

PREFACE

This book contains the text of the Haskell Lectures for 1972-1973, delivered at Oberlin College, April 3 through April 6, 1973, the assignment being four lectures on a topic in post-biblical Judaism. The form of the book is shaped by its origin in a series of lectures. The lectures have been expanded only by footnotes and bibliography.

I chose to make use of the opportunity afforded by the invitation of the Haskell Lectures Committee to explore not solely a given topic, but also the methodological issues pertinent to the study of any problem in the history of ideas in ancient Talmudic Judaism. These issues are addressed in the foreword. This has entailed explaining my conception of how Talmudic Judaism as a structure of religious ideas is to be historically investigated. By doing things the way I think they should be done, I am spared the necessity of criticizing former efforts. In further work on the laws of purity, I hope to do the same for the far more difficult problem of the history of Talmudic law. Detailed comparative studies of Jewish and Hellenistic-Roman, or Iranian religion and law fall outside my competence. The "comparative study of religions" here is undertaken through the comparison of stages and groups within the history of Judaism alone.

It is not inappropriate to include an autobiographical note, for scholarship does not proceed in a vacuum, but in response to issues and ideas which are "in the air." That must account for the fashions and fads—the "sociology"—of learning. When I began my studies of Talmudic Judaism, time and again I came up against laws of impurity, the details of which mystified me even more than did their frequency and evident importance in the rabbinic system of theology and law. I began to realize, in studies on the *History of the Jews in Babylonia*, and in particular, on the Talmudic rabbis as holy men, that purity and impurity were immensely important to the law as a whole. When, in work on *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees before 70*, I observed that the larger part of the laws attributed by the post-70 rabbis to the pre-70 Pharisees concerned these same matters, and that the external evidence—for instance Mark 7, Matthew 15 and 23—supported the same observation, I could no longer ignore the larger issue. Imbedded within Talmudic Judaism, important within its laws, therefore expressive of its underlying construction and interpretation of reality,

lay a pre-Talmudic body of laws about purity. Study of the idea of purity in Talmudic Judaism rose to the top of the agenda for my studies.

At nearly that same time, in May, 1971, I had occasion to lecture at various European universities, and, to my surprise, found that various friends, working in historically cognate, but quite unrelated fields, had come to the realization of the importance of purity in the study of religions. Conversations with Professors Carsten Colpé and R. Macuch in Berlin, Geo Widengren in Uppsala, Mary Boyce in London, and Peter Brown in Oxford, revealed that historians of religion in quite autonomous fields of study—Mandaëism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Late Antique Christianity—all were tending to focus upon the same issue. It goes without saying that scholars in fields more closely related to my own, for instance Professors Johann Meyer, Cologne, Geza Vermes, Oxford, and Wayne A. Meeks, Yale University, working on the Jewish sects of Second Temple times and early Christianity, shared this interest. Not only so, but friends in the quite separate fields of philosophy of religion and anthropology were studying with great care the—to them—important books of Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston, 1967), and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966), not to mention the *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions. II. Guilt or Pollution and Rites of Purification* (Leiden, 1968). In all, it seemed that everyone I knew was talking about purity.

Yet when I examined accounts of Talmudic Judaism, I found barely a word on the subject. The monumental studies of George F. Moore, Jean Bonsirven, S. J., and, most recently, Professor E. E. Urbach, Hebrew University, treat the subject casually, if at all. Of these, only Urbach pays any attention to purity, and then primarily in the context of the Pharisaic *havurah*. One has to go back to the work of A. Büchler to find serious and sustained attention to the role of purity in ancient Judaism. (Perhaps the most valuable service of Büchler was to provoke G. Allon to his brilliant, if methodologically very primitive, critique). And, of course, Büchler's interest in purity began as a response to the ignorant accounts of New Testament scholars of his day, accounts which he rightly saw as prejudiced and bigoted against rabbinic Judaism. So for perhaps fifty years there has been a hiatus in the consideration of the question. And now it seems to be of interest everywhere, in a wide variety of disciplines, as well as in the narrower field of the study of ancient Judaism. Indeed, even the students of Talmudic

texts have returned to those tractates which center upon purity. Saul Lieberman's *Tosefet Rishonim*, parts III and IV (Jerusalem, 1939)—half of that monumental work—are on purity-laws. I draw attention also to the compendious Talmudic dissertation of Jacob Zussman, *Sugyot bavliot lisedarim zera'im ve'ehorot* [Babylonian Pericopae for Orders Seeds and Purities] soon to be published by the Israel Academy of Sciences.

To be sure, I cannot account for this interesting turn in scholarly interests. But I have to stress that what seemed to me my own quite private and capricious notion that purity constituted a more important theme in Talmudic Judaism than had been appreciated now turns out to be nothing more than an expression of a common concern.

It is my pleasant duty to thank the generous friends and colleagues who read and carefully criticized the manuscript. Since I have to refer to matters in which I am in no way expert, I am especially grateful for having been saved from blundering into areas under dispute among specialists in the biblical and Second Temple periods as though controverted matters were clear. In general I have tried so to phrase matters as to avoid moot interpretations and to take account of, and avoid, scholarly disputes not pertinent to my main inquiry. In this regard, the helpful correction of the following proved exceedingly valuable: Chapter One, Professors Nahum Sarna, Brandeis University, and Brevard S. Childs, Yale University; Chapter Two, Professors John Strugnell, Harvard University, Wayne A. Meeks, Yale University, Horst R. Moehring, Brown University, and Wendell S. Dietrich, Brown University; Chapter Three, Professor Baruch A. Levine, New York University. The following read the entire manuscript: my teacher Professor Morton Smith, Columbia University, who annotated the whole second draft; and Professors Hans H. Penner, Dartmouth College, Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago, Ernest S. Frerichs and David Goodblatt, Brown University, as well as Professors Levine, Meeks, and Strugnell. Professors Levine and Meeks also read the third draft in its entirety. My graduate students at Brown University also commented on the early drafts: William Scott Green, Gary G. Porton, Baruch M. Bokser, Joel Gereboff, Jack Lightstone, and Charles Primus. I enjoyed the counsel of Professor Frank M. Cross, Jr., former Haskell Lecturer, in preparing my lectures. None of these friends is to be blamed for the writer's deficiencies.

The book is dedicated to Professor Jonathan Z. Smith and his family. It was he who originally made me aware of the fruitful ap-

proaches to the study of religions made available by historians of religions and who raised for me questions which continue to prove provocative and illuminating. I cannot claim to have much transcended my origins as a historian of a decidedly positivist orientation, less interested in general concepts than in historical- and literary-critical modes of establishing facts, and more involved in inferring rather small ideas out of the accumulation of still smaller details, than in large conceptions. But Jonathan Smith for fifteen years has shown me not to find entire satisfaction in those earliest and enduring commitments. His own scholarly achievements, which are formidable, instruct me. But letters and conversations even more teach me what is to be hoped from the history of religions and its methods. The friendship I and my family enjoy with him and his family brighten our lives.

It remains to observe that the publication of the pertinent sources on the Dead Sea community is not complete, and therefore my account of ideas and laws associated with purity in the *yahad* is necessarily partial. My friend and sometime colleague, Professor Yigael Yadin, is in the last stages of publishing the Temple scroll, which contains important materials on the subject. Professor Strugnell kindly showed me unpublished fragments from Qumran on purity-laws. These too will appear in the near future. It did not seem to me appropriate to refer to the findings of my colleagues before these have appeared, properly analyzed, in their own names.

The honor of the invitation extended by the Haskell Lectures Committee at Oberlin College and the hospitality shown me during my visit are gratefully acknowledged.

I cannot close without a word of thanks to my friend, Dr. Frits Wieder, Jr., and his firm, E. J. Brill of Leiden. Many authors of scholarly works are in the debt of that excellent firm, for, without it, publishing the results of scholarship for the attention and criticism of colleagues would be exceedingly difficult, and, for many, not possible at all. My personal indebtedness to Brill is a matter of public record. I am deeply and happily grateful.

J. N.

Providence, Rhode Island

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