

The Rhetoric of Rabbinic Ritual
by Tzvee Zahavy

Rabbinic rituals are good to think about and good to do. A talmudist thinks about ritual in the abstract, and a practicing Jew performs the rites. An anthropologist analyzes, and a native performs.

Several theories ought to serve the study of the diverse data of rabbinic ritual. The theoretical discussions by anthropologists like S. J. Tambiah, M. Bloch and R. Rappaport serve in their situations as sorts of "Talmudic expositions" of ritual.¹ Such discourse has both great strengths and some shortcomings. Commonly both Talmudic and social scientific arguments make broad and sweeping generalizations, seek after essential definitions and build on layers of logical inference passed down through strata of authorities. Both Talmud and social science look post facto at evidence and serve as descriptive sources. Talmud stands out as a potentially prescriptive source.

A Jew in a synagogue, or a shochet in a slaughterhouse, acts out a ritual on the basis of learned skills and the guidance of virtuosi. The discussion of theory is barely relevant to that performance. It may be available in a code or in the person of the rabbi himself. But the talmud is a theoretical diversion. An act of philosophy.

Neusner describes in somewhat overly glowing terms the major premises of the metapropositional program of a chapter of Talmud:

1. *The nuance of language bears messages and meanings because*
2. *the source of the law is so perfectly crafted that every word and phrase bears a message; so the law is conveyed to us in absolutely flawless utensils.*
3. *When we seek the source of the law that governs a case, we may turn equally to reason and to Scripture, but Scripture settles questions. Scripture*

¹Recent studies of note include S. J. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought and Social Action: an Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, 1985; S. J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality*, New York, 1990; R. A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion*, Richmond, Ca., 1979; M. Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology*, Atlantic Highlands, N. J., 1989.

and Mishnah and the settled facts of cases all together conform to a prior reason, which comes to expression in them all, but among them all, Scripture takes priority as the most perfect among perfections.

4. It follows that, whatever the source, the law derives from reason and in diverse cases makes a single point that reason dictates for those diverse cases.

5. Reason is so accessible that successive generations, long after the origin of the holy books, Scripture and Mishnah alike, may participate in the processes of reasoned thought and rigorous argument, from cases to principles to cases.

6. The marks of a reasoned proposition are cogency, consistency, universal application ("universalizability") and other marks of philosophical perfection.²

Similarly, the metapropositional discussion of ritual of R. Rappaport, for example, spells out metapropositions for ritual in religion in general. In dealing with indexical and canonical performances in ritual, relies on the groundwork of performativeness deriving ultimately from the ideas of J. Searle, or the philosophical grounding of A. J. Ayer, or of another prior authority. Applying all this back again to a given system may seem a facile afterthought or even turn out to be an impossibility. Other kinds of investigation, such as fieldwork or systemic analysis must serve as bridges for the cultural understanding of a given society.

Reliance on prior tradition is common for any disciplinary work of scholarship or for an individual active within a historic religious framework. And indeed the study of tractate Berakhot or Hullin of the talmud is as much a mental challenge as the philosophical exercise of reading R. Rappaport's essay on "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual."³ But just how much direct information about systems of ritual performances do we get from the theoretical musings of the talmudists or of the social scientists? Not much I fear unless we make a serious attempt to see the system as a whole and within that perspective to tailor the abstract theory to specific performances of a given culture.

²Jacob Neusner, *The Bavli's One Statement: the Metapropositional Program of the Babylonian Talmud*, Atlanta, 1991, p. 141.

³Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*, Richmond, CA., 1979, pp. 173-221.

Systemic Analysis

When the interpretation of rituals is carried out according to the accepted standards of academic interpretation in our fields, such as that of religious studies in general, and the history of Judaism in particular, we posit that representations that pertain to experiences in the context of a religious tradition and its social manifestations cannot be pulled out and thrown together with other data for an indistinct form of universal analysis. They must be understood as components within a "Judaism," a coherent cultural system.

A systemic analysis is the study of the representations of a religion based on the premise that religions, like culture in general develop not along a simple linear progression, but as a series of separate, sometimes overlapping, systems. The theory of the applied systemic analysis of a religion was recently articulated and developed by J. Neusner in his studies of the history of Judaism.

Neusner uses a systemic approach for the interpretation of official Judaic legal and hermeneutical texts and narrative. He deals mainly with the literary criticism of texts of late antique Judaism within their proper systemic framework. In this view, to engage in the construction of the broader history of Judaism, one must consider independently each Judaic system and its data considering its metaphoric social personification, its "Israel."⁴ "Given the diversity of Judaisms past and present," Neusner says,

We cannot find it astonishing that the name for the social entity constituted by Jews, the name "Israel," has carried a variety of meanings, and . . . each of these served not as concrete description of real people living in the here and now, a merely factual statement of how things are, but as a metaphor. The metaphor might take genealogical or political or supernatural or taxonomical and hierarchical or ontological or epistemological character, as systems varied (p. 39).

The vitality of Neusner's inquiry rests in its insistence on placing primacy for description on the social group. "*A Judaic system derives from and focuses upon a social entity, a group of Jews who (in their minds at least) constitute not an Israel but Israel* (p. 13)." A strength of the approach is the clarity of the definition of a system: a "Judaism" articulates a distinct world-view and a well-defined way of life for its society. "I understand by a religious system three things that are one," Neusner says:

- [1] a world-view, which by reference to the intersection of the supernatural and the natural worlds accounts for how things are and puts them together into a cogent and harmonious picture;
- [2] a way of life, which expresses in concrete actions the world-view and which is explained by that world-view;
- [3] and a social group, for which the world-view accounts, which is defined in concrete terms by the way of life, and therefore which gives expression in the everyday world to the world-view and is defined as an entity by that way of life.

In further defining his ideas, he adds:

A religious system is one that appeals to God as the principal power, and a Judaic system is a religious system that identifies the Hebrew Scriptures or "Old Testament" as a principal component of its canon. A Judaism, then, comprises not merely a theory -- a book -- distinct from social reality but an explanation for the group (again: Israel) that gives social form to the system and an account of the distinctive way of life of that group. A Judaism is not a book, and no social group took shape because people read a book and agreed that God had revealed what the book said they should do.

⁴Jacob Neusner, *First Principles of Systemic Analysis: The Case of Judaism Within the History of Religion*, Lanham, MD, 1987, pp. 35-36.

The recovery of the details of systemopoesis, the making of Judaic systems, constitutes one important element of the task of the historian of Judaism in tracing the development of the religion.

Systemic analysis studies religions as ecological systems, ordered and closed cultural entities. Neusner's systemic view originates in large part in Geertz's definition of religion as a cultural system,⁵ and derives in the main without question from the classical Weberian vision of social structures.

Systemic analysis rests on two premises:

[1] *No religious system recapitulates any other.*

[2] *All religious systems within a given social and political setting recapitulate the same resentments (p. 19).*

To this I add:

[3] *Components of a given system will always conform to its distinctive rhetorical choices.*

Neusner ultimately aims to compare systems one to another. This enterprise requires, he says, study of the setting, the literary and material evidence of the system and, "the consequent system and its definition of urgent questions and self-evidently true answers." Because each system stands ecologically distinct from another we can ask about the particular "resentment" confronting the vision of a certain group and how it, through the representations of its system, "responded to that inescapable question (p. 20)."⁶

⁵See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Michael Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966, pp. 1-46 and the references assembled there on pp. 44-46.

⁶Some recent books by Neusner related to the description of systems include, *From Description to Conviction: Essays on the History and Theology of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1987, *The Systemic Analysis of Judaism*, Atlanta, 1988, *Canon and Connection: Intertextuality in Judaism*, Lanham, 1987, *Midrash as Literature: The Primacy of Documentary Discourse*, Lanham, 1987,

Typologies of Ritual

Rabbis of the middle ages made the metapropositions of the Talmud relevant to their circumstances through the productions of the commentaries, codes and responsa of their day. They used at least three modes of bonding theory and applications. Commentaries approximate encompassing micro-social analyses of cultural activities. Codes were typologies constructed to illumine snapshots of cultural systems. Responsa served as rough analogues to the special and deeper investigations of individual conglomerations of cultural data or a religious system in history.

Let us establish a rudimentary taxonomy to blanket some issues we encounter in the study of the rabbinic data. This may form the backbone of one codification of the data.

The term "ritual" is used by anthropologists and scholars in religious studies to refer to a wide gamut of activities. Many rituals are public performances in a recognized social structure, often religious, but also potentially secular. The nature of the public arena of performance also may vary. Thus we are faced by a wide multiplicity of types. Some rituals are enacted by an elite class for the elite [=elite-elite]. Others are staged by an elite class for the entire community [=elite-community]. Still others are performed by the entire community together with the elite [=community-community]. The full character of the ritual sub-system of a given religious system is voiced in the varieties and complexities of all the pertinent acts.

The elite-elite rituals may be hardest to trace and study. For instance the details of an actual ritual of rabbinic ordination are not available to us via existing textual or other data or means of transmission. Its detail once was known well to the elite class of rabbis, but not accessible beyond.

Equally difficult is the process of recovering the details of the interior acts of the sacrificial cult of the ancient Israelite Temples. The elite priests maintained their franchise over the cult by confining much to secrecy.

Ancient Judaism and Modern Category Formation: "Judaism," "Midrash," "Messianism," and Canon in the Past Quarter-Century, Lanham, 1986.

Elite-community and community-community rituals are easier to trace because they are public in more respects. In a society with even minimal conservative traditional structures such rituals either will be maintained as active, or an account of them will be preserved somehow. So we have easier access to the data of liturgical patterns or the rituals of public dinners, like the seder. Hence social context serves as one major element in our differentiation of the data of rituals in a specified religious system.

More complete typologies consider also the substance of the ceremonials. There will be typical distinctions between those rituals that are mainly verbal and social [like most liturgies] and those that are predominantly physical and economic [like the slaughter and preparation of meat]. Classical Rabbinism intermixes its these elements in some of its rituals [like the circumcision ceremony, a physical act with strong social consequence].

One could distinguish further between regular rituals conducted on a cyclical basis [e.g., taking the lulav] and those that are performed only under special circumstances. There are rituals that stave off danger [some prayers] and those that mark the rites of personal passages [wedding ceremony].

Rituals also can stand on their own as the purpose for an event or gathering [sacrifice or liturgy] or momentarily channeling one's everyday behavior in a given direction. Some performances can thereby serve as defining frameworks for transforming the meaning of routine or mundane actions [frames for meals].

Naturally many rituals have more obvious functional applications [meat preparation] and others seem mostly symbolic [seder]. We need to account for those that are economic or political in nature [tithes and heave-offerings] and those that are philosophical or descriptive. The potential overlap among these categories makes the range of possible ritual types extensive.

Along with performances, traits that define a group will naturally include its prescribed avoidances. Often taboos are linked to rituals. Menstrual taboos are ended by ritual immersion. Food taboos are removed by the proper actions of slaughter and preparation.

Applications of the taxonomies

Now that we have set forth some elements of a code or taxonomy let us raise our power of magnification to consider another level of detail of the data. What makes a system unique is both its substance and its rhetoric. Rabbinic rituals have their own identifiable forms of rhetoric.

In one sense the term rhetoric implies structures or forms of speech. Verbal rabbinic rituals have their own rhetoric. Rabbinic liturgy is distinctive. The blessing form is easily recognizable. The externals and structures of prayers are singular. The rabbis weave into them the content of the ritual speech from their mythic structures and basic values.

The Rabbinic Typology of Mishnah Berakhot

As I said, Some rituals are wholly verbal and easily identified as rabbinic. Other rabbinic rituals are framed by verbal rhetorical devices. Blessings frame meals. The ritual is a mixture of actions and speech.

A second sense of the concept of rhetoric permits us to extend the term to non-verbal actions. We may say then that physical rituals have a rhetoric, specified movements and order, even if they are not examples of formalized speech. Examples of this abound. Davening is action, mannerism, and rhetoric.

Yet in a third connotation, rhetoric may refer to the way rabbis wrote about their rituals. Characteristically, they imposed the forms of their rhetoric on their discourse regarding rituals.

Let us look at tractate Berakhot's metapropositional program of prayer and its rhetoric.⁷ The tractate as a coherent entity, in its substantive selection and

⁷I first described this in 1984 in a paper at the SBL Annual Meeting, "Rabbinic Prayer in the Time of Early Christianity: The Evidence of Mishnah Berakhot."

organization of early rabbinic rules for liturgical recitations, enunciates a clear, structured early rabbinic program utilizing three broad major propositions and many subsidiary ideas. The basic distinctions in M. are:

(1) There are two types of prayers. The first type, independent, primary prayers and blessings, make up the main elements of a ritual. The other kind, dependent secondary prayers and blessings, serves as subsidiary adjuncts to other rituals.

(2) Second, and related to the preceding proposition, the texts of prayers are often either framed by accompanying materials or serve as frames for other rituals.

(3) Prayers are comprised of at least two elements: a verbal and a mental component, i.e., an act of recitation and a state of concentration.

In the first half of the tractate, chapters one through five, M. deals with the rhetoric of those prayers that stand on their own as independent rituals--the daily liturgies of rabbinic Judaism. Throughout the first five chapters of the tractate M. presents rules that regulate the rituals of the recitation of the texts of the *Shema`* and of the blessings that comprise the Prayer of Eighteen.

In the second part of the tractate, chapters six through nine, M. takes up the rules for those prayers and blessings that serve as secondary elements of other rituals, first turning to regulations for the recitation of those blessings that accompany the meal. In actuality, the meals themselves are the focal rituals. The blessings merely frame the meal and establish it as a ritual occasion. Berakhot's laws propose that only through the recitation of the correct formulae before and after the meal, can one define a situation of eating as a fellowship dinner (chapters six and seven).

The concluding section, chapter nine, spells out other secondary prayers and blessings--those that one recites for special events. One says certain formulae to give thanks to God for deliverance from danger, to request protection from harm, or to recognize the national or historical importance of a place, or the significance of an unusual natural event (ch. nine). These blessings have no function if they are recited detached from the events with which Mishnah connects them.

Accordingly, in Mishnah Berakhot's view there are two related but distinct kinds of prayers. There are those independent prayers, such as the *Shema`* or the Prayer of Eighteen, which one recites apart from any other focal event or ritual. Next, there are those dependent blessings recited over foods or at various times that are adjuncts to other actions. The prayers themselves are not present, the verbal elements omitted. M.'s program regulates only the rhetoric of the ritual performances.

Framing is an extrinsic and mainly rhetorical device. Mishnah's second implicit metaproposition is the idea that some rituals need to be formally framed or demarcated. The rabbinic meal is one example of a ritual framed by the recitation of blessings. Blessings before and after eating transform acts of consuming food, which they surround, into sacred occasions of ritual (cf. M. Chapters six and seven). The rabbinic blessings recited before and after the scriptural passages of the *Shema`* (see M. 1:4) serve to frame the recitation of these verses from the Torah, and transform the act from mere speech or study into liturgy. M.'s perception is that some rituals may be framed through the recitation of the formulae of prayers or blessings, and that some prayers themselves may be framed by other liturgical devices.

Visible, but less urgent concerns of this tractate of Mishnah are such notions that prayers and other rituals may be differentiated from ordinary activities in a variety of rhetorical signals, not just through the recitation of other preliminary and concluding formulary texts. Physical signals such as posture, tone of voice, demeanor, dress, or the use of special objects, serve a similar purpose. In addition the physical locale or the social context of a prayer or another ritual may set it off from the profane endeavors of everyday life.

Rhetorical concerns do not suffice. M. expresses the third metaproposition of its definition of prayer in a few choice rules governing the recitation of the liturgies. In order for an individual to recite properly the *Shema`*, M. requires that one achieve a certain level of concentration that shuts out some ordinary interactions of social life (M. 2:1). Likewise for the correct recitation of the Prayer of Eighteen, one must completely close out the distractions of the physical world and turn his attention inward, to prayer (M. 5:1). In addition Mishnah emphasizes that special positive forms of intention or concentration must accompany the recitation of prayers.

Several subsidiary metapropositions of prayers and blessings inhere in the remaining rules of the tractate. In Mishnah's view, the *Shema`* and the Prayer of Eighteen, play a role in demarcating the "rhetorical" structure of daily life. The *Shema`* marks the beginning and end of every day (M. 1:1-3). The blessings that frame the *Shema`* express many rabbinic beliefs concerning the nature of the daily cycle of life and the importance and purpose of a person's daily endeavors.

The systemic identity of ritual is more obvious in its content than in its rhetoric. The liturgical texts (blessings) that frame the morning *Shema`*, make mention of God's role in the creation of light and darkness and in renewing each day his acts of creation of the world. They refer to the basic rabbinic beliefs in the revelation of the Torah, in redemption, and salvation. The blessings surrounding the evening *Shema`* make reference to God's role in bringing the darkness of night, his love for his people Israel, his promise for the redemption of the people. In this liturgy one asks for God's protection through the night to come.

Each Jew recites the blessings of the Prayer of Eighteen and invokes many important beliefs of rabbinism to mark the cycle of each passing day, morning, afternoon, and night.

Social circumstances mold the metapropositional program. Earlier I said that M. requires intention or concentration for the recitation of prayers. Several rules in this tractate add conceptions subsidiary to this fundamental notion. For example, M. recognizes that the social realities of the pressures of a person's daily life may affect an individual's ability to concentrate for prayer. M. exempts from the obligation to recite the *Shema`*, a newlywed who cannot properly concentrate because he is emotionally distracted (M. 2:5). In addition the text recognizes the limitations of a mourner's ability to achieve the proper frame of mind for prayer because of his grief (M. 3:1-2).

M. further rules that a craftsman may recite the *Shema`* while atop a tree (M. 2:4). An ordinary householder cannot because he will not be able to concentrate properly while high above the ground. These additional rulings develop derivative

notions of how one must alter his awareness to make special efforts to concentrate during the recitation of the *Shema`* and the Prayer of Eighteen.

Other rulings, also subsidiary to the main propositions of the tractate, exclude certain classes of individuals from the obligation to recite prayers. M. excludes women, slaves and minors, individuals who suffered a pollution, and those who stand unclothed or near waste materials (M. 3:3-6) from participation in the rituals of prayer. M. also specifies elements of a physical rhetoric of ritual: how the level of a person's voice and the correct pronunciation of the words of liturgies, contribute to the proper execution of the ritual. In addition, one's posture and bodily orientation are all factors in defining and properly framing liturgical recitations (M. 2:4-6, 1:3).

As I said, the second half of the tractate develops metapropositions concerning those secondary prayers that accompany other rituals--the blessings one recites before and after eating and the blessings for other special events. M. presents a simple system of those blessings to be recited before eating any foods, representing its idea of a basic taxonomy of foods. Its rabbinic rhetorical program distinguishes separate categories for bread and wine, for fruits, for vegetables, and for all other foods (M. 6:1-3).

Besides its outline of the system of food blessings, M. spells out a second important substantive proposition. One must make exceedingly sparing use of these blessings presumably because they invoke the name of God (M. 6:4-7).

To review, the chief concerns of M.'s third-century rabbinic metapropositional program for a rhetoric of prayer in the tractate are:

1. The distinction of independent from dependent prayers.
2. Rhetorical frames of texts of prayers to separate them from ordinary speech.
3. How blessings may bracket the rituals of prayer and of the fellowship meal.
4. Various other modes of rhetorical framing for the act of prayer with physical signals, such as voice, posture and orientation.
5. The nature of the mental processes associated with prayer.
6. The relationship between real social structures and situations, and the metapropositions of the recitation of prayers.

7. How blessings support the rhetorical conceptions of taxonomic structures of natural produce.
8. How one makes economical use of the formulae of blessings recited in the context of the meal.

Examples from Hullin and Berakhot show that for elite-elite varieties of ritual, especially the processes of slaughter, rabbis used their rhetoric of ritual both to express or illuminate *and* to cloak and to conceal the nature of the proper actions and to preserve the details within the private traditions of their elite.

The rabbis used rhetoric differently to define and extend rituals of elite-community participation. Through rhetoric they regularized performative rituals. Their metapropositions for prayer display a rhetoric of ritual used to extend the knowledge of the details of performing rituals, and the influence they had over the community.

Through remarkably similar rhetoric in other areas they hid the essences of virtuoso rituals. They kept elitist control. Rules for slaughtering convey little of the necessary information about the skill of master craftsmen. The metapropositions in Hullin spell out minimal information of the vocation for transforming the novice into a professional, expert in the ritual.

In the rhetoric of the ritual of animal slaughter rabbis obscured their special knowledge while speaking at great length of metapropositional regulations of proper action. Rabbis reveal and convey truths and they lie and conceal in the rhetorical expressions about their ritual. Fairly frequently they use biblical verses, digressions, and other diversions within the programmatic discussion of ritual.

The Imposition of Rabbinic Rhetoric on Public Discourse

The rabbis overtly recognized the discursive disconnection but concealed substantive divergences in ritual and theology from their Israelite counterparts. These masters of late antique Judaism industriously renovated their received traditions through a process of imposing metapropositions of predominantly legal discourse and interpretation on an antecedent heritage, or "rabbinization." They converted major

elements of the cultural substance of the Israelite past to a radically different rabbinic rhetoric.

In the process of rabbinization of ceremony and theology and revision of rhetoric, rabbinic authorities made Moses "our rabbi" and made other heroic Israelite figures also take on rabbinic characteristics. They made the major seasonal festivals into occasions for the celebration of the Torah and for its study. They transformed Pentecost, the Israelite festival of the first fruits, into the rabbinic celebration of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai, and Passover, the Israelite national festival of animal sacrifice at the Temple in the Jerusalem, into the time for technical discourse at the rabbinic Seder-symposium, in the homes of the rabbis and their followers.

That which they did not transform in Israelite practice or scripture, they atomized in midrashic analysis into brief pericopae and practiced on those their analyses based on their accepted rhetorical, mainly legal techniques and conventions. They by that both created and resolved glaring incongruities, ambiguities and contradictions of rabbinic theology and ideology.

The later emergence of the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur serves as a dramatic illustration of how thoroughly the rhetoric of legal discourse permeated rabbinic ritual and how sharply rabbinic practice concealed the antecedent aspects of Israelite ritual. Yom Kippur was thought to be a somber occasion of penitence and atonement. In the Israelite Temple cult it was the only time of the year that the High Priest licitly entered the Holy or Holies. The rite of the sacrifice of the scapegoat dominated the festival.

In rabbinic practice the festival began in the synagogue at sundown with the public legal declaration renouncing the year's vows and declaring them null and void. Though its formal institutionalization is thought to have been post-talmudic, this litany refracts the centrality of legal rhetoric earlier in rabbinism. In the most somber of Judaic chants, the following was recited three times to inaugurate the service on Yom Kippur eve:

All vows, renunciation, promises, obligations, oaths, taken rashly, from this Day of Atonement till the next, may we attain it in peace, we regret

them in advance. May we be absolved of them, may we be released from them, may they be null and void and of no effect. May they not be binding upon us. Such vows shall not be considered vows; such renunciations, no renunciations; such oaths, no oaths.⁸

A religious system pervaded by the rhetoric of law could elevate such a set of formulae to one of the esteemed pinnacles of its liturgy.⁹

Considering components of the system now summarized, it is not surprising that rabbinism revered the rhetorical review of its metapropositions itself as ritual and attributed its highest value to the study of Torah, as defined by the rabbinic paradigms of practices of analysis. In rabbinic idiom, the study of Torah outweighed all other commandments. *Torah Ieshma*, Torah-study for its own sake, was the pinnacle of religious activity.

Multiple Judaisms and discursive spheres of rhetoric

Historians of Judaism, following the prevailing systemic paradigm of analysis, work with a multiplicity of Judaisms. The classical Judaism of the dual Torah, rabbinic Judaism, took shape after a catastrophe in 70 C.E., the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and loss of independence to the Roman Empire. It persists in one or another form through the middle ages to the today where spokesmen claim it is approximated as one or another form of contemporary Orthodoxy or Conservative Judaism.

⁸*The High Holy Day Prayer Book*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser, New York, 1959, p. 258.

⁹We find references to the Kol Nidre by the Geonim beginning in the eighth century and subsequent debate over the propriety of reciting it. Sages in Sura condemned it. Some modern scholars speculated that it originated in Israel as reaction to Karaism. Others thought it was opposed by the sages because some saw a connection between it and formulae meant to annul magical incantations, like those on the Aramaic incantation bowls of the Talmudic era. This theory seems far-fetched and represents at best a secondary meaning, associated *post facto* with these clearly legal declarations. For a discussion of the litany see, R. Posner et. al. eds., *Jewish Liturgy*, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 177.

Jews in Nineteenth century Europe formulated several new Judaisms. Dominant among these were utopian and messianic movements leading to Reform and Zionism, and other forces producing Conservative Judaism and Yiddishism. They also participated in and helped shape a variety European secular cultural alternatives, like socialism, anarchism and communism, all movements conceived of and articulated in significant measure by Jews.

Undoubtedly, as the Holocaust ruptured the whole fabric of European Jewish life, representations of its events emerged within each Judaism of the time. Accordingly, one may argue, only within each system can they in turn be fully understood.

The various systems we call *Judaisms* employ a multiplicity of modes of thought and expression, or as some might prefer, of discourses and discursive practices, rhetoric and rhetorical style or metapropositional programs.

Ritual in the Rhetoric of the Multiple discursive representations of the Holocaust

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed the renewed development of systems of Judaisms, such as, an American communal Judaism, a state-sponsored Zionist Judaism in Israel, popular counter-cultural Judaic expressions in America (ostensibly non-systemic), and serious modifications of the synagogue-connected official Judaisms of Conservative, Reform and Orthodox Jews.

Accordingly, within the wide range of possibilities of how the Holocaust (whatever that category may include) becomes embedded in the memories of several systems, one can consider two sharp contrasts:

1. The Holocaust as represented within two ranges of North American discourse: the coherent communal American Judaic civil system and, by contrast, popular non-systemic (counterculture) American folk and literary representations. These manifestations I treat elsewhere.¹⁰

¹⁰"Judaisms and Memories: Systemic Representations of the Holocaust."

2. The Holocaust as represented in ordinarily disjoint discursive systems: as represented in official state-sponsored Zionism in Israel compared with one of its embodiments in the Conservative Judaism of the American synagogue.

The Holocaust in the Rhetoric of the Organized American Jewish Community

North American Jews have created two systemic worlds of Judaic expression. The Judaism of the synagogue and home is expressed in the officially stated beliefs and practices of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements. A second "Judaism" takes its shape within the realm of the civic, mainly secular, public life of the community. Neusner calls this official communal system in America, "the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption, with its interest in the destruction of European Jewry as paradigm of evil, then the creation of the State of Israel, as compensation renewal after the ultimate catastrophe (p. 119)."

American Jews form, "a shared corporate experience of polity (p. 120)," and thus form a differentiated social unit, an "Israel." Their interests are expressed by such bureaucratic structures as Federations for Jewish Service, fund-raising groups with a self-interest in actively propounding an ideology of distinctiveness. Organizations like those preach the public doctrines of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption. Though some argue the motivation is manipulative, the result nevertheless is substantive and the system has taken definitive form.

Neusner expands on the meanings imputed to the murder of the six million and the creation of the State of Israel:

The world-view of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption stresses the unique character of the murders of European Jews, the providential and redemptive meaning of the creation of the State of Israel. The way of life of the Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption requires

active work in raising money and political support for the State of Israel (p. 122).

He is openly critical of the value of this systemic expression and, characteristically, does not hesitate to spell out his view. This Judaism, "offers as a world of nightmares made of words." He goes on:

First, the message of Holocaust and Redemption is that difference is not destiny but disaster -- if one trusts the gentiles. Second, the media of Holocaust and Redemption leaves the life of the individual and family untouched and unchanged . . . [It] turns on its head the wise policy of the reformers and enlightened of the early nineteenth century: a Jew at home, a citizen out there. Now it is an undifferentiated American at home, a Jew in public policy (p. 128).

Lapsing theological, he concludes that the enduring Judaism of the dual Torah has the power to transform the inner life of the Jew, this other Judaism does not. Thus one historian of Judaism has rendered his analytic judgment and, in addition, expressed his personal preference. He distrusts the stability of this system's rhetoric and rejects the notion that it has a meaningful metapositional program.

The Holocaust in the Rhetoric of the Zionist State

Zionist representation in the State of Israel postulates that the Holocaust was not a complete rupture of the Jews' cultural context. It posits that in effect Zionism adumbrated the Holocaust, was waiting for it, and knew it was coming. The Holocaust is proof of the validity of the essential Zionist enterprise and in the destined failure of diaspora Judaism.

Its rhetorical expression coheres to its systemic nature. The official Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, is one main discursive representation of the Holocaust within that secular state-sponsored system. It stands as a testimonial to

martyrdom and resistance.¹¹ Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel, Yom Hashoah, promotes the ideology of the State as it perpetuates the memory of the victims. It does so in public civil ceremonies, decidedly dissociated from the "religious" rituals of Israeli Orthodoxy.

The rituals, shrines and commemorations as "texts," and literary narratives of the Zionist system are comprehensible as components of that state-bound ecology of culture. Those, like Young, who discuss aspects of such representations without accounting for their systemic foundations cannot reach a competent level of interpretation or explanation of its metapositional program.

The Holocaust in the Ritual Rhetoric of the American Synagogue

Official synagogue representation of the Holocaust in text or ritual has been rare and just now beginning to become more prevalent. The official Judaisms of the synagogue have for the most part chosen not to deal with the Holocaust. Official attitudes toward memorializing its victims in the past have been superficial. As its rhetorical expression emerges it shows signs of conforming dramatically to the systemic nature of the American Jewish synagogue.

American Jewish synagogue members today frequently associate Judaism solely with the commemoration of death. Alan Mintz explains that this association began in the middle ages as a popular representation of a "cult of the dead" grew up as a subset of Judaic practice:

In the generations immediately following the First Crusade the ceremony of remembering the dead began to be practiced not only in the case of renowned rabbinical martyrs of public persecution but also simply for all who died natural deaths, entirely irrespective of the conditions of persecution. A bereaved son would recite the Kaddish, an Aramaic doxology, for the memory of his recently departed father or mother, in

¹¹See James Young's discussion in *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1988, pp. 27-28, of two diaries, the one of Anne Frank, secular and assimilated, and the other of a Zionist youth, Moshe Flinker, for a sharp contrast of memories molded by varying systemic forces.

the conviction that such recitation had the power to save the deceased's soul from tortures beyond the grave. The practice gained headway in the thirteenth century and by the fifteenth a new custom emerged: the *Yorzeit*, the recitation of the Kaddish on the anniversary of the death of a relative. And soon there was further established the *Yizkor* or *Hazkarat neshamot*, the Kaddish together with various supplications for the souls of the departed, recited on the Day of Atonement and the last days of the Pilgrimage Festivals. Taken together, this amounts of a kind of cult of the dead that began in medieval Ashkenaz and later spread to all of world Jewry.¹²

Mintz comments further,

The astounding tenacity of this outlook is observable in the simple sociological fact, known to all, that in the process of secularization, and especially in the acculturation of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to America, the recitation of the mourner's Kaddish with its attendant rites is the very last particle of tradition to be given up.

Recently American Conservative Judaism developed a Kaddish for death camps. Based in part on the last passages of Andre Schwarz-Bart's novel, *The Last of the Just*,¹³ this ritual representation and text is a perfect logical cultural extension of Conservative Judaic systemic values and rhetorical constructions. The rite was originally incorporated into the Martyrology of the 1972, *Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*, of the Rabbinical Assembly. Rabbi Jules Harlow, editor of the *Mahzor* describes the impetus for the innovation as follows:

The text of the martyrology incorporates Rabbinic narratives about some of the martyred rabbis as well as words from the Psalms and from modern authors, including Bialik, Hillel Bavli, Nelly Sachs, A.M. Klein and

¹²Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, New York, 1984, pp. 100-101.

¹³New York, 1960.

Soma Morgenstern. At the conclusion of the narrative recalling martyrs of various times, we wanted to articulate the tension between faith on the one hand and, on the other, the questioning doubt that arises out of our confrontation with even the recollection of the murder of those Jews. And we did not want to articulate that tension in an essay or in a footnote . . . We chose the statement of faith *par excellence* in Jewish tradition, the Mourner's Kaddish. After the death of a family member, when a Jew has perhaps the strongest reasons to question God, he or she is obliged to stand in public to utter words in praise of God.

Harlow explains the motives of the liturgy:

We interrupt these words, this statement of faith, with the names of places where Jews were slaughtered, places which therefore cause us to raise questions, to have doubts. The tension is resolved, liturgically, by the last four lines, whose words are uninterrupted by the names which give rise to questioning, thus concluding in a framework of faith.¹⁴

The original Aramaic text alternates with a register of sites of extermination in the new liturgy:¹⁵

We rise
Yitgadal
Auschwitz
ve'yitkadash
Lodz

¹⁴Jules Harlow, personal communication, March 2, 1989. He adds that there are intentionally seventeen places named, signifying that life, represented by the Hebrew *Chai*, numerically eighteen, "can never be complete, can never be the same, after such slaughter." This is not noted in the prayer book.

¹⁵I cite the Kaddish of the *Siddur Sim Shalom*, ed. Jules Harlow, 1985, pp. 841-843. The more extensive Kaddish of the Martyrology of the Day of Atonement is not limited to communities and camps where the Jews were killed during the Second World War. It includes Kishinev, Hebron, Mayence, Usha and Jerusalem, places where Jews were slaughtered in other historical eras.

Sh'mei raba
Ponar
b'alma di v'ra khir'utei,
Babi Yar
v'yamlikh malkhutei
Maidanek
b'hayekhon u-v'yomeikhon
Birkenau
u-v'hayei d'khol beit yisrael,
Kovno
ba-agala u-vi-z'man kariv,
Janowska
v'imru amen.
Y'hei sh'mei raba m'vorakh l'alam u-l'almei almaya.
Yitbarakh v'yishtabah
Theresienstadt
v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam
Buchenwald
v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar
Treblinka
v'yit'aleh v'yit-halal
Vilna
sh'mei d'kudsha,
Bergen-Belsen
brikh hu l'ela
Mauthausen
min kol birkhata v'shirata,
Dachau
tushb'hata v'nehemata
Minsk
da-amiran b'alma,
Warsaw
v'imru amen.
Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya v'hayim aleinu v'al kol yisrael,
v'imru amen.

*Oseh shalom b-m'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu v'al kol yisrael,
v'imru amen.*

This new Kaddish is a text with no narrative. It creates an intrusion into the death-liturgy, thus depicting the disruption of death within the historical reality of the people. It is a violent representation. Names of locations of destruction, in language read from left to right, confront the doxology of praise, in the liturgy recited from right to left.

The new powerful ritual sustains the particularity of violence. Unlike many other forms of ritual, it resolves nothing. The new Kaddish confuses and traumatizes the soothing cadence of the expected traditional prayer. This unconventional form of the prayer breaks the somber beat of the chant of the Kaddish, one of the only sure rhythms and universally recognized prayers of this American Judaic system.

The Holocaust finds expression in the discourses of Judaic systemic alternatives according to the needs and expectations of each. For the differing Judaisms, we expect and find divergent memories. These engender their rituals according to the needs of their rhetoric. Those imbued with internal persistence, consistency or inner power, will endure.