

ISRAEL ABRAHAMS

JUDAISM

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FOREWORD

The writer has attempted in this volume to take up a few of the most characteristic points in Jewish doctrine and practice, and to explain some of the various phases through which they have passed, since the first centuries of the Christian era.

The presentation is probably much less detached than is the case with other volumes in this series. But the difference was scarcely avoidable. The writer was not expounding a religious system which has no relation to his own life. On the contrary, the writer is himself a Jew, and thus is deeply concerned personally in the matters discussed in the book.

The reader must be warned to keep this fact in mind throughout. On the one hand, the book must suffer a loss of objectivity; but, on the other hand, there may be some compensating gain of intensity. The author trusts, at all events, that, though he has not written with indifference, he has escaped the pitfall of undue partiality.

I. A.

CHAPTER I

THE LEGACY FROM THE PAST

The aim of this little book is to present in brief outline some of the leading conceptions of the religion familiar since the Christian Era under the name Judaism.

The word 'Judaism' occurs for the first time at about 100 B.C., in the Graeco-Jewish literature. In the second book of the Maccabees (ii. 21, viii. 1), 'Judaism' signifies the religion of the Jews as contrasted with Hellenism, the religion of the Greeks. In the New Testament (Gal. i. 13) the same word seems to denote the Pharisaic system as an antithesis to the Gentile Christianity. In Hebrew the corresponding noun never occurs in the Bible, and it is rare even in the Rabbinic books. When it does meet us, *Jahaduth* implies the monotheism of the Jews as opposed to the polytheism of the heathen.

Thus the term 'Judaism' did not pass through quite the same transitions as did the name 'Jew.' Judaism appears from the first as a religion transcending tribal bounds. The 'Jew,' on the other hand, was originally a Judaeon, a member of the Southern Confederacy called in the Bible Judah, and by the Greeks and Romans Judaea. Soon, however, 'Jew' came to include what had

earlier been the Northern Confederacy of Israel as well, so that in the post-exilic period *Jehudi* or 'Jew' means an adherent of Judaism without regard to local nationality.

Judaism, then, is here taken to represent that later development of the Religion of Israel which began with the reorganisation after the Babylonian Exile (444 B.C.), and was crystallised by the Roman Exile (during the first centuries of the Christian Era). The exact period which will be here seized as a starting-point is the moment when the people of Israel were losing, never so far to regain, their territorial association with Palestine, and were becoming (what they have ever since been) a community as distinct from a nation. They remained, it is true, a distinct race, and this is still in a sense true. Yet at various periods a number of proselytes have been admitted, and in other ways the purity of the race has been affected. At all events territorial nationality ceased from a date which may be roughly fixed at 135 A.D., when the last desperate revolt under Bar-Cochba failed, and Hadrian drew his Roman plough over the city of Jerusalem and the Temple area. A new city with a new name arose on the ruins. The ruins afterwards reasserted themselves, and Aelia Capitolina as a designation of Jerusalem is familiar only to archaeologists.

But though the name of Hadrian's new city has faded, the effect of its foundation remained. Aelia Capitolina, with its market-places and theatre, replaced the olden narrow-streeted town; a House of Venus reared its stately form in the north, and

a Sanctuary to Jupiter covered, in the east, the site of the former Temple. Heathen colonists were introduced, and the Jew, who was to become in future centuries an alien everywhere, was made by Hadrian an alien in his fatherland. For the Roman Emperor denied to Jews the right of entry into Jerusalem. Thus Hadrian completed the work of Titus, and Judaism was divorced from its local habitation. More unreservedly than during the Babylonian Exile, Judaism in the Roman Exile perforce became the religion of a community and not of a state; and Israel for the first time constituted a Church. But it was a Church with no visible home. Christianity for several centuries was to have a centre at Rome, Islam at Mecca. But Judaism had and has no centre at all.

It will be obvious that the aim of the present book makes it both superfluous and inappropriate to discuss the vexed problems connected with the origins of the Religion of Israel, its aspects in primitive times, its passage through a national to an ethical monotheism, its expansion into the universalism of the second Isaiah. What concerns us here is merely the legacy which the Religion of Israel bequeathed to Judaism as we have defined it. This legacy and the manner in which it was treasured, enlarged, and administered will occupy us in the rest of this book.

But this much must be premised. If the Religion of Israel passed through the stages of totemism, animism, and polydemonism; if it was indebted to Canaanite, Kenite, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and other foreign influences; if it experienced a stage of monolatry or henotheism (in which Israel

recognised one God, but did not think of that God as the only God of all men) before ethical monotheism of the universalistic type was reached; if, further, all these stages and the moral and religious ideas connected with each left a more or less clear mark in the sacred literature of Israel; then the legacy which Judaism received from its past was a syncretism of the whole of the religious experiences of Israel as interpreted in the light of Israel's latest, highest, most approved standards. Like the Bourbon, the Jew forgets nothing; but unlike the Bourbon, the Jew is always learning. The domestic stories of the Patriarchs were not rejected as unprofitable when Israel became deeply impregnated with the monogamous teachings of writers like the author of the last chapter of Proverbs; the character of David was idealised by the spiritual associations of the Psalter, parts of which tradition ascribed to him; the earthly life was etherialised and much of the sacred literature reinterpreted in the light of an added belief in immortality; God, in the early literature a tribal non-moral deity, was in the later literature a righteous ruler who with Amos and Hosea loved and demanded righteousness in man. Judaism took over as one indivisible body of sacred teachings both the early and the later literature in which these varying conceptions of God were enshrined; the Law was accepted as the guiding rule of life, the ritual of ceremony and sacrifice was treasured as a holy memory, and as a memory not contradictory of the prophetic exaltation of inward religion but as consistent with that exaltation, as interpreting it, as but another aspect of Micah's

enunciation of the demands of God: 'What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

Judaism, in short, included for the Jew all that had gone before. But for St. Paul's attitude of hostility to the Law, but for the deep-seated conviction that the Pauline Christianity was a denial of the Jewish monotheism, the Jew might have accepted much of the teaching of Jesus as an integral part of Judaism. In the realm of ideas which he conceived as belonging to his tradition the Jew was not logical; he did not pick and choose; he absorbed the whole. In the Jewish theology of all ages we find the most obvious contradictions. There was no attempt at reconciliation of such contradictions; they were juxtaposed in a mechanical mixture, there was no chemical compound. The Jew was always a man of moods, and his religion responded to those varying phases of feeling and belief and action. Hence such varying judgments have been formed of him and his religion. If, after the mediaeval philosophy had attempted to systematise Judaism, the religion remained unsystematic, it is easy to understand that in the earlier centuries of the Christian Era contradictions between past and present, between different strata of religious thought, caused no trouble to the Jew so long as those contradictions could be fitted into his general scheme of life. Though he was the product of development, development was an idea foreign to his conception of the ways of God with man. And to this extent he was right. For though men's ideas

of God change, God Himself is changeless. The Jew transferred the changelessness of God to men's changing ideas about him. With childlike naivete he accepted all, he adopted all, and he syncretised it all as best he could into the loose system on which Pharisaism grafted itself. The legacy of the past thus was the past.

One element in the legacy was negative. The Temple and the Sacrificial system were gone for ever. That this must have powerfully affected Judaism goes without saying. Synagogue replaced Temple, prayer assumed the function of sacrifice, penitence and not the blood of bulls supplied the ritual of atonement. Events had prepared the way for this change and had prevented it attaining the character of an upheaval. For synagogues had grown up all over the land soon after the fifth century B.C.; regular services of prayer with instruction in the Scriptures had been established long before the Christian Era; the inward atonement had been preferred to, or at least associated with, the outward rite before the outward rite was torn away. It may be that, as Professor Burkitt has suggested, the awful experiences of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple produced within Pharisaism a moral reformation which drove the Jew within and thus spiritualised Judaism. For undoubtedly the Pharisee of the Gospels is by no means the Pharisee as we meet him in the Jewish books. There was always a latent power and tendency in Judaism towards inward religion; and it may be that this power was intensified, this tendency encouraged, by the loss of Temple and its Sacrificial rites.

But though the Temple had gone the Covenant remained. Not so much in name as in essence. We do not hear much of the Covenant in the Rabbinic books, but its spirit pervades Judaism. Of all the legacy of the past the Covenant was the most inspiring element. Beginning with Abraham, the Covenant established a special relation between God and Abraham's seed. 'I have known him, that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and judgment' (Gen. xviii. 19). Of this Covenant, the outward sign was the rite of circumcision. Renewed with Moses, and followed in traditional opinion by the Ten Commandments, the Sinaitic Covenant was a further link in the bond between God and His people. Of this Mosaic Covenant the outward sign was the Sabbath. It is of no moment for our present argument whether Abraham and Moses were historical persons or figments of tradition. A Gamaliel would have as little doubted their reality as would a St. Paul. And whatever Criticism may be doing with Abraham, it is coming more and more to see that behind the eighth-century prophets there must have towered the figure of a, if not of the traditional, Moses; behind the prophets a, if not the, Law. Be that as it may, to the Jew of the Christian Era, Abraham and Moses were real and the Covenant unalterable. By the syncretism which has been already described Jeremiah's New Covenant was not regarded as new. Nor was it new; it represented a change of stress, not of contents. When he said (Jer. xxxi. 33), 'This is the covenant

which I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it,' Jeremiah, it has been held, was making Christianity possible. But he was also making Judaism possible. Here and nowhere else is to be found the principle which enabled Judaism to survive the loss of Temple and nationality. And the New Covenant was in no sense inconsistent with the Old. For not only does Jeremiah proceed to add in the self-same verse, 'I will be their God, and they will be my people,' but the New Covenant is specifically made with the house of Judah and of Israel, and it is associated with the permanence of the seed of Israel as a separate people and with the Divine rebuilding of Jerusalem. The Jew had no thought of analysing these verses into the words of the true Jeremiah and those of his editors. The point is that over and above, in complementary explanation of, the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants with their external signs, over and above the Call of the Patriarch and the Theophany of Sinai, was the Jeremian Covenant written in Israel's heart.

The Covenant conferred a distinction and imposed a duty. It was a bond between a gracious God and a grateful Israel. It dignified history, for it interpreted history in terms of providence and purpose; it transfigured virtue by making virtue service; it was the salt of life, for how could present degradation demoralise, seeing that God was in it, to fulfil His part of the bond, to hold Israel as His jewel, though Rome might despise? The Covenant made the Jew self-confident and arrogant, but

these very faults were needed to save him. It was his only defence against the world's scorn. He forgot that the correlative of the Covenant was Isaiah's 'Covenant-People'—missionary to the Gentiles and the World. He relegated his world-mission (which Christianity and Islam in part gloriously fulfilled) to a dim Messianic future, and was content if in his own present he remained faithful to his mission to himself.

Above all, the legacy from the past came to Judaism hallowed and humanised by all the experience of redemption and suffering which had marked Israel's course in ages past, and was to mark his course in ages to come. The Exodus, the Exile, the Maccabean heroism, the Roman catastrophe; Prophet, Wise Man, Priest and Scribe,—all had left their trace. Judaism was a religion based on a book and on a tradition; but it was also a religion based on a unique experience. The book might be misread, the tradition encumbered, but the experience was eternally clear and inspiring. It shone through the Roman Diaspora as it afterwards illuminated the Roman Ghetto, making the present tolerable by the memory of the past and the hope of the future.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION AS LAW

The feature of Judaism which first attracts an outsider's attention, and which claims a front place in this survey, is its 'Nomism' or 'Legalism.' Life was placed under the control of Law. Not only morality, but religion also, was codified. 'Nomism,' it has been truly said, 'has always formed a fundamental trait of Judaism, one of whose chief aims has ever been to mould life in all its varying relations according to the Law, and to make obedience to the commandments a necessity and a custom' (Lauterbach, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ix. 326). Only the latest development of Judaism is away from this direction. Individualism is nowadays replacing the olden solidarity. Thus, at the Central Conference of American Rabbis, held in July 1906 at Indianapolis, a project to formulate a system of laws for modern use was promptly rejected. The chief modern problem in Jewish life is just this: To what extent, and in what manner, can Judaism still place itself under the reign of Law?

But for many centuries, certainly up to the French Revolution, Religion as Law was the dominant conception in Judaism. Before examining the validity of this conception a word is necessary

as to the mode in which it expressed itself. Conduct, social and individual, moral and ritual, was regulated in the minutest details. As the Dayan M. Hyamson has said, the maxim *De minimis non curat lex* was not applicable to the Jewish Law. This Law was a system of opinion and of practice and of feeling in which the great principles of morality, the deepest concerns of spiritual religion, the genuinely essential requirements of ritual, all found a prominent place. To assert that Pharisaism included the small and excluded the great, that it enforced rules and forgot principles, that it exalted the letter and neglected the spirit, is a palpable libel. Pharisaism was founded on God. On this foundation was erected a structure which embraced the eternal principles of religion. But the system, it must be added, went far beyond this. It held that there was a right and a wrong way of doing things in themselves trivial. Prescription ruled in a stupendous array of matters which other systems deliberately left to the fancy, the judgment, the conscience of the individual. Law seized upon the whole life, both in its inward experiences and outward manifestations. Harnack characterises the system harshly enough. Christianity did not add to Judaism, it subtracted. Expanding a famous epigram of Wellhausen's, Harnack admits that everything taught in the Gospels 'was also to be found in the Prophets, and even in the Jewish tradition of their time. The Pharisees themselves were in possession of it; but, unfortunately, they were in possession of much else besides. With them it was weighted, darkened, distorted,

rendered ineffective and deprived of its force by a thousand things which they also held to be religious, and every whit as important as mercy and judgment. They reduced everything into one fabric; the good and holy was only one woof in a broad earthly warp' (*What is Christianity?* p. 47). It is necessary to qualify this judgment, but it does bring out the all-pervadingness of Law in Judaism. 'And thou shalt speak of them when thou sittest in thine house, when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up' (Deut. vi. 7). The Word of God was to occupy the Jew's thoughts constantly; in his daily employment and during his manifold activities; when at work and when at rest. And as a correlative, the Law must direct this complex life, the Code must authorise action or forbid it, must turn the thoughts and emotions in one direction and divert them from another.

Nothing in the history of religions can be cited as a complete parallel to this. But incomplete parallels abound. A very large portion of all men's lives is regulated from without: by the Bible and other sacred books; by the institutions and rites of religion; by the law of the land; by the imposed rules of accepted guides, poets, philosophers, physicians; and above all by social conventions, current fashions, and popular maxims. Only in the rarest case is an exceptional man the monstrosity which, we are told, every Israelite was in the epoch of the Judges—a law unto himself.

But in Judaism, until the period of modern reform, this fact

of human life was not merely an unconscious truism, it was consciously admitted. And it was realised in a Code.

Or rather in a series of Codes. First came the *Mishnah*, a Code compiled at about the year 200 A.D., but the result of a Pharisaic activity extending over more than two centuries. While Christianity was producing the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament—the work in large part of Jews, or of men born in the circle of Judaism—Judaism in its other manifestation was working at the Code known as the *Mishnah*. This word means 'repetition,' or 'teaching by repetition'; it was an oral tradition reduced to writing long after much of its contents had been sifted in the discussions of the schools. In part earlier and in part later than the *Mishnah* was the *Midrash* ('inquiry,' 'interpretation'), not a Code, but a two-fold exposition of Scripture; homiletic with copious use of parable, and legalistic with an eye to the regulation of conduct. Then came the *Talmud* in two recensions, the Palestinian and the Babylonian, the latter completed about 500 A.D. For some centuries afterwards the Geonim (heads of the Rabbinical Universities in Persia) continued to analyse and define the legal prescriptions and ritual of Judaism, adding and changing in accord with the needs of the day; for Tradition was a living, fluid thing. Then in the eleventh century Isaac of Fez (Alfasi) formulated a guide to Talmudic Law, and about a hundred years later (1180) Maimonides produced his *Strong Hand*, a Code of law and custom which influenced Jewish life ever after. Other codifications were made; but finally, in the

sixteenth century, Joseph Caro (mystic and legalist) compiled the *Table Prepared* (*Shulchan Aruch*), which, with masterly skill, collected the whole of the traditional law, arranged it under convenient heads in chapters and paragraphs, and carried down to our own day the Rabbinic conception of life. Under this Code, with more or less relaxation, the great bulk of Jews still live. But the revolt against it, or emancipation from it, is progressing every year, for the olden Jewish conception of religion and the old Jewish theory of life are, as hinted above, becoming seriously undermined.

Now in what precedes there has been some intentional ambiguity in the use of the word Law. Much of the misunderstanding of Judaism has arisen from this ambiguity. 'Law' is in no adequate sense what the Jews themselves understood by the nomism of their religion. In modern times Law and Religion tend more and more to separate, and to speak of Judaism as Law *eo ipso* implies a divorce of Judaism from Religion. The old antithesis between letter and spirit is but a phase of the same criticism. Law must specify, and the lawyer interprets Acts of Parliament by their letter; he refuses to be guided by the motives of the Act, he is concerned with what the Act distinctly formulates in set terms. In this sense Judaism never was a Legal Religion. It did most assiduously seek to get to the underlying motives of the written laws, and all the expansions of the Law were based on a desire more fully to realise the meaning and intention of the written Code. In other

words, the Law was looked upon as the expression of the Will of God. Man was to yield to that Will for two reasons. First, because God is the perfect ideal of goodness. That ideal was for man to revere, and, so far as in him lay, to imitate. 'As I am merciful, be thou merciful; because I am gracious, be thou gracious.' The 'Imitation of God' is a notion which constantly meets us in Rabbinic literature. It is based on the Scriptural text: 'Be ye holy, for I the Lord am holy.' 'God, the ideal of all morality, is the founder of man's moral nature.' This is Professor Lazarus' modern way of putting it. But in substance it is the Jewish conception through all the ages. And there is a second reason. The Jew would not have understood the possibility of any other expression of the Divine Will than the expression which Judaism enshrined. For though he held that the Law was something imposed from without, he identified this imposed Law with the law which his own moral nature posited. The Rabbis tell us that certain things in the written Law could have been reached by man without the Law. The Law was in large part a correspondence to man's moral nature. This Rabbinic idea Lazarus sums up in the epigram: 'Moral laws, then, are not laws because they are written; they are written because they are laws.' The moral principle is autonomous, but its archetype is God. The ultimate reason, like the highest aim of morality, should be in itself. The threat of punishment and the promise of reward are the psychologic means to secure the fulfilment of laws, never the reasons for the laws, nor the motives to action. It is easy and

necessary sometimes to praise and justify eudemonism, but, as Lazarus adds, 'Not a state to be reached, not a good to be won, not an evil to be warded off, is the impelling force of morality, but itself furnishes the creative impulse, the supreme commanding authority' (*Ethics of Judaism*, I. chap, ii.). And so the Rabbi of the third century B.C., Antigonos of Socho, put it in the memorable saying: 'Be not like servants who minister to their master upon the condition of receiving a reward; but be like servants who minister to their master without the condition of receiving a reward; and let the Fear of heaven be upon you' (Aboth, i. 3).

Clearly the multiplication of rules obscures principles. The object of codification, to get at the full meaning of principles, is defeated by its own success. For it is always easier to follow rules than to apply principles. Virtues are more attainable than virtue, characteristics than character. And while it is false to assert that Judaism attached more importance to ritual than to religion, yet, the two being placed on one and the same plane, it is possible to find in co-existence ritual piety and moral baseness. Such a combination is ugly, and people do not stop to think whether the baseness would be more or less if the ritual piety were absent instead of present. But it is the fact that on the whole the Jewish codification of religion did not produce the evil results possible or even likely to accrue. The Jew was always distinguished for his domestic virtues, his purity of life, his sobriety, his charity, his devotion. These were the immediate consequence of his Law-abiding disposition and theory. Perhaps there was some lack of

enthusiasm, something too much of the temperate. But the facts of life always brought their corrective. Martyrdom was the means by which the Jewish consciousness was kept at a glowing heat. And as the Jew was constantly called upon to die for his religion, the religion ennobled the life which was willingly surrendered for the religion. The Messianic Hope was vitalised by persecution. The Jew, devotee of practical ideals, became also a dreamer. His visions of God were ever present to remind him that the law which he codified was to him the Law of God.

CHAPTER III

ARTICLES OF FAITH

It is often said that Judaism left belief free while it put conduct into fetters. Neither half of this assertion is strictly true. Belief was not free altogether; conduct was not altogether controlled. In the *Mishnah* (Sanhedrin, x. 1) certain classes of unbelievers are pronounced portionless in the world to come. Among those excluded from Paradise are men who deny the resurrection of the dead, and men who refuse assent to the doctrine of the Divine origin of the Torah, or Scripture. Thus it cannot be said that belief was, in the Rabbinic system, perfectly free. Equally inaccurate is the assertion that conduct was entirely a matter of prescription. Not only were men praised for works of supererogation, performance of more than the Law required; not only were there important divergences in the practical rules of conduct formulated by the various Rabbis; but there was a whole class of actions described as 'matters given over to the heart,' delicate refinements of conduct which the law left untouched and were a concern exclusively of the feeling, the private judgment of the individual. The right of private judgment was passionately insisted on in matters of conduct, as when Rabbi Joshua refused

to be guided as to his practical decisions by the Daughter of the Voice, the supernatural utterance from on high. The Law, he contended, is on earth, not in heaven; and man must be his own judge in applying the Law to his own life and time. And, the Talmud adds, God Himself announced that Rabbi Joshua was right.

Thus there was neither complete fluidity of doctrine nor complete rigidity of conduct. There was freedom of conduct within the law, and there was law within freedom of doctrine.

But Dr. Emil Hirsch puts the case fairly when he says: 'In the same sense as Christianity or Islam, Judaism cannot be credited with Articles of Faith. Many attempts have indeed been made at systematising and reducing to a fixed phraseology and sequence the contents of the Jewish religion. But these have always lacked the one essential element: authoritative sanction on the part of a supreme ecclesiastical body' (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, ii. 148).

Since the epoch of the Great Sanhedrin, there has been no central authority recognised throughout Jewry. The Jewish organisation has long been congregational. Since the fourth century there has been no body with any jurisdiction over the mass of Jews. At that date the Calendar was fixed by astronomical calculations. The Patriarch, in Babylon, thereby voluntarily abandoned the hold he had previously had over the scattered Jews, for it was no longer the fiat of the Patriarch that settled the dates of the Festivals. While there was something like a central authority, the Canon of Scripture had been fixed

by Synods, but there is no record of any attempt to promulgate articles of faith. During the revolt against Hadrian an Assembly of Rabbis was held at Lydda. It was then decided that a Jew must yield his life rather than accept safety from the Roman power, if such conformity involved one of the three offences: idolatry, murder, and unchastity (including, incest and adultery). But while this decision throws a favourable light on the Rabbinic theory of life, it can in no sense be called a fixation of a creed. There were numerous synods in the Middle Ages, but they invariably dealt with practical morals or with the problems which arose from time to time in regard to the relations between Jews and their Christian neighbours. It is true that we occasionally read of excommunications for heresy. But in the case, for instance, of Spinoza, the Amsterdam Synagogue was much more anxious to dissociate itself from the heresies of Spinoza than to compel Spinoza to conform to the beliefs of the Synagogue. And though this power of excommunication might have been employed by the mediaeval Rabbis to enforce the acceptance of a creed, in point of fact no such step was ever taken.

Since the time of Moses Mendelssohn (1728-1786), the chief Jewish dogma has been that Judaism has no dogmas. In the sense assigned above this is clearly true. Dogmas imposed by an authority able and willing to enforce conformity and punish dissent are non-existent in Judaism. In olden times membership of the religion of Judaism was almost entirely a question of birth and race, not of confession. Proselytes were admitted by

circumcision and baptism, and nothing beyond an acceptance of the Unity of God and the abjuration of idolatry is even now required by way of profession from a proselyte. At the same time the earliest passage put into the public liturgy was the Shema' (Deuteronomy vi. 4-9), in which the unity of God and the duty to love God are expressed. The Ten Commandments were also recited daily in the Temple. It is instructive to note the reason given for the subsequent removal of the Decalogue from the daily liturgy. It was feared that some might assume that the Decalogue comprised the whole of the binding law. Hence the prominent position given to them in the Temple service was no longer assigned to the Ten Commandments in the ritual of the Synagogue. In modern times, however, there is a growing practice of reading the Decalogue every Sabbath day.

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