true' religion. True religion may be freed of its accretions by discovery of a pristine past. It is in this sermon that Abrahams makes the assertion identified by Meirovich as Abrahams claiming the Rabbis as closet-minded Liberals. Abrahams avers that abandoning Rabbinic Judaism in favour of reliance entirely upon the Bible, 'is to abandon the very rights of individual judgement which the Rabbis exercised and we in our turn claim' (p. 39).

It is in the sermon entitled *A New Song* that we find Abrahams tackling head-on the issue of liturgical change:

> And this is the lesson of all religious progress.[123] … The formulation of the highest truth needs constant revision, and even more surely do the forms in which that truth is clothed. When dogma takes the place of love, religion is dead. And a liturgy that cannot expand, that cannot absorb the best religious teaching of the age, that cannot dare to sing unto the Lord new songs, such a liturgy is a printed page, it is not a prayer fresh from the suppliant's heart. (pp. 46-7)

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[122] On proposals and pressure for ritual reforms in Orthodox synagogues at this time and the Ritual Reform Conference of May 1892, see Elton (2009: 114-122) and Persoff (2008: 113-4). In the opening sentence of a sermon by Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, first published in 1885, the Chief Rabbi states that: 'A discussion has been going on for some weeks past in one of our communal organs as to the expediency of introducing the English language into the service of our Synagogues' (Adler 1905: 5).

[123] The confident tone of Abrahams' declaration reflects characteristic nineteenth century notions of progress. Among many present-day Orthodox Jews there is a pervasive belief that each succeeding generation is inferior in some respects to preceding generations. This idea is usually described as 'the decline of the generations'. According to Berger (1992): 'while the basic equality of all intellects is a tenet of the Enlightenment, the theological assumption of continually declining generations is a tenet of Judaism' (cited in Kellner 1996: 7 who argues against the idea).

The trope of sincerity appears strongly in this sermon. Working in reverse order of Abrahams' ideas in the paragraph, he states that prayer should arise 'from the suppliant's heart'. This is in agreement with tradition. It also reflects the interiority which is an important aspect of sincerity and a key notion also for liberal Jews for whom the autonomous individual is a source of authority and validation.[124] Abrahams refers to a liturgy which does not dare to sing new songs as being 'a printed page'. The phrasing strongly suggests that he wants his readers to understand his meaning to be that such a liturgy is *nothing more than* a printed page. This links to an idea a little further on in the sermon in which Abrahams characterises Judaism as having fallen 'into its stereotyped stage; everything became rigid; the laws and the liturgy were codified, and men's emotions were reduced to a series of set tunes. The songsters ceased, and no new voices have been heard from more than three centuries' (p.49). The 'more than three centuries', devoid of new voices, coincides quite neatly with the era of printing in Europe: 'Lastly, and chiefly, in explaining the stoppage in the flow of poetical inspiration, we must not forget that the decay is only about as old as the invention of printing' (p. 53). This is, for Abrahams the historian, an (unintended) outcome of the widespread dissemination of printed prayer books: rigidity, codification and set tunes. The spontaneity of the outpouring of the heart is gone, replaced by stereotyped performance.

Abrahams no doubt understood full well that the printed page, with all its consequences, was here to stay. So, what should be on those pages that would align with his commitment to heart-felt expression? For Abrahams, what one recites as liturgy should express 'new songs', absorb the best religious teaching of the age and reflect truth; liturgy is one of the 'forms in which that [highest] truth is clothed'. To offer anything less than a liturgy which reflected the best understanding of the age regarding what is true would be an act of intellectual dishonesty and communal insincerity. Abrahams wistfully yearns for a mode of Jewish worship which is sincere:

> capable of accepting new truth, and of singing new songs to God based on that new truth. Judaism could adopt a wider hope, a fuller theory of God's relation to the world, and yet could do this without abandoning those essential elements which made it a special and historical religion. (p. 47)

[124] See *The Jewish Religious Union: Its Principles and its Future* (reproduced in Rigal and Rosenberg 2004) at p. 323).

Here Abrahams expresses the delicate balance which he wishes to maintain between the change necessary to inspire successive generations and the traditions which give historical Judaism its identity. He recognises the difficulty of the task of balancing using a traditional liturgy—the virtue of which is considered by some to be its authenticity—with a desire to change it. Since repetition is seen as reducing spontaneity. which is aligned with sincerity, can one maintain authenticity whilst also enabling sincere expression? Abrahams praises the poetic beauty of the Psalms, but in their utilisation in the synagogue he sees their greatness diminished:

> [the Psalms] have become part and parcel of a stereotyped ritual, and have thus lost something of their spontaneity. One almost longs for less inspired songs, provided that they be new. One seeks variety and not sameness in one's prayers just as there is variety and not sameness in one's feelings. Does one feel alike every week? Yet one must pray alike every week. Oh for the old fluidity when the Poetan extemporised, for if his song was wanting in delicacy of form, it came fresh from his heart (p. 51-2).

One of the significant changes to synagogue liturgy which Liberal Judaism introduced was the use of prayers, readings and hymns in the vernacular, in this case, English. Abrahams spoke approvingly of the 'effect for good' which this had brought about and his hope for inspiration towards 'new songs':

> Some people expect great things from the growing popularity of prayers in the vernacular, and no one can doubt that the introduction into the Synagogue of Bible readings in English has already had a marked effect for good in this country.… and it may be that when we can decide how far, and under what restrictions, English is to find a place in the liturgy, the new songs will not be wanting (p. 52-3).[125]

An argument put forward by Liberal Jews for prayer in the vernacular is stated to be that it facilitates sincerity, as the full text of the relevant *Affirmation* makes clear:

> We affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship: we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts. To that end, though we retain much of the traditional Jewish liturgy, we have revised it, with some omissions and

[125] Rigal and Rosenberg (2004: 38) stated that by 1909 Shabbat afternoon services at two London Orthodox synagogues had portions recited in English.

> modifications, and many amplifications. For the same reason, we use English as well as Hebrew in our services.
>
> (Tobias 2007: 178)

In his remarks on the 'difficulty of the language' and the failure of modern Jews to enrich the liturgy, Abrahams describes the problem as being that 'the Maccabees prayed and sang in the language in which they thought, while we think in one language and pray in another' (p. 52).[126] He muses that:

> [W]hat we need at present are a few simple, stirring Hebrew hymns, in which the thoughts should be new, but the language old; the ideas elevated, but the style such as a child can understand. (p. 53)

How an Anglo-Jewish child who, being of a family drawn to Liberal Jewish services, and most probably lacking significant depth of Hebrew learning, is meant to appreciate the style of a contemporary Hebrew liturgical composition is not explained. I take Abrahams' remarks here in the sermon to have been a form of thinking aloud, reflecting the conflict he recognised between his attachment to the traditional liturgy and his desire for sincerity in prayer. In chapter 6 we will see the practical results of the attempt at a balance between these competing demands as manifested in published liturgy.

Claude Montefiore

The person most credited with developing Liberal Judaism's religious thought is Claude Montefiore.[127] Dr Claude Joseph Goldsmid-Montefiore was born in 1858, the same year as Israel Abrahams. His father was a nephew of Sir Moses Montefiore, his mother a daughter of Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid. Both branches of the family had been in England for several generations and were extremely wealthy. At a relatively young age Montefiore inherited vast fortunes which enabled him to live a completely independent existence and to give over his time and energy to academic learning and to charitable endeavours.

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[126] Abrahams' apparent lapse of historical knowledge regarding the language spoken by the Maccabees or, rather, the population of the Eastern Mediterranean soon after 200 B.C.E is very odd. In the historic lands of Israel and Judah, as in the Babylonian diaspora, the vernacular was Aramaic, otherwise Ezra's having the Levites translate the Hebrew of the *Torah* into Aramaic for the people of Jerusalem cannot be explained (Nehemiah 8).

[127] Recent works on Montefiore are Kessler (1989) which is a good introduction to Montefiore's writings, and the biography by Langton (2004) which is a very substantial critical treatment. Additional biographical material is found in Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) and in Kessler's *Reader of Early Liberal Judaism* (2004).

Montefiore's interest in the academic study of Judaism marked him out as different from almost all other members of his wealthy circles. He studied at University College, London and at Balliol College, Oxford, going up in 1878 and graduating with a first-class degree in 1881 (Langton 2004: 5). His inclination toward radical liberal views on religion became apparent from a chance discovery after his death. His cousin, Lucy Cohen (1940: 56-7) recorded that:

> After his death his son came across an early journal written in the years between 1883 and 1886. It was the only diary beyond mere statements of facts and engagement and in his busy life he had time or inclination to write. It deals with his philosophical views, and… it is chiefly notable for one thing… that while he was an undergraduate at Balliol and developing his sense of religious vocation under Jowett's influence, he had sketched and written in the *Journal* a preliminary *avant propos* of what was afterwards to be the programme of Liberal Judaism. That is, he foresaw while scarcely out of his teens, the need of a reverent and sympathetic approach to biblical criticism.

At Balliol Montefiore was significantly influenced by Benjamin Jowett with whom he had an enduring association. Jowett's liberal Anglicanism impressed Montefiore and many of Montefiore's religious ideas can be traced directly to Jowett's influence.[128] Montefiore consistently credited Jowett's impact upon his own religious thought (Cohen 1940: 12, 43 *et passim*), referring to him as 'The Master' and quoting him in his writings and his sermons.

After Oxford, Montefiore spent six months in Berlin where he briefly attended the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Higher Institution for the Scientific Study of Judaism) in Berlin. Back in England, Montefiore engaged in scholarly research and writing. His friendship and collaboration with Israel Abrahams in both scholarly work and in promoting liberal religious thought proved remarkably fruitful.[129] Montefiore also worked on academic projects with Herbert Loewe who from 1931 held the post of Reader in Rabbinics at Cambridge University formerly held by Israel

[128] On Benjamin Jowett's religious ideas see Hinchliff (1987), especially chapter 6 'A Liberal Gospel'.

[129] Abrahams was a great support for Montefiore in the JRU during its first decade, understandably less so of the Liberal Synagogue after Rabbi Mattuck took up his leadership role. Herbert Loewe's remark that Abrahams was 'essentially conservative … Generally [he] was Orthodox' is probably accurate (cited in Langton 2002: 103).

Abrahams. Montefiore and Loewe published a jointly-authored work *A Rabbinic Anthology* in 1938.

Montefiore was the focus of much controversy over his religious views which were unconventional and which, for many in the Jewish community, seemed to threaten their understanding of what Judaism represented. He often couched his views in language which was provocative and which contributed to generating heated polemic. His sympathetic view of Christianity led to accusations that Montefiore was a crypto-Christian. Rabbi Mattuck did not share Montefiore's benign view of (at least, liberal) Christianity (Fox 2014: 119-20). Despite these challenges, Montefiore was highly respected. Though one might not be surprised to find Montefiore's cousin offering the sympathetic appraisal that, '[H]is absolute sincerity and simplicity remained outstanding features of his character' (Cohen 1940: 67), 'His detractors admitted that his character and intentions were irreproachable, but this "personal regard for Mr Montefiore and his high-minded and zealously-pursued good intentions" only made him more dangerous, as his critics complained' (Langton 2004: 8).

The Trope of Sincerity in Montefiore's Writings

I will now look to *Aspects of Judaism* as a source in which to seek the trope of sincerity in Montefiore's sermons. I will draw in particular on two sermons in which Montefiore brings out very clearly the underlying strata of his religious thought, in which the trope of sincerity can be recognised. The first of these is a sermon entitled *Religion and Morality,* the second *The Consciousness of Judaism*. I will comment on the excerpts in the order in which they appear in the two sermons, not because Montefiore structures the sequence of different ideas particularly well but, rather, because he often raises a number of significant points in a single sentence, let alone a single paragraph; disentangling them would break up the unity of his writing and give it a disjointed feel.[130] Before turning to the first extract from Montefiore's sermons, it would be helpful to review some of the features of the trope of sincerity which were noted earlier: an aesthetic of simplicity, an antipathy towards accretions and elaborations in ritual and practice, a view of 'true' religion as 'inner', a modern view of the 'self', and a privileged role for individual consciousness and conscience in religion.

[130] The first two excerpts on which I comment come from a single sentence of 174 words. I did not reproduce the entire sentence here.

The sermon *Religion and Morality* is introduced by the Revised Version translation of Psalm 11: 7, 'The Lord is righteous; he loves righteousness; the upright shall behold his face'. Montefiore told his readers:

> [W]hen you have attempted a reform in the outward worship of God, and — what is far more — have asserted that there is a spiritual Judaism higher, more permanent, more satisfying, above all, more *true* than the Judaism of precept and ritual tradition… it were well for you to remember that [this higher, spiritual] Judaism is directly based upon the teaching of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah… (p. 241 emphasis in original)

An obvious question arises here: what attempt at reform does Montefiore mean? This sermon was published in 1895, at which point liberals had not *attempted* anything beyond the services at the Hampstead Town Hall from 1890, described in the previous chapter. The reforms to services requested by the group proposing a synagogue for Hampstead had been refused by Chief Rabbi Adler. Those proposals for ritual changes were likely what Montefiore had in mind when he wrote 'when you have attempted a reform in the outward worship of God'. He goes on to indicate the response of those who opposed change: 'you are told that you are eviscerating Judaism, that you are removing from it what is distinctive and peculiar' (p. 241).[131] Montefiore identifies with the teaching of the eighth-century prophets that outward aspects of religion, 'precept and ritual tradition', are of lesser import than inner aspects.[132] In this he asserts his own 'sincere' credentials: what counts above all is the inward, the spiritual and the true. For Montefiore, such a reformed Judaism would be more permanent than the version practised in nineteenth-century England. This refined Judaism would contribute to the religion of the future:

> [T]here can surely be no greater boast and pride for a religion than the consciousness of claiming as its own chosen and characteristic possession that general doctrine which is the common element of truth in all religions of the present, and which of the religion of the future shall be, with all its far reaching implications, well-nigh the substance and the sum. (p. 241-2)

[131] In the light of Montefiore's vision of future religion, a vision shared by Lily Montagu, the charge is not entirely unwarranted.

[132] Lily Montagu also made this identification with prophetic teaching in her preaching and writing. Umansky (1983: 105) credits Montagu's tutor, Simeon Singer (father-in-law of Israel Abrahams) with having introduced her to the ideas of social justice found in the prophetic books.

The ‘general doctrine’ of which Montefiore speaks, he identifies as ‘the great dogma of Judaism. The assertion that there is one God, and one God only’ (p. 241). This pure or strict monotheism will contribute to the religion of the future, but without the ritual accretions which have obscured simple and true moral teachings. In addition, people must be sincere by practising and living up to what they believe and profess:

> We must, indeed, strive that the outward forms and embodiments of Judaism which have come down to us from the historic past, shall gradually be moulded into fuller accordance with our actual ideas, beliefs and aspirations…we must seek to qualify ourselves to live up to the level of that spiritual Judaism in the reality and all-sufficiency of which we profess to believe. (p. 254-5)

The moral earnestness to be expressed in actions and profession which Montefiore projects in the concluding words of this sermon reflects both the personal conduct and the preaching of Liberal Judaism’s founders which contributed to the Liberals’ reputation as sincere:

> Do not most of us know where and how we could live better lives, purer lives, fuller, stronger, more useful lives than we do…Could we not all put to a more searching test than hitherto the truth and reality of our axiom: Through morality to religion, through goodness to God? (p. 255-6)

The sermon, *The Consciousness of Judaism*, is prefaced by Genesis 12: 3, ‘In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ Early in this sermon, Montefiore makes clear his commitment to pluralism, noting within the Jewish community that ‘people’s conception of Judaism…is exceedingly various’ and he calls for an appreciation of this ‘diversity of conception and of method’, insisting that ‘It is very important that the keen consciousness of Judaism should not be appropriated by any one section of the community’ (p. 263). Pluralism and tolerance of diversity is a logical outcome of a commitment to sincerity and derives from the status afforded to the individual conscience in liberal religion.

Montefiore goes on to discuss how ‘fidelity to Judaism’ can be achieved:

> [T]here is a moral life, lived with conscious intent and desire, in every section of our lives, not only in our homes but in our occupations, professions and trades, and there is also the inner life of the spirit, the life of prayer, self-sacrifice and love. (p. 265)

It is not at all surprising that Montefiore reiterates the fundamental importance of morality to religion and the inner, spiritual aspects of religion, including the life of prayer which, in this context, I take to mean individual prayer. What is striking here is the phrase 'lived with conscious intent and desire'. Why is it not enough to be moral, spiritual, prayerful, self-sacrificing and loving in one's conduct, without consciously intending and desiring to be so? Montefiore's thought in this passage resembles very closely the seventeenth-century Protestant idea cited by Christopher Hill (1972: 159-60): 'The Lord accepteth the affection and the endeavour for the thing done.' 'He who desires to be righteous, is righteous,' declared John Downame; 'he that would repent, doth repent … If there be a willing mind it is accepted.'[133] I believe that this passage demonstrates the pervasive nature of the concept of sincerity in Montefiore's cultural and intellectual influences.[134]

The sermon continues with the acknowledgement that within the Jewish community there are 'non-observant Jews' and Montefiore admits that 'judged by a certain standard, I should be regarded as a non-observant Jew myself' (p. 267). Regarding such non-observant Jews, he tells his readers that 'I will not argue whether they could or ought to observe more than they do. Personally, I have had no temptation not to observe as much as seems to me to square with my own conception of Judaism, and no practical difficulties in doing so' (p. 271). In the light of the difficulties to which Montefiore would admit ten years later, some of his opinions about the 'need' of people for communal worship might have seemed unrealistic, even in the late nineteenth century:

> Once more, if these men become more conscious that they are Jews and are regarded as such, will not the need come to them too to take more active part in the outward religious life of the community, and to join more frequently in its public worship of God? (p. 272)[135]

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[133] See above, chapter 2.

[134] The influence of Protestant thought on Montefiore's religious views can be seen also in an article from the *Jewish Quarterly Review*: 'Judaism proclaims a religion in the closest possible association with morality and truth. Jewish Theism need never be reactionary. It can be the ally of knowledge, pure, free from superstition, bracing, moral. But Judaism has two mighty foes. On the one hand, all reactionary religious forces, such as on the whole and in its pre-dominating elements and organizations the Roman Catholic Church seems to us to be, on the other all non-Theistic forces, including Positivism, Agnosticism, and Materialism' (Montefiore 1900: 633).

[135] As will be shown in the next chapter, Montefiore shared a great deal of his beliefs about what we might call 'religious psychology' with Lily Montagu. Both believed that people generally are possessed of a need to worship.

In his immediate next observations Montefiore remains diplomatically silent on what was, by that time, the obvious impediment to achieving a reform of worship in Orthodox synagogues: the unrelenting opposition of the Chief Rabbinate. This may be because he hoped that another 'Hampstead experiment' might achieve a different outcome or, possibly, because he was already reconciled to the idea that only a new institutional enterprise could deliver the desired changes.

> When the need comes to those who are now so largely outsiders to have a ceremonial religion as well as the moral and spiritual religion, they will take their part with us in securing that this ceremonial shall best answer to the needs of the largest number of worshippers. (p. 272)

It is in keeping with the trope of sincerity which privileges individual conscience, belief and feeling, that Montefiore asserts that the ceremonial form of this future time will answer to the needs of the majority of the worshippers and will not make the worshippers subservient to tradition.

Montefiore had a wide range of interests which engaged him. Among these was education. Writing in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (*JQR*), he commented on Jewish education for young children:

> [A] rigid honesty in religious teaching is a first and cardinal necessity, that nobody should teach that which he does not wholly himself believe, and lastly, (and above all), that the heavier the dogmatic charge the greater may be the sceptical recoil. (p. 306 n. 1 in Montefiore (1892))

In this sentence, Montefiore's commitment to sincerity shines through in his rejection of 'definite statements and opinions' in favour of 'rigid honesty in religious teaching' and his insistence that 'nobody should teach that which he does not wholly himself believe', the latter phrase echoing the language of the *Affirmation*: 'we should not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts'.

In an article in the *JQR* published about a year before the formal end of the Jewish Religious Union as a broad cross-community group, Montefiore defended Liberal Judaism against the charge that it was destroying Judaism by embracing 'the results of historical investigation' and 'in the specious and fateful interests of a cheap religious universalism'.[136] He told his readers that 'Both the so-called destructions have been

[136] At that time (1908), Liberal Judaism, with a capital 'L' would have been understood as the denomination which was well established in Germany and North America, known in the USA as Reform

wrought in the service of truth, and therefore in the service of religion'. Truth was a major issue for Montefiore and his fellow liberals: 'This is our driving power. Whither truth points, thither we must follow' (Montefiore 1908: 384). Just two years earlier he had published a sermon in which he laid out the Liberal view concerning truth and religion:

> Truth is not the best loved of virtues; and yet it is one of the noblest, as it is, perhaps, the hardest of them all it needs courage and resolution and strength of will: it must be loved for its own sake, or it will not be practised… Specious arguments are used… about all things under heaven except one. And that one omitted subject is: what do we owe to truth?[137]

Montefiore was a prolific writer and publisher. In 1923, forty-one years after the publication of his first work, he set out his mature religious views in *The Old Testament and After* in which he reviewed the development of religious thought from the Old Testament through the New Testament, Rabbinic literature and Hellenic ideas. He concluded with an essay 'What Liberal Judaism has sought and is seeking to achieve'. Though the essay is concerned mainly to place modern religious ideas in the historical context of the literatures and thought surveyed in the earlier part of the book, the chapter contains a passage in which Montefiore describes what he saw as the essential character of Liberal Judaism which, by then, had emerged as a significant movement in Anglo-Jewish life (Montefiore 1923: 551-2). In the selected quotations we find expressed Montefiore's thoughts on religious services and prayer, spiritual religion, attitudes of mind, beauty, truth, goodness and freedom, all of which are related to the trope of sincerity. As noted in chapter 4, Jewish religious reform in Germany did not set out, initially, to reform Jewish belief, but the aesthetics of synagogue worship. Montefiore listed the aesthetic elements: 'order, decency, reverence, propriety, beauty in the services of the Synagogue'. He recognised that such matters were 'only a very small part of Liberal Judaism'. Orthodoxy, too, could adopt aesthetic reforms, and in England some measures were adopted. But Montefiore doubted that Orthodoxy could satisfy the needs of 'the modern, spiritual, and informed western mind'. In Montefiore's understanding of what it meant to be a Liberal Jew, synagogue worship was 'merely the outward manifestation, or expression of spiritual truths and affirmations… [Liberal

Judaism, but still a few years in the future in England.

[137] *Truth in Religion and Other Sermons (1906 p. 8ff.)* reproduced in *Siddur Lev Chadash,* p.64.

Judaism represented] a religious system, the harmony of ideas… a certain attitude or condition of mind and soul… it is the spirit, of a life… freedom is of the essence of our religion (Montefiore 1923: 551-2).

These short extracts from Montefiore's essay 'What Liberal Judaism has sought and is seeking to achieve' are sufficient to demonstrate the depth of his commitment to sincerity in worship. His characterisation of worship services as 'merely' the garments of the spirit of Liberal Judaism is significant. There was an aspect of sincerity in worship on which Montefiore gave hints that he took a radical stance: language. He lived long enough (d. 1938) to see much of his vision realised through the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, though one can only speculate whether the institutional expression of Liberal Judaism's ideas was sufficiently radical for him. How Liberal Judaism has tried to answer Montefiore's question 'what do we owe to truth?' and how this was embodied (to use a typical piece of Montefiore vocabulary) in Liberal Judaism's liturgies, in particular on the question of the use of Hebrew in services, will be explored in chapter 7.

Chapter 6
Personal Context: Sincerity in the Writings of Liberal Judaism's Founders: the 'builders'

This chapter continues the survey of the presence of sincerity in the lives and writings of the founders of Liberal Judaism begun in chapter 5. The founders who are the subject of this chapter are Lily Montagu and Israel Mattuck. My engagement with these figures relies on the published material on them that is currently available, which includes biographies of both of these founders.[138] In addition, a volume of sermons, addresses, letters and prayers by Lily Montagu has been compiled her biographer (Umansky 1985) and a volume of sermons by Israel Mattuck has been collected with an accompanying brief commentary (Rich 2014). Biographical material on both founders appears also in Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) and in Kessler (2004). The energetic and ultimately successful—though sometimes admittedly ineffective—organisational response was due in no small part to the determination of Lily Montagu. In his *Introduction* to an anthology of the writings of the four founders, Kessler (2004: 1) states: '[W]ithout the scholarly contributions of Abrahams, the astute leadership of Montefiore, the organisational abilities of Montagu and the pastoral dynamism of Mattuck, the Liberal Jewish movement would not exist today'.

Lily Montagu: a brief biographical sketch

Lily Montagu was born in 1873, a daughter of Samuel Montagu, a wealthy banker who was honoured with a baronetcy in 1894 and a peerage as the first Baron Swaythling in 1907.[139] As part of the wealthy élite, Lily Montagu was free to pursue her own interests without the need to earn a living. Her father was a significant model for her, pursuing as he did many projects for the betterment of his fellow Jews and having a genuine affection for the East European Jewish immigrants to Britain, whose uncompromising Orthodox faith he shared and whose champion he became. Lily's early religious education was not untypical of Jewish women of her time in that her Jewish education was largely limited to Bible study. Lily attributed her initial serious engagement with

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[138] For Lily Montagu, see Umansky (1983) and for Israel Mattuck see Fox (2014).

[139] A clear and concise account of Lily Montagu's family background is found in Umansky (1983) 99-104. Samuel Montagu was a significant influence in his daughter's life despite the fact that they disagreed profoundly on religious issues. Her father's support was eventually to be lost entirely and replaced by implacable opposition to her activities as Lily's inclination to liberal religious views consolidated into her prominent leadership role in what became Liberal Judaism.

religion to Rev. Simeon Singer who tutored both her and her sister Marian, introducing them to the religious ideals propounded by the prophets of Israel, especially their calls for social justice. [140] This was the backdrop against which Lily Montagu began, at the age of 17, and with Singer's blessing, to lead services (mainly in English) for children at the New West End synagogue.[141]

Other sources of influence came from non-Jewish literature and the cultural and intellectual currents found in wider English society. Umansky identifies Carlyle, Browning, Eliot, Tennyson and Arnold as authors read and admired by Lily Montagu (1983: 57-76). Able to draw upon the moral and financial support of the Jewish grandees, at the age of 19, Lily had founded her first non-synagogue institution, the West Central Jewish Girls Club (Umansky 1983: 106-9), though as Kessler (2004: 15) describes it, the club reflected Lily Montagu's personal views:

> Lily Montagu ensured that the West Central Club was based upon religious principles. Unlike Marian, Lily's concerns included the religious life and she sought to infuse the club with that spirit. While she was aware that the club members were, for the most part, religiously indifferent, she devoted much time to bringing to them an awareness of God.

Lily's mother supported her principally by taking a genuine interest in her daughter's pursuits (Umansky 1983: 105-6). Her father regarded unorthodox religious ideas as a menace to traditional Judaism, though Lily seems to have convinced herself that he somehow 'really' supported her work for religious pluralism.[142]

Through her reading of such literary sources as those which Umansky identified, Lily Montagu developed a very particular sense of what constituted 'true religion'. During the 1890s she began to read works by Montefiore and Abrahams as well as:

> other self-professed Liberal Jews whose understanding of Judaism helped validate her own thoughts as Jewish…it was they (as well as Joseph Mazzini and possibly

[140] Although universally referred to as 'Reverend', Simeon Singer had received *s'michah* (Rabbinic ordination) from Isaac Hirsch Weiss of Vienna, a noted Talmudic scholar who opposed both extreme Orthodoxy and extreme Reform (Persoff 2008: 406 n. 27), an attitude shared, to some degree, by Singer.

[141] This was an Orthodox synagogue, part of the establishment 'United Synagogue'. Despite its compromising, Anglicised attitudes and practices, Samuel Montagu, and most his family, remained members even though Samuel Montagu was by temperament inclined to the more stringent Orthodoxy of the post-1880 immigrant community. Lily Montagu eventually left and committed exclusively to the emerging Liberal movement.

[142] Umansky (1983: 111-12) relates a somewhat bizarre episode in which Lily Montagu reported having a dream in which her father appeared to her, as a result of which she had 'an absolute certainty that he approved of my efforts'.

> Benjamin Jowett) who encouraged her to formulate a plan through which she could share these thoughts with others, enabling them to discover, as she had, that Judaism was not antithetical to the "true" religious life.[143]
>
> (Umansky 1983: 76)

Montefiore's and Abrahams' writings allowed Lily Montagu to understand that Jewish Orthodoxy did not equate with Judaism but was only one part of the greater whole, and that Judaism contained (at the very least) a good measure of 'true' religion. In addition, these two authors, as founders and editors of a Jewish journal, the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (*JQR*), facilitated the process by which Lily Montagu was able to emerge as a religious leader. Although, as described in chapter 4, conditions may have been promising for something new to emerge in Anglo-Jewry, the catalyst for the new movement was Lily Montagu and the publication of her article 'The Spiritual Possibilities in Judaism Today' in the *JQR*.[144]

Spiritual Possibilities

Lily Montagu was, quite literally an 'enthusiast', meaning (based on the Greek origin of the word) that she was one of those who believed themselves 'inspired by God'. She believed that she had a mission to pursue and, indeed, others believed it too: she was seen as a prophet by some of her admirers (Umansky 1983: 203). Her traditionally-minded opponents would perhaps gleefully point out that based upon its meaning in Latin, an enthusiast is a member of a heretical group. Both meanings contain some truth with regard to this dynamic woman. Like the prophets of the Bible, Lily Montagu had a message for her people, Anglo-Jewry; unlike the prophets, Montagu published her message in the form of an article in the *JQR*. 'This article provided the cornerstone upon which the foundation of Liberal Judaism was based' (Kessler 2004: 185n.). Lily Montagu was just 27 years old, had comparatively little formal Jewish education and was not a scholar, but she had a vision.

In *Spiritual Possibilities*, Montagu excoriated what she perceived as the hypocrisy of indifferent Jews who sheltered under the communal respectability offered by membership of Orthodox synagogues. However, she was not so critical of Orthodoxy that she overlooked sincerity in its ranks. It was sincerity that Montagu focused on as a

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[143] Joseph (Giuseppe) Mazzini had a significant following among upper class English women as a result of his support for equality between men and women.

[144] *JQR* 11, (1899) pp. 216-31; page references to *Spiritual Possibilities* in this chapter are to the article reproduced as the appendix to Kessler (2004) pp. 172-84.

redemptive quality of Orthodoxy. She and her sister had, after all, received individual religious instruction from Rev. Simeon Singer, minister of her family's Orthodox 'home', the New West End Synagogue and, later, a supporter of the Jewish Religious Union. Even so, forty years after *Spiritual Possibilities* was published, her commitment to sincerity in worship could prompt her to be scathing about what she considered hypocrisy among those who, while claiming allegiance to Orthodoxy, she suspected of harbouring serious doubt. This she contrasted with those among Orthodox Jews who held to unshaken belief in the 'literal and eternal truth' of the words of the Torah (Umansky 1985: 202).[145] Doubt, in Montagu's view was inconsistent with sincere Orthodoxy, to which many gave only 'lip service' in contrast to the 'consistently Orthodox'(Umansky 1985: 203). For Montagu, only those convictions can be real, i.e. sincere, if they are, as the *Affirmation* would have it, believed 'in our hearts', which means, in Montagu's understanding of the issue, that such convictions had been subject to intellectually rigorous scrutiny. She clearly allowed that the convictions of the 'consistently Orthodox' could also be sincere, based on the assumed premise that those who were genuinely Orthodox regarded the received scriptural and Rabbinic traditions as unimpeachable.

While recognising the possibility of sincerity in the position of those who are 'consistently Orthodox', Montagu does offer a critique, as this passage from *Spiritual Possibilities* which reflects her characterisation of the 'East End Jew', make abundantly clear:

> When he repeats the prayers ordered by his fathers, he is less stirred by the effort of the soul to hold communion with the Infinite than by a sense of righteousness resulting from unquestioning obedience. (p. 174)

In this passage we can see what sincerity in worship is for Montagu. Her concern is about adherence to divine truth, not repetition of tradition rituals. This is very similar to Protestant ideas about true worship being the worship/service of the heart that only God can see, in contrast to, as Tyndale expressed it concerning Catholic prayer practices, 'a false kind of praying, wherein the tongue and lips labour, …but the heart talketh not'. Reciting prayers in a routine manner may not be true worship.

Likewise, the insincere religion of the 'West End Jew' is equally flawed:

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[145] These views were expressed in a sermon entitled *Can We Possibly be Mistaken?*, delivered by Montagu at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue 11 November 1939.

> By continuing to follow mechanically a religion which they have not the energy to revive, by maintaining tenets which jar on their sense of truth, they are neglecting their most urgent duties, and rendering themselves for ever unfit to serve their brothers. (p. 181)[146]

Here we can see what Montagu understood to be happening: the pious immigrant Jew for whom 'religion is obedience glorified into a cult', goes through the motions of prayer 'at prescribed times and seasons' (p. 173) but rather misses the point of prayer—and consequently depriving it of 'life' so that it needs reviving—which is for the soul to commune with God. Consequently, even observant Orthodox Jews—diligently adhering to tradition—will fail to achieve their spiritual possibilities, since they have not 'dared to use their minds in the service of religion', but have privileged the repetition of traditional formulations of prayer over the truth, in the sense of true belief (tenets); they do not believe 'in their hearts', as the *Affirmation* puts it, the words they pray. It seems that for Montagu, there is a world of difference between adherence to prescribed rituals of prayer and sincerity in worship. In chapter 3 it was shown that rabbinic texts posited an ideal of achieving a balance between, on the one hand, making prayer a fixed routine while, on the other hand, ensuring prayer remains 'an entreaty for mercy and grace before the Omnipresent One'. The latter, the 'service of the heart', seems to be what Montagu claims not to find in contemporary Orthodoxy.

Montagu characteristically uses very strong language to make her points, describing the behaviour she disapproved of as 'blasphemy':

> [W]e are required to use in God's service all the gifts of mind and heart which he has granted to us, since it is a form of blasphemy to conceal or to pervert truth, in order to render our service of God acceptable to him. (p. 179)

With the exception of her use of the term 'blasphemy', this sentence might be judged quite innocuous and unlikely to offend even the most traditionalist Jews. However, almost immediately, she continues her 'diagnosis' of the ills of Anglo-Jewry with phrases indicative of one of the key tropes of sincerity—an antipathy towards accretions and elaborations in ritual and practice—a diagnosis, and a treatment, which paint a portrait of Orthodox Judaism with which few observant Orthodox Jews, if any, would agree:

[146] More will be said below concerning the 'most urgent duties' which leads to their 'rendering themselves for ever unfit to serve'.

> Together we must sift with all reverence the pure from the impure in the laws which our ancestors formulated in order to satisfy the needs of their age, and to refuse to resort to hair-splitting argument in order to reestablish a religion which was originally founded on the basis of truth, dignity and beauty. (p. 179)[147]

The vocabulary she employs to describe this imagined former embodiment of Judaism which she wishes to recover, a Judaism of 'dignity' and 'beauty', mirrors the language used by Protestants. They imagined their reforms 'as the removal of the ornate outer garments of Catholicism to reveal a bare and unadorned, more truthful, core' (Carruthers 2011: 12). By ridding Judaism of its accretions, its pristine dignity and beauty—later to be embodied in the stripped-down simplicity of decorous Liberal services—is revealed.[148] While, for Montagu, Judaism's 'abiding essence is simplicity and truth' (p. 178), she concedes that some form of 'ceremonialism' must be allowed to the mass of people who cannot realise their spiritual possibilities without the help of a 'ritualistic system':

> Yet, at the outset of our search, we shall be persuaded that only the elect among us can worship at the 'Fount of Inspiration' without some assistance in the form of a ritualistic system, and that the perpetuation of Judaism therefore requires the maintenance of certain ceremonial observances. For the essence of a religion cannot be transmitted in all its simplicity to a child, whose mind cannot conceive an abstraction, and a certain discipline of observance is essential to character training. (p. 179-80)[149]

In her analysis of Protestant aesthetics, Carruthers noted the idea that the 'bare and unadorned' could be equated with that which was 'more truthful'. In the same way, 'A

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[147] While Montagu no doubt felt justified in suggesting that traditional Judaism had become alloyed, outdated and was maintained only by means of a hair-splitting *halakhic* process, the language she used is hardly irenic and one must wonder who else is envisaged as being included in the 'we' who 'together' must sift with reverence the pure from the impure. Montagu's remark that Judaism was 'a religion which was originally founded on the basis of truth, dignity and beauty' possibly reflects her concern to associate her reformist proposals to strands of the venerable tradition. As Michael Meyer (1988: 3) observed: 'It is a characteristic of reforming movements that they seek precedents. Unlike revolutions, they tend to stress continuity, links with the past rather than radical departures from it'.

[148] In a manner similar to that of Israel Abraham's alleged 'misrepresenting the Rabbis as 'closet-minded' Liberals', Lily Montagu co-opts Biblical prophets as 'closet-minded' progressives: 'We must boldly follow Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and allow a place to progress in religious thought' (p. 179).

[149] The 'Fount of Inspiration' is almost certainly a reference to Aganippe, also known as Hippocrene, a spring on Mount Helicon (Boeotia), associated with the Muses. To drink from the spring was to receive poetic inspiration.

natural preference for the aesthetically simple is to suggest a preference for the morally simple, for truth and justice' (Carruthers 2011: 13). Montagu's thinking contains very similar ideas expressed in what is very clearly the vocabulary of aesthetics linked with the vocabulary of morality, especially where she employs a binary opposition of 'beauty-deformity; and 'truth-deception':

> Inspired by a natural desire to examine with all tenderness possessions, which our fathers preserved with so much courage and devotion, we shall probably find treasures of beauty and truth where we had expected deformity and deception. (p. 180)[150]

To examine the possessions preserved by one's fathers is described by Montagu as 'a natural desire', suggesting an inner drive which is widespread, if not universal, and being natural and inner indicates a trope of sincerity. Yet, as we have already seen, the type of examination which Liberal Jews like Montagu would wish to undertake had been, and still is, rejected by the Orthodox. Though she suggests that this examination should be carried out with tenderness, just as she had earlier suggested that the sifting of traditions should be carried out with reverence, it seems she has an expectation of the outcome. The expectation is that the examination of tradition would reveal 'deformity and deception'. To state that one expects to find these things does suggest some degree of pre-judgement on Montagu's part.

Dr Jo Carruthers helpfully commented that it is important to keep in mind the difference between sincerely held convictions or desires, and sincerity in worship/religion. The latter is identified Montagu as non-ritualistic, and involving intellectual assent and communication with God. The outcome of the tender and reverent examination of the ancestral possessions would therefore be that ritual observances, which had been misidentified as an end in themselves, and which separated people from God rather than leading them to God (p. 174) would have 'their proper place and function as means for the attainment of holiness' (p. 180). From the perspective of sincerity, Montagu's view of ritual observances is functionalist; the

[150] Here and in many other passages in Montagu's writings, she employs very strident language, likely to cause offence to traditionally-minded Jews. Kessler (2004) contains an autobiographical note in which Montagu recalls how the members of the JRU 'faced and survived the abuse and unkindness of those who thought we were causing schism' (p. 168). Yet an inescapable impression one gets from reading Montagu's writings is that, at times, she can be quite intemperate and, consequently, is unlikely to persuade, a conclusion she agrees with in her *Thoughts on Judaism* (1904: 49): 'these Apostates perhaps deserve some of the anathemas, which are flung indiscriminately at the unobservant—although conversion to religious observance is seldom accomplished by abuse'.

essential meaning of rituals lies outside themselves. As Seligman *et al* (2008: 4) argued, such a view of ritual may be unnecessarily narrow and 'has led to an emphasis on inner states like sincerity or belief that may not always be relevant to the social and cognitive context of ritual action'.

Montagu had quite a lot to say about prayer and services and her tone in talking about services, particularly services for children, could be very didactic:

> The lesson of God's omnipresence may be best enforced by constant variety of service, and by the introduction of passing events and incidents of daily life as themes for prayer. It might certainly be urged that a constantly varying service during childhood would render any fixed ritual irksome. But with the growth of judgment the necessity for some uniformity in worship will be felt.
>
> (Kessler 2004: 180)

Her comments about the themes for prayer may reflect a Protestant influence in which prayers are more sincere if they reflect the individual inner needs and concerns of the person praying, as opposed to 'fixed ritual' with, one supposes, fixed words. Yet, this need not be the case since, as was noted in chapter 3, Jewish prayer has always included 'pouring out one's heart to God' as a major part of its self-understanding, though extempore prayer is not a common feature of public Jewish worship. A striking feature of Montagu's comments on prayer and services is the tone of certainty which she displays in talking about what happens in worship. This is especially the case when she talks about children's education in relation to prayer and the nature of services for children:

> Our children have to learn that prayer involves *effort*. If they could see their leader moved by spiritual need, struggling to approach his God, they would unconsciously join in the search, and experience veneration in the presence of God. (p. 180, emphasis in the original)

More than a century after this was written the sentiments expressed may not be thought to reflect the reality of the worship experience of non-Orthodox Jews today, but this is sincerity in worship writ large. The inwardness of *effort* in prayer, being *moved* by spiritual *need*, *struggling* to approach God, the *search*, and *experiencing* the presence of God is not the language of those who mechanically follow a religion. This is Lily Montagu's ideal prayer service.

Thoughts on Judaism

How Lily Montagu understood religion in general, how Liberal Judaism fitted into that understanding, and the vision which Lily Montagu shared with Claude Montefiore of the religion of the future, is conveyed in her book *Thoughts on Judaism*, published in 1904. In the *Introduction* Montagu tells her readers:

> I have written in a dogmatic strain, not assuredly because I am not painfully conscious of my own limitations, but because there is a large body of Jews who require the construction, at any rate in outline, of a definite theory of their faith (p. 2).

In chapter 1 of *Thoughts on Judaism*, Montagu identified four vital principles which she believes underpin Judaism:

> **1**. There is one sole Creator or God.
>
> **2**. The God of the World has relations with each human soul, and each soul, being an emanation from Him, must be, like Him, immortal.
>
> **3**. We are responsible to God for our conduct, and if we sin we must bear the consequences of our sin. No intercessor is possible or necessary between man and God. The Divine love enters into the hearts of those who seek it with prayer and contrition.
>
> **4**. The love of our neighbours is then a necessary development of our love of God.

She is also clear in identifying those for whom she is *not* writing:

> The so-called orthodox section of Jews would reply that these principles do not comprehend Judaism. The formulating of principles is to them a matter of secondary importance.… This book is not addressed to men and women belonging to this school of thought.

Having first outlined, and then expanded on, the basic principles of Judaism as she understood them, Montagu turns her attention in chapter 4 to the religious situation of her time:

> In our community to-day, there is a large class of Jews who are unobservant, because their Judaism no longer rests on the authority of the Pentateuch. *They find it instead in human conscience*, in experience and in history. (p. 49, emphasis in original)

For avoidance of doubt, what Montagu is stating is that some Jews base their religion on the authority of human conscience, the 'Voice of God within man' and should not be afraid to follow it (p. 50). Given what Montagu has written elsewhere, at first reading this passage might be thought to be describing the large number of non-observant, nominally Orthodox Jews who were indifferent to religion. Rather, it describes Jews like her, who cannot ground their faith and practice upon the idea of literal verbal revelation recorded in Scripture:[151]

> [R]eligious observances must be tested by their ethical value. If they suggest no moral lesson applicable to modern life, it is our obvious duty to discard them, but their presence is likely to spoil our vision of God. This duty of selection is incumbent on all those Jews who do not believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and who endeavour to devote their reason to the service of God. (p. 79)

The Jews of whom she was speaking sought to validate their faith through their own moral judgement and personal religious experiences. Montagu emphasised the authority of individual *conscience*. A privileged role for individual consciousness and conscience in religion is one of the tropes of sincerity.

For Montagu, prayer did indeed amount to communication between human beings and God and consciousness/conscience included 'the Voice of God within man', which was authoritative (p. 50). Montagu was not unaware of the challenges of grounding religious belief and practice in this way:

> We… recognise its difficulties and dangers. …a religion based on human conscience, must be a religion of conflicting, chaotic principles. It is only after careful consideration we are led to a different conclusion, and to realise that a religion based on the authority of conscience, makes a supreme demand on the noblest faculties with which man is endowed. (p. 49-50)

Given that, for Montagu, conscience is the voice of God within people, and that there is genuine communication with God through prayer, her programme is clear: to inculcate the habit of prayer, resulting in conduct which demonstrates devotion to the Jewish principles which she had outlined. The prayer which leads to right living is:

[151] I think that we may infer with confidence that Montagu rejected (some) scriptural traditions as genuine records of the people's experience and history, preferring modern critical understandings of what constituted history.

> real intelligent communication with God [which] must therefore include some 'made up prayer' spoken in all simplicity, sincerity and reverence in the language most familiar to the worshippers. (p. 73)

In this sentence we see several of the tropes of sincerity. Montagu's idea is that for communication with God to be real and intelligent, it must come from the individual—expressed here as being 'made up'—in contrast to traditional Jewish liturgical formulations, which are often chanted and performed by professional service leaders. The individual worshipper, responding to inner feelings rather than to 'someone else's words', is able to speak to God simply and with reverence, that is, sincerely. Montagu felt very strongly that prayer could affect real change in people's lives and that is why she argued so strongly in favour of change to synagogue liturgy and ritual. Those changes, in particular the use of the vernacular and the introduction of new prayers and hymns, were, in part, intended to:

> arrest the departure of those truly religious members of our brotherhood, who leave our community, because its forms and ceremonies offer them so little spiritual satisfaction. (p. 144)

Those she identified as 'truly religious' did not mean the 'consistently Orthodox', as she called them. She was only too well aware of 'very observant Jews, whose religious professions are not in harmony with their daily conduct' and warned of the danger that others who took note of their behaviour might think that 'their insincerity justifies our complete indifference' (p. 88). It is noteworthy that Montagu equates insincerity with hypocrisy, the non-alignment of claimed religious commitment with personal conduct. Nor was Montagu referring to the religiously indifferent. She had in mind people like herself, for whom 'true' religion meant an *inner* spiritual experience, which could not be achieved by the observance of external 'forms and ceremonies'. One of those people was Israel Isidor Mattuck, the first Rabbi of Liberal Judaism, about whom she said in 1922, 10 years after his taking up post at the LJS:

> I did tend to prophesy once; it was at a drawing-room meeting held at my sister's house. I ventured to hope then that one day we should have a minister of high intellectual power and humanity, one possessed of sympathy and indomitable courage and with a magnetic personality. Well, today, we have such a one in Rabbi Mattuck.

(JRU Bulletin, January 1923, cited in Fox 2014: 119)

It is to a consideration of Rabbi Mattuck's life and his published work that this chapter now turns.

Israel Mattuck: a brief biographical sketch

Israel Isidor Mattuck – frequently referred to by writers by his initials IIM – was born in Lithuania in 1883 into a traditionally observant Orthodox family. In 1891 the young Mattuck, his mother and his four siblings joined their husband and father, Benjamin Mattuck, in the United States. The Mattuck family set up home in Worcester, Massachusetts. In the autumn of 1901 Israel Mattuck entered Harvard College, situated across the Charles River from the city of Boston. According to his biographer, there is evidence that Mattuck retained a high degree of Orthodox religious observance at the time he entered university. However, it appears that early in his time at Harvard he encountered Reform Judaism. In contrast to the traditional Jewish services with which he would have been acquainted, in the Adath Israel synagogue in Boston Mattuck encountered a service where he witnessed 'men and women sitting together, singing accompanied by an organ (which, he thought, "adds to the praying in one way, and detracts in another"), a lack of talking during the service and the conduct of prayers in English (Fox 2014: 52). Overall, Mattuck seems not to have been very impressed by his first encounter with Reform Judaism and, in particular he disliked the Rabbi's sermon. Despite this, Mattuck's time at Harvard University had a profound effect on him not only intellectually, but also religiously, leading him away from tradition and towards a new path:

> We are able to say with some authority that IIM's remarkable shift away from Jewish orthodoxy took place while he was at Harvard… [I]t is clear that gaining access to one of America's elite institutions was the main catalyst for IIM to reconsider his self-definition as a Jew in a liberal society and his religious beliefs… [O]n his arrival in Cambridge he was traditionally observant and critical of a Reform service, but within a few years he had turned his back on the restrictions of religious orthodoxy and had taken the decision to enter a Reform seminary.
>
> (Fox 2014: 55)

At Harvard Mattuck was ‘a diligent and conscientious student’ (Fox 2014: 47), completing his undergraduate degree *magna cum laude* under in three years, rather than the usual four, and graduating in the top 50 of 2,000 students in his year (Fox 2014: 57).

Mattuck enrolled at Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati in 1905. Throughout his five years at HUC his relationship with the College authorities was difficult, and during this period he worked as the Minister of several Reform congregations and he married. Despite the heavy load of academic study, congregational work and a major change in his personal life, Mattuck was ordained as Rabbi in 1910. The following year Mattuck was invited to take up the post of Rabbi to the newly founded Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London. An inaugural service took place on 20 January 1912 to welcome the new Rabbi. The third of the ‘Three Ms’ had arrived. The situation he found was not comparable to that which he had left behind in America. Just a few years earlier Claude Montefiore had admitted the difficult task that lay ahead in trying to establish liberal Judaism, noting that it would require ‘a good deal more work than we had originally supposed’ (Black 1988: 70). Israel Mattuck turned out to be the right choice for the task:

> [T]he endurance of the Liberal Jewish movement can be attributed almost exclusively to IIM. It was IIM who shaped the ideas, practices, liturgies, organisational structures and procedures of English liberal Judaism… there can be no doubt that he was the inspiration and above all the communicator, of Liberal Judaism. Claude Montefiore and Lily Montagu laid the foundation stones of Liberal Judaism in England, but IIM built the edifice.
>
> (Fox 2014: 335)

It was in the area of prayers and prayer books, worship and services that Liberal Judaism sought to make its distinctive position most clear and this where Rabbi Mattuck’s ideas and practical efforts made a substantial and significant contribution. He oversaw the first prayer books to be used at the LJS (as opposed to books for the meetings of the JRU) and these were used in other, though not all, Liberal offshoots of the LJS. In 1911, the leaders of the LJ S had been working on a liturgy for Shabbat morning services, but delayed completion until Rabbi Mattuck took up his post. His most significant liturgical publication was the three-volume Liberal Jewish prayer book, published in the 1920s with a revision brought out in 1937, and not superseded until thirty years after that (Rich 2014: 34).

Mattuck's Ideas

In comparison with the other three founders of Liberal Judaism, Israel Mattuck's literary output was modest, but significant. As noted above, it included liturgies which were in use in Liberal synagogues for more than four decades and an influential presentation of the ideology of the movement in *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism,* published in 1947. Mattuck lectured and preached extensively in synagogues, at public meetings and in universities, and he made radio broadcasts on numerous occasions. The majority of his sermons remained unpublished until a substantial selection from them appeared recently (Rich 2014). In his inaugural sermon, on 20 January 2012, Mattuck described Liberal Judaism as:

> [A] manner of thinking. It is an attitude of mind… a search for the truth [which] refuses to be restrained by tradition. Liberal Judaism is the application of this manner of thinking to Judaism. [It has] no dogma and its unity is found in the manner of thinking and [as] a community of hope and purpose.
>
> (*What is Liberal Judaism?* in Rich 2014: 36)

In his conception of Liberal Judaism as 'a manner of thinking' and 'an attitude of mind' Mattuck reflects the understanding of sincerity proposed by Seligman *et al*. (2008: 4) as having an essential orientation to internal attitudes within social actors, often expressed as 'attitudes' or 'intentions'. His own attitude to truth was fundamental to his religious outlook:

> One of the most striking aspects of IIM's personal faith was his uncompromising commitment to seeking out, speaking and putting into action what he saw as being 'the truth'… Truth was… the very essence of religion… Liberal Judaism sought to make Judaism synonymous with truth.
>
> (Fox: 2014: 328-9)

Mattuck was committed to promoting a view of religion which he believed reflected the religious spirit of the ancient prophets of Israel. Robert Seltzer has suggested that prophetic religion had been characterised by its 'formulating a call to "return"', to an 'intimacy with God'. In doing so, the prophets were 'radical simplifiers, seeking to apply a clarified set of old values to the changed situation of their time'. The prophets' 'emphasis on self-transformation' and their demand for 'absolute faithfulness … marked the beginnings of a change in the nature of religion that would have potent long-range consequences' (Seltzer 1980: 93). The prophetic values which Mattuck

propounded throughout his career and his pursuit of lofty goals relating to service to God and to people left those who encountered Mattuck in no doubt about his personal sincerity (Fox: 2014: 316).

Further tropes of sincerity appear in the inaugural sermon 'What is Liberal Judaism?' in which Mattuck describes the aim of Liberal Judaism as being to:

> interpret the spirit of Judaism in the light of the age and to fix the attention upon the spirit away from the letter. [We] accept only that of tradition which we can honestly and sincerely accept as valid… What we cannot accept on present-day evidence we cannot accept on the dictum of tradition.
>
> (Rich 2014: 36)

The contrast between 'spirit' and 'letter'[152] and the emphasis upon interpretation from the perspective of (any given) present day as the measure of what one may 'sincerely accept as valid' is an idea which has continued in Liberal Judaism to the present century. In the preamble of the current *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism* (2006) it is stated that 'Liberal Judaism values truth above tradition, sincerity above conformity' (p. 4). In those few words we find binary oppositions which encapsulate a legacy of the founders of liberal Judaism: truth and sincerity versus tradition and conformity.

We also find Mattuck expressing the central idea expressed some decades later in Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*: that we should not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts. He told his congregation that the prayer books of Liberal Judaism should:

> [E]xpress the beliefs held in common by those who constitute our Congregation [in the hope that] all of us accept most – a very large most – of the ideas our prayers express and imply… and nothing of importance violates the conscience of any of us…
>
> (Sermon: *Our Prayer Book*, 24 January 1920, cited in Rich 2014: 35)

Here we can clearly identify the trope of sincerity in Mattuck's acceptance of the elevation of the individual conscience above other considerations in deciding what should be the content of Liberal Jewish prayers and prayer books. While traditional formulations may have been the starting point for the selection of prayers, Mattuck was very clear about what needed to be done to produce an acceptable Liberal liturgy:

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[152] I'm indebted to Dr Jo Carruthers for reminding me that this is quoting the New Testament and also represents a primarily Protestant formulation or manner of expression.

> Our very first task… was to take from the traditional prayerbook what we could not believe, and therefore honestly say, had to be omitted. What we believe to be true and helpful we have retained.
>
> (*ibid.*)

However, that is not the whole story. In the *Introduction* by Mattuck to the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book*, published in 1926 and revised in 1937, he explains that there are some 'prayers which are so old that they could not be excluded from Jewish services' (p. xv). Mattuck tells the prospective worshipper that such prayers have been retained in the original Hebrew but that rather than accompany those prayers with literal English translations, the editors opted for a paraphrase in which 'we ascribe to it a meaning somewhat different from the original one but related to it.' (*ibid.*). One of those prayers is the second paragraph of the *Amidah* prayer which 'contains a reference to the belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead', a belief which, for Liberal Judaism, 'has lost its significance' (*ibid.*).[153] What Mattuck identifies here is a problem which his use of English paraphrases highlights and does not resolve: in what way can age justify the inclusion of a prayer in Liberal Jewish prayer books? In the 1903 publication of texts to be used at the services of the Jewish Religious Union the first two paragraphs of the *Amidah* appear only in English translation. The first paragraph is heavily paraphrased and does not reflect the wording of the Hebrew text other than thematically. There are other prayers whose Hebrew text is present, including other parts of the *Amidah*. It was primarily Mattuck's decision to restore the Hebrew texts to the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book*.[154] If those texts contained ideas which were in some respect objectionable, or had lost their significance for Liberal Jews, why could they not be omitted? It seems inconsistent with the basic premise of both his own beliefs ('what we cannot accept on present-day evidence we cannot accept on the dictum of tradition') and the *Affirmation* published eighty years later. This inconsistency forces us to ask *how* and *how much* is the Liberal commitment to sincerity compromised by other considerations? In this instance priority is accorded to the age of a prayer which displaces the priority of sincerity in what is said in the prayers. It does seem that Mattuck is prepared, on occasion, to be flexible with regard to strict sincerity and to allow for other

[153] While Mattuck recognises that the use of these paraphrases means the reading into certain prayers of meanings which the originals did not bear, and that this is, in some respects, unsatisfactory, this practice was followed and, indeed, continued in the 1967 Siddur *Service of the Heart,* in which English passages which were paraphrases of the corresponding Hebrew were clearly indicated to be such.

[154] Mattuck's biographer records that he compiled his prayer books single-handedly (Fox 2014: 342).

considerations (here a desire to maintain a link to the past) to play a part in his editorial decisions. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, this apparent inconsistency and the issue which underlies it continue to present a challenge for Liberal Jewish liturgists.

Adapting to Anglo-Jewish ways

A further challenge concerning choice of words faced Mattuck in his early days in the new post. Educated and trained in the USA, he was accustomed to a robust and assertive Reform Judaism which was well established as a substantial and vigorous section of the Jewish community. He was certainly unaccustomed to the deference shown to Orthodox Judaism in England, to Chief Rabbis and to the desire for communal 'unity'.[155] Some of his early pronouncements concerning traditional Judaism were regarded as outspoken and insensitive. Just as Lily Montagu had mirrored language used by Protestants in her description of an ideal Judaism of 'dignity' and 'beauty', so Mattuck mirrored the type of strong language used by Montagu to attack Orthodoxy. He described traditional Judaism as 'an idolatry' which 'conceals its beauty and the heavy trappings of ugly ceremonies. Away then with all that sullies, corrupts or stifles…' (Rich 2014: 36). These sentiments clearly echo the antipathy towards accretions and elaborations in ritual and practice of the sincere viewpoint and an aesthetic which seeks to uncover the underlying or inner beauty of religious beliefs and practices. However, like Lily Montagu, Mattuck could appreciate that there was a role for some 'ceremonies':

> Ceremonies have a place in the worship of God. They conserve religion, if they are the right kind, and if they are observed significantly, that is, observed not mechanically but with feeling. They can rouse a sense of holiness, and so help men to lead better and holier lives.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 97)

While the idea that ceremonies do have a proper role to play in worship is subject to the caveat that they be observed other than mechanically and with feeling, that is, in a sincere manner, Mattuck was not so rationalistic or cold that he could not appreciate the aesthetic qualities of ceremonies. In fact, he had quite a lot to say about ceremonies and their aesthetics. 'Ceremonies can supply the element of beauty in religion; and religion ought to value beauty' (Mattuck 1947: 98). He traces the origin of the secular arts to religious rites and many art forms, including poetry, music and architecture, exist

[155] C.f. the comments by Montefiore (1900: 619) regarding an aversion among English Jews for 'disunion'.

because they have served and still function, to provide media through which humans express religious ideas. Judaism 'put beauty in its ceremonies' and 'some of them' can beautify worship. This is a striking comment which once again highlights the manner in which Mattuck seems prepared to allow some degree of flexibility in his thinking on sincerity, in contrast to both his own and others' expressions of disapproval of ceremonialism. This may represent a softening of his stance over time. As noted above, he could be highly critical of ceremonies, especially when they intrude into worship in a way which 'conceals its [worship's] beauty under heavy trappings of ugly ceremonies' (Rich 2014: 36). Those words were from a sermon delivered in 1912. Thirty-five years later, Mattuck felt able to quote Psalm 96: 9 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness', and to suggest that such a verse 'imposes the condition on ceremonies that they must be beautiful' (Mattuck 1947: 98). A positive attitude to ceremonies was never entirely absent in Liberal Judaism and the verse from Psalm 96 concerning worship appears inscribed above the ark in some Liberal synagogues. Yet this paean to the elevating possibilities of aesthetically pleasing rituals is immediately followed by the comment: 'Some of the Jewish ceremonies that have come down from the past do not satisfy that condition [of being beautiful]; so Liberal Judaism either abolishes them, or does not insist on their observance (*ibid.*). Mattuck recognised that many judgments concerning religious belief and practices are subjective and often charged with emotion. He could sometimes be out of line with the thinking of other Liberal Jews, including those of his flock, leading to conflict.

From time to time, especially in his early days in London, Mattuck would misread the attitude of his congregation in certain areas of practice: the wearing of head coverings proved to be one such an issue. As a product of American Reform Judaism, he was accustomed to a widespread communal practice in that country of worshipping with the head uncovered. He was not personally inclined to wear a head covering in the synagogue and on occasion preached against it. However, he came under pressure from members of the congregation, including Claude Montefiore, and gave some ground by encouraging men to wear hats when on the *bimah* (an elevated platform from which readers and preachers conducted services) in the synagogue. He himself wore a clerical gown and took to wearing a *biretta*, a form of clerical cap often worn by Roman Catholic priests.

Mattuck demonstrated a preparedness to compromise on some matters, but had no time for many traditional practices. He believed that they were too often cursorily

observed in ‘a spirit of artificiality and hollow sham’. Mattuck admired the teachings of the Prophets and attributed to them his own stress on ranking ethics far more highly than rituals. He characterised rituals as ‘oriental trappings’ which often hid ‘the truth and beauty of Judaism’ (Fox 2014: 325). He averred that the Prophets had taught that rituals unaccompanied by ethical conduct were void and he did not regard ceremonies as arising from divine ordinances (Fox 2014: 327).

It is clear that for Mattuck sincerity was a major issue when it came to assigning value to rituals. Mattuck considered that many observances were trimmed with ‘elaborate frills’ and laden ‘with tinsel [which] destroys their life and cannot touch the heart because the heart loves the language of simplicity’ (Fox 2014: 327). Trimmed with trappings, frills and tinsel, he regarded some observances as making no connection to the heart of the worshipper and, worse still, capable of degeneration into superstition and even idolatry. Rituals must have meaning for those observing them:

> Ceremonies must, however, possess not only beauty but also meaning. And the meaning must be such that those who are asked, or urged, to observe them can accept. Not all ceremonies that have come down from the past can have meaning for Jews in the present.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 98)

Mattuck’s frequent references to the ‘spirit’ of traditions is indicative of the trope of sincerity in his religious outlook. He told his congregation that: ‘We see, however, the chief value in tradition not in its physical or material elements… but in the spirit which expresses itself in them.’ (Sermon *Liberal Judaism and the Jewish Tradition,* 3 March 1917 in Rich 2014: 37)

The spirit identified by him as inherent in tradition may be conceptually linked to his notion of the spirit in persons which we see in his observations on what we may term the religious psychology of worshippers:

> We worship God not only by what we do, but by what we are, not only in conduct but also in spirit, in personality. […] Our actions indicate qualities of character. […] God is interested in what we are.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 99-100)

It was noted in chapter 2 that (a) an important characteristic of sincerity is a significant focus on the individual and on ‘interiority’ and that (b) Protestants taught that salvation

could not be achieved through one's deeds. Sincerity in thought and will only could ensure salvation:

> God would accept the will for the deed… 'The Lord accepteth the affection and the endeavour for the thing done.' 'He who desires to be righteous, is righteous… If there be a willing mind it is accepted'.
>
> Hill (1972: 159-60)

Mattuck's view of the proper worship of God was very 'inner'. It is tempting to see in this Puritan idea—that interior motivation is, at least, the larger part of the achievement of salvation—as being close to the Rabbi's ideas regarding how people may fulfil their duty to develop their inner 'spiritual and moral selves':

> This aspect of human duty involves the most intimate part of our lives. It includes purity in thought, in feeling and in most personal acts. It belongs to our worship of God because it has to do with our character and personality.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 100).

However, one must exercise care when language is used in a vague manner, terms are unclear or where several meanings are possible.[156] In *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism* Mattuck told his readers that 'The worship of God begins with an attitude of mind and heart…' (p. 94) and 'The worship of God is, in the first place, an inner feeling' (p. 95). His ideas are heavily influenced by his conception of the sincerity demanded by the Prophets who placed inner dispositions, such as love, higher than concrete acts such as making sacrifices:

> [M]en learnt that God did not desire this form of worship, as the prophet Hosea said in God's name: "I desire love and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 96)

Mattuck's quotation of this prophetic call to inwardness and ethical behaviour is part and parcel of his religious radicalism, a stance representative of what has come to be known as 'Classical' Reform Judaism. This expression of Judaism emphasised modern thought, individual moral conduct and social justice. Although as early as the 1920s the austere anti-traditionalism of Classical Reform Judaism was giving way in the United States to a less radical, more nuanced appreciation of Jewish tradition, this

[156] I am grateful to Professor Knott for pointing out the apparent 'sleight of hand' by which Rabbi Mattuck seems to conflate spirit, personality and character.

ideological shift appears largely to have passed Mattuck by. Even so, there was another strand to his religious understanding. This was supplied by his traditional Orthodox upbringing. His thorough knowledge of traditional Jewish literature, including its liturgy, may well have influenced even the mature thought of his later years; in *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism*, published in 1947, he wrote:

> Being flows into doing. The spiritual and moral qualities which constitute character or personality, attached to our inner being, our feelings, thoughts, hopes, ideals and faith. The outward life, our deeds and utterances, express them… Personality itself is the essence of his being. Our personal relations to God centred in it. This is why we worship God by what we are. But personality entails activity. The ideal of holiness involves both character and conduct.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 102)

The ideas expressed here certainly reflect the trope of sincerity with their emphasis on the 'spiritual qualities' of 'inner being' and their reflection on personality and character which, in turn, motivate activity, yet Mattuck's thought here is sufficiently sophisticated that he avoids a simple dualism of an inner-outer binary. In Mattuck's view, and in his own personal religious life, the most transforming of activities was prayer:[157]

> Prayer must have some influence on the mind or spirit. It produces a feeling of joy, or of strength, or of courage, or of confidence… And the inner life of man—mind and heart—is the channel through which the effect of prayer can reach his outer or physical life… The question to ask about prayer is not: What do we get out of it, but what do we feel in it? It is valuable not for what benefits we can derive from prayers but for the exaltation we find in them.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 82)

Mattuck's notion of what constitutes prayer which 'works' has, at its heart, the trope of sincerity and, once more, approaches an understanding of prayer very close to that of the seventeenth-century Puritans whose words are cited above: 'God would accept the

[157] In the passages quoted from his writings, Rabbi Mattuck makes reference to, *inter alia,* 'purity in thought' and' holiness'. He was no doubt aware of the debate in Judaism over how holiness may be attained, in particular, whether it was intellectual thought or inner feelings and emotions which most effectively led to holiness. There is a well-known saying in *Pirke Avot* (2: 5, references vary slightly) that 'an ignorant person cannot be a pious person'. As Louis Jacobs noted, in the 18th century 'Hasidim had inverted the traditional scale of values, in placing the life of prayer higher than the life devoted to Torah study…' (Jacobs 1990: 28). It may well be that some liberal (small 'l') Jews held the same view. If so, they are more likely to have done so under the influence of Christianity than of Hasidism. On the hierarchy of religious activities in Rabbinic literature see Reif (1993) pp. 95-102.

will for the deed… 'If there be a willing mind it is accepted'. Mattuck again insists on the efficacy of sincerity:

> Of any prayer it can be said that it is effective when he who utters it feels that he has really communed with God… [and it may] contain anything which is in the mind or heart of the worshipper… The very communion with him is effective. No sincere prayer, therefore, is ever unanswered.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 80-81)

The next chapter of this thesis will examine the practical outcome of Mattuck's ideas in the production of liturgy for Liberal Jews in the first half of the twentieth century and how his work and the work of his successors relate to Liberal Judaism's concept of sincerity and worship throughout the twentieth century. The consistency of the views of Liberal Judaism's first Rabbi and the current *Affirmation of Liberal Judaism* concerning sincerity in worship can be seen in this statement:

> It is not always necessary that we use words, for we can pray without words. The feelings of our hearts… are prayers, whether we express them in words or not; but words are not prayers unless they express sincere feelings in our hearts.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 95)

In these two sentences Rabbi Mattuck expresses both the long Jewish tradition that prayer is the pouring out to God of the 'feelings of our hearts', and a distinctive liberal Jewish idea that prayer *must* 'express sincere feelings in our hearts'. Chapters 7 and 8 will examine how theology and belief are expressed in the choices made by the editors of the liturgies produced in the twentieth century for Liberal Jewish communities.

Chapter 7

Liberal Judaism's liturgies and platforms: early twentieth century

In this chapter attention turns to how the concept of sincerity is expressed in the liturgies produced for the JRU and for Liberal Judaism's congregations in the twentieth century. In Liberal Judaism's centenary history (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004), the authors identified the liturgy as articulating the movement's sincerely held beliefs: 'As the Liberal movement laid emphasis on sincerity in worship and in saying prayers that it believed in [*sic*], the best place to see these beliefs exposed is in its liturgy' (p. 115).[158] The focus of attention in this chapter will be on (i) the Shabbat liturgy published in 1902 (revised 1903) by the Jewish Religious Union (JRU), the forerunner of Liberal Judaism, and (ii) the Liberal Jewish Prayer Book (*LJPB*) published in 1926 (revised 1937). These two publications were used in Liberal Jewish worship for 65 years.

Liberal Judaism in England began its institutional life in the early years of the twentieth century. Jewish religious reform had begun in Europe a century earlier. Throughout the nineteenth century reformed liturgies were published in Germany and in North America. The long editorial history of Jewish prayer book reform and the debates generated around the published liturgies highlight the issues involved in the production of liturgy by the JRU and Liberal Judaism. Though there was a considerable degree of variation among the Reform prayer books which appeared in the nineteenth century, there was also a considerable degree of commonality regarding those issues of belief which the reformers felt they could not pray with sincerity, i.e. things they did not believe. There were two ways reformers dealt with such problem texts. The first was simply to omit them. The second was to change them, either by editing the Hebrew text or by providing a nonliteral translation into the vernacular, or both. The (Reform) West London Synagogue had published its own liturgy, but this was quite *sui generis* in its

[158] Liberal Judaism shares this understanding of prayer and liturgy with liberal Protestant Christianity. Willard Sperry, a former Dean of the Theological School at Harvard University, wrote that: 'I am persuaded that the act of worship implies the celebration and adoration of an objective reality— and this reality, the noblest, most adequate, most important thing for us in our universe. That reality is what we mean by the divine. In worship that reality is set before the mind, the feelings and the will, for the contemplation and consent. The act of worship is our "Yea-saying" to what is for us the truest, the most beautiful, the best (ethically) in our world. (Sperry1930: 315). He could have been quoting Lily Montagu's characterisation of God as representing all that is good, beautiful and true; see e.g. *Thoughts on Judaism* (1904) p. 9 & 13.

conservatism.[159] Liberal Judaism largely followed a more radical, but still moderate, path chartered by European and American prayerbook reform. It did not adopt the most radical innovations implemented by some liberal congregations elsewhere, such as prayer services conducted only in vernacular languages.

Liturgy, sincerity and 'problem' beliefs

In pursuing reform of traditional liturgies, liberal Jews felt able, if not compelled, to remove statements embodying beliefs which they felt were in conflict with what they understood to be true for modern people. When we examine the content of those texts which were omitted from nineteenth-century European and American Reform prayer books and those published by the Jewish Religious Union (JRU) and Liberal Judaism in England, we see a significant degree of theological uniformity in the omissions and reinterpretations.[160] Doctrines which liberals felt were at variance with modern knowledge included the divine origin—through the agency of Moses—of the Torah, the doctrine of retribution, bodily resurrection, the existence of angels and the occurrence of miracles. Other traditional ideas with which liberal Jews consistently felt ill at ease included Israel as the 'Chosen People', the idea that at some future time, 'the end of days', a personal Messiah would come to gather in the exiled Jewish people, restore the homeland of Israel under a Davidic monarchy and the Temple sacrifices.

By making significant changes to the content of its prayer books Liberal Judaism was trying to meet what its leaders perceived as the spiritual needs of their congregation. At the same time, they believed that they were remaining faithful, as they understood it, to the 'real' Jewish tradition and to the Jewish people conceived as a religious community, rather than a national or ethnic entity. Following the logic of the idea of a 'real' tradition, obscured by accretions added over many centuries, they sought to 'purify' liturgical expression and practice. The early Jewish reformers in Germany

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[159] 'Ritual modifications were considered by members of the Reform congregation in 1888, 1896, 1910 and 1912. The major proposal on all four occasions was the curtailment of Hebrew and the introduction of more English into the services… a West London Synagogue Committee made more radical recommendations in 1910. It proposed that a substantial portion of the service should be read in English'. From 1910 an increasing proportion of English was introduced to WLS services (Sharot 1979: 215-6).

[160] For an overall view of the ideological aspects of Reform changes to liturgy see Meyer 1988. Useful collections of documentary sources include Plaut (1963), Gutmann (1977), Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz (1995), Isaacs and Olitsky (1995), Meyer and Plaut (2001). Significant works on the reform of Jewish liturgies are Petuchowski (1968) and Reif (1993). Elbogen (1993) must be treated with a degree of caution. It is based upon a work first published in 1913, then revised in 1972 for a Hebrew translation. This edition was then translated into English. Elbogen's comprehensive description of the liturgy remains useful, but the historical reconstructions are widely regarded as inadequate.

had looked to the Protestant Church as a model and their reformist project strongly echoes Protestant ideas, including sincerity. Worship which included statements of belief to which worshippers could not give assent was insincere and failed to meet their spiritual need to pray with sincerity.

Though the impetus for reform in the first decades of the 1800s had begun among 'lay' people, the growing desire for reform attracted the support of a small number of prominent Rabbis. One of these was a Hungarian Rabbi Aaron Chorin, at that time appointed as a communal Rabbi in Romania. Chorin wrote a *responsum* in reply to the question: 'Is it permitted to cleanse our liturgy from the additions which have crept in by the bye?' [161] Chorin's answer made a distinction between two types of daily prayers, the one which included obligatory prayers and hymns of praise (Hebrew: *pesuke dezimra*), the other which he regarded as accretions, such as the poems known as *piyyutim*:

> As concerns obligatory prayers, there can be no question: these have not "crept in," …and should not be changed in either content or language. High antiquity has given them a place of respect; they are surrounded by an aura with which one would not easily dare to tamper.
>
> (Plaut 1963: 153)

As for the songs and poems referred to as *pesuke dezimra,* Chorin recommends that 'they deserve the cutting knife of the wine grower who labors in God's vineyard' (Plaut 1963: 153), while concerning other parts of the traditional service such as the *piyyutim*, he writes:

> In the whole Talmud there is not one relevant passage concerning the nonsense of these prayers (if they deserve such names at all!). They were generally written much later, at the time of the darkest persecutions. They bear the mark of the extreme suppression of the human spirit. … [and he concludes] There is, consequently, no doubt that the liturgy must be cleansed from additions which have crept in by the bye.[162]
>
> (Plaut 1963: 153-4)

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[161] An English translation of the text of the *responsum* can be found in Plaut (1963) p. 152–154.

[162] Chorin was not without support for his dislike of *piyyutim*. '[S]ome still continued to permit the addition of appropriate *piyyutim*, even though such an authority as Maimonides condemned this practice as likely to cause people to take the prayers too lightly, compromising their feelings of devotion (Hammer 1994: 98).

Prior to 1967, Liberal Judaism's extensive excision of passages from the traditional order of service, the desire to introduce new material responsive to the ideas of the day and the wish to imitate the decorous aesthetics of Protestant Christian services produced an outcome of content and structure which Jakob Petuchowski characterised as 'a wilful and arbitrary departure' (1968: 73). In order to appreciate what Petuchowski meant, and to facilitate comparison of traditional and liberal liturgies, the following page gives a brief 'skeleton' overview of the structure and content of a Shabbat morning service, as Shabbat services have always been the services most attended by Liberal Jews.[163] The order and content of obligatory daily prayers and those for Shabbat and festivals were fixed by the early ninth century C.E. and changed little until the nineteenth century (Hammer 1994: 97).[164] The order of a morning service is:

Introductory Prayers/Preliminary Service

Morning Blessings (*Birchot Ha-Shachar*) and Verses of Song (*Pesukei d'Zimra*)

The Recitation of the *Shema* (Hear O Israel!)

passages from the *Torah,* blessings and passages on redemption

The *Amidah* ('Standing' Prayer)

also known as *Tefilah* (*the* 'Prayer') or *Sh'moneh Esrei*, (the '18' blessings)

Reading of the Torah

Musaf ('Additional' Service)

(generally omitted in Liberal services)

Concluding Prayers

Tachanun ('Supplication') and *Aleynu* ('It is our Duty')

Other prayers, psalms and *Kaddish* ('Sanctification) appear throughout services.

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[163] When examining the version of the liturgy produced for the Jewish Religious Union in 1903, it should be borne in mind that the services of the JRU were afternoon services. The liturgy, however, contains the first paragraph of the *Shema* both in Hebrew and in English. The *Shema* is not traditionally recited at afternoon *Minchah* services. Its presence in the published liturgy probably indicates a flexible view towards the traditional content of services on the part of the editors who wished to include this text because of its importance.

[164] Hammer (1994) contains a full description by a Conservative/Masorti scholar and Rabbi of traditional services, their order and content. Hertz (1947) is a useful commentary by an Orthodox Chief Rabbi on the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (Singer's). Hammer (2003) is a detailed commentary on the *Siddur Sim Shalom* for Shabbat and Festivals of the Conservative movement, first published in 1985. British Reform *siddur*, *Forms of Prayer* (eighth edition, 2008) contains extensive commentary including a helpful graphic layout of the structure of services (p. 745).

Language: a perennial issue

The idea of introducing vernacular prayer in synagogue services had been prominent among the religious reforms proposed by liberal-minded Jews in Germany from early in the nineteenth century. The relationship between the vernacular and sincerity is clear: how can one address God with sincerity if one does not understand the language in which one makes the address? In what follows I will look at how this was understood and argued for. The issue of using the vernacular in prayer to help achieve sincerity in worship is important for considering the British situation. As will be shown, as the twentieth century progressed, the use of vernacular in English Liberal Jewish prayer books diminished. This happened despite the explicit admission by liturgical editors that prayer in Hebrew was not understood by most of those being asked to use it in services.

In the formal debates concerning specific issues of Jewish religious reform in Germany, the issue of the use of the vernacular for Jewish prayer had been controversial, in particular as very radical proposals were mooted. As part of a statement calling for the creation of a commission to devise a new prayer book issued at the first rabbinical conference which met to debate religious reform, in Brunswick in 1844, Joseph Maier had made the following comments regarding the continued use of Hebrew:

> The language in which it [the prayer book] is written has for many centuries been unintelligible to half of the congregation, namely the women, and now it has become a secret for nine-tenths of the people, a thick wall of separation between the worshipper and his God[.]
>
> (Plaut 1963: 154)

The effect of this barrier between the worshipper and God 'makes a spiritual attitude and true exaltation of the spirit impossible'. Translation, Maier declares, is ineffective as it merely 'proves the purposelessness of a dead language and its inability to achieve a vital, life-giving spiritualization'.[165] When worshippers need to look to the vernacular translation on a page in order to understand the prayers, 'then worship becomes an exercise of the mind rather than an exaltation of the heart' (Plaut 1963: 154).

[165] I am grateful to Dr Jo Carruthers for an insightful observation that the phrase 'Life-giving spiritualization' is an interesting phrase that really invokes what sincerity means in terms of its religious/spiritual substance.

The Conference of Reform leaders held in Frankfurt in July 1845 saw major differences emerge among delegates over the issue of the use of Hebrew and German in services.[166] A few months later services for the High Holy Days, *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, were organized by reform-minded laypeople in Berlin. A new prayer book, produced for the occasion, significantly abbreviated the services and was almost entirely in German and included original compositions. The attendance was much larger than had been anticipated and this initiative resulted in the establishment of a Reform congregation (Meyer 1988: 129). Though popular in Berlin, the community structure of congregations regulated by the various German states, such as Prussia, created practical difficulties, such as access to allocations from the Church tax collected and distributed by state officialdom, which stifled the possibility of creating a radical synagogue movement in other regions. The Prussian state had tolerated the radical congregation but was not prepared to endorse it (Meyer 1988: 131). There is no suggestion in Meyer's account that the reason the radical reforms which were enthusiastically received in Berlin had anything to do with the use of the vernacular as the language of prayer and the near elimination of Hebrew from the services.

In America, Reform Judaism of a radical hue had an extensive influence. In Chicago, the synagogue led by Emil G. Hirsch, a leading ideologue of radical reform, dispensed with the Ark and the Torah scrolls altogether, while a census in 1906 revealed that more than a hundred Reform congregations no longer used Hebrew in prayer, and many others used little (Meyer 1988: 280).[167] The liturgy which achieved widespread use among Reform synagogues, the *Union Prayer Book* (first published in 1892) was predominantly in English and, according, opened from left to right. Where Hebrew prayers appeared, the English prayers were on the left-hand pages and the Hebrew prayers on the right-hand pages (Meyer 1988: 279).

[166] As might be expected, there was little controversy over the language of personal prayer, public worship was the focus of the heated debate. See Meyer (1988: 137); Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz (1995: 167-183).

[167] A criticism levelled against the Berlin congregation and Hirsch's Chicago synagogue was the holding of services on Sundays. In neither case was Shabbat 'moved' to Sunday. In the USA, the liturgies used in the minority of congregations which held Sunday services specifically omitted references to Shabbat (Meyer 2008: 290-2).

English Liberal Judaism and the language of prayer

The founders of Liberal Judaism, like others before them in England, sought to introduce English into synagogue services. Even Israel Abrahams, the founder with the strongest sympathy towards Jewish tradition, seemed to favour change in the language of services. In a sermon published in 1895, seven years before the formation of the Jewish Religious Union (JRU), he appeared to approve of the use of English in services, though with reservations. 'Some people expect great things from the growing popularity of prayers in the vernacular', he wrote, while at the same time he seems to acknowledge that there might be resistance to the change: 'it may be that when we can decide *how far*, and *under what restrictions*, English is to find a place in the liturgy, the new songs will not be wanting.' (Abrahams and Montefiore 1895: 52-3 emphasis added). The context suggests that the 'new songs' he referred to would be in English. However, as was described in chapter 5, Abrahams was clearly concerned that there should be sincerity in worship, but he was clearly aware that introducing vernacular prayer, when the long-established practice had been to use Hebrew only, was not a straightforward issue. This is particularly clear when he discussed issues of the aesthetics and the quality of vernacular prayer compositions. In the sermon A *New Song*, published in 1895, Abrahams commented on the enduring beauty and appeal of the Psalms, and disclosed that he felt their high quality discouraged further liturgical composition: 'One almost longs for less inspired songs' (pp. 51-2).

With regard to the language of the JRU liturgy, of the 39 sections only six substantial paragraphs of prayers and three individual verses from the traditional service are printed in Hebrew. It is obviously a liturgy intended for a congregation with very limited Hebrew skills and a lack of knowledge of, and perhaps some antipathy towards, traditional synagogue worship. This may possibly indicate a priority at that moment in the development of liturgical reform of the need for understanding over a desire for aesthetic quality and respect for traditional forms. On a more positive view, a predominantly English liturgy improves the prospects that worshippers will understand the meaning of the prayers and be able to recite them with sincerity.

Such a priority appeared to be the view of Claude Montefiore. In *Liberal Judaism in England: Its Difficulties and Its Duties* (1900), Montefiore discusses why liberal

(small 'l') Judaism 'has no organized expression or embodiment in England' (p. 618).[168] In his explanation of factors which militated against the formation of an embodiment of liberal Judaism he includes a general dislike of 'strife and disunion' which would cause pain to relatives. He cites the use of English in services as an example of an issue which would cause pain to relatives of a conservative mindset:

> A mere abstention from synagogue causes no disturbance or irritation; to attend a synagogue where the service was entirely in English would be far more disliked; to be instrumental in founding such a one would be worst of all (p. 619).

This is a very revealing remark and one can but speculate on what personal experience, if any, had led him to his conclusion. The possible analogues of a 'synagogue where the service would be entirely in English' in 1900 would have been the Berlin Reform congregation which used the vernacular, an American Reform Synagogue of the radical wing or, perhaps more likely, the 'disliked' service held by Oswald Simon in Hampstead the previous year.

Montefiore goes on to tell readers that he had often asked one of his friends to pen a piece for the *JQR* on the topic 'Why I do not go to Synagogue'. Once more, the reason his friend declined the invitation is that it would cause pain to others. While the non-attendance would be unlikely to upset his family who have grown used to it, 'That he should give his reasons would, however, cause them pain' (pp. 623-4). Montefiore's subsequent remarks indicate that the pain would be inflicted because the relatives felt that they were being accused of *insincerity*. He writes: 'the suspicion arises as to whether an unsatisfied attendant at Synagogue had not better become a regular abstainer. Is he not playing the part of a hypocrite, professing or appearing to believe what he does not believe, and injuring rather than advancing the cause of morality and truth? (p. 624).

Among the reasons for non-attendance advanced by Montefiore are (i) that synagogue services, especially the lengthy chanting of portions from the Torah is unappealing, that (ii) Hebrew 'is no longer an attraction; on the contrary it is a deterrent' and (iii) 'the singing is poor; there are no English hymns in which the congregation can join' (p. 624).

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[168] The publication of this article in July 1900 places it more than a year before Lily Montagu sent out her letter in November 1901 seeking expressions of interest in forming the JRU.

Liturgy of the Jewish Religious Union (1902-3)[169]

The content of the 1902 *Selection of Prayers* ran to just 42 pages and the title page bore the description 'Experimental Edition' (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 115).[170] The expanded 1903 *Selection of Prayers* had 127 pages and the preface noted that it was 'like its predecessor, of a provisional character'. It was divided into five sections: (i) Prayers, (ii) Ten Commandments, (iii) Scriptural Verses, (iv) Psalms and (v) Hymns. There are features of the *Selection* which clearly demonstrate its radical nature. The most obvious of these is the omission of large swathes of the material found in a traditional service. The sequence of the traditional service is only minimally maintained in the order of material offered and the omission of a great deal of material means that the traditional structure of a prayer book is effectively absent.[171] There is very little by way of rubrics and the first section of the service book, *Prayers*, is not structured as a single sequential service but as 39 discrete and numbered paragraphs. The intention was to allow a good deal of leeway to service leaders to choose their texts for each service, allowing them to make a selection to reflect a theme, or themes, as well as to produce a service of a desired length. A printed order of service was handed out on each occasion to indicate which prayers, psalms, readings and hymns were to be used that day.[172]

The third section of the JRU *Selection* consists of six pages of *Scripture Verses*. These are subdivided into four sections identified as A to D, all of which are in English. Section A consists of short passages from the *Torah*, mainly of an ethical nature or regarding the duty to recognise and praise God. This section concludes with part of the blessing recited after the public reading of the *Torah* in the synagogue. Section B consists of readings from the books of the prophets, mainly the book of Isaiah. The section concludes with one of the blessings traditionally recited after the reading of the *haftarah*, a passage chosen from the books of the prophets which is read after the *Torah* reading. The fact that these sections conclude with traditional blessings suggests that the

[169] The full title of the expanded publication analysed in this chapter is: *A Selection of Prayers, Psalms and Other Scriptural Passages, and Hymns for Use at the Services of the Jewish Religious Union, London. 5664-1903.*

[170] Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) contains a full chapter on prayer book development in Liberal Judaism (Chapter 8, p. 115–127).

[171] Paragraphs 1 to 5 are from the traditional introductory prayers, paragraphs 6 is one of the blessings recited before the *Shema* and paragraph 7 is the first paragraph of the *Shema*. However, thereafter subsequent paragraphs are not in the traditional sequence and the English translation of the first paragraph of the *Amidah* (paragraph 10), a significant prayer, is reduced and paraphrased.

[172] An example is reproduced in Rigal and Rosenberg (2004: 117).

readings may have been intended to be used in reading the *Torah* and *haftarah,* albeit it within a severely curtailed ritual, though Rigal and Rosenberg state that the *Torah* and *haftarah* were not read at these afternoon services (2004: 116). In either event, the *Selection* had no separate service for the reading of the *Torah*.

The third section of *Scripture Verses*, section C, are verses taken from prophetic books and from the Psalms. In this section, made up of short readings from Psalms, the themes chosen, such as the pursuit of justice, speaking the truth, repentance, and seeking goodness and peace, also included verses which expressed aspects of the trope of sincerity, such as an emphasis on inward religiosity rather than outward appearance or conduct, proper attitude of mind ('heart') towards God and genuine morality through to the core of one's being, the heart:

> I desire love, and not sacrifice; the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings (Hosea 6: 6).
>
> Thou desirest not sacrifice, else I would give it: thou delightest not in burnt offerings: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise (Psalm 52: 17).
>
> Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart (Psalm 32: 11).

The largest part of the JRU prayer book is taken up by the fourth section which is 54 pages of psalms of which all but five are in English only. Why only these five have their Hebrew texts printed is not clear.

The final (fifth) section, a series of *Hymns, Including Portions of the Hallel and Metrical Versions of Psalms*. Of these thirty-six pieces to be sung, just seven have a Hebrew text accompanied by an English translation, twenty-nine are in English only. Many of the texts of the English hymns and psalms are translations and compositions by Alice Lucas, the sister of Claude Montefiore. Lucas was well known as a translator, poet and hymn writer. At least one hymn in the *Selection*, with the English title *Now bless the God of all,* is a translation made by Israel Abrahams. Another celebrated contributor to the selection of hymns is American Orthodox Rabbi Marcus Jastrow, composer of the *Selections*' translation of *Maoz Tzur* ('Rock of Ages'), a hymn for the festival of *Chanukkah*. The inclusion of this hymn is a little surprising, given that liberals (small 'l') have often had a problem with the sentiments of the original Hebrew

version, which celebrated the destruction of an enemy. Even Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz chose to paraphrase his English version:[173]

> the literal translation of lines two and three is: “when Thou shalt have utterly destroyed the blaspheming foe, I will complete with song and psalm the dedication of the altar.” By a slight change, this is now: “when Thou shalt cause all slaughter to cease, and the blaspheming foe, I will complete, etc.”
>
> (Hertz 1947: 950)

These hymns are all the work of Jewish translators. More controversial was the inclusion of hymns/psalm translations by Christian authors:

> *All People that on Earth do Dwell*, and *O Worship the King* (both by William Kethe); *Through all the Changing Scenes of Life* (Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady);
> *O God our Help in Ages Past* (Isaac Watts)
> *The Spacious Firmament on High* (Joseph Addison).[174]

The important point here is that the compilers felt that they could appropriate these texts because their origin in the Psalms, their content and their spirit was such that they could speak or sing the words of these hymns in all conscience and sincerity, regardless of the provenance of the English wording.[175]

Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, in the 1902 sermon *The New Paths*, referred to above, vehemently disagreed concerning the use of English as the primary medium for Jewish worship.[176] He had Claude Montefiore firmly in his critical sights when he began

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[173] Chief Rabbi Hertz also recognised that there were issues regarding the story of *Purim*: ‘Strictures have been passed on the Book [Esther] on allegedly moral grounds…’ (Hertz 1947: 952-3).

[174] Kethe’s hymns are paraphrases of Psalms 100 and 104 respectively, Tate & Brady’s hymn is based on Psalm 34, Watts’ hymn on Psalm 90 and Addison’s is based on the opening verses of Psalm 19. Despite these origins in the Psalms, there has been, and continues to be, disquiet about using texts and music from Christian sources in Jewish worship: ‘A people that has produced the Psalmist, a Rabbi Judah Halevi, and other hymnologists and liturgists counted by hundreds, has no need to pass around the hat to all possible denominations begging for a prayer or a hymn’ (Schechter), cited in Plaut and Washofsky (1997) responsum 5752.11.

[175] As Rabbi Mattuck was later to state regarding prayers and readings from non-Jewish sources: ‘These were all included because they were felt to express inspiringly much of our thought and inspiration in a way acceptable to all theists… If the use of appropriate non-Jewish writings in a Jewish Prayer Book requires justification other than their intrinsic merits, it would be the belief which Liberal Jews hold, that Divine inspiration is universal… so that their words can help us when we pray.’ *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book*, Vol. 1 (1937, p. xvi-xvii).

[176] Much of the sermon, *The Old Paths*, is reproduced in Persoff (2008) pp. 121-3. In 1895 Adler had preached a sermon entitled *Hebrew: the language of our prayers’* condemning proposals to introduce the vernacular into synagogue services (reprinted in *The Jewish Voice*, 1 September 1905, referenced in this thesis as Adler (1905)).

by telling his audience that that those who proposed reforms to services had suggested that lack of attendance was because the synagogue ritual was 'distant, unsatisfying and unattractive'. (Adler 1902: 5). The unflattering words describing synagogue ritual were attributed to Montefiore in a report in the *Jewish Chronicle* (Persoff 2008: 120). Adler then turned his attention to the language of prayer: 'It is contended, that members of the community are out of sympathy with the Ritual, because it is couched in an unknown tongue' (Adler 1902: 5) He continued by admitting that there might be something in the view, 'if the worshipper, by his ignorance of Hebrew, were altogether debarred from joining in the devotions'. But this was not the case since in the prayer book (Singer's) 'we possess a translation which reproduces the Liturgy with admirable fidelity and in terse English' (Adler 1902: 5).[177] Presumably, the admirable fidelity and terseness are somehow helpful, but Adler does not tell his readers how. One is also left to speculate on what 'joining in the devotions' is understood to mean for worshippers who, unable to follow the Hebrew prayers, struggle to find the appropriate place in an English translation. For Adler, it seems that a liturgy conducted almost entirely in English, with almost no Hebrew, *cannot* be Jewish. Somehow, for him, the use of Hebrew, the sacred language, makes a service Jewish.[178] He asked his listeners, 'What inducement will there remain to our children to undertake the task of learning Hebrew, when some kind of authoritative sanction is given to the use of the vernacular for public Prayer?' (Adler 1902: 10). Adler pronounced an uncompromising verdict on the JRU's services:

> I have given most careful consideration to the *Selection of Prayers, Psalms and Hymns* which has been prepared for use at these gatherings. And I'm constrained to say that a service which almost entirely dispenses with the use of the sacred language…such service cannot, I maintain, be considered a Jewish service[.]
>
> (Adler 1902: 7)[179]

[177] Adler also took delight in reminding his audience that Claude Montefiore's mother, 'a worthy sister in Israel' had financed the production of Singer's prayer book (Adler 1902: 5).

[178] Debates over who is Jewish are common in the Jewish world, debates over what makes practices or words or languages Jewish, less so.

[179] It is difficult to grasp what Adler means here by 'a Jewish service'? 'Jewish' can be used in a national or ethnic sense, or to indicate religious adherence. Hebrew is a 'Jewish' language only in a loose sense, as are others such as Jewish versions of German (Yiddish) or Spanish (Ladino). In his criticism, Adler omits to mention the Talmudic permission to pray in a language one understands. Whatever his objection that a vernacular service is not Jewish is based upon, he has not identified it in his written response.

In an *Open Letter,* written in response to Chief Rabbi Adler's critical sermon, Israel Abrahams defended the 'experimental' pamphlet *Selection of Prayers, Psalms and Hymns* against the charge that it, and the services in which it was used, were not fully Jewish. On the issue of language, he specifically mentions three parts of the service which were read in Hebrew: the Ten Commandments, the *Shema* and the hymn *Adon Olam*. In particular, he used his extensive knowledge of Jewish history and liturgy to stress that the methods which underpinned the production of the *Selection* were compliant with traditional norms:

> I ventured to submit some considerations which may convince you that the compilers of the pamphlet were not animated by a 'non-Jewish spirit'… In the firm conviction that our service is fully Jewish, and that it is adapted to its particular end, we trust to promote the cause of Judaism, and to win back to enthusiastic allegiance those who at present are half-hearted or worse.
>
> (Persoff 2008: 123-4)

However, there were lengthy parts of the traditional services which were entirely omitted in JRU services. In liberal eyes this was entirely justified as these passages were no more than recitations of instructions for, or descriptions of, ancient ritual ceremonies recorded in Biblical and Rabbinic sources and considered by liberals to be irrelevant to modern Jewish life. Israel Abrahams was full of praise for Alice Lucas whose translation of texts from some of the same sources provided uplifting hymns and psalms for the JRU prayerbook but ignored most of the 'ceremonial' passages. The trope of sincerity shows through with regard to the lack of spiritual value Abrahams discerns in such passages and his invocation of an aesthetic which is—at least, almost—moral: 'these are mainly obsolete, arid, and spiritless, full of recondite reference and straining after effect, and Mrs Lucas has shown excellent taste in ignoring them' (Abrahams 1898: 82).[180] In this he was in agreement with Rabbi Mattuck who chose a passage from Philo of Alexandria to include among *Readings for Meditation Before the Service* in his *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* (*LJPB*) which superseded the JRU's *Selection:*

> If a man practises ablutions of the body, but defiles his mind—if he offers hecatombs, founds a temple, adorns a shrine, and does nothing for making his soul beautiful—let him not to be called religious. He has wandered far from real

[180] Alice Lucas's translation of *Yigdal* was not included in the JRU prayer book, but was deemed of sufficient literary merit to be used by Chief Rabbi Hertz in his prayer book with commentary (1947).

religion, mistaking ritual for holiness… God welcomes the genuine service of the soul, the sacrifice of truth… Will any man with impure soul and with no intention to repent, dare to approach the most high God? The grateful soul of the wise man is the true altar of God.

(*LJPB* 1937: xxxi)

To a reader familiar with traditional Jewish liturgies, the impression made by the 1903 JRU *Selection* is that 'the cutting knife of the wine grower who labors in God's vineyard' has been applied so severely that what remains is barely recognisable as a Jewish liturgy. From another perspective it could be argued that this *Selection* and the services of the JRU were eminently suited to the intent of the compilers: to draw back into Jewish worship, and Jewish community, those who felt alienated from more traditional worship, especially women. Those who had been marginalised by customary synagogue practice and whose Jewish education was limited could see in these services a response to their situation and to their needs. Given the challenge and the manifesto outlined by Lily Montagu in her article *The Spiritual Possibilities of Judaism,* this was a form of service, to employ contemporary usage, 'fit for purpose'. The *Selection* allowed those taking part in JRU services to understand what they were praying and it selected for them words from traditional and non-traditional sources which they could sincerely pray.

That the JRU produced what was a radically 'pruned' selection of prayers and other texts, was not the result of a lack of understanding of traditional liturgy, nor was it inadvertent as those involved in producing that liturgical offering had a profound knowledge of, and deep appreciation of, the traditional *siddur*. [181] They included established Orthodox ministers such as A.A. Green and Simeon Singer, editor of the (Orthodox) *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, and Israel Abrahams, Singer's son-in-law, who later (1914) published a commentary to the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book.* Despite its very anglicised services and some other changes in worship practices which attracted the criticisms of Orthodox leaders, the JRU was tolerated since it was 'contained'

[181] Why the JRU *Selection* took the form it did, and why particular changes to the Liberal liturgies throughout the twentieth century were made is, unfortunately, not something about which we can be certain in *every* case, mainly through lack of evidence. Sometimes we are told that forms were changed, though not precisely why, as when Rabbi Mattuck wrote: 'Some of the services for Sabbath and weekdays do not follow the traditional form. It was felt that there are times when a service of this sort has a particular value' (*LJPB* 1937: xviii).

within established communal structures to which it posed no obvious threat.[182] In Germany and the United States liberal prayer books had been published which could have been models for the JRU to adopt.[183] We can only speculate that had they done so it would have provided their traditionalist opponents with reason and opportunity for more sustained opposition to the JRU's activities.

The Liberal Jewish Prayer Book (LJPB) 1926 to 1937

In 1911 the Jewish Religious Union (JRU) made a decisive break from existing communal structures by establishing the Liberal Jewish Synagogue (LJS). Within a year the LJS had appointed Rabbi Dr Israel Mattuck as its religious and spiritual leader. Though Claude Montefiore had wished to retain the style of service to which the JRU had become accustomed, Rabbi Mattuck began to steer Liberal Judaism's liturgy in a *slightly* more traditional direction (Fox 2014: 110).[184] In the following decades Rabbi Mattuck created new liturgy for the LJS, which came to maturity in the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* of 1937, the version analysed here.[185] Even a cursory reading of *Volume 1, Services for Weekdays, Sabbaths etc.* reveals that this prayer book is substantially different in some key respects from the 1903 *Selection* of the JRU. The *LJPB* of 1937 contains 22 different, and internally sequential, Shabbat or weekday services plus a number of other services for special occasions.[186] The individual services reflected the traditional structure and sequence of prayers to a greater extent than had the 1903 *Selection* and they included many more traditional prayers, though the *Amidah* prayer,

[182] As Lily Montagu expressed it: 'My father and other Jewish leaders regarded our efforts at the beginning with benevolent tolerance. So long as we did not interfere with the times of the existing services, we could not do much harm, and might draw in some of the waverers who never attended real services. Moreover, a Jewish movement initiated by a woman could not be of serious importance anyhow' (Kessler 2004: 168).

[183] 'In the early years the LJS [Liberal Jewish Synagogue] used the *Union Prayer Book* of the American Reform movement at New Year and the Day of Atonement' (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 118).

[184] Fox's statement—probably following Rigal and Rosenberg cited above—that 'IIM's prayer book [*Sabbath Afternoon Services* (1912)] introduced more Hebrew, included the *Shema*, which had until then only been read at morning and evening services' is probably incorrect as Israel Abrahams stated in his *Open Letter* of 1902 that the *Shema* was recited in the afternoon services of the JRU (Persoff 2008: 123). It was printed in Hebrew and English in *Selections* (1903: 11-12).

[185] The liturgy of the JRU (1902-3) and the *LJPB* (1926 and 1937) are different in respect of placing Hebrew texts and English texts in juxtaposition: JRU rarely did so, whereas LJPB did it often, like later prayer books. As a result, 'side by side' textual comparisons of *LJPB* which illustrate relevant points of language are more useful if made against texts from the prayer books of 1967 and 1995. I have done this in the next chapter.

[186] Lily Montagu had advocated variety in services in her 1897 article *Spiritual Possibilities* (Kessler 2004: 180).

one of the core sections of the traditional service structure was represented to a lesser degree than in the JRU's *Selection*. Traditional prayers usually included the Hebrew text alongside an English translation. The overall impression is that, in comparison to the 1903 *Selection*, the *LJPB* somewhat more closely resembles a traditional *siddur*. Despite this small step in the direction of tradition, Rabbi Mattuck felt the need to include an eleven-page introduction to the volume in which he set forth some of his reasoning concerning the form and content of the services. While one cannot be certain on this point, it seems very likely to have been a concern for the compilers of the JRU *Selection* that those who used it *understood* the prayers, and therefore could pray them with sincerity. Hence most of the liturgy was printed only in English. On this question Rabbi Mattuck had much to say. The use of English in worship he linked to the Liberals' concept of the aim of worship. Services are not held 'to maintain a tradition, but to maintain life':

> [P]ublic worship must consist of prayers that can be understood by the individual who takes part in it… At any rate, in the construction of our prayer book, we have worked on the principle that public worship… must use the language that the worshippers can understand. All English Jews understand English, very few understand Hebrew. All think in English. It therefore follows as the most natural act of religion for them to pray in English.
>
> (*LJPB* 1937: xi-xii)

Clearly, for Rabbi Mattuck, the possibility of sincerity in worship *necessarily* rests upon the comprehension by the worshippers of the words they speak and pray and, implicitly, think about. Those words must also express those traditional ideas held to be of permanent truth and value, blended with those ideas peculiar within Judaism to its liberal 'wing':

> In form and content the services in this book show the ideas of Liberal Judaism, which aims, in its teaching, to combine the permanent spiritual values in the Jewish Tradition with modern thought… The new prayers often express more especially the distinctive ideas of Liberal Judaism; and *only* those traditional prayers have been retained which in themselves or by reinterpretation express ideas which we believe, or desires which we feel.
>
> (LJPB 1937: xiv; emphasis added)

In that single word 'only' Rabbi Mattuck makes clear for his readers how the concept of sincerity guided his hand in applying the cutting knife to the vines. In addition, he explains that where traditional prayers are translated from Hebrew deviation from literalness is allowed if it facilitates an easier reading. More significantly, from the perspective of the Liberal Jewish commitment to sincerity in worship:

> [A]t other times, however, the English paraphrases also the meaning of the original, interpreting it so as to accord with our beliefs. In other words, we have here and there read a new meaning into an old prayer, one, however, not unrelated to its original meaning.
>
> (*LJPB* 1937: xv)[187]

Yet, although wishing the words of prayer to reflect only sincerely held beliefs, the mere fact that the language of a particular prayer contains statements which are not literally true, in terms of their propositional force, did not constitute a bar to inclusion in the *LJPB*. An example of this was the prayer known as *El Adon* ('God, the Lord') which is found in the traditional order of prayers among the passages which introduce the recitation of the *Shema*.[188] Part of the prayer describes the sun and the moon and attributes to them a number of human characteristics such as personality and agency:

> They rejoice in their going forth, and are glad in their returning;
> they perform with awe the will of their Master.
> Glory and honour they render unto his name,
> exaltation and rejoicing at the remembrance of his sovereignty.
> He called unto the sun and it shone forth in light:
> He looked, and ordained the figure of the moon.
> All the hosts on high render praise unto him.

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[187] Mattuck's reservation were shared by the American progressive denomination known as 'Reconstructionist Judaism'. In the *Introduction* to the *Sabbath Prayer Book* of 1945, the editors stated: 'Some have attempted to obviate the need for change in the traditional prayers by reading into them meanings completely at variance with what they meant to those who framed them. This practice is fraught with danger. To read those new meanings into the traditional text by way of translation is to violate the principle of forthrightness… We dare not take the chance of conveying meanings which do not conform with the best in our religious thinking and feeling. Not that prayers need be prosaic in their literalness, but their figures of speech must have clear and true meanings.' https://archive.org/details/SabbathPrayerBookJewishReconstructionistFoundation1945

[188] The English rendering is that of *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (Singer's) of 1992. The prayer appears in the *LJPB* at page 81-2, following the recitation of the first paragraph (only) of the *Shema*, i.e. not in its traditional place in the service.

This prayer is moved from the services of the 1967 and 1995 prayer books to the themed readings.[189] Its inclusion in the body of some of the services of *LJPB* may have been a matter of Rabbi Mattuck's taste or fondness for the prayer. Israel Abrahams considered the *El Adon* prayer's most significant quality to be its ethical worth. In his *A Companion to the Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (p. cxliv), he cites an early verse, *'purity and rectitude are before his throne*', writing that the prayer is: 'a praise of God and of his power as revealed in his moral excellence and in the marvels and regularity of the natural phenomena'.

Rabbi Mattuck informed his readers that 'Our prayer book, like Liberal Judaism itself, is a combination of the past and the present, and of Judaism and universalism' (*LJPB* 1937: xix). It has been noted in earlier chapters that universalism is a part of the trope of sincerity, though not an obvious element. In chapter 2 an important characteristic of sincerity was identified as 'a significant focus on the individual and on interiority'. Religious precepts are validated for continued observance by the human intuition that they are good and true. It is the human, not only the Jewish, soul which is conscious of the divine which resides at the core of all religion and transcends all *particular* expressions and forms of religion. True religion is therefore, ultimately, personal religion and, for Mattuck, non-traditional source material could achieve the task of the familiar liturgy just as well. He did not hide the fact that material from non-Jewish sources had been included in the liturgy, including poems which he felt were inspiring. '[T]he best poetry speaks the language of universal religion… Plato and Shakespeare can help Jews to find their way to God (*LJPB* 1937: xvi-xvii).[190] Producing a prayer book which is a 'combination of the past and the present, and of Judaism and universalism' runs risks, as was seen in the incident of the sermon preached by Chief Rabbi Adler against the JRU *Selection* in 1902. Rabbi Mattuck was well aware of that history and the accusation that JRU services were not Jewish. [191] He insisted that in

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[189] *SOH* p. 222; *SLC* p. 163.

[190] In a *Supplement* to the services in *LJPB*, Mattuck included English poems which, he thought, 'in their poetic quality and for the ideas they express, [are] suitable for reading in Jewish worship' (*LJPB* p. 437). Authors included Sir Philip Sydney, Emily Brontë, Browning, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge and Matthew Arnold.

[191] Surprisingly, despite the earlier criticism regarding the use of hymns from Christian hymn books in Jewish services, the *LJPB* contains prayers drawn from the liturgical publication of a Christian Church: *The Book of Congregational Worship* published by the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1920. These include a prayer for healing on p. 59 and prayers for the monarchy and government on p. 108 and 208-210. These prayers are very much of their day. Considering the non-Jewish source, one of the prayers includes a reference to what can only be British colonial activity, rather than the Jewish diaspora: 'thou hast gathered our people into a great nation and sent them to sow beside all waters, and multiply

Liberal Judaism's services 'the Jewish character of the worship is evident', that character being 'the teaching of a pure and universal theism' (*LJPB* 1937: xviii).[192] Rabbi Mattuck's claim is that Judaism, not only Liberal Judaism, 'stands for the teaching of a pure and universal theism'. This is quite different from the notion that Judaism comprises various 'denominations' and that, among these, Liberal Judaism has distinctive ideas, teachings or emphases. There is support for universalism in Jewish thought, especially in the teachings of the eighth-century prophets, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Rabbi Mattuck's personal attachment to 'universal theism' is well illustrated in the opening words of a prayer newly composed by him for the prayer book: 'O thou Infinite Spirit of the Universe, whom men serve in diverse ways, and whom men acknowledge in diverse faiths, do thou come unto us impelling us to seek for truth[.] (*LJPB* 1937: 94)

In addition to Rabbi Mattuck's informative *Introduction*, there are explicit references to sincerity in the prayers throughout the book, as in:

> Our God, thou desirest the worship of the pure heart, wherein abide sincerity, truth and humility (*Third Service* p. 35);
>
> Cause us to hate all fraud and deceit… May we keep ourselves in purity and temperance, in simplicity and sincerity of heart (*Twelfth Service* p. 132).
>
> May [our Shabbat worship] sanctify the whole of this coming week, ennobling our most familiar tasks, hallowing our worldly work with sincerity and rectitude (*Fifteenth Service* p. 178)[193]

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sure dwellings on the earth' (p. 108). Another, in praying for leaders, asks, *inter alia*, that 'the men of wealth' should 'serve as wholesome salt unto the earth and be worthy stewards of thy good and perfect gifts' (p. 209). Less surprisingly, these prayers were replaced by other texts in Liberal Judaism's prayer books of 1967 and 1995.

[192] An echo of the defence put forward by Israel Abrahams in his *Open Letter*, referred to earlier in this chapter at p. 156.

[193] Cf. the Protestant idea that an action, even a menial task, performed with the right intention or attitude ennobles it, as expressed in Anglican clergyman George Herbert's poem *The Elixir:* 'Teach me, my God and King, / In all things Thee to see, / And what I do in anything / To do it as for Thee. … Who sweeps a room as for Thy Laws, / Makes that and th' action fine'.

Theology, belief and sincerity: the challenge for liberals

Rabbi Mattuck's liturgical work in shaping *The Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* steered Liberal Judaism away from the very radical innovations of the JRU's *Selections.* Yet, far from being seen by contemporaries as a move in the direction of tradition, *LJPB* was seen as the last in a line of liturgies which embodied a form of radicalism which, by the time of the publication of the first edition in 1926, was passing out of fashion. In the USA, this fading ideology is now usually identified as 'Classical Reform Judaism' and it was the type of liberal religion which dominated non-Orthodox Judaism when Israel Mattuck was educated and trained as a Rabbi. The decline of the 'Classical' form of radical Reform Judaism in the USA through the 1920s was reflected in an intense polemic *within* American Reform Judaism. Aspects of this can be seen in Samuel Cohon's (1928) scathing assessment of Reform Judaism's beliefs as expressed in the prayers of *The Union Prayer Book*.[194] Cohon's article, in parts a biting parody, was entitled 'Are We Retired Philanthropists?' He wrote:

> As if to avoid embarrassment the petitionary prayers have been toned down… God is allowed only as much as the current textbooks of science cannot possibly deny him. Prayer does not function as an expression of deep felt human needs, as a cry for health, for sustenance and for relief from pain, sorrow and distress, but only as a vague meditation on an ethical theme.
>
> (Blau 1973: 261, partial reprint in Meyer and Plaut 2001: 63)

For Cohon, the true nature of prayer is precisely the concept elaborated in chapter 3 of this thesis—reflecting classical Jewish sources—that: 'For the religious minded Jew prayer can neither be a soliloquy nor a dialogue with his own soul. It can have value only if he knows before whom he stands' (Blau 1973: 263).

To some degree this struggle over the ideology of Reform and Liberal Judaism was reflected in the United Kingdom where strong disagreements between Liberal Judaism and Orthodoxy were given a public airing. In the early 1920s, at around the same time that Rabbi Mattuck was deleting from the traditional liturgy 'what we could not believe, and therefore honestly say', a young American Jew was in Cambridge (England) preparing a book for publication which challenged the liberal community to confront what the author insisted were its 'dogmas'. The man in question was James

[194] First published in 1890 *UPB* had gone through several revisions by 1928. As noted above, *UPB* was used by Liberal Jews in England before the publication of *LJPB* in 1926.

Waterman Wise whose book *Liberalizing Liberal Judaism* was published in 1924.[195] I have placed an account of the furore which followed the publication of Wise's book at this point in the thesis as Wise's championing of Classical Reform Judaism coincides in time with Mattuck's development of that ideology in an English environment in the decades after the First World War.[196]

Wise's book is not directly about English Liberal Judaism. It was written from an American perspective and with the American experience of Jewish religious reform in mind. Throughout the book he writes of 'Liberal' Judaism (rather than the usual term 'Reform' Judaism used in America), and on a number of occasions he refers directly to aspects of American Jewish life. His critique is of a long-established Liberal Judaism,[197] which could only be that of his homeland, since the synagogue of English Liberal Judaism was, in 1924, barely more than a decade old. Wise was acquainted with the writings of British Liberal Jewish leaders Israel Abrahams and Claude Montefiore and a number of citations from them appear in his book. As some of Wise's ideas mirror very closely those of Lily Montagu, often employing very similar vocabulary, he may well have been acquainted with her writings too. James Wise's book was a radical critique of Reform/Liberal Judaism. The publication of this work caused a stir among English Jews, though not—despite its critique of Liberal/Reform Judaism—among the leadership or members of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue.[198]

> In the brief *Foreword* to *Liberalizing Liberal Judaism*, Wise states his case (p. 7): Liberal Judaism has ceased to advance… It has definitely lost its character as an insurgent force… It has become an established religion…The beliefs which were so vital… are no longer a driving power; they have lost their edge. And beliefs without an edge cannot evoke that devotion which alone is able to give them life and meaning[.] [199]

[195] All subsequent references to Wise's writings are from *Liberalizing Liberal Judaism* (1924). I will therefore limit references to the page number.

[196] Israel Mattuck's biographer noted that he maintained a strong attachment to his *alma mater*, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, an institution which remained 'wedded to the main tenets of 'classical' Reform Judaism for longer than CCAR (Fox 2014: 200). CCAR is the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the representative body of American Reform Rabbis and Cantors.

[197] Slightly confusingly, Wise uses a capital letter in 'Liberal'.

[198] This is, perhaps, not surprising. Claude Montefiore had prefigured Wise's radical views, showing a 'determination to value Reason above tradition at all costs, and… following through the logic of this position' (Langton 2000: 128-9).

[199] In the booklet *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*, the movement is described as 'the dynamic, cutting edge of modern Judaism… Liberal Judaism confronts the challenges of our time… Liberal Judaism is the

Wise's words echo the spirit of those used by Lily Montagu in her 1899 article *The Spiritual Possibilities in Judaism Today*, in which she speaks of Judaism being devoid of 'life' and having lost 'much of its inspiring force' (Kessler 2004: 172). In his *Foreword*, Wise declares that 'Liberal Judaism in itself is full of faults, faults to be found in doctrine and practice alike' (p. 8). He chides Liberal Jews for being content with intellectual and spiritual achievements accomplished two generations earlier and insists that (p. 8):

> Our faith must be re-examined. Reverently and with love we must search into the truths of our fathers, but resolved that where there are for us no-truths, we must deny them; where they are half-truths, we must alter them; and where ourselves can catch a glimpse of yet unseen truths we must not fail to follow the gleam.[200]

Wise's insistence 'that where there are for us no-truths, we must deny them' could be a paraphrase of the words of Liberal Judaism's contemporary *Affirmation*: 'we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts'. As will become clear, sincerity is well-represented in Wise's writing, in particular in his criticism of beliefs which are held in a dogmatic fashion.

'The fundamental attitude of Liberal Judaism is wrong'[201]

Wise's criticism of Liberal Judaism's attitude (Wise 1924: 47, emphasis in the original) appears utterly uncompromising, perhaps dogmatic. In his view, Liberal Judaism was 'unconscionably dogmatic' (*ibid.*) and though it had arisen as a protest movement against certain dogmas, he maintained that Liberal Judaism had clung to theological dogmas, in particular:

> [T]he ultra-positive assertion of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul. Liberal Judaism asserts these things as sure, teaches them as facts established beyond the question of a doubt. And this, it seems to me, is wrong.
>
> (Wise 1924: 48)

Judaism of the past in the process of becoming the Judaism of the future' (2006: 4); this description is what Wise accuses (American) Liberal Judaism of failing to be.

200 Cf. Lily Montagu's words: 'Together we must sift with all reverence the pure from the impure in the laws which our ancestors formulated in order to satisfy the needs of their age, and to refuse to resort to hair-splitting argument in order to reestablish a religion which was originally founded on the basis of truth, dignity and beauty' (Kessler 2004: 179).

201 Wise's criticism of 'Liberal Judaism' was aimed primarily at American Reform Judaism but applied, in certain particulars, also to British Liberal Judaism.

Whether expressed in American ‘platforms’ and ‘statements’, such as the *Pittsburg Platform* (1885), or in Liberal Judaism’s *Affirmations* (2006), Reform and Liberal Judaism across the world have remained consistently committed to theism and to the view that human beings are endowed with immortal souls. The challenges of specific beliefs have always been recognised. Lily Montagu stated ‘It is obviously impossible to prove the existence of God’ (Montagu 1904: 18). Claude Montefiore viewed his own belief in God, not as a fact to be affirmed, but as ‘a venture, a theological search’. He told his cousin, Lucy Cohen that his faith was founded on his perception of the good in people he knew, and in the stars and the human mind, neither of which he could believe arose by chance (Cohen 1940: 109, cited in Langton 2002 126-7).

The Purpose of Religion

Hertz told his readers that Wise ‘ridicules the idea that a religion need perpetuate itself… (Hertz 1927: 166-7). He is correct in that Wise did indeed write (p. 19): ‘its [religion’s] aim must not be to perpetuate itself’.[202] Elsewhere in *Liberalizing Liberal Judaism* Wise argued that Liberal Judaism assumed and preserved ‘the validity of the ethical and spiritual teachings of the past’ and offered them as a solution to the challenges of contemporary life. He went on to suggest that if these past ideas were ‘invalid or insufficient’ then, ‘the religious form which embodies them’, that is, Liberal Judaism, ‘no longer deserves to live’ (p. 50). Wise’s argument on this issue is a historical and psychological one.[203] Religions, he asserts, arise when particular spiritual and moral situations are regarded as unsatisfactory and there is an impetus to replace an established order with a new one. Eventually, that which was once new becomes established and, in its turn, may resist pressures to change and to progress. Wise concludes with the following words, summarising his argument (p. 23):

> [T]he purpose of religion is to help man to live well… it is inconsistent for religion to aim at self-preservation, and that if occasion arise it must be prepared to lose itself in order to find itself more fully.

His notion of the purpose of religion, as noted above, is to lead ‘an individual, to live well… according to the highest that he knows’ (p. 146). That view is, however, further

[202] Keeping in mind that Hertz was writing in a polemic vein it should not surprise us that he presented less than Wise’s full exposition of his position.

[203] The bulk of Wise’s argument about the preservation (or not) of a particular religion is found in a chapter entitled *Fundamentals,* (pp. 19–23).

qualified by him. In addition to living well and living according to the highest ideals—both historical and contemporary—individuals must take account of the responsibility laid upon them by the modern world: 'The individual has become to an unprecedented degree its [religion's] standard and its test… The individual has become the sole judge of the spiritual values in his own life' (p. 143). The purpose of religion, and in particular the purpose of the Jewish ministry, will be to help people to live well, by encouraging them to determine their own standards according to their best judgement. The radical nature of Wise's view may be seen in his advocacy of the primacy of individual conscience and judgement, irrespective of the effect it may have on traditional Jewish beliefs (pp. 139-40).

Wise clearly understands where searching questioning of religious doctrines may lead (p. 57 n. 5):

> Any religion which is unable to stand a searching scrutiny can hardly expect to retain its influence… And in any case if these or any tests which are justifiable prove it to be worthless, it cannot in conscience be preserved.

Wise's qualification, 'in conscience', is indicative of his commitment to sincerity in religion. Wise's view is essentially identical to that expressed by Lily Montagu in her *Thoughts on Judaism* (1904: 50), though Montagu's ruminations present a more optimistic picture:

> We may still venture to define conscience as the Voice of God within man, and we need not be afraid to be guided by its authority. It leads us to recognise… the noblest ethical lessons in the Bible, and in the lives and works of the best men of all ages.

In their respective expressions, Wise and Montagu reflect facets of the concept of sincerity which relate to the privileged position accorded to the individual conscience. Montagu may label individual human conscience as 'the Voice of God within man', but it is clear where authority lies. When Wise writes that 'priceless though Judaism may be, its prolonged existence must not be purchased at the cost of the right of the individual Jew, in matters such as this, to be himself…' (p. 100), he acknowledges that same authority.

Wise's view that the individual's right to be, to borrow Shakespeare's vocabulary, true to oneself, is of paramount importance is found expressed strongly in what Wise has to say about intermarriage (pp. 100–1, *emphasis in the original*):

> An opposition to intermarriage which is based on the harm which it may do to Judaism, places the individual in a position of subordinate importance to religion, a position which, *from the religious point of view itself*, is clearly impossible.

The founders of English Liberal Judaism understood themselves to be trying to re-establish a vibrant, living Judaism, aiming to recover the best of the tradition. As Langton described it, Montefiore's aim had been to 'clear away the debris of tradition, particularism and ignorance that had built up around the essential doctrines and teachings' of Judaism (Langton 2002: 126).[204] Wise's book raised a spectre: that even those foundational teachings of Judaism, those still affirmed by Liberal Judaism, may be undermined by serious examination, perhaps leading Jews 'to find spiritual light and life elsewhere' (p. 57). An important question which warrants further research is why Wise's critique does not appear to have had an impact upon Liberal Judaism. The communal polemic of the 1920s was fierce and continued, on and off, for much of the twentieth century. The impression I take away from my own research is that the potential impact of Wise's critique was blunted by two things. The first is the 'god-intoxicated' nature of the faith of Lily Montagu and her immense influence in the congregations of the JRU and Liberal Judaism. The second is that, though Claude Montefiore's religious ideology may have chimed with much of what Wise had to say about sincerity and religion, Montefiore may have given over his intellectual attention in the 1920s and 1930s to other concerns, such as Zionism and the rise of Nazism.

A Liberal Jewish teacher and leader of the next generation also recognised the consequences for tradition of a serious pursuit of truth:

> Liberal Judaism… teaches that we must face frankly and accept fully whatever seems to us, when we are quite honest, to be true or to be probably true. If it conflicts with traditional assumptions, then those assumptions, however time-honoured, must be modified. For loyalty to truth is more important than loyalty to tradition.
>
> (Rayner 1959: 8)

[204] As was noted in chapter 4, 'It is a characteristic of reforming movements… to stress continuity, links with the past rather than radical departures from it' (Meyer 1988: 3).

Wise's radical challenge that 'Liberal Judaism must dare to liberalize itself' (p. 57) was not intended as a doom-laden jeremiad towards Liberal Judaism but, rather like the challenge which Lily Montagu presented in *Spiritual Possibilities*, a prescription intended to lead to a healthier future. Rabbi John Rayner also took an ultimately optimistic view, writing that Liberal Jews believed in a God of truth, and that truth ultimately leads towards God and must be beneficial to religion (Rayner 1959: 8).

There are two strands of thought here which are not easily disentangled: (i) the future of liberal Judaism and (ii) the future of religion. Chief Rabbi Hertz had criticised Wise very strongly for suggesting that it was not the aim of any particular religion to perpetuate itself. Wise's view is not without some support among the founders of English Liberal Judaism. Rabbi Mattuck expressed the hope for a universal religion in the future, to which all humanity would adhere. He did not believe that it would be the same as the Judaism of his time, though perhaps a development of it, retaining a common core of essentials or fundamentals which he held to be eternally true (Mattuck 1947: 125). Claude Montefiore too, in his statements concerning the future of religion, hoped for a future universal religion, in which the core ideas of liberal Judaism became widespread, though perhaps not known as Judaism, and perhaps even mistaken for a form of Christianity (Langton 2002: 152).[205]

Montefiore's ideas reflect the influence of sincerity in the liberal culture of the first three decades of the twentieth century which had come to be part and parcel of his own thinking. He saw the religion of the future as a version of Judaism stripped of its particularistic attitudes and practices which were mere accretions to the pure faith. Controversially, he believed that the religion of the future could not but include important elements of Christianity. His thoughts about Christianity reflect very strongly the influence of his Oxford tutor Benjamin Jowett who envisaged a future Christianity the essence of which was 'the simple love of truth and of God, and the desire to do good to man' (Langton 2002: 210-11). The simplicity of this core of a putative future religion —of much greater importance than the variety of practice and belief found in the world's religions—is characteristic of Jowett's liberal Anglican commitment to sincerity, a commitment which was shared by Montefiore. In this shared view of future liberal religion, the stripping away of inessential rituals created the right frame of mind for proper spiritual devotion, a service of the heart, 'true', and sincere religion.

[205] Montefiore's thought is distinctive, complex and nuanced and was much misunderstood by his contemporaries. A very full and clear exposition is to be found in Langton (2002).

Summary

The earliest embodiment of Liberal Judaism, the Jewish Religious Union, made significant and radical changes to traditional religious services. The outcome of these changes to content and structure were sufficient for a scholar of liturgy to characterise the mainly English language services as ‘a wilful and arbitrary departure’ (Petuchowski 1968: 73). The content of the *Selection of Prayers etc*. used in the JRU services reflected the importance of universalism—a key element of the trope of sincerity—to Liberals. Structure, the ‘choreography’ of the traditional service, was of little importance compared to the need to arouse feelings of spirituality in the breast of the worshipper. The trope of sincerity appeared in the concern to respond to the needs of the individual and to interior feelings and emotions. The changes represented by the JRU services aroused fierce opposition, in particular the substantial diminution in the use of Hebrew caused outrage, with the Chief Rabbi declaring that ‘such service cannot, I maintain, be considered a Jewish service…’ (Adler 1902: 7).

The JRU was trying to meet what its leaders perceived as the spiritual needs of their congregation. In common with reformers elsewhere they believed that they were remaining faithful, as they understood it, to the ‘real’ Jewish tradition. Statements of belief in the prayers which they felt were out of keeping with or unresponsive to the ideas of the day were removed. There was a clear intent to conform to the decorous aesthetics of Protestant Christian services. However, the initial novelty of the services wore off and attendance diminished. More work than just offering a service was needed. From 1912, Rabbi Israel Mattuck took on the challenge.

Mattuck’s *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* (1926) was substantially different in some key respects from the 1903 *Selection* of the JRU. It contained a large selection of varied, and internally sequential, Shabbat and weekday services. To a limited extent, the individual services reflected the traditional structure and sequence of prayers than had the 1903 *Selection.* Mattuck included more of the traditional prayers, and usually offered an English translation alongside the Hebrew text. The overall impression is that, in comparison to the 1903 *Selection*, the *LJPB* of 1926 still omitted much traditional content and prioritised thematic arrangements of service content over traditional structure. It represented a radical perspective. It was not until 1967 that features of a traditional *siddur* began to appear in Liberal Judaism’s liturgy.

The theological criticism mounted by James Wise concerning Liberal Judaism's dogmas of God and of the soul generated heated controversy in the 1920s. Such theological topics have remained 'live' in Liberal Judaism. A century ago, Wise threw down a theological 'gauntlet'. The next chapter will explore how adequately Liberal Judaism has answered Wise's challenge to dare to be more liberal.

Chapter 8

Liberal Judaism's liturgies and platforms: later twentieth century

In this chapter I will explore the concept of sincerity in Liberal Judaism's liturgies of 1967 and 1995 and in the platforms published in 1978 and 2007. Where one sees the influence of the concept of sincerity most clearly in Liberal Jewish prayer books is where choices have been made which deviate from the traditional liturgy. The choices can be identified in three areas. The first choice is in the language selected where there is an English paraphrase, rather than a translation of a more literal kind. Creating a paraphrase indicates the modified sense, significance or meaning which the editor wishes to read into a text. A second choice occurs where there is an English translation. An editor might render a translation close to a widely accepted meaning, but may indicate a preferred 'slant' in the choice of available translations. In the third choice, the editing of Hebrew texts, one can see more clearly which ideas an editor rejects by omissions or modifies by substitution. In each case, I will argue that we can see the effect of the commitment to sincerity in worship reflected in the decisions how to present, through vernacular and Hebrew texts, those things the editor believes a Liberal Jew may say because it is considered believable. Of particular interest will be shifts in what is broadly seen to be believable through each successive edition of prayer books. A substantial element of what follows will, therefore, be a comparison of examples of (a) paraphrases and (b) translations and (c) the editing of Hebrew texts in different 'generations' of Liberal Judaism's liturgy.[206] The examples I have chosen for comparison will be drawn mainly from *Service of The Heart* (1967) and its successor, *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995) (with occasional reference to *LJPB*). I will begin with a brief introduction to the two prayer books.[207]

[206] The use of paraphrase, identified as such, is not a feature of *Siddur Lev Chadash*.

[207] When *Service of the Heart* appeared in 1967, the principal guides of liturgical development were Rabbi John Rayner and his co-editor, Rabbi Chaim Stern. Rabbi Rayner had arrived in England as a child refugee from Nazi Germany. Educated at Cambridge University and at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, he became the Senior Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in 1961. American-born Rabbi Stern, who was to become the foremost liturgist in American Reform Judaism, had for several years in the 1960s served the Liberal Jewish Synagogue and had taught at Leo Baeck College in London.

Service of the Heart (SOH) (1967)

Liturgical change is rarely undertaken without reservations by editors. As Rabbi Mattuck explained, where a traditional prayer had been included in *LJPB*, the original Hebrew text may have an English paraphrase. The rendering may be quite 'literal' or 'the English paraphrases also the meaning of the original, interpreting it so as to accord with our beliefs'.[208] And Mattuck concludes that: 'For some reasons this procedure is unsatisfactory, it is open to misunderstanding.' (Mattuck 1937: xv). [209] In a journal article about *Siddur Lev Chadash*, Rabbi John Rayner stated that the editorial team had attempted to satisfy the demands of both tradition and modern thought in order to achieve 'integrity, in the sense of consistency between text and translation, and between both and the honestly held beliefs, insofar as these could be surmised, of the constituency for which the book was intended' (Rayner 2006: 142). He seems to have had reservations concerning paraphrases. In connection with the change—in the first blessing of the *Amidah*—of the Hebrew *go'el* ('redeemer') to *ge'ulah* ('redemption'), he wrote: 'Other Progressive prayer books leave the Hebrew unchanged but disguise its meaning in translation' (Rayner 2006: 139).[210] The commitment to sincerity, expressed as 'integrity', and 'honestly held beliefs' is clear and perhaps contributes to the suggestion of discomfiture indicated by his use of 'disguise'. If one is trying to produce liturgy which articulates a community's widely-shared beliefs and is congruent with a commitment to sincerity, such as that expressed in Liberal Judaism's *Affirmation*, there are significant challenges. An obvious tension exists between trying to express sincerely held beliefs and trying, at the same time, to maintain an integrity or sincerity in rendering a translation.

The first thing which strikes one about *Service of the Heart* is the attention given to production, including to the aesthetics of the layout and of the fonts. Like *LJPB, Service of the Heart* opens from left to right. The English used in the prayer book is contemporary rather than archaic, dispensing with 'thee', 'thou' and 'ye' etc. As the

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[208] By 'literal' I have in mind what might be taken to be a 'common sense' or 'plain meaning' interpretation, but given the complexity of language and meaning, this is a limited idea.

[209] I recognise the idea of a 'literal translation' is not at all straightforward and that there is a range of possible literal translations. In these instances, I am drawing attention to cases where the editors have deviated to a significant degree from the usual range of literal interpretations.

[210] Probably a reference to British Reform Judaism's siddur, *Forms of Prayer*, which in the 1977 edition retained *go'el* ('redeemer') in Hebrew while rendering it 'rescue' in English (see e.g., p. 37). The paraphrase was also kept in the next edition of *Forms of Prayer* in 2008 (see e.g., p. 223).

editors expressed it, the English is ‘neither artificial nor sensational, but simple, clear and faithful to the sense of the original. We have not attempted to be colloquial, but we have also sought to avoid being pompous…’ (*SOH*: xi). Being simple, clear and faithful are obviously adhering to the commitment to sincerity.

In the content and structure of the services *SOH* moved Liberal Jews closer to traditional prayer books. The number of different Shabbat services was smaller, just four evening services and five morning services, with ‘a consistent format, with all morning and evening services containing the Shema, blessings, the Amidah and the Aleynu, *in that order*. This was something that Dr Mattuck’s services rarely did’ (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004: 122 emphasis added).

In *SOH* only five hymns appear in English. One is a metrical version of Psalm 29. As the full text of the psalm also appears in Hebrew with an English translation, it can be assumed that the metrical version was to be sung in English. Throughout *SOH* the English which accompanies Hebrew texts is largely a ‘word for word’ translation; though the occasions when a paraphrase is used are frequent and clearly indicated. In *LJPB* Rabbi Mattuck had only rarely altered traditional Hebrew texts. The editors of *SOH* felt free to change to the Hebrew of traditional prayers ‘to pay due regard to the changes in religious outlook which have occurred in our community, as elsewhere, in recent decades… [and] in order to make it acceptable to Progressive Jews’ (*SOH* 1967 *Introduction* p. x). *Service of the Heart* appeared thirty years after the second edition of *LJPB* in 1937. In those years significant events had occurred including the *Shoah* and the founding of the state of Israel. By the 1960s, Jewish identity, national feeling, and the relationship of modern European Jews to their culture and inherited traditions had shifted. By the 1990s other changes prompted a further revision of Liberal Judaism’s liturgy.

Siddur Lev Chadash (1995)

Service of the Heart used modern translations and paraphrase to convey the editors’ intention regarding how readers should understand the sense of the Hebrew prayers. In its turn, *Siddur Lev Chadash* introduced inclusive, non-gendered language in the English, and opening and reading from right to left in the manner of a Hebrew book.

The 12 collections of *Prayers and Readings on Special Themes* found in *SOH* were expanded to 53 *Prayers and Readings on Various Themes*. As in *SOH*, each selection typically occupied four pages; the larger number of 53 readings permitting a

different set of readings to be used on each Shabbat throughout the Jewish (lunar calendar) year.[211]

The editorial team of *Siddur Lev Chadash* stated in their *Introduction* (p. xviii) that:

> [W]e have felt able to translate a little more freely than in the past, bearing in mind that it is concepts, not words, that need to be transposed.

Liberal liturgists need also to take into account the demands made by the concept of sincerity; in the words of the *Affirmation*, 'we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts'. Sincerity demands a translation that is amenable to contemporary understandings.

The concept of sincerity in SOH

The *Introduction* to *SOH* is a mere three pages, mostly of technical information, though on the very first page (ix) the editors told their readers that: '[T]he Rabbis of old said that… he who utters one prayer with sincerity saves himself, and helps to save the world, from the death of the spirit.' The Liberal commitment to sincerity is here reflected in the editors' referencing of this rabbinic saying, both in making the claim that sincerity in prayer is a Jewish value of long pedigree, and that sincerity is necessary to the life of the spirit. *SOH* opens with *Readings for Meditation* (p. 3-12). The readings include the following passages some of which express familiar ideas which form part of the trope of sincerity.[212] These texts emphasise the mental and emotional commitment and the effort needed to offer 'proper' prayer, such as the concentration of one's mind, praying from 'the heart', and speaking words which are true:

> The pious men of old used to wait a whole hour before praying, the better to concentrate their minds on God (p. 3);
>
> The Tzanzer was asked by a Hasid: "What does the Rabbi do before praying?" "I pray," was the reply, "that I may be able to pray properly" (p. 3);

[211] 53 or 54 *parashiyyot* (weekly readings) are recorded in traditions regarding an annual cycle. See Tobias 2007 p. 95, a Liberal Judaism publication, which gives the number as 54. The *Introduction* to the *JPS Bible Commentary: Haftarot* (p. xxii) notes the tradition of either 53 or 54 readings.

[212] An innovative feature of the book was twelve selections of *Prayers and Readings on Special Themes*, including one entitled 'Sincerity' (pp. 242-5) in which many of the texts indicative of the concept of sincerity cited elsewhere in this thesis are gathered together.

> If I knew that I had answered a single 'Amen' as it ought to be said, I would be contented (p. 3);
>
> Make every effort to pray from the heart. Even if you do not succeed, the effort is precious in the eyes of the Lord (p. 4);
>
> The Lord will scatter you among the peoples… but if you search there for the Lord your God, you will find him, if you seek him with all your heart and soul (p. 4);
>
> The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth (p. 4);
>
> True prayer is the opening of our hearts Godward (p. 7).

Immediately following the *Readings for Meditation* there are a number of *Opening Prayers* (p. 23-6). Taken together with the *Readings* the two introductory sections very much set the tone of what is expected of the worshipper, what one should bring to a service, and what one might hope to get out of a service. Of the *Opening Prayers*, the final prayer is verse 15 of Psalm 19, translated in the plural rather than the singular of the Hebrew: 'May the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer', a verse which has always been understood by Liberal Jews to be about sincerity in worship. The trope of sincerity is even more evident in a prayer written for *SOH* by Rabbi Chaim Stern which immediately precedes the verse from Psalm 19 just quoted:

> O Lord our God, many are the evasions and deceits which we practise upon others and upon ourselves. We long to speak and hear truth only, yet time and again, from fear of loss or hope of gain, from dull habit or cruel deliberation, we speak half-truths, we twist facts, we are silent when others lie, and we lie to ourselves. But we stand now before You, and our words and our thoughts speed to One who knows them before we utter them. We know we cannot lie in your presence. May our worship teach us to practice truth in speech and in thought, not only before you, but before our fellow men.[213]
>
> (*SOH* p. 26)

[213] In this prayer, Rabbi Stern spells out clearly an issue which was raised above in chapter 3, where the question was posed: 'If God cannot be deceived because God is omniscient, knowing *everything*, even the innermost thoughts of human beings, why pray… and, more pertinent still, why worry about sincerity in prayer?'

This prayer contains three logically connected ideas: (i) that the worshipper recognises human aspirations to honesty and truth but acknowledges how often people fail to realise those aspirations; (ii) that God knows human thoughts, rendering lying—or insincerity—in prayer certain to fail; (iii) the hope that this aspect of the experience of prayer—the impossibility of *in*sincerity—will transfer to the mundane realm of relations between people.

Siddur Lev Chadash (SLC): sincerity and praying in Hebrew

In *SLC*, the Editors' *Introduction* is followed by nine pages of *Meditations*, grouped according to five themes: *The Meaning of Religion; The Possibility of Prayer; The Meaning of Prayer; The Value of Prayer; Sincerity in Prayer.* In the last group are two passages which directly address the question of language: Is it desirable, or even possible, to pray in a language which one does not understand?[214]

The first passage reads:

> Prayer takes place only when the mind understands, and if the mind does not know what proceeds from the lips, what good is that to the worshipper? Therefore it is better that those who cannot pray in Hebrew should pray in a language they understand.[215]
>
> (*Siddur Lev Chadash* 1995: 8)

The editors' notes on this text in *Siddur Lev Chadash* (p. 663) do not identify the author(s) of English translation, but the gender-neutral style suggests that it was probably made by the editors. The online Hebrew text resource *Sefaria* includes the Hebrew text and an English translation of this particular section (588).[216] It shows that the version in *Siddur Lev Chadash* has been abbreviated and paraphrased:

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[214] Debate over the language of prayer, and decision making by leaders, is not unique to Liberal Judaism, other religious groups face similar issues. In 2021, the Roman Catholic Church felt the need to issue Papal instructions regarding the use of the Latin Mass. As a prominent American Catholic church official stated: 'There was a reason why Vatican II called for a reform of the liturgy. The Council Fathers knew that the Mass was failing the salient point of liturgy: namely, giving the people a chance to worship God with understanding and knowledge. The mystery the liturgy should cause ought to lift people to the heights of heaven, not befuddle their minds because of a language they cannot understand'. (Monseigneur Eric Barr, 'Four Reasons Francis had to restrict the traditional Latin Mass', *Catholic Herald*, 21 July 2021. https://catholicherald.co.uk/four-reasons-francis-had-to-restrict-the-traditional-latin-mass/) accessed 17 Jan 2023.

[215] *Sefer Chasidim* (12th-13th cents., Germany), §588.

[216] https://www.sefaria.org/Sefer_Chasidim.588?lang=bi [accessed 2 September 2021].

> If it will come to pass that a person who doesn't know holy tongue (*lashon ivri*) will come to you and he is a heaven fearing person who wants to pray with intent or if a woman will come to you – tell them that they should learn how to pray in the language they understand, because prayer requires understanding in one's heart, on the contrary if one's heart does not understand what one utters with his mouth – of what use will this be to him...[217] That's why it is better that one prays in the language he understands.

The two English versions do not diverge in any significant degree on the need for understanding what one prays: without understanding, there is no prayer. Where the text uses the words 'cannot pray in Hebrew', the meaning seems to be (based on the latter part of the sentence) that being able to pray in Hebrew includes understanding what the Hebrew means.

The second passage reads:

> Even if a person is able to pray in the Holy Tongue, it is better that they should pray in a language they understand, whether in public or private, so that they may pray with *Kavvanah* (concentration) than that they should pray in the Holy Tongue without *Kavvanah*. For prayer without *Kavvanah* is nothing.[218]
>
> (*Siddur Lev Chadash* 1995: 8-9)

This second passage is from an eighteenth-century Chasidic source. A comparison of the translation published by Chabad[219] shows that the passage as it appears in *Siddur Lev Chadash* is abbreviated and paraphrased:

> Nevertheless, [what of] an unlettered person who can recite the prayers in the Holy Tongue but does not understand it? Rather than praying in the Holy Tongue without mental focus, it is preferable that he pray in a language that he understands, even when praying individually, so that he can concentrate on what he is saying — for prayer without devout intent is of no value.

[217] It is not clear why the *Sefaria* translator inserted an ellipsis at the end of the penultimate sentence. There is no indication in the Hebrew text of any lacuna.

[218] Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1747-1813, Russia), *Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav,* Part 1, 101:5.

[219] https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3299190/jewish/Shulchan-Aruch-Chapter-101-Requirement-to-Concentrate-during-All-Blessings-License-to-Pray-in-Any-Language.htm [accessed 1 September 2021].

This second passage differs from the first in that it deals with the case of a person who can pray in Hebrew ('the Holy Tongue'). However, while in the version of the passage in *Siddur Lev Chadash*, the meaning of the words 'can pray' may bear a meaning referring either to those who may be able to read out prayers in Hebrew, or to those who can recite prayers in Hebrew from memory, the Chabad version, which more fully reflects the Hebrew text, rules out the first meaning.[220] Neither version seems to refer to one who can both pray in Hebrew and understand the prayers.

Arguing for Hebrew

The authors of Liberal Judaism's 1978 'platform' publication, *Judaism for Today,* had addressed the issue of the use of the Hebrew language: 'So overwhelming, indeed, is the case for the use of the vernacular in Jewish worship that it is the continued use of Hebrew which needs to be justified' (Rayner and Hooker 1978: 60). They stated that the case for retaining the use of Hebrew in services is 'strong' (*ibid.*). Five statements were advanced in support of their case:

1. The classical Jewish liturgy was largely composed in Hebrew;
2. Translation cannot fully convey meanings and nuance;
3. Hebrew in services makes worshippers familiar with it;
4. Hebrew in services encourages worshippers to learn it;
5. Hebrew in services maintains a bond between Jews of all lands and languages.

I will deal with each of these in turn. Regarding the first statement, this is a fact which is undisputed, since so much of the traditional liturgy is drawn from or based upon Biblical texts which were composed in Hebrew. *Why* it commends Hebrew for use by Liberal Jews is not stated. It is a premise which is left unargued.

The truth of the second statement is also not disputed as a *general* statement. Language, let alone translations, often fails to fully convey meanings and nuance. It depends upon the level of knowledge of the reader or listener. However, in the particular context of Liberal Judaism's commitment to sincerity in worship, what does this statement contribute to justifying the use of Hebrew? If it is not possible to pray

[220] The phenomenon of people who can read or recite prayers in Hebrew, often with little or no understanding of what they are saying, is a well-attested situation in Jewish communities, both in the past and the present.

words sincerely when one does not understand what one is saying, then, as Joseph Maier had argued in the 1840s, translation (alongside the original language) is ineffective. It merely 'proves the purposelessness of a dead language and its inability to achieve a vital, life-giving spiritualization' (Plaut 1963: 154). If one cannot understand Hebrew, or has a limited ability in that language, comprehension of what one prays in Hebrew is absent or incomplete. Liberal Judaism's position, as expressed above, is that such prayer *cannot* be sincere; without a worshipper's 'being fully aware of the meaning of every sentence he utters, his worship lacks integrity' (Rayner and Hooker 1978: 60). It would seem to make sense, rather, to pray the translation.

Decades earlier, Israel Mattuck had linked the use of English in worship to the Liberals' concept of the *aim* of worship which was not 'to maintain a tradition, but to maintain life', echoing the sentiment of Maier's 'vital, life-giving spiritualization', cited above. Mattuck wrote: '[P]ublic worship must consist of prayers that can be understood by the individual… It therefore follows as the most natural act of religion for them to pray in English' (*LJPB* 1937: xi-xii).

Translation into a language which worshippers understand may successfully—and sufficiently for all practical purposes—convey meaning, even allowing that it may be more difficult to convey nuance. Whatever the difficulties, the authors of *Judaism for Today* have not discouraged translation of scripture from Hebrew into other languages. Public verbal interpretations of Jewish scriptural texts have a long history, reaching back to the public recitation of the *Torah* in Hebrew and Aramaic in the mid-fifth century B.C.E. Though scriptural translation is not public prayer, translations of scripture, such as the Septuagint, a Greek translation produced in Egypt in the third century B.C.E., were valued by Jewish communities

The third statement by the authors of *Judaism for Today* is that using Hebrew in services makes worshippers familiar with it. On the face of it, this claim seems to be reasonable. However, it depends what one understands to be the force of 'familiar'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'familiar' as 'known from constant association; well known'. If one were to use the experience of an observant Orthodox Jew as a reference point, it would probably be the case that such a person would be 'familiar' (in the sense defined above) with Hebrew from encountering it in liturgy. A regime of frequent daily prayer, using the same texts over and over, would ensure familiarity with Hebrew. For committed Orthodox Jews the daily liturgical exposure to Hebrew would usually be combined with a sustained and regular education using Hebrew language texts. This

experience would not only result in familiarity but would also be expected to produce comprehension of Hebrew.

The experience of Liberal Jews with regard to Hebrew is not like that of people in observant Orthodox communities. The radical step of eliminating Hebrew entirely, or almost entirely, as a language in which to recite prayer was taken in some places, though it was not sustained over the long term. The evidence of the foregoing chapters is that Reform/Liberal Judaism in Europe and North America consistently promoted the extensive use of the vernacular in prayer. As the twentieth century wore on the *proportion* of Hebrew printed in services of British Liberal Jewish prayer books and used in the services has moved in the direction of more use of Hebrew. Has this achieved familiarity in any meaningful sense? Familiarity requires 'constant association' in order that the object with which one associates should become 'well known'. The proportion of Hebrew used in Liberal Jewish services had been intentionally increased, but the absolute amount of Hebrew in the services remains small. Familiarity requires more than a brief encounter. Even the most diligent Liberal Jews generally attend public worship on Shabbat and festivals only. As noted in chapter 2, low rates of synagogue attendance have been a feature of Anglo-Jewish life since the eighteenth century across most parts of the community, the exception being the observant Orthodox. Only a small proportion of the membership of Liberal Synagogues attends weekly services frequently. There is no sustained programme of significant Jewish learning comparable to that of observant Orthodox Jewish communities. One is prompted one to ask, after so much qualification, what is left of the claim that using Hebrew in Liberal Jewish services makes worshippers familiar with it? I would contend that this 'leg' of the argument in support of using Hebrew as a language of prayer is particularly weak in an English-language environment like the United Kingdom.

The fourth statement, that using Hebrew in services encourages worshippers to learn it, was advanced without qualification or evidence offered in support of it. In fact, the claim seems to be contradicted on the very same page on which it is advanced (Rayner and Hooker 1978: 60 emphasis added):

> Some Jews know Hebrew so well that they are able to pray in Hebrew with such full comprehension [that they achieve integrity in worship]. For the great majority of our members that is not true; and though we do all we can to encourage the

learning of Hebrew by children and adults, *we must be realistic and say that it is not likely to become true.*

The fifth and final statement advanced in *Judaism for Today* was that using Hebrew in services maintains a bond between Jews of all lands and languages. That there is a bond between Jews is a widespread, though not universal, belief.[221] In chapter 4 the claims by Rabbi Hermann Adler regarding the bonds between Jews were noted. He argued for the sole use of Hebrew in public prayer as it fostered a bond between Jews and God as well as between Jews of different nationalities.

The vernacular liturgy of the nineteenth-century Berlin Reform congregation, which eliminated all but a few lines of Hebrew, proved to be very popular in attracting people to the synagogue who had been estranged for decades. It aimed 'to engage the minds and hearts of Jews greatly alienated from tradition but nonetheless *seeking a religious bond with fellow Jews*' (Meyer 1988: 129 emphasis added). The alienation was not to be overcome by using Hebrew in communal prayer. A bond, or the desire to express a bond, was deemed present, but Hebrew stood in the way of such a bond. As Claude Montefiore had argued, the use of Hebrew in services had become a deterrent. Hebrew severed, rather than served, the bond between Jews and worship, thereby contributing to the loosening of bonds between people.

Though Rabbi Rayner, writing in the late 1970s, could be pessimistic about the likelihood of adults and children in Liberal Jewish communities learning Hebrew, things have moved on. Several factors give rise to greater optimism concerning familiarity with the language. The first concerns the State of Israel established in the late 1940s with a modern form of Hebrew as one of its official languages; Hebrew is now the dominant language in the State. The cultural success of modern Hebrew in areas such as secular literature and film and as the medium of instruction in well-respected schools and universities has elevated and extended its status. Since the 1970s more British Jewish youth than ever before visit the State of Israel on organised programmes of education and, in a sense, 'nation building' intended to strengthen Jewish identity and an attachment to Israel as a Jewish state.

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[221] The American Reconstructionist Movement has also posited a bond between Jews: '[D]eviation [from established liturgy] impairs the spiritual unity of the Jewish people… We too are eager to preserve the Jewish worshiper's sense of oneness with Israel and to maintain the common memories and the feeling of a common destiny, which the services of the traditional synagogue have always fostered' (*Sabbath Prayer Book* 1945: xvii). The editors identify commonalities which they believe foster the 'oneness' of the Jewish people but made no claim that it was the use of the Hebrew language which fostered the spiritual unity of Israel.

A second factor in increased Hebrew literacy has been an expansion in the participation of young British Jews in full-time day school education in Jewish 'faith' schools. This growth of Jewish educational provision has included the establishment of schools with a non-Orthodox Jewish ethos, sponsored by the progressive movements in the UK. The curriculum of these schools includes the teaching of modern Hebrew. The first such school to be set up was the Akiva School in North London, a primary school which opened in 1981, and provides 'particularly for members of Reform and Liberal communities' according to its website.[222] A 'pluralist' Jewish primary school, the Clore Tikva School, opened in 1999 in Ilford, Essex. It accepts Jewish pupils from across the religious 'spectrum' and is twinned with a school in Israel.[223] A pluralist Jewish secondary school, JCoSS, opened in North London in 2010.

The effect of these programmes and schools is to increase the Hebrew literacy of participants and pupils. This has not, to my knowledge, had a noticeable impact on attitudes or policies regarding Hebrew in published liturgies. The increased use of transliteration in progressive prayerbooks in recent decades speaks to the continuing need to provide for a community many of whose members in older generations need support for their use of Hebrew in prayer. That said, in my current experience of leading services in Reform and Liberal congregations I have not encountered any controversy regarding the use of Hebrew even in a majority of the core prayers of services. It is as though the question is accepted as settled in favour of the extensive use of Hebrew in prayer. In the absence of research to support an answer, I can only speculate that among younger Liberal Jews there is an increased interest in and commitment to the State of Israel, which may have the effect of creating a positive attitude to the use of Hebrew in liturgical settings.

Of the five statements offered in support of the use of Hebrew in services, numbers 1 and 2 are facts which are not disputed. However, the authors of *Judaism for Today* do not present a coherent argument in defence of why these statements should justify using Hebrew in prayer. Statement 3 is vague (what is the meaning of being 'familiar' with Hebrew?). Statement 4 is contradicted by the authors themselves; Liberal Jews are unlikely to learn Hebrew so as to understand their prayers. Statement 5 suggests the existence of a bond between Jews but does not substantiate the claim that

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[222] Akiva School (2024) *Introduction to Akiva School* Available at: https://www.akivaschool.org/Introduction/ (Accessed 4 April 2024).

[223] Clore Tikva School *Israel Partnership* Available at: https://www.cloretikva.redbridge.sch.uk/israel-partnership/ (Accessed 4 April 2024).

Hebrew maintains the bond. The cumulative weight of these five arguments is anything but a 'strong' case for using Hebrew in services.

Claude Montefiore and Israel Mattuck, following the views of liberal leaders and congregations in the nineteenth century in Germany and the USA, held that one *cannot* be sincere when one says prayers in a language which one cannot understand. In the second half of the twentieth century the challenge to sincerity in worship posed by this view seems, for many Liberal Jews, to have been overcome or accommodated. Instead, an argument in favour of greater use of Hebrew in services has been offered. The authors of *Judaism for Today* wrote that the case for Hebrew was strong. Yet *Siddur Lev Chadash*, the most 'Hebrew' of all Liberal Jewish prayer books, had introduced texts in the *Meditations* which supported the position that 'Prayer only takes place when the mind understands' and commending vernacular prayer where Hebrew is not understood (*SLC* 1995: 8-9). These texts were not found in the equivalent places in the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* or *Service of the Heart*.

Liberal Judaism's 2007 'platform', based on the *Affirmations*, contains a passage which is quite remarkable in the light of the examination of Liberal Judaism's liturgies and platforms so far. The passage suggests that Liberal Judaism no longer even recognises when it is being inconsistent. Noting that 'considerably more Hebrew' is used in the twenty-first century than a hundred years earlier, the writer, Rabbi Tobias states that this is not as a consequence of 'a greater level of Hebrew knowledge or ability on the part of congregants' (Tobias 2007: 182). The justification for the change is that:

> [P]rayer is as much about the creation of an appropriate atmosphere as it is to do with understanding. The reading of psalms and prayers in the original Hebrew allows their poetic quality to be appreciated as well as encouraging a link with Jewish communities all over the world…
>
> (Tobias 2007: 182)

In this passage 'atmosphere', could be taken to mean an appropriate setting and the conduct of services with a decorum supportive of attention to prayer. That would be my reading. Alternatively, it could mean an invocation of mystery and a link to the past through the use of Hebrew. I would argue that the evidence is persuasive that Montefiore and Mattuck were convinced that that it was of paramount importance that worshippers comprehend their prayers and sincerity in worship depended on that

comprehension. ‘Atmosphere’ in the first sense suggested above was not unimportant to them, but it is straining the evidence to rank it on a par with comprehension.

Liberal Judaism has also argued strongly that worshippers should use Hebrew even while acknowledging that worshippers’ understanding of Hebrew may be limited. I have argued that the case in favour of prayer in Hebrew is weak. Liberal Judaism seems to be trying to hold two views at the same time: (i) that it is necessary for sincerity that prayer be in a language which the worshipper can understand and (ii) that there is a strong case for using Hebrew in communal prayer even if the worshippers cannot understand it. The latter view is difficult to reconcile with the *Affirmation* and with statements in Liberal Judaism’s other publications.

For those who wish to express ideas and beliefs with sincerity language *in general* presents challenges. This thesis has identified a number of instances in which the use of Hebrew in services was eliminated almost completely. Those who sought sincerity through a fully, or almost full, vernacular liturgy for Liberal Jewish services, failed to persuade the majority, so that during the twentieth century the use of Hebrew in Liberal synagogue services in the United Kingdom increased. In the light of what has been noted in this thesis regarding balancing sincerity with other priorities and achieving a justifiable compromise between, for example, sincerity and tradition, it would be wrong to conclude that increased use of Hebrew has rendered Liberal Jewish worship insincere. Worship may fulfil a range of purposes in addition to being a vehicle for sincere expression of beliefs. Liberal Judaism’s prayer services continue to offer significant and valued experiences for some Jewish people, albeit only a minority. Even so, based on the research done for this thesis, it is unclear what, if anything, the use of Hebrew in prayer by those who do not understand it well contributes to achieving sincerity in worship. To express it slightly differently, if it is the case that the use of Hebrew in prayer without understanding does not *alone* entail insincerity in worship, the argument that this is so has not been articulated well by Liberal Judaism.

Criteria for retention or omission of prayers and expressions

Liberal Judaism’s view about liturgy and the beliefs contained therein has been expressed for the movement by Rabbis Rayner and Hooker in *Judaism for Today*. It is that ‘the traditional Jewish liturgy… expresses in its prayers some fairly definite doctrines which, by reciting them, the worshipper is presumably expected to affirm’

(Rayner and Hooker 1978: 13). As a consequence of the Liberal commitment to sincerity, those authors state:

> What is at issue here is nothing less than intellectual integrity, which demands that the search for truth should be unfettered… For it can never be right to affirm that which, when we have made every effort to learn from the past and present, and to be honest with ourselves, seems to us certainly, or even probably, false.
>
> (Rayner and Hooker 1978: 15)

This is an exacting standard. What are the criteria which settle, as Rabbi Mattuck had put it, 'what we could not believe, and therefore honestly say'? It is clear from his statement on liturgical editing that sincerity, expressed as the exercise of informed conscience ('what we could not believe, and therefore honestly say, had to be omitted') is the primary standard of what must be excluded, and what may be included, in liturgy. How does a prayer, or an assertion in part of a prayer, qualify to be retained, modified or excluded? Though there are some relatively clear and substantiated indications of what the criteria may be, such as the commitment to philosophical reason and scientific understandings outlined in chapter 4, there also seems to be a degree of inconsistency in the application of criteria in the texts of Liberal Judaism's liturgies.

Inconsistency may be detected where traditional formulations which had been altered by the editor(s) of earlier Liberal Jewish liturgies only to have their original wording restored in subsequent editions. An example of this is the statement in the creation story found in the first chapter Book of Genesis, and its partial reiterations elsewhere, that God made the world in six days: 'for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and was refreshed' (Exodus 31: 17). It was considered that this could not be prayed in the liturgies of the 1920s and 1930s, or of 1967, and it was therefore omitted from its expected loci in the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* (p. 10) and in *Service of the Heart* (pp. 69-70). Yet it was acceptable to include the passage in *Siddur Lev Chadash* published in 1995: 'For in six days, I, the Eternal One, made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day I ceased from work, and rested' (*SLC* p. 99; 566).[224] Writing about *Siddur Lev Chadash*, Rigal and Rosenberg (2004: 123) posited that: 'In some instances, such as the reference to the six days of creation in the Sabbath morning Kiddush, the book assumed that the modern

[224] The difference in translation between the first version (Jewish Publication Society translation) and *Siddur Lev Chadash* arises as the editors of *SLC* wished to avoid gendered language concerning God.

congregant would not take the words literally'. The editors of the Liberal Jewish prayer books up to and including 1967 appear to have assumed that members of their congregations might have taken the six days of creation literally, and so the editors omitted the passage. The editors of the prayer books of 1967 and of 1995 were the same, Rabbis John Rayner and Chaim Stern. Yet they decided to reinstate the omitted text in the 1995 prayer book. It seems most unlikely that they believed that earlier generations of congregants up to 1967 were more credulous than people three decades later, many of whom would be the same people. The inconsistency is worth noting (a) in the light of the paramount importance of sincerity in worship, meaning that one should not say in prayer what one does not believe and (b) the presentation of Liberal Judaism's ideas in *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century*. In that work—discussed below in this chapter—the author, Rabbi Pete Tobias, avoids discussion of material activity by God, making statements only of the most general type, which practically identify 'God' with natural processes. In the 1920s, James Wise accused Liberal Judaism (meaning American Reform Judaism) of being dogmatic by retaining statements of belief in their liturgy which sincerity might reasonable demand be modified or removed. Yet, as already noted in this chapter, Liberal Judaism's liturgy has exhibited inconsistency which calls into question whether sincerity in worship is truly of paramount importance. In the rest of this chapter, I shall consider examples of how Hebrew prayers have been translated into English in Liberal Jewish prayer books and what this may tell us about Liberal Judaism's commitment to sincerity in practice.

Textual Comparisons (i) The Amidah: What happens after death?

The *Amidah* is the core prayer of all Jewish services. It is known also simply as *Tefilah*, 'prayer', or the prayer *par exc*ellence. The second paragraph of the Amidah indicates a belief in some form of bodily resurrection. Israel Abrahams, in his *Companion* to the prayer book (1914: lix), stated that the second paragraph of this prayer: '[R]ecites God's sustenance of the living and resurrection of the dead… when the Sadducees disputed the resurrection, the Pharisees (perhaps in the reign of John Hyrcanus 135–104 B.C.E.) introduced into the Amidah this emphatic statement of belief in the dogma.'[225] This has

[225] Even Orthodox authorities have seemed to waver in their acceptance of the dogma of bodily resurrection. Chief Rabbi Hertz in his commentary to the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (Hertz 1947: 133) steers his readers away from the issue. On the phrase '*revivest the dead*' he comments: 'He awakes the dead to new life. This emphatic statement concerning the resurrection was directed especially against the worldlings who disputed the deathlessness of the soul, its return to God, and its continued separate existence after its reunion with the Divine Source of being'. On the complex interplay of ideas of personal

presented challenges for Liberal Jews who have (re)interpretated the meaning, usually through their vernacular translations and, less commonly, textual emendations in Hebrew.

The initial sentence of the second paragraph of the *Amidah* prayer reads:

'Attah gibbor l'olam Adonai, mechayyeih meitim attah rav l'hoshi'a'.[226]

A 'word for word'[227] style of translation of this phrase is:

'You, O Lord, are mighty for ever; you revive the dead; you have the power to save'.

The translations of the same phrase of the prayer from *SOH* (1967) and *SLC* (1995) are, respectively:

'Eternal is Your power, O Lord; all life is Your gift; You are mighty to save'.

'Unending is Your might, Eternal One; You are the Source of eternal life; great is your power to redeem'.

The clear difference between the traditional formula 'you revive the dead' and the translations in the two Liberal *siddurim* is the attribution to God of the different powers: (i) to give life or (ii) to be the source of eternal life. In terms of only saying what worshippers believe in their hearts, for many Liberal Jewish synagogue members both formulations could fall into the category of ideas which are not widely believed where, for them, materialistic scientific explanations of physical existence and life prevail over traditional religious ideas. It is also the case that the two formulations are conceptually distinct: giving life can be interpreted as meaning a limited physical existence, whereas 'eternal life' is generally viewed as some form of non-physical existence. If, as noted in chapter 1, liturgy reflects 'theology' (Gillman 2008: 32), do the distinct concepts in the two translations signify a shift in Liberal Jewish theology?

In *SOH,* in addition to the translation cited above, a paraphrase appears (e.g., evening service p. 83; morning service p. 165) which reads: 'Great is Your power, and

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resurrection, immortality of the soul, afterlife and national destiny in the Jewish tradition, see Jacobs 1995: 420–22.

[226] Liberal Judaism did not publish transliterations in the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book*, *Service of the Heart* or *Siddur Lev Chadash*. However, British Reform Judaism included transliterations in their *siddur* published in 2008, the scheme of which I have followed here.

[227] I have used the English translations from the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (*ADPB*) published in 1992 to represent 'word for word' translations.

infinite your love. The morning stars sing of Your wisdom, and the miracle of life reveals Your design'. Liberal Judaism's liturgies have been produced by successive small circles of editors which allows prayer book editors to engage in sometimes idiosyncratic, (re)interpretations. This is analysed further in this chapter in the section on *Yigdal: A Poetic Creed*.

Another indication of idiosyncratic editorial activity appears in the English translation of the verse being considered here in *SLC*, where the editors explain in a note (p. 664) that 'we have so interpreted the references to resurrection that they can be understood in terms of the survival of the soul, or immortality, in a more general sense'. This is fair, as the editors make clear in their editorial work. It does, however, leave open a question raised earlier in this chapter concerning integrity in translation.

In many of the longer blessings in Jewish liturgy, the main idea of the opening of the prayer is reflected in the closing words, which in this prayer are:

'V'ne'eman attah l'hachayot meitim. Baruch attah Adonai, m'chayyeih ha-meitim'.

The *ADPB*'s translation and Liberal translations (*SOH* and *SLC*) are, respectively:

> 'And You are sure to revive the dead. Blessed are You – the Lord, who revives the dead'.
>
> 'Our trust is in You, the Source of life. We praise you, O Lord, who have implanted within us eternal life'.
>
> 'Trusting in You, we see life beyond death. We praise You, O God, Source of eternal life'.

In 1967 *SOH* had altered the Hebrew text of this prayer. Where the traditional opening had the words *mechayyeih meitim* ('you revive the dead'), this was changed to *mechayyeih ha-kol* ('you revive everything') and is paraphrased in *SOH* as 'all life is Your gift'. Given that modification, it might be expected that the editors of *SOH* would make a change also to the Hebrew text of the closing phrase of this second paragraph of the *Amidah*. In the traditional form of the conclusion of the prayer are the words:

V'ne'eman attah l'hachayot meitim. Baruch attah Adonai, m'chayyeih ha-meitim

> 'And You are sure to revive the dead. Blessed are You – the Lord, who revives the dead'

In *SOH* the words are changed in both sentences of the conclusion, becoming:

> *V'ne'eman attah l'hachayot ha-kol. Baruch attah Adonai, noteiyah b'tocheinu chayyeih olam*

This is translated there as:

> 'Our trust is in You, the Source of life. We praise you, O Lord, who have implanted within us eternal life'.

In *LJPB*, Rabbi Mattuck had avoided the problem of translating 'this emphatic statement' of the dogma of physical resurrection by simply ignoring part of the wording of the Hebrew prayer. *SOH* and *SLC* resorted to English paraphrases to tackle this problematic belief. But this consistency was not carried over in the Hebrew texts where the 'solution' of *SOH* to the problem of having worshippers say words they don't believe was *undone* by *SLC*, which restored the traditional Hebrew phrase *m'chayyeih ha-meitim,* 'revives the dead'. This instance of an apparent reversal of earlier Liberal reasoning is not an isolated case, as will be shown below.

Textual Comparisons (ii) The Amidah: miracles, signs and wonders

The penultimate blessing of the *Amidah* prayer is known by its first word, *modim*, meaning 'thank'. The English translation in the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (1992: 210) includes the following:

> We will give thanks to You and declare Your praise, for our lives which are committed to Your care, for our souls which are entrusted to You, for Your miracles which are daily with us, and for Your wonders and favours which are with us at all times.

This passage appears in the revised and expanded *A Selection of Prayers, Psalms and Hymns* published by the Jewish Religious Union (JRU) in 1903 and includes reference to both 'miracles' and 'wonders' (p. 15). As noted in chapter 7, those involved in producing the JRU publication, including Simeon Singer, editor of the (Orthodox) *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, had a deep appreciation of the traditional *siddur*. In contrast Rabbi Israel Mattuck, the first Rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, came from a more radical and rationalist tradition which was very influential in the United States. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the first Liberal Jewish *siddur* edited by Rabbi Mattuck,

the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* (1926/1937), omitted the *modim* blessing in its entirety. In *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism,* Rabbi Mattuck was unequivocal in his view of miracles:

> On the basis of what we believe about the relation of God to the universe, I find it impossible to believe in miracles… I must stress the fact that religion as interpreted in Liberal Judaism does not require us to believe in them.
>
> (Mattuck 1947: 37)

He also noted that the word 'miracle' was used in more than one sense. Among these senses was the conventional understanding that a miracle is an event which seems to violate what are usually termed 'the laws of nature'. If an event took place which could be explained by a known physical law, 'it is not a miracle' (Mattuck 1947: 36).[228]

The publication of *Service of the Heart* (*SOH*) in 1967 saw the *modim* blessing restored, albeit in an abbreviated form:

> We thank and praise You for our lives, which are in Your hand; for our souls, which are ever in Your keeping; for the miracles that are with us day by day; and for Your wondrous kindness at all times.

In the 1995 liturgy, *Siddur Lev Chadash*, the successor liturgy to *SOH,* the *modim* blessing is present, still in the same abbreviated form as in *SOH*, but in the English translation the editors have removed the words 'miracles':

> We thank and praise You for our lives, which are in Your hand; for our souls, which are in Your keeping; for the signs of Your presence we encounter every day; and for Your wondrous gifts at all times.

Rabbi Mattuck's statement in *The Essentials of Liberal* Judaism cited above encapsulates the dilemma which all non-Orthodox denominations face. If 'the basis of what we believe about the relation of God to the universe' is not to conflict with 'known physical law[s]', what can sincerely be said about the signs of God's presence or wondrous gifts?

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[228] This view is contradicted elsewhere in Liberal Jewish publications where mundane events may be characterised as 'miraculous'. See, e.g., Rabbi Stephen Howard's *Miracles* in the series of pamphlets *Liberal Jewish Values* (Liberal Judaism 2005). 'Liberal Judaism affirms a traditional, yet rational, understanding of miracles… We embrace the whole world as continually miraculous…' For a substantial analysis of the Biblical and Rabbinic understanding of miracles, see *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism* (2000) s.v. 'Miracles in Judaism, The Classical Statement'.

Textual Comparisons (iii) Yigdal: A Poetic Creed [229]

The third example of a prayer and its presentation in Liberal Jewish prayer books in response to the challenge posed by the concept of sincerity is *Yigdal*, a fourteenth-century poetic version of Maimonides' *Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith*.[230] This poetic version was characterised by Shapiro (2004: 3) as a 'vulgarization which received widespread rhetorical acceptance'. He goes on to quote Menachem Kellner (1999: 69):

> Not only were Maimonides' principles accepted without the theological substrate which gave them coherence and which made of them something more than an elegant literary device for teaching Jewish ideas; they were not even accepted in the form in which Maimonides' presented them, but, rather, in a simplified, even debased fashion.

The thirteen verses of the traditional *Yigdal* contained theological claims which presented problems for Liberal liturgists including references to a personal Messiah, Moses' receiving of the *Torah*, and the physical resurrection of the dead. As noted in chapter 7, *Yigdal* was omitted from the JRU *Selections* of 1902/3. In *LJPB*, Rabbi Mattuck avoided the problem of sincerity raised in parts of *Yigdal* by omitting several of the verses:[231]

7. 'There has never arisen in Israel another like Moses, a prophet who beheld God's image.

8. 'God gave to His people the Torah of truth by the hand of His prophet the most faithful servant in his household'.

12. 'He will send our Messiah at the end of days to redeem those who wait for His final salvation'.

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[229] *Yigdal* is usually found at the beginning of the traditional morning service (Hertz 1947: 6; *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* 1992: 11). In Reform and Liberal liturgies, it is generally used as a concluding hymn (*LJPB* p. 428; *SOH* p. 374; *SLC* p. 526). On the location and significance of *Yigdal* in services, see Schonfield (2006: 123 ff.).

[230] For a brief introduction to Maimonides' *Principles*, see Jacobs (1995: 386–8). In-depth analysis can be found in Jacobs (1964); Kellner (1986 and 1999); Shapiro (2004).

[231] The English translations are from the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (1992: 12).

In addition to the omissions above—and exceptionally—Rabbi Mattuck changed the Hebrew wording of verse 13. The traditional wording begins:

meitim y'chayyeih eil b'rov chasdo

'God will revive the dead in His great lovingkindness'

Rabbi Mattuck substituted:

chayyeih olam natah b'tocheinu

'He has implanted within us eternal life'.

Clearly, in 1937, Rabbi Mattuck felt that Liberal Jews were unable to say with sincerity that:[232]

7. Moses was unique, in particular, as he saw God
8. God gave the Torah to Moses
12. God will send a Messiah
13. God will revive the dead.

By 1967 something had changed, as the editors of *SOH* offered worshippers an almost completely restored version of *Yigdal* reflecting much more closely the original poem.[233] The version restores all but verse 7:

'There has never arisen in Israel another like Moses, a prophet who beheld God's image'.

The Hebrew text of verse 8 in *SOH* follows the traditional form:

'A law of truth God gave to his people, through his prophet, his faithful servant'.

Verse 9 was also restored in its traditional wording in Hebrew, but the English translation conveys a changed meaning or new interpretation, thus:

'God will never alter or change his law for any other',

becomes in *SOH*:

'God does not change; his teaching will not be supplanted; he will always be the same'.

It could be argued that the translation 'God will never alter or change his law for any other' is ambiguous and could be taken to mean:

[232] The numbers indicate the Maimonidean *Principles.*

[233] The editors note the omission of Principle 7 and the changes that they have made elsewhere in their revision of *Yigdal*, but do not explain the reasoning behind their changes (*SOH* p. 513-4).

> 'God will never alter; [nor will God] change his law for any other,'

The American Conservative *siddur* and commentary *Or Hadash* (Hammer 2003: 53) translates this verse as:

> 'Our God will neither change nor modify His law; its place remains established for eternity'.

Again, the rendering is potentially ambiguous in that there is a possibility in this English translation that the 'neither' refers to two elements: (i) 'God will never change' and (ii) 'nor [will God] modify His law'.

> Hertz (1947: 7) offers the metrical translation by Alice Lucas:
> 'This Law God will not alter, will not change
> for any other through time's utmost range.'

British Reform Judaism's *Forms of Prayer* (2008) also adopts a metrical translation:

> 'God will never change the teaching we received nor ever put another in its place'.

This understanding of the verse, that God will not change the law, rather than that it is God who is unchanging, is borne out by the Hebrew grammar of the original text. It is also supported by scholars such as Shapiro (2004: 122) when he writes: 'The Ninth Principle teaches that the Torah will never be abrogated, in whole or part, and that God will never give another Torah'.

These translations into English illustrate the ever-present possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding. However, the possibility of misunderstanding in relation to a text such as *Yigdal* caused by ambiguity in the translation is not the most significant issue here. Of greater import are decisions by prayer book editors to engage in their own reinterpretation. As the editors of *SOH* indicate (p. 513-4):

> In v. 12 we have changed (in H & E) the first half of the verse ("He will send our Messiah at the end of days") to "at the end of days he will pour out his spirit upon all flesh" (c.f. Joel 3:1). In the last verse [13] we have followed *LJPB* (p. 429) in changing (in H & E) "in his great love God will resurrect the dead" to "he has implanted eternal life within us".

In contrast to the changes made in *SOH*, its successor *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995) gave a further novel treatment to *Yigdal* through a metrical translation by Rabbi John Rayner.

SLC's *Yigdal* has 13 verses, as verse 7—omitted in both *LJPB* and *SOH*—had been restored. A comparison of the translations of the 'problematic' verses in the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book* (*ADPB*) (1992) with *SLC* yields:

Verse	*ADPB* Translation	*Siddur Lev Chadash*
7	'a prophet who beheld God's image'	'Moses, who perceived what God demanded with unclouded clarity'
9	'God will never alter or change his law for any other'	'God's nature does not change, immutable God's law, and God alone abides in perpetuity'
12	'He will send our Messiah at the end of days to redeem those who wait for His final salvation'	'And at the end of days God's spirit shall be poured upon all flesh, redeeming all humanity'.
13	'God will revive the dead in His great lovingkindness'.	'Hope of immortal life God planted in our souls'

What do these liturgical amendments tell us? Liberal Judaism takes sincerity, often expressed by writers as 'intellectual integrity', seriously: those who recite liturgy should only say what they honestly believe. The theology of the liturgy and the belief of worshippers must be more than minimally, or vaguely, congruent. As a prominent Conservative Rabbi put it, the wording of the *siddur* prayers must, at least in some significant respect, 'be something that you honestly believe in' (Schulweis in Feinstein 2007: 104). Whatever else is clear from the foregoing textual comparisons, they demonstrate that Liberal Judaism was prepared to cease endorsing key beliefs expressed in the traditional liturgy.

Yet the overall impression of liturgical modification is that there are inconsistencies too. Many significant traditional statements and formulations on theological issues, such as the belief in the future coming of a human Messiah, have

been deleted from Liberal Judaism's liturgy. Even so, despite a readiness to revise and amend texts, there are prayers in the current *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995) which contain expressions which seem, at first sight, somewhat anomalous. Examples include a prayer in which God is described as the one 'whose understanding changes times and seasons' (p. 93) and as 'working wonders' (p. 95). In other instances, the pray-ers are invited to ask God to 'shield us from sickness and war, from famine or distress' (p. 96). In the second blessing of the *Amidah* prayer God is addressed in the words 'You cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall, the sun to shine and the dew to descend' (p. 19).[234] Since Liberal Judaism's members probably do not believe that God manipulates the seasons, does not perform miracles, does not intervene in individual lives, and does not determine weather conditions, it is unclear why these expressions are being used or what their retention is intended to convey, except to say that they are perhaps so strikingly 'unscientific' that readers may regard them as not intended to convey a literal meaning but be open to, for instance, poetic interpretation.[235]

Sincerity: 'intellectual integrity' in the Liberal Jewish context

According to Rigal and Rosenberg (2004: 4) the challenge of sincerity for liberal religion in the nineteenth century concerned the content of prayer texts versus intellectual developments such as scientific claims concerning the physical world and the findings of critical-historical research. Such modern knowledge touched directly upon the claims of scripture, challenging the 'legitimacy of change in Judaism and the denial of eternal validity of any given formulation of Jewish belief or codification of Jewish law' (Kessler 2004: 5). The debate became a debate also about the formulations and codifications of Jewish liturgy. Neil Gillman, a Conservative Rabbi and Professor of Jewish philosophy, saw liturgy as part of the continuing development of myth:

> [I]f the Bible represents the initial canonization of at least the core of the Jewish religious myth, then in postbiblical Judaism the extension of that process of canonization can be found most explicitly in the liturgy.
>
> (Gillman 2008: 32)

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[234] The phrase 'you cause the dew to descend' is not found in all traditional liturgies (Elbogen 1993: 115). The phrase '[You cause] the sun to shine' is, 'a new interpolation' (see *SLC* p. 664 n. 19).

[235] This is an issue which I have not investigated in this thesis for two reasons. The first is my lack of knowledge of what 'poetic' interpretation means and how it is understood to operate. The second is that I do not have the time or space in the thesis to cover such an analysis to the extent that it may deserve.

A liturgy should not be viewed merely as a text, but as an activity to be performed, and that activity is 'doing theology'. By this Gillman means that 'the liturgy articulates a series of theological claims' and Biblical ideas are transformed in these familiar texts which many would read on a daily basis (*ibid*. p. 33). A substantial part of the Jewish myth expressed in liturgy is heard in the recitation of the *Shema* and in the blessings/prayers which precede and follow it, including 'God reigns over all of creation, nature, and history, and maintains, daily, the created world' (*ibid*. p. 47). The myth *is* articulated in Liberal Judaism's most recent liturgy in the passages which follow the *Shema* and which are known, from their theme, as *G'ullah*, ('redemption').[236] At the core of that myth, 'is the image of a transcendent, sovereign God who cares deeply about what transpires in nature and history' (*ibid*.). While the myth is retained by Liberal Judaism's latest liturgy, other elements of more recent origin composed by Liberal Judaism's editors, have subsequently been removed. In *Service of the Heart* (1967: 80), we find a prayer composed by Rabbis Rayner and Stern following the *Shema:*

> We solemnly affirm the truth of Israel's faith: there is One God in heaven and earth. His power and wisdom are manifest in nature, his love and justice in the life of mankind.
> We see God's guiding hand most clearly when we look back upon the history of our own people.

The prayer goes on to describe relevant episodes of Jewish history which include the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the theophany at Sinai, and the inspiration and teaching of prophets and sages. Most of this passage of prayer is reproduced with minor editing in *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995) but, crucially, it is relocated. No longer in the body of the services, in the *G'ullah*, it appears instead in the *Prayers and Readings on Various Themes*, on one occasion in the section on *Jewish Identity* (p. 189-90) and on another in the section on *Jewish History* (p. 322-3). In both cases the first two sentences, 'We solemnly affirm the truth of Israel's faith: there is One God in heaven and earth. His power and wisdom are manifest in nature, his love and justice in the life of mankind' and 'We see God's guiding hand most clearly when we look back upon the history of our own people' have been removed. One can only speculate on the reason for this deletion. If belief in the existence of a God whose existence is manifested in

[236] See *Siddur Lev Chadash,* p. 51.

nature and in human history, is no longer something which Liberal Jews can affirm, then a strict or strong version of sincerity would demand that such beliefs are not expressed in the liturgy.

Arguing for God

Liberal Judaism in the twentieth century remained committed to theism and very forcefully so.[237] The grounds advanced in support of theism included the physical universe, the progression of history and human conscience. A brief review of Liberal declarations taken from articles and platforms intended to set out the Liberal position will show the unequivocal nature of the commitment.

1. Claude Montefiore believed that God was 'a *real* God… a God to whom prayer is no mockery, a God who in a real sense is the "ruler" of the world and of man' (Montefiore 1900: 632-3 emphasis in original). Furthermore, he held that the Jewish idea of God was: 'a pure, but a very uncompromising Theism' which 'admits of no paltering or faltering with the Divine idea' (*ibid*.).

2. In *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism* (1947), Israel Mattuck wrote that 'About some religious ideas it is possible for Jews to hold different views; but not about the existence of God' (p. 1) 'The belief in God was always accepted in Judaism as axiomatic. There could be no questioning it' (p. 19). 'It is reasonable to argue that the physical universe gives grounds for the belief in God' (p. 23) and 'The spiritual life in man gives ground… for the belief in God' (p.26).

3. Rabbis Rayner and Hooker wrote in *Judaism for Today* that: '[I]n this, the most fundamental area of Jewish belief, we stand essentially where Jews have always stood… In all essentials, the God of our fathers is also our God' (1978: 26-7).

4. The most recent example of literature setting forth Liberal Judaism's outlook and ethos is *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Cen-*

[237] In the USA a non-theistic expression of Judaism arose which coalesced into the Progressive denomination known as Reconstructionist Judaism. For an introduction to Reconstructionist Judaism, see Alpert and Staub (2000).

tury. It declares that the existence of God is 'not so much a question of belief as one of awareness… but the starting point for Judaism is that there is a God (Tobias 2007: 9).

It seems that the fourth statement above may be inconsistent with the three statements which preceded it since it seems to deny that the assertion, 'the starting point for Judaism is that there is a God', is necessarily a Liberal Jewish belief, in the sense of a statement of how things are. God is, rather, an 'awareness'. This holding back from positing the existence of God as a belief may be considered an example of sincerity, as the concept of sincerity requires that when one affirms beliefs, those beliefs are, *in a strong sense*, genuinely held. As Tobias put it, 'Liberal Judaism… insists that its adherents confront today's major issues with the honesty and integrity our age demands' (Tobias 2007: 3). Tobias may well be signalling that belief in God is no longer taken for granted. In the 1920s James Waterman Wise criticised Liberal Judaism for being dogmatic, that is, unjustifiably confident in its assertions, regarding the existence of God and the existence of human souls. Is this criticism justified a century after Wise's book was published? Liberal Judaism's contemporary beliefs are set out in the latest 'platform' publication *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* (Tobias 2007). Each of its chapters explores in depth one of the 42 *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*. [238]

Early in chapter 2 'The Jewish View of God', we find the following, an extract from which was cited above:

> Proving God's existence… has never been a concern of Judaism's… Judaism's attitude to the existence of God, then, is not so much a question of belief as one of awareness. We may, at certain times in our lives feel more or less aware of God's presence, but the starting point for Judaism is that there is a God.
>
> (Tobias 2007: 9)

Are we seeing here a shift regarding beliefs of the same type that were noted in the liturgy? Is it being suggested that God's presence (and existence) is to be 'felt', through an 'awareness' and is that awareness interior, subjective and private? And what of Wise's charge that liberal Judaism harboured a second 'dogma': the existence of an

[238] Tobias' 2007 book is a successor to *Judaism For Today* (1978) and *The Essentials of Liberal Judaism* (1947). The most recent edition of the *Affirmations* appeared in 2006.

immortal human soul? Tobias' chapter entitled 'The Jewish View of Humanity' addresses Liberal Judaism's third *Affirmation*.[239] It is stated in the chapter 'there is, implanted within us in some mysterious and intangible way, a spark of the divine' (p. 16) and that there is a 'divinely inspired potential that has been planted within us… This awareness of God within us is something we can acknowledge or ignore; it is always there, but recognition of it varies from individual to individual, from generation to generation, according to situation or circumstance' (p. 17). The majority of Tobias' discussion focuses on human beings' possession of free will, and their response to moral choices through being 'endowed with a good inclination and an evil inclination', but the word 'soul' and possible cognates such as 'spirit' are entirely absent.

If this disinclination to state that human beings possess a soul is intentional, the implication could be that, in the absence of a soul, Liberal Judaism does not believe that human beings survive the death of their physical bodies in any way. As noted above, for example in Rabbi Mattuck's description of God as 'beyond our finding out' (LJPB 1937: 76), many religious beliefs may be true, or untrue, or their truth status may not be known or even knowable. The evidence of Tobias' chapter suggests that a belief in some sort of survival after the death of our bodies seems to have weakened or been fully abandoned. Given what Tobias suggested about God's being less of a belief than an awareness, one might consider that the concept of souls ought to present little difficulty in being viewed in a similar way, an awareness or sensing that people are more than just their material bodies.

It was noted earlier in the chapter that *Siddur Lev Chadash* had translated a phrase from the second paragraph of the Amidah to include the idea that God is the source of eternal life. The only indirect suggestion of immortality for the human in Tobias' chapter appears when he describes 'a sense of eternity; an inexplicable awareness that whatever we give to life does not come to an end when we depart from the planet and that whatever good we bring into the world does not perish' (p. 18). This does not sound at all like typical concepts of what a soul might be. It sounds more like the description of an effect rather than an entity. Why this reticence about 'soul' is present is unclear—if that is what is going on in the chapter—since the word 'soul' (and the Hebrew *n'shamah*) appears regularly in Liberal Judaism's liturgies.

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[239] The *Affirmation* states: 'We affirm the Jewish conception of humanity; created in the Divine Image, endowed with free will, capable of sublime goodness but also of terrible evil, mortal yet with a sense of eternity, able to enter into a direct personal relationship with their Creator, and to restore that relationship, when it is broken, through repentance (t'shuvah)'.

Evidence from successive editions of Liberal Jewish liturgies and 'platforms' suggests a desire to maintain only those discourses in liturgy which seem reasonable to contemporary people. Much of the focus of this thesis has been the meanings of the words of prayer texts. From a research perspective, there is a crucial difference between, on the one hand, how we might study cognitive understandings of the words of a prayer —and psychological and emotional states of mind when reciting prayers—and, on the other hand, how we might study religious experiences arising from and during prayer.[240] If a fixed prayer regime 'works' for a pray-er, that outcome, the 'working', may be a religious experience which is difficult or impossible to convey to others.

An attempt to offer an insight into such an experience is found in an influential study published in 1933 in German by Rabbi Elie Munk entitled *Die Welt der Gebete*.[241] At the very opening of the book, in the *Preface*, the author deprecates the 'vague philosophizing about the nature and idea, origin and forms of prayer' as being 'of little help'. In contrast, he speaks approvingly of 'the need of searching into the ultimate meaning and content of that prayer in order to be filled and pervaded by it so deeply and so totally, that the soul, surrendered in longing love of God, finds again its creator' (Munk 1954: 1-2). What Munk means by the 'ultimate meaning and content' of prayer is, for him, to be understood in the context of Jewish mysticism. While a mystical worldview can be described, the claimed religious experience resulting from the practice of prayer is far less susceptible to academic analysis.

A liberal, critical exploration of the challenge of fixed prayer is explored by Gabriel Josipovici in *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (1988). Josipovici, a novelist, playwright, literary critic and Emetitus Professor in the School of English at Sussex University, but not a Rabbi, argues that the words of prayer (in the *Affirmation*, 'our lips') facilitate the expression of feelings and needs (in the *Affirmation*, 'our hearts') and he asks what the relationship is between language and the *need* (his emphasis) to pray, understood as 'to pour out one's heart'.[242] Using the Biblical example

[240] By 'religious experience' I intend to point to those experiences which are claimed to involve more than everyday psychological experience. I offer no suggestions as to what any additional elements might be.

[241] English translation: *The World of Prayer* (1954). Munk was an important rabbinical figure in Europe and became the father-in-law of Immanuel Jakobovits, British Chief Rabbi from 1967 to 1991.

[242] Many Jewish commentators and scholars, medieval and modern, assume a human 'need' to pray (see e.g. Donin 1980: 4-5; Hammer 1994: 3; Jacobs 1995: 382; Mattuck 1947: 79, 95). The assumption is rarely challenged. Even if there exists such a universal need, the practice of prayer understood as 'speaking words to God' is not the entirety of the concept of prayer, even in Western religious traditions. See Josipovici's remarks on contemplation as prayer (1988: 161) and Mattuck (1947: 95).

of two prayers by Hannah (both prayers are in I Samuel), one of which is formulaic, the other spontaneous—a dichotomy which must not be accepted as unproblematic—he seeks to establish what it is about available forms of language which helps the heart to 'flow' (p. 161-2). Relating this question to the concept of sincerity he refers to the challenge which we face in understanding both the simplicity and the complexity of what is involved in sincerity. He describes the influence of the idea of sincerity as 'something which is so much a part of our daily lives that we are not even aware of it' and argues that 'the modern (and Protestant) contrast between inner and outer leaves no place…for prayer' (p. 162). What he means by that is that these two spheres are conceived of as so dissimilar in nature that there is no notion that there may be a conduit between them. He suggests that such a conduit can be found in language which is capable of creating the possibility of prayer, and that the words of prayer are what allows the heart to flow. By using available language, a person may eventually express in words, even in other people's words, the inner which *needs* an 'outering'. How is this brought about? He compares the practice of prayer to the case of an artist who paints on a canvas and goes on to make changes to the painting many times until satisfied that the painting *finally* expresses what the artist wished to communicate. Just as there are shared social practices, conventions and understandings which define artistic painting, so language has conventions and is a social phenomenon, in the sense of being created and shared by communities of speakers. The artist employs conventions of painting, and may modify and experiment with them, and other persons seeing the result will 'read' the painting. The shared conventions do not in any way prevent there being something unique communicated in the painting, nor require there to be a 'correct' interpretation of it. The practice of painting, the conventions which are not the artist's own, facilitate the expression of something 'interior' by the artist. The same can be said for musical works, that they convey ideas and feelings which composers felt they needed to express.

Just as art and music offer a range of ways to express ideas and interior states, such as emotions, there are different forms of worship in Jewish practice, such as study and performing *mitzvot*, both ritual and ethical, and prayer. Despite their long history in Judaism, how fixed prayer works as an experience has not been fully explained by Munk or Josipovici.

Summary

In this and the previous chapter the focus has been on the examination of changes made over several generations of Liberal Jewish liturgies and platforms. Even the most 'traditional' Liberal *siddur*, *SLC,* has excised large amounts of material found in traditional *siddurim*. Changes to the wording of Hebrew prayers and the use of paraphrase based on themes suggested by original texts present a religious view quite different from that of the traditional liturgy.

The successive editions of Liberal Judaism's liturgies point to shifts over time in what editors considered could be stated about God's action in the world. In *Service of the Heart* (1967: 80) and *Judaism for Today* (1978: 25) God was hailed as ruling in, and being manifest in, both nature and history. By the time *Siddur Lev Chadash* appeared in 1995, references to God's existence being arguable from nature or from historical experience—which no longer reflected wider cultural understandings of the world—had been removed from the body of services and placed in collections of readings, where they would be encountered occasionally, if at all. The chapter on 'The Jewish view of God' in Tobias (2007) lends support to the impression that Liberal Judaism's official view is that neither our experience of human history nor of the physical universe are, any longer, grounds to have a belief in God.

Chapter 9

Sincerity and Liberal Jewish liturgy: what can we say?

In the early twentieth century Liberal Jews created the first radical Jewish religious movement in the United Kingdom. It has been shown from the writings of the founders that from its inception Liberal Judaism considered sincerity in worship to be of paramount importance to the extent that sincerity in general came to be seen as akin to a shibboleth, a distinguishing marker of the Liberal section of the Jewish community. Sincerity, often expressed as intellectual integrity, remains part of Liberal Jews' self-understanding. The founders and subsequent generations of leaders sought to create liturgical forms which appealed to the sensibilities of their congregations, responded to contemporary intellectual environments, and demonstrated the Liberal movement's commitment to sincerity in worship. In their publications and public statements, such as *Affirmations of Liberal Judaism*, the movement has consistently and explicitly declared that commitment.

The question on which this research has focused was expressed in the opening chapter as: 'If sincerity in worship is of paramount importance what effect will applying Liberal Judaism's understanding of sincerity have upon liturgy?' Liberal Judaism's understanding of sincerity in worship is found in the *Affirmation* which is the key text in this research:

> We affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship:
> we may not say with our lips what we do not believe in our hearts.
> To that end, though we retain much of the traditional Jewish liturgy,
> we have revised it, with some omissions and modifications, and many amplifications.
> For the same reason, we use English as well as Hebrew in our services.

In this thesis I have examined the attempt by successive generations of editors to apply Liberal Judaism's understanding of sincerity to the task of revising traditional liturgy. My conclusion is that the evidence gathered during the research strongly suggests that the editors' attempts to produce a 'sincere' liturgy exposes just how complex and challenging the concept of sincerity can be to apply in practice. The somewhat strident wording of the *Affirmation:* 'paramount need', 'may not say', 'do not believe', serves to make the challenges all the more stark. The apparent clarity and

straightforwardness of the *Affirmation* might be read as being just that: a straightforward, unambiguous description of what sincerity in worship is. The *Affirmation* looks like a sincere, 'innocent' statement embodying in its own plain simplicity what sincerity means. Yet the *Affirmation* may also be understood as an ideological statement intended to convey a very specific notion of what sincerity means when applied to worship. The elements of the *Affirmation*, such as the idea of 'believe' when applied in the context of revising the language of traditional liturgy prove to be inherently complex.[243] The challenge for the editors in revising liturgy becomes most apparent when contemporary understandings of the world no longer align with beliefs expressed in traditional liturgical texts and those beliefs are then seen as not reasonable.

Does consistency matter for sincerity?

One of the outcomes of Liberal Judaism's naïve attitude towards sincerity as apparent in the liturgical revisions, seen in successive editions of liturgy, is that the application of the *Affirmation*'s formulation of sincerity in worship to the texts has been uneven and, at times, clearly inconsistent. A consequence of inconsistency in the editorial process, such as the commitment to sincerity alongside the commitment to Hebrew as a language of prayer for a congregation largely made up of non-Hebrew speakers, as discussed in chapter 7, is that the beliefs expressed by the liturgy may be confused, even contradictory.

A representative example of apparent inconsistency was the retention of a traditional prayer, *El Adon*, in the editions of the *Liberal Jewish Prayer Book* published in 1927 and 1937, which was discussed in chapter 7. The editorial decision to retain this text seems to represent an instance of compromise: the commitment to sincerity was overridden by another consideration. The editor, Rabbi Israel Mattuck defended the retention of the text on the grounds that some prayers were too old, which I have read to mean too well established, to be omitted from the liturgy (*LJPB* 1937: xiv;). He wrote that 'only those traditional prayers have been retained which in themselves or by reinterpretation express ideas which we believe, or desires which we feel'. Yet this 'policy' appears to be contradicted by the retention of the *El Adon* prayer. It is unlikely that Rabbi Mattuck's fellow Liberal Jews in the twentieth century would have regarded the literal content of the *El Adon* prayer as something which they would believe 'in their hearts'. Rabbi Mattuck's use of the phrase 'desires which we feel' is rather opaque and

[243] On the complex nature of religious beliefs see Jensen (2014) pp. 61–76.

it is difficult to identify what he may have had in mind. I have concentrated rather on the qualification that prayers are retained in the liturgy because they 'express ideas which we believe'. I did so because the phrase reflects the terminology of the *Affirmation* and because each of the founders and the prayer book editors have addressed the issue of belief.

As an editor, Rabbi Mattuck was aware of the challenge for sincerity in worship of retaining traditional Hebrew prayer texts, the plain meaning of which was clearly not widely accepted. Worshippers with a good knowledge of Hebrew would have a sense of the meaning of the original text, yet, at the same time, the editor—usually by providing an English paraphrase—seems to expect worshippers to read a new meaning into the Hebrew prayer. In the 'Introduction' to *LJPB* (page xv), Rabbi Mattuck identified an example in the prayer 'beginning "Thou art mighty, O Lord"' in which the Hebrew phrase *m'chayyeih meitim* (literally: who enlivens the dead) occurs twice. On the first occasion it is paraphrased as 'thine is the power to save' and on the second occasion as 'source of eternal life'. Rabbi Mattuck admitted that 'this procedure is unsatisfactory' (*LJPB* 1937: xv). As chapter 7 noted, the editors of the American Reconstructionist *siddur* of 1945 shared with Rabbi Mattuck the view that this was an unsatisfactory situation. Issues around the use of Hebrew or the vernacular as the language of services and the desirability, if not necessity, that worshippers understand prayers in order to worship with sincerity are addressed further below.

Inconsistency may be both attributed to, and to some extent excused by, complexities to do with sincerity. As was shown in chapter 2, sincerity may appear to be a straightforward concept, but is fraught with difficulties. For example, that chapter examined the cases of people who hold beliefs, but who hold them uncertainly, or harbour significant doubt about them. Many people admit to questioning their religious beliefs, even if they subscribe to them publicly. As Golemboski expressed it: 'How confidently must the belief be held for the profession of such belief to qualify as genuine?' (2020: 869). Sincerity is not about the truth of beliefs, but about having beliefs which are then expressed without dissembling, openly and honestly. In support of this understanding of sincerity, the chapter addressed basic questions about what it meant to have religious beliefs and to have them sincerely, i.e. by expressing them in a certain way. Golemboski's research scrutinised tests which had been applied in a secular context, the court system, to evaluate the sincerity of the expression of religious beliefs. He found that factors taken by the judiciary to be determinative of sincere

expression of beliefs included (i) the coherence of beliefs, (ii) inconsistency between belief and conduct, and (iii) ulterior motives (Golemboski 2020: 866). Importantly, for a religious belief to be held to be coherent, it had to 'be reliably engaged on the terms of ordinary propositional logic' (Golemboski (2020: 871). Notably, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that it *should* not try to evaluate the truth of religious beliefs—because it *could* not evaluate them—but it could pass judgment on the sincerity of beliefs expressed. In that ruling the Court seems to support the idea that sincerity is about the consistency of expression and belief.

Furthermore, how people hold, modify or abandon beliefs depends on complex and often unconscious thought processes in which different types of beliefs influence one another. Nor is (in)consistency an all or nothing matter, but a matter of degree. How consistent one can be about beliefs depends upon whether beliefs are expressed with a significant degree of specificity. That allows the internal coherence (consistency) to be more easily adjudicated, coherence being one of the standards adopted by the courts in Golemboski's study. Vagueness about beliefs may represent a genuine attempt to avoid dogmatism by allowing some freedom for differing interpretations or understandings. Avoiding narrow specifics has the advantage that it can blunt potential criticism that one is inconsistent concerning those beliefs. Viewed more positively, it also leaves room for developing fresh insights or ideas concerning beliefs. Though institutional forms of Judaism, including liberal and Liberal Judaism, subscribe to beliefs such as the existence of a supernatural divine power, specific features of those beliefs are often not tightly defined. Indeed, the impossibility of definitive articulation of some beliefs is quite orthodox. Rabbi Mattuck indicated his view in *LJPB* (1937) when he wrote, 'Great is God beyond our finding out' (p. 76). So, where a lack of definition is found, though it may give the appearance of inconsistency, it need not be fatal to a claim of sincerity regarding beliefs in general, nor fatal to the sincere expression of beliefs in liturgy. It is not unusual for people to hold religious beliefs sincerely while admitting that the beliefs are paradoxical or mysterious.

The challenge of the meaning of some traditional Hebrew texts such as *El Adon*, and of the belief proposition that such texts contain regarding God, is difficult to resolve. Rabbi Tobias' suggestion that God: 'is not so much a question of belief as one of awareness' (Tobias 2007: 9) is interesting, but ultimately leads only to other difficulties. My reading of this statement is that it suggests that experience may be an important factor in the acceptance or rejection of beliefs. Many people have had

experiences which they have described variously as an ‘awareness’ of something or someone. Those experiences of ‘awareness’ have often been interpreted to indicate the presence of the divine and subsequently become labelled as a ‘religious experience’. It is sufficient to note for the argument of this thesis that Jensen characterised the history of the concept of religious experience across disciplines including theology, philosophy, psychology as ‘vexed’ (Jensen 2014: 76).[244] If one cannot believe something because one’s other beliefs and one’s experiences mean that the belief does not seem reasonable, how is one helped by viewing God as an ‘awareness’? Unless one has experienced such an awareness, and identified or interpreted it in a particular way, the suggestion seems to lack purchase.

Dogmatic beliefs

It is perhaps a mark of the importance of sincerity as an aspect of the worldview of many liberal (and Liberal) Jews that in the 1920s the charge was made that liberal Judaism (at that time, specifically, the American Reform movement, of which Liberal Judaism in the UK is a close counterpart) held some beliefs in a ‘dogmatic’ fashion incompatible with sincerity. Chapter 7 introduced the critique by Wise, in his now largely-forgotten book *Liberalizing Liberal Judaism* (1924), that holding beliefs with a dogmatic certainty seriously undermined a commitment to sincerity. Although Wise did not use the terms ‘sincere’ or ‘insincere’, his writing suggests that by propounding such beliefs in a ‘dogmatic’ fashion, liberal Judaism was guilty of insincerity, that is, by causing those who attend its prayer services and insincerely assert things in the liturgy which the whole congregation are unlikely to believe consistently. Without stretching the argument too far, the charge may be seen as applicable to Liberal Judaism today since the two beliefs identified by Wise which were held by liberal Judaism are, in much the same terms, expressed in the present liturgy of Liberal Judaism.

Wise argued specifically that liberal Judaism presented belief in God and in immortal human souls in a dogmatic fashion, treating these beliefs ‘as facts established beyond the question of doubt’ (Wise 1924: 48), whereas ‘these are things of which *no* man, nor age, nor faith *can be sure*’ (p. 49, emphasis in the original). Wise’s critique warrants serious consideration as the existence of both God and of human souls

[244] Jensen writes (2014: 76): ‘[T]here has been a marked tendency for religious experience to be associated with ideas in mainly Christian Protestant theology with its distinctive focus on individual faith’. This thesis has noted the significant influence of Protestant ideas on modern reform movements in Judaism,

continues to be expressed in the liturgy of Liberal Judaism. As noted in the previous chapter, Liberal Judaism's most recent 'platform' statement *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* (Tobias 2007) seems to be careful to avoid affirming clear, specific statements on the nature of either belief. If this avoidance of clear articulation were taken as a sign of dissembling, it would represent a challenge for Liberal Judaism, given the commitment to sincerity stated by the *Affirmation*. In some respects, avoiding specific dogmatic topics which sincerity renders problematic is one possible response to the challenge of Wise's charge that liberal Judaism affirmed certain beliefs dogmatically. However, avoiding tackling issues, or resorting to vague formulations, even where justified, may create its own problems around sincerity. Unless one takes a position of radical philosophical scepticism, there needs to be at least minimally identifiable and recognisable beliefs to which sincerity can be ascribed.

One hundred years after Wise's challenge, Liberal Judaism's current liturgy, *Siddur Lev Chadash*, presents beliefs about the existence of God and of human souls in what Wise would characterise as dogmatic. That is to say, prayers containing these ideas are offered for worshippers to use in the core prayers of services without any indication that they might be questionable. Wise would certainly argue that if reciting these prayers is taken to entail sincere assent then, at the very least, this creates difficulty for some pray-ers. While prayers expressing (or, at least, assuming) belief in God which so concerned Wise are among many beliefs open to challenge in contemporary English society, these two beliefs remain accepted by many as reasonable, even when not shared universally. Beliefs of a supernatural nature are still widely accepted as reasonable and so endure. They often persist when, and probably because, their articulation is vague. Other supernatural claims, such as the efficacy of prayers for healing are less well anchored in publicly-endorsed reasonableness. I read the evidence of the shifts across successive generations of Liberal Jewish liturgies as suggesting a conscious desire on the part of the editors to express only those beliefs which seem reasonable to a wide range of contemporary people. The sincerity demanded by the *Affirmation* seems to entail that any belief, including the existence of God or of human souls, should be modified or removed from liturgy if most Liberal Jews cannot subscribe to those beliefs as stated. This is a significant challenge for the editors of Liberal Jewish liturgies.

Is God a matter of belief?

The commitment to sincerity in worship meant that successive editors sought to align the propositional content of liturgy to what were assessed as the beliefs of Liberal Jewish congregations. In successive editions of Liberal Judaism's liturgies, the editors have made substantial changes to statements expressing beliefs concerning God's activity in the world. In both the liturgy of the *LJPB* (1937) and *Essentials of Liberal* Judaism (1947) Rabbi Mattuck proposed that the physical universe offered evidence for belief in God. In the 1960s and 1970s Liberal Judaism felt able to state that God was manifest in and ruled nature. By 1995, such direct statements were expunged from the main body of services in *Siddur Lev Chadash*. This probably indicated that the commitment to sincerity in worship was guiding the editors. They were responding to widely-held societal views of what could be taken as being reasonable to say, and they amended the liturgy accordingly.

It is, of course, the case that liturgical texts may express things which are not intended to be taken as expressions of belief, particularly hard and fast belief, but rather of, say, an attitude or outlook. In the poem *El Adon*, God is said to have formed the sun and the moon: 'The luminaries are good which our God hath created' (*LJPB* 1937: 81). These celestial objects are described as performing the will of their Master, and render honour to him. Overall, the poem may be read less as a statement of fact but, rather, as an expression of awe at God's power as creator and sustainer of the universe to whom praise is due. However, the understanding of sincerity which editors are guided to apply to worship texts is that one should not say with the lips what is not believed in the heart. In contrast, the ideas expressed in *El Adon* represent a challenge for the concept of sincerity in worship as expressed by the *Affirmation*. Even when one may understand *El Adon* to be expressing a sense of awe or wonder, one has to recognise that the text also expresses belief in a God who has created and sustains the material universe. As Tobias acknowledged (2007: 14), many Liberal Jews declare themselves 'staunch atheists'. For those Liberal Jews what is impossible for them to subscribe to sincerely is the belief in God as creator of the universe. This is the most likely reason why editors of both the 1967 and 1995 prayer books removed this prayer from the body of services to the sections of themed readings. This was despite its having found a place in the main service sections of *LJPB*. If a poem which portrays God as creator of the universe is no longer able to find a place in the main body of the liturgy, from the perspective of a

critic such as Wise, it would seem that the last bastion of Liberal Judaism's dogmatic belief had surrendered to modern critical thought.[245]

Sincerity, doubt and beliefs

Liberal Judaism's liturgists have confronted the question of doubt directly, recognising that there is an issue with many beliefs where things are not clear cut or settled. Believers can waver or be unsure and yet their expressing of doubt would be sincere. As noted in chapter 7, Rabbi John Rayner (1959: 8) was clear that sincerity demanded that 'we must face frankly and accept fully whatever seems to us, when we are quite honest, to be true or to be probably true'. His words seem carefully chosen to be positive, by which I mean that he does not give an explicit indication of what one should do if, after weighing up, testing and being honest, one decides that a belief is probably *un*true. This thesis has cited evidence from the liturgy that Liberal Judaism has, by and large, followed the logic of the position articulated by Rabbi Rayner. It has rejected long-held Jewish beliefs, such as that physical human bodies would be resurrected by God after death and removed them from the liturgy. If physical resurrection was a belief which sincerity demanded must be given up, what makes belief in God a different proposition, so that, as Wise suggested, it is a dogma which cannot be given up?[246]

By asking that question, I do not mean to suggest that there is now some physical evidence or philosophical argument which is so convincing that everyone should face frankly and accept fully that God does not exist. Rather, I have in mind Wise's criticism that beliefs are held in a dogmatic fashion. Beliefs are not held dogmatically if they are widely accepted as reasonable. In contrast, beliefs which may be labelled dogmatic are those which one cannot expect a significant majority of people to consider unquestionable. I think that this idea of holding beliefs dogmatically has a parallel in the distinction made by the United States Supreme Court which would not attempt to judge the truth of beliefs, but would judge the expression of them as sincere or insincere. It is possible to hold an untrue belief sincerely. Wise would recognise that as undogmatic. However, where the truth of a belief may not be questioned, it is held dogmatically.

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[245] In contrast, the editors of the 2008 *siddur* of the UK's Movement for Reform Judaism, *Forms of Prayer*, restored *El Adon* to their services, perhaps reflecting a different attitude to liturgy, i.e. that it does not matter very much that what one says in prayer may not be sincerely believed. See, e.g, *Forms of Prayer* p. 208.

[246] Reconstructionist Judaism did just that in the USA from the 1930s onwards, see Alpert and Staub (2000).

The concept of sincerity demands that one says what one genuinely believes to be the truth. Yet, in chapter 5 it was shown that even as clear a thinker as Montefiore seemed to hold inconsistent views on this point. He asked: 'what do we owe to truth?' (*Siddur Lev Chadash* p. 64) and answered that truth was 'our driving power. Whither truth points, thither we must follow' (Montefiore 1908: 384). Yet for Liberal Jewish thinkers from the founders to present day leadership the notion that a commitment to truth might entail accepting that a supernatural creator, actively involved in the world, does not exist is not admitted. In the sermon entitled *Religion and Morality*, Montefiore identified 'the great dogma of Judaism. The assertion that there is one God, and one God only' (Abrahams and Montefiore 1895: 241). Montefiore did not challenge the notion that belief in God was taken to be dogma in traditional Judaism, nor did he distinguish an undogmatic Liberal Jewish position, i.e., one which allowed that God may not exist. He was a convinced theist. Rabbis Rayner and Hooker (1978: 26-7) were also adamant that, for them, God was real and that their God was the God represented in Jewish tradition.

This thesis has identified numerous explicit statements by prominent Liberal Jewish leaders, and frequent references in *Siddur Lev Chadash,* to the effect that God acts in the natural order.[247] In 1978 *Judaism for Today* had affirmed God but 'frankly confessed' that such a belief had become 'more difficult' and that 'the degree of assurance had diminished' (p. 18). If belief in God, at least as traditionally understood in Biblical and Rabbinic sources, has become difficult and assailed by doubt, how are we to understand the statement in *Liberal Judaism: A Judaism for the Twenty-First Century* that 'the starting point for Judaism is that there is a God'? Once again, there appears to be more than a modicum of dogmatism in the 'official line' in its eradication of even the possibility of disbelief as compatible with Judaism. The authors proposed to those who found themselves unable to believe in God that they should resist closing their minds and 'continue to wrestle with' and 'ponder yet again the evidences' which allow human beings to 'affirm the reality of God' (p. 19). An objective critic might wonder why not believing in God reflects a closed mind while, presumably, the opposite is implied to be the case for believers. In 2007 Liberal Judaism reiterated the recommendation to keep an open mind on this issue, advising even those 'many members who claim to be staunch atheists' that they 'persist with the struggle' (Tobias

[247] E.g. 'We praise you, O God, Healer of the sick' (SLC p. 56; 'You cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall, the sun to shine and the dew to descend' (SLC p. 98).

2007: 13-14). What is striking is that in neither instance does it seem that the authors contemplated that readers might adopt the alternative, i.e. atheism. Liberal Judaism seems to be fostering contradictory positions. In these platform statements the movement does not accept that belief in God, which is admitted to be difficult and to be resting on diminished assurance, means that the case for God is weak. Given the nature of the evidence and the arguments, Liberal Judaism's leaders appear reluctant to 'face frankly and accept fully' that a supernatural God who created the universe is a claim which for many people cannot be sincerely affirmed. It may even be that a majority of Liberal Judaism's members may no longer find such a belief accords with their views of what it is reasonable to believe. Liberal Judaism thus appears to have at least one belief (the existence of God) which is, as James Waterman Wise suggested in 1924, 'dogmatic', in the sense of being held in a manner which does not allow *decisive* challenge or criticism.[248]

Sincerity and language: English in services

In chapter 8, it was shown that Liberal Judaism has repeatedly endorsed the view that sincerity in worship cannot be achieved by using a liturgical language which most worshippers do not understand. The editors of successive iterations of Liberal Jewish liturgy and the *Affirmation* itself claimed that the use of the vernacular in prayer facilitates a sincerity *unavailable* through praying a Hebrew text. In the discussion of the language of prayer in chapter 8, I proposed that the arguments offered in favour of the use of Hebrew are weak. When, as Liberal Judaism has argued, the commitment to sincerity in worship depends upon the pray-ers' understanding of the words they say, then it is the continued use of Hebrew which Liberal Judaism must justify. The encouragement of greater use of Hebrew in services seems, prima facie, to contradict Liberal Judaism's claim that 'We affirm the paramount need for sincerity in worship'. To emphasise the significance of problem presented by the continued public use of a language which few worshippers understand, I will briefly review key evidence adduced in this research.

German reformers argued that prayer in Hebrew rendered services unintelligible and a 'secret', which created a barrier to prayer for most worshippers. Translation only

[248] As noted in chapter 8, references to souls appear in all Liberal Judaism's liturgies, including the most recent, *Siddur Lev Chadash* (1995) but acknowledgment of the existence of a human soul, in anything resembling a traditional formulation, is absent from the latest 'platform' publication, (Tobias 2007), though it is not at all clear why this is so.

emphasised that Hebrew was a dead language, unable to offer 'vital, life-giving spiritualization' (Plaut 1963: 154). German-language services at the Berlin Reform congregation proved popular as did American Reform services in English.

In England Claude Montefiore wrote that Hebrew was a deterrent to participation in services, a dead language (Montefiore 1900: 624; 650). In 1902, he spoke of 'unintelligible' services (Rigal and Rosenberg 2004:19). Jewish Religious Union services made extensive use of English.[249] Rabbi Israel Mattuck, wrote that it was a 'principle that public worship… must use the language that the worshippers can understand', that it was 'the most natural act of religion for them to pray in English' (*LJPB* 1937: xi-xii). In the 1970s, it was explicitly acknowledged that prayer in the vernacular was warranted: 'it is manifestly necessary that our Services should be conducted to a *large extent* in the vernacular' (Rayner and Hooker 1978: 60 emphasis added). 'Unless the worshipper is fully aware of the meaning of every sentence he utters, his worship lacks integrity' (*ibid*.). It is a 'principle that in Liberal Judaism, the understanding of prayers is no less important than their recitation' (Tobias 2007: 179) and 'a key element of ensuring sincerity in worship is that prayers be understood' (p. 181

The *Affirmation* on worship is clear that English is used in Liberal Judaism's services *in order to achieve sincerity*. Liberal Judaism has not articulated how using English in the liturgy does this, beyond stating that one cannot pray sincerely without understanding the words one is praying. For many people, that may suffice as a justification for using vernacular languages. The decision by nineteenth-century reformers in many countries to promote vernacular prayer was upheld despite significant opposition from traditionalist Jewish groups. In the early twentieth century, English Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler declared that services 'which almost entirely dispenses with the use of the sacred language… cannot, I maintain, be considered a Jewish service (Persoff 2008: 122). In Liberal Judaism, decisions concerning the use of the Hebrew language in liturgy and in synagogue services have been taken by the leadership élite. Though the case for Hebrew made by them is, in my estimation, weak, the leadership may have been right. But *why* there was a turn back towards the greater use of Hebrew in services remains unclear. Formal research into why the use of Hebrew

[249] See 'Account of the first service' [of the JRU, published in the *Jewish World*, 24 October 1902], reprinted in Rigal and Rosenberg (2004) pp. 299-305.

survived in the face of strong opposition to it by early Liberal Jews, and why its use among Liberal Jews increased, has yet to be undertaken.

Further Research

In this thesis the focus has been on analysis of liturgy and, in parallel, of formal, 'official' publications and 'platform' statements articulating the views of the leadership of Liberal Judaism. What I believe this analysis of liturgy has shown is that the commitment to sincerity in worship stated in the *Affirmation,* i.e., to say in prayer only things which we really believe, sets up a remarkably difficult challenge for Liberal Jews.

In chapter 2 it was shown that diverse views have been expressed concerning what sincerity in worship means. Some of those views, particularly among some strands of Protestant thought, are based upon an assumption that language is largely plain and simple. However, language is not plain and simple. It has layers of meaning and association which are rich with metaphor and nuance. On the one hand this may be considered a positive feature, enabling us to express subtle and complex ideas. On the other hand, the complexity of language can make it difficult for us to be certain about the meaning of what we hear or read. Ambiguity often presents a hurdle to interpreting or translating a text. When coupled with the uncertain nature of many of the beliefs we hold and the way in which our beliefs change and shift, saying only what we believe in our hearts is, to say the least, a challenge if not a near impossibility. This thesis has identified and set out the formidable task which Liberal Judaism has set itself in choosing to make sincerity of worship such a key issue in shaping its liturgical life.

The positive appeal of sincerity became firmly embedded in the liberal Jewish psyche from the earliest reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Germany and were so characteristic of Liberal Jews that in the 1920s 'Liberal' and 'sincere' were virtually synonymous. However, to use a figure of speech, to make sincerity of paramount importance in editorial decisions is a double-edged sword. While sincerity is regarded as a virtue by Liberal Jews, the risk is that applying it leads to difficulties in affirming more than vague generalities, as the analysis of two chapters of Tobias (2007) illustrated. Furthermore, in Liberal Judaism's liturgies, so much traditional content has been deleted that 'it leaves little to remind one of the density and depth of traditional liturgies' (Schonfield 2006: 346). This creates a disconnect with tradition. The first Shabbat morning service in *Siddur Lev Chadash*, opens by asking God: 'As we say the

prayers of our ancestors…[m[ay the tradition we have received live in us and pass from us to generations we shall never know' (p. 105). I have no doubt that this was not intended as irony.

This thesis has not touched upon the beliefs and attitudes, understandings and interests of the membership of the Movement, other than noting occasional brief references to the beliefs of congregants by leaders such as Rabbis Mattuck and Tobias. In 2022 Liberal Judaism decided not to replace *Siddur Lev Chadash* for the foreseeable future. This would allow time and opportunity for the Movement to conduct further research which could throw light on what Liberal Judaism's membership think about, for example, services being conducted in Hebrew and/or in English. It would be helpful too if the reasons for retaining Hebrew in services could be explored more fully by those who place great store on sincerity.

Yet, the question of Hebrew or English as the language of prayer is surely not the key question which researchers might pose. A more fundamental question would be the extent to which Liberal Judaism's members regard the wording of liturgy as being of equal, greater or lesser importance than the position implied in the *Affirmation*. With Rosenzweig's profound experience at a synagogue service in mind, researchers could delve into the contemporary experience of Liberal Judaism's services and what they 'deliver' for the pray-ers. In particular, it would be helpful in assessing the continued relevance of the *Affirmation* to ask worshippers whether they feel that the wording of particular prayers, such as those suggesting God's activity in the material world and in human lives, can be prayed sincerely.[250]

Two aspects of the *Affirmation* have been key to the argument of this thesis. The first is that sincerity is of paramount importance, it takes priority over other considerations. The thesis has called into question whether sincerity is the paramount consideration in deciding the content of liturgy. The second aspect of the *Affirmation* I have in mind is that it puts forward the idea that sincerity is *necessary* in worship. The corollary of that is that without sincerity worship falls short of, or fails, in its aims. We have seen that this idea, too, has been called into question. Schonfield observed that Orthodox worshippers seem to exercise a benign inattention to the wording of prayers. He also observed that many participants in traditional services exhibited 'an uneasy

[250] Addressing a 2002 conference on Jewish identity and community in London, American sociologist Steven M. Cohen informed participants that research indicated that most of the British Jewish community was not 'an ideological or theological community' and that 'key Jewish experiences are often ethnic rather than religious, and you have little interest in theology' (Cohen 2003: 29).

blend of devotion and inattention' to liturgical texts and liturgical situations where one finds 'the emphasis on form over content' (2006: 7–8). In the light of Liberal Judaism's desire for sincerity in worship, Schonfield's research raises important questions regarding Liberal worshippers. What is the 'devotion' of Liberal Jews, that is to say, what drives them to active participation in services and, conversely, to which aspects of what happens in services might they be 'inattentive'? To draw upon and paraphrase a verse used in liturgy, do the meditations of their hearts chime with the words of their mouths; how much do they care what they are asked to say?

Even among those who attend synagogue services infrequently, the experience of worship sometimes produces strong responses, both positive and negative. Liberal Judaism's commitment to sincerity lay at the root of this research and it was that 'virtue' and its effects upon liturgy, which prompted me to explore further. Rosenzweig's description of his experience in a traditional synagogue using a traditional liturgy provokes an as yet largely unanswered question: why do people come to, and participate in, synagogue services, often committing themselves regularly to that experience? If Sconfield and others are correct that the words used in services are not crucially significant to those reciting them, where does this leave the Liberal Jewish commitment to sincerity? Is it a positive attraction to have a liturgy which strives to include only material which worshippers can recite sincerely, or does it function to deter people from participation, perhaps because it departs from familiar forms? If the words do not matter greatly, has changing them radically risked the loss of potentially appealing aspects, such as feeling oneself to be part of a tradition? There is no doubt that for some people reciting the actual prayers of one's ancestors is an aspect of their self-understanding. Traditional forms may evoke a sense of being a link in a historic community of great significance, reforming them may alienate some worshippers.

When Franz Rosenzweig entered a Berlin Synagogue with the intention of giving up on Judaism, he experienced something profound. He characterised it as an authentically Jewish 'lived experience'. We shall never know if it was something in the words of the prayer services that inspired him, or whether it was something quite different. However, his experience suggests that it is worth taking seriously questions about sincerity, liturgy, theology, and what people experience in synagogue services.

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