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Liberal Judaism and halakhah

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Introduction

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Liberal Judaism emerged from the nineteenth century struggle between tradition and modernity. After half a century of development in German speaking lands it spread to the rest of Western Europe. It also found fertile soil in the United States and Canada; quickly the Reform and then the Conservative movement established themselves and together became the dominant forms of American Jewish religious expression.

Liberal Jewish has been creative; this has shown itself through the evolution of the modern rabbi and synagogue; the reevaluation of the role of the woman; the reformulation of the liturgy and the rethinking of shabbat and festivals. We have welcomed the scientific study of Judaism with its emphasis upon historical and critical insights into the past and produced many of its scholars. After an initial opposition we have joined with Zionism in an effort to renew Jewish spiritual and physical life.

Progress in all of these areas has not been even. Among those which have suffered occasional neglect has been **halakhah**. Although Liberal Judaism concerned itself with **halakhah** from the very beginning, as the debates at the early European and American conferences and synods clearly indicated, practical considerations sometimes led in different directions. We should remember, however that the scholarly founders of Liberal Judaism such as Abraham Geiger, Zacharias Frankel and Leopold Loew dealt with **halakhah**. The American Reform and Conservative movement, heirs to European Liberal Judaism, have demonstrated an