



Study Guide and Discussion Questions

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I. Beginnings

1. Towards the beginning of this chapter, Wine writes: “If the Jews had never existed, the world would have managed to discover love and justice—and to develop religions with one and only one God” (page 9, Kindle Locations 322-323). Do you agree? How else might the world be different if the Jews had never existed? Do you know of, or can you imagine, other religions with “one and only one God” that developed independently of the Jews? Where do love and justice come from, if not from religion?
 2. In the section of this chapter subtitled “Religion,” Wine writes: “In the history of humanity, religion is not a trivial pursuit. Enormous amounts of time, energy, talent and wealth are expended in the service of the gods. Whether the gods are real or not is secondary to the fact that religion is real” (page 13, Kindle Locations 377-379). What do you make of the fact that “enormous amounts of time, energy, talent and wealth” are invested in this enterprise? Is it all a waste? Or are there benefits—to individuals or to society? What makes religion “real”? And what does this mean for non-religious people—can they get any individual or social benefits of religion without being religious?
 3. Towards the end of this chapter, Wine writes: “The general consensus of modern scientific biblical scholars is that the biblical Exodus never took place....An exodus of two million former slaves—600,000 adult males (Numbers 2:24)—from the most powerful nation in the Near East—accompanied by colossal catastrophes—with no reference to it in Egyptian texts or in the propaganda of Egypt’s powerful enemies—is the stuff of nationalist propaganda, not truth” (page 45, Kindle Locations 881-885). Is it important to learn the “real” history of the Jewish people, even where it may come into conflict with ancient sacred texts? Do myths and legends such as the Exodus story have value too? Is there any harm in letting people believe in myths and legends not supported by evidence? And what implications does this scholarly history have for celebrating Jewish life (e.g., Passover)?
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II. Jews

1. In the first section of this chapter, entitled “‘Biblical’ Archaeology,” Wine writes that “objectivity was difficult” for the first generations of archaeologists working in Biblical lands (page 51, Kindle Location 1074). Why do you suppose “objectivity was difficult”? Was it the result of internal pressures, external pressures, or perhaps a mix of both? Is this still the case for some in the field, do you suppose?
2. Towards the end of this section, Wine writes: “There is a direct historical continuity of over 3200 years between the small Hebrew nation that emerged in southern Canaan and the Jews of today” (page 58, Kindle Locations 1194-1195). Where does this “continuity” come from? Is it the result of genetics, cultural trappings, and history? Can it be the product of other factors as well?
3. In the section of this chapter entitled “David and Solomon,” Wine writes: “Who the real David and Solomon were, we will never fully know. The splendor of David’s conquests and Solomon’s temple

were probably real, but not in the time of David and Solomon....Some biblical historians suggest that the story in the Bible was created 300 years later, when Judah was richer and more powerful” (Kindle Locations 1354-1356). Does the archaeological and critical account of David and Solomon that Wine presents change your perspective on these two important figures of early Judean “history”? How much do you think can be believed of the Biblical account?

4. Towards the end of this chapter, Wine writes: “In the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, both Israel and Judah lay on the periphery of Canaanite Phoenicia, the most significant economic power between Egypt and Mesopotamia....This Phoenician connection was to remain one of the most powerful legacies in Jewish life....The Jews did not remain shepherds like their Hebrew ancestors. They became merchants and traders just like their Canaanite brothers” (pages 75-76, Kindle Locations 1465-1470). What do you think is the legacy of this history of the Jews as merchants and traders? Might they have done better in some ways by remaining shepherds? How might the course of Jewish (and world) history have been different?

III. Religion

1. In the third paragraph of this chapter, Wine writes: “Until modern times, people devoted enormous amounts of time to the service of the gods” (page 83, Kindle Locations 1643-1644). Why do you suppose this was the case? Can we have empathy for people in different historical and geographic contexts even if we have different priorities today? What binds us together as modern humans with the civilizations of the ancient world, if anything?
2. In the section of this chapter entitled “Torah,” Wine discusses the dilemmas of the Jewish community during the Chaldean exile. He notes that during this period “[t]he issue of intermarriage and Jewish ethnic survival emerged” (page 119, Kindle Location 2247), a primary concern became the “ethnic purity of the Jewish people” (Kindle Location 2250), and that “[p]edigree became an obsession” (Kindle Location 2251). Have we evolved as a community on these issues? To what extent is this still the framework under which we operate, even as modern progressive Jews?
3. Throughout this chapter, Wine describes the sources combined to create the Torah (“J” “E” “D” “P”). Which sources sound most familiar? With which do you most sympathize? Is the fact that archaeologists have not found separate documents with just one or two of the JEDP sources, and therefore their discrete existence is a deduction rather than an interpretation based on extra-Biblical textual evidence, a problem for the “Documentary Hypothesis?”
4. Near the conclusion of this chapter, Wine writes: “Ezra had supervised the editing of a powerful document that would serve as the constitution of the Zadokite state. It was called *Torat Moshe*, the ‘Teaching of Moses.’ It claimed to be the only and final written communication of Yahweh to the Jewish people” (page 120, Kindle Locations 2272-2274). What do you make of a religious document such as the Torah serving as the “constitution” of a state? From your own knowledge of the Torah, can you imagine potential problems resulting from this arrangement? Can you imagine any benefits? Is it fair for us to judge an ancient civilization by our 21st-Century standards of democracy, feminism, and freedom of conscience? Might the Torah in fact reflect “the best wisdom of its time”?

IV. Diaspora

1. Discussing the concurrent thought revolutions occurring in China and India in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries BCE, Wine writes that both Confucius and Buddha “would have had a hard time talking to Ezra” (page 129, Kindle Location 2492). Does this give lie to the claim made by some that the wisdom of all religious traditions is essentially the same? What do you make of the popularity in our time of Eastern religions such as Buddhism among many in the West (including many Jews)? From what you learned about Ezra in the previous chapter, why would he have had a hard time talking to Confucius or Buddha?
 2. In this chapter, Wine makes one of his more provocative and intriguing claims for the first time in the book. He writes: “In our present age of antisemitism, many Jews are very uncomfortable with this perception of the Jew as a ‘volunteer’ for the world of trade and money. They want to believe that the Jews would have preferred to remain farmers and shepherds, and that it was the persecutors of the Jews who forced them to become merchants and bankers” (page 133, Kindle Locations 2555-2562). Do these professions strike you as particularly “Jewish” today? Is the reticence of contemporary Jews to celebrate their success in these fields understandable? Or would the Jewish community do well to embrace this heritage? Why or why not?
 3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Priests,” Wine writes that, as Diaspora communities grew and flourished, the land of Israel became “more than the homeland. It was the Holy Land” (page 137, Kindle Locations 2615-2616). How much is this spiritual connection to the land of Israel still a part of Diaspora Jewish life? Is it an important part of your Jewish life? Or do you feel “rooted” in the country of your birth or current residence? Is it possible to feel both?
 4. At the end of this chapter, Wine describes the Greeks as “a new conqueror and a powerful new culture that challenged the culture of the Torah” (page 147, Kindle Location 2679), citing the “secular edge to the Hellenic culture” and the “primacy of human reason” (page 146, Kindle Location 2764-2766) in Greek culture. What is your response to this legacy? As Humanists, can we find things to admire in the values and priorities of the Greeks? At the same time, can we recognize the threat this way of life may have posed to Jewish national unity and group cohesion? Was a harmonious blending of Jewish and Greek wisdom and philosophic traditions ever a realistic possibility? Are Jews of this time to be applauded or condemned for wanting to participate in the wider Hellenistic world?
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V. Rabbis

1. In the section of this chapter entitled “Pharisees,” Wine writes of the emergence of a “Bibliolatry” (page 173, Kindle Location 3277), or belief in the supremacy of sacred text, in the following terms: “Nothing was right unless the Book could be made to say that it was right. Everything was true if the Torah said it was true” (pages 173-174, Kindle Locations 3277-3278). Do some people still approach the Torah in this way? If so, what does one do with the work’s numerous apparent contradictions? What about the work’s ethically questionable or indefensible passages? Is there a danger in elevating any historical text to this level? Would this be true also for the United States Constitution? The International Declaration of Human Rights? A Humanist Manifesto?
 2. In the section of this chapter entitled “Herod,” Wine writes that “Herod was the creator of the third Jewish state (39 BCE)” (page 182, Kindle Location 3420) and that, under his rule, “The modest Temple was transformed into a Hellenistic shrine, replete with massive courtyards, mighty foundation walls and a splendor that it had never before known” (page 183, Kindle Locations 3440-3441). Yet Wine also notes that Herod “was a confirmed megalomaniac,” “behaved ruthlessly when he should have been kind,” and “was seriously paranoid,” even to the extent that he “killed three sons and killed his Maccabean wife” (page 184, Kindle Locations 3451-3453). Based on Wine’s description of his positive work and his deficiencies, would you consider Herod to be a good ruler or a bad ruler? Is he to blame for the later Great Revolt, or do you think a Jewish revolt against Roman rule was inevitable?
 3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Christianity,” Wine writes: “The success of the Christian cult in the Hellenized world lay in four things. The first was the egalitarian message of free and easy entrance into Heaven....The second was the creation of communities of support....The third factor was the emergence of a spectacular clergy who served as organizers and “shepherds” to these congregations....The fourth reason was the development of a central ritual that was overwhelming in its meaning, beauty and splendor....”(pages 210-211, Kindle Locations 3872-3881). What do you make of Wine’s characterization? Do you think it explains the success of Christianity, at least in its earlier stages? Would Judaism have done well to adopt some of Christianity’s reforms, such as abolishing circumcision, ending sacrifices at the Temple, or ignoring its obsession with pedigree? Would the “Judaism” that would have emerged from these reforms be recognizable as the same belief system or religious tradition?
 4. In the section of this chapter entitled “Declining Western Diaspora,” Wine writes that “the Judaism of the rabbis became the only non-Christian religion to survive Christian persecution....Given the hatred that existed between Christians and Jews, the survival is puzzling” (page 213, Kindle Locations 3939-3941). What do you think is the reason for Rabbinic Judaism’s survival during Christianity’s rise? Is it a testament to some feeling of religious kinship, perhaps, between Christians and their Jewish neighbors? Perhaps the tenacity of the Jews themselves in spite of the persecution they faced? Was it merely an accident of history? Or is there some other explanation, perhaps?
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VI. Muslims

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Wine writes: “In Roman and Parthian times, the Jews became a non-territorial nation, where the population of the dispersion far outnumbered the people in the homeland....But Jewish national identity was reinforced by the self-image of the Jews and by the opinions of their neighbors and enemies” (page 219, Kindle Locations 4131-4134). What does it mean to be a “non-territorial nation”? What are the risks of being part of a nation without a geographic territory of its own? What are the potential benefits, if any? Does this descriptor still accurately describe the Jews in our own time? Are the “self-image of the Jews” and the “opinions of their neighbors and enemies” equally important? Why or why not?
 2. In the next paragraph, Wine writes that “Jewish national identity was experienced in many ways. There was the obvious sense of shared ancestors. There was the Hebrew language, which was no longer spoken by most Jews but which was honored as the language of high culture and used as the language of religion. There was the messianic vision of the restoration of the Jewish people to the Jewish homeland. There was the national religion which featured a universal god with strong parochial prejudices” (page 219, Kindle Locations 4134-4137). How many of these elements remain important to contemporary Jewish identity? Can someone be a Jew without Jewish ancestors, language, homeland, and/or religion? What other avenues might allow a person to connect with Jewish tradition, culture, and history?
 3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Islam,” Wine writes: “Members of subject nations were allowed to keep their old religion, provided that the religion was monotheistic and that the conquered accepted their inferiority to their Muslim conquerors....Tolerated non-Muslims were called *dhimmi*. They were subjected to minor and major humiliations—and they initially constituted the vast majority of people in the Muslim and Arab world” (page 224, Kindle Locations 4216-4220). What do you make of this system? Is it a reasonable compromise, considering the time and place and the “holy war (*Jihad*) requirement of early Islam” (page 224, Kindle Location 4216) otherwise in effect? What of the “minor and major humiliations” to which other groups were subjected and the requirement of a monotheistic belief system? Do you think Jews were better or worse off on the whole under Muslim rule versus Christian rule? Discuss.
 4. In the section of this chapter entitled “Orthodoxy,” Wine writes: “In our present individualistic world, diversity is the value we applaud. But in the family and collectivist environments of the past, conformity was a more desirable value. Sometimes conformity was imposed by public opinion, sometimes it was imposed by government alone; usually it was imposed by both. Conformity of behavior is called *orthopraxy* (right behavior). Conformity of public ideology is called *orthodoxy* (right doctrine). The foundations of both now emerged in Jewish life. “Orthodox”...is the short adjective for both developments” (page 233, Kindle Locations 4372-4377). What do you make of the development of “orthodox” Judaism as described? Are there potential benefits, such as increased group cohesion? On the other hand, is *herem* (expulsion) an appropriate punishment for potentially legitimate and thoughtful differences of opinion? What is your experience with contemporary “Orthodox” Judaism?
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VII. Christians

1. Discussing the legacy of Christianity with regard to the Jews, Wine writes: “The foundation of Christian culture was Western culture. And the foundation of Western culture was the culture of the Greeks and the Hellenistic world. Christianity became the dominant religion of the Western world because it was essentially a Hellenistic religion” (page 276, Kindle Locations 5130-5132) What is your view of this characterization? Does it mesh with things you have learned previously about Christianity, its origins, and its belief system? What are your feelings about Christianity and the Jewish experience of living in a majority Christian world? Are the negatives, such as the Crusades, balanced out by the positives, such as legacy of the Enlightenment and the Secular Revolution?
2. In the section of this chapter entitled “Romaniotes,” Wine writes that in this period “[t]he Jew as the devil of politics and religion makes his appearance....The clergy, in particular, came to view the Jews as dangerously subversive. Hostile mobs attacked Jews and Jewish homes. Many Jews fled for their safety. Some fled to a foreign kingdom which bordered on Greek territory” (page 284, Kindle Locations 5254-5257). How familiar are you with the tropes of “the Jew as the devil of politics and religion”? Do these stereotypes still persist in our time? Where do you think antisemitic hatred comes from? Do you think we can ever hope to eradicate it?
3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Ashkenazim,” Wine writes: “The Jews are a Mediterranean people....Like Mediterranean people, Jews lived with grapes and olives, dates and figs, flat bread and goat meat, flat roofs and donkeys....In the ninth century, it all changed. The Jews tasted the cold north, not realizing that within one thousand years their pioneering spirit would produce the largest branch of Jewish people in Jewish history....They had to learn to like carrots and beets, cabbage and turnips. They had to live in thick stone houses with slanted roofs. They had to cover their bodies with heavy clothing and fur hats. They had to keep their hats and shoes on when they entered holy places” (pages 285-286, Kindle Locations 5281-5287). Which of these climates seems more familiar to you—Mediterranean or Northern? Which seems more “Jewish” to you? Do you suppose most Jews today consider themselves a “Mediterranean” people? What binds together groups with such dramatically different lifestyles as one people?
4. In the next paragraph of this section, Wine writes: “Charlemagne needed the Jews and their commercial skills to stimulate economic growth, especially along the main transportation route of his realm, the Rhine River....The commercial skills of the Jews, which frequently provoked church and peasant hostility, were often the source of Jewish survival and success” (page 286, Kindle Locations 5291-5299). What do you make of this? Is it a just happy accident that the Jews’ historic skills were often the ones needed by some of the world’s great empires? Did the Jews survive by being “in the right place at the right time” time and time again, or are there other possible explanations? Do you suppose Wine’s view on the subject of Jewish survival is shared by all Jews?
5. In the first part of the section of this chapter entitled “Sephardim,” Wine describes the theology of the *Zohar*, the 13th Century text which became one of the most important texts of the Jewish mystical movement known as Kabbalah (page 295, Kindle Locations 5446-5448). What is your explanation for the “sensational success” of this movement (including among such unlikely contemporary adherents as Madonna and Britney Spears)? Are there meaningful parallels, perhaps, with the rise of Scientology, New Age belief, and other movements in contemporary spirituality? Do you think that the *Zohar*’s implicit claim to represent “the true and secret meanings of the Torah” (page 295, Kindle Location 5441) was a view legitimately held by its author, Moses De Leon (1250-1305), or merely a clever ruse?

6. Later in this chapter section, Wine writes that “Spain was a world where Jews, Christians and Muslims had lived together for centuries, depended on each other and taken on complementary professional specialties....Christian princes protected their Jews. But defeat of the Muslims gave the death knell to Jewish survival. The victorious Church, supported by public opinion, persisted in its demands for Jewish conversion or expulsion” (page 296, Kindle Locations 5461-5465). Are the Jews who converted to Catholicism—including both those who did so out of sincere belief and those who merely wished to avoid danger—more to be celebrated or regretted today? How does the expulsion and execution of the Jews in late 15th-Century Spain compare with other catastrophic events such as the Chaldean Exile, the destruction of the Second Temple, and/or the Crusades? How does it compare with the Holocaust?

7. In the section of this chapter entitled “Eastern Ashkenazim,” Wine writes of the development of what would become one of the most important Jewish languages, along with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ladino: “Like Jews in other places, [the Jews of Ashkenaz] had turned the language of Germany into a Jewish language, flavoring it with Hebrew and Aramaic words and writing it in Hebrew letters. This Jewish-German (*Yiddish-Deitsh*) was a folk language, a variation of the German spoken in Southern Germany.... Yiddish was in the same condition as Old English, Old French and Old German before they were written down, refined and turned into the languages of the educated classes—used for ordinary daily transactions but not valued by scholars” (page 306, Kindle Locations 5628-5632). What is your connection with Yiddish? Did you ever hear it in your home, or in the home of your grandparents, while you were growing up? If so, how much of it were you able to learn? If not, are there any Yiddish words and phrases you may have picked up from other sources? Do you agree with those who consider Yiddish a “dead language” today? If so, why and how do you think the language “died”?

8. Discussing the growth of *yeshivas* [schools of higher Jewish learning] in Eastern Europe, Wine describes a particular contribution of this yeshiva culture, *pilpul*, in the following passage: “In a Jewish world without real secular power and with limited options for public entertainment, showing off in the yeshiva was the best show in town. A form of academic discussion called *pilpul*, esoteric discussions of no pragmatic value other than to display expertise, emerged to dominate the Polish yeshivas. A disarmed people with a penchant for verbal skills addressed their admiration of scholar performers. The foundation for future Jewish lawyers, writers and actors was firmly established” (page 309, Kindle Locations 5664-5677). Is this legacy of education as a symbol of “status and prestige” still embraced by the contemporary Jewish community? What of the phenomenon of *pilpul*, with its embrace of the “esoteric” and its relative indifference toward the “pragmatic”? Do you agree with Wine’s analysis linking this activity with the achievements of “future Jewish lawyers, writers and actors”?

9. In the section of this chapter entitled “Hasidim,” Wine discusses the rise and popularity of Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760), founder of the movement that would come to be known as “Hasidism.” Israel, who came to be known as the Baal Shem Tov (Master of the Good Name) or “Besht,” created a movement around the belief “that obeying God was not enough—but obeying and loving God would win his favor and hasten the coming of salvation. Since poor and simple people are as good at loving God as scholars—if not better—the simple people may have a better chance at salvation than the scholars” (page 311, Kindle Locations 5717-5719). Can you understand and perhaps appreciate the appeal of Hasidism in 18th-Century Polish Jewry? Can you understand the feelings of hostility and mistrust it engendered among the rabbinic elites? What is the legacy of Hasidism, in your opinion, for contemporary secular Jews? To what extent does the “Hasidism” of the Baal Shem Tov and its other early practitioners resemble the “Hasidism” of contemporary Jewish movements like Chabad?

VIII. Revolution

1. In the first paragraph of this chapter, Wine argues that “[t]he Christian world has turned into the Post-Christian world” (page 319, Kindle Locations 5875-5876). In the insert entitled “Post-Christian,” Wine continues that “[m]ost people in Europe are secularized” and that “[i]n all of North America, a large majority of the people are secularized” (page 319, Kindle Locations 5881-5882). He cites as the reason for the decline in religion in these societies the simple fact that most people “have other things that they wish to do” (page 319, Kindle Location 5884). Do you think Wine is correct in his “Post-Christian” characterization? Has religion in fact become “another consumer item” in our culture? Is this good, bad, or neutral in your view? Are there benefits to religious affiliation that people miss out on by not participating? Are there benefits to the diminished role of religion as well?
2. Describing the 17th-Century philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), Wine writes: “[Spinoza] pioneered a new intellectual defense system for the political and religious structures of the new economy. He openly championed freedom of speech and personal autonomy, denouncing government attempts to suppress individual dissent...He advocated reason, not divine revelation, as the arbiter of truth and falsehood, right and wrong. He denied supernatural and magic power and turned religion into the contemplation of the laws of nature” (page 328, Kindle Locations 6019-6023). Is Spinoza a useful role model for Humanistic Jews? Are there points on which we would differ with his conclusions? Do we have to adopt all of the language a historical figure used in order to claim them as inspiration? What do you make of Spinoza’s excommunication from the Jewish community and his rejection of a University teaching position?
3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Emancipation,” Wine writes: “Emancipation was the rage—emancipation from superstition, emancipation from the old class distinctions, emancipation from Church oppression, and especially emancipation from ethnic and religious discrimination. The Jews were, on the whole, ecstatic. Even if they were skeptical of the ideology of the Enlightenment, they could see that the political and economic advantages of emancipation outweighed all drawbacks” (page 333, Kindle Locations 6101-6104). Given the positives (freedom, removal of discriminatory restrictions) and negatives (Enlightenment antisemitism, the loss of Jewish communal authority) described in this section, would you describe the major transitions of this period as good or bad for the Jews?
4. In the section of this chapter entitled “Reform,” Wine describes the emergent ideology and practice of Reform Judaism in the following terms: “The Jews were no longer a nation. They were loyal citizens of those Enlightened nations that would allow them to be citizens.... [T]here was only one God, and he had chosen the Jews to be his missionaries. The laws of God were contained in the holy texts of Rabbinic Judaism—but only imperfectly. The texts were written by human beings inspired by God....Saying all prayers in Hebrew, the Messianic return to Jerusalem, and the avoidance of social mixing with non-Jews—were national and *out*. Dietary laws, ceremonies of water purification and the avoidance of useful activity on the Sabbath—were irrational and *out*.... Compulsory prayers were ritual and *out*. Loving your neighbor was ethics and *in*” (page 347, Kindle Locations 6328-6338). How much of this remains the belief system of many progressive Jews today? How radical do you imagine this was for its time? How much overlap is there, in your opinion, between the efforts of the early reformers and contemporary Secular Humanistic Judaism? How much divergence do you observe between the two?

IX. Antisemitism

1. In the section of this chapter entitled “Russia,” Wine writes that “Russia became an antisemitic country without Jews” after the fifteenth century, and notes that “[a]bsent demons can be turned into the fiercest devils” (page 362, Kindle Locations 6628-6630). What “absent demons” exist in our own time and place? How can we resist the urge to turn opponents, present or absent, into “devils”?
2. In the section of this chapter entitled “New Antisemitism,” Wine writes: “The Depression of 1873 was almost as severe as the Depression of 1929. But the success of socialism, with its demand for state welfare and state regulation, had not yet appeared. The ‘losers,’ working class and bourgeois, had no recourse to social agencies that could help them. Their suffering was intense: unemployment, eviction and humiliation. Western Europe and North America were in shock. The working classes and the lower middle classes were traumatized. The inevitable question arose. Who was responsible? The answer that emerged was *the Jews*” (pages 367-368, Kindle Locations 6718-6722). Do you see this description as part of a pattern of antagonizing the Jews as “other” in Western Europe and North America? Or was this a new phenomenon only made possible by the rise of the Enlightenment and the modern economy? What do you make of the term “antisemitism” itself, coined in the wake of this event, with its pretensions to “intellectual respectability” (page 369, Kindle Locations 6747-6748)? Can Jews ever hope to escape persecution in our world?
3. In the section of this chapter entitled “Jewish Nationalism,” Wine contrasts the experience of American Jews in the Nineteenth Century, who saw themselves as “Americans by nationality and ‘Jewish by faith’” with Eastern European Jews, for whom “this formula was nonexistent” (page 377, Kindle Locations 6879-6882). He describes how Jewish nationalism took shape as “[t]he spirit of the Enlightenment energized resistance and discouraged the old religious passivity” and how “[n]ot only religion but also language became the rallying cries of the awakened resentful masses” (page 378, Kindle Locations 6888-6889). Is the notion of the Jews as a “nation” a familiar one for you? In what sense is this designation meaningful in the absence of territorial sovereignty, a centralized government, a flag, national currency, armies, and other things typically associated with “nationhood”? In what sense is this designation accurate and useful, particularly with the rise of secularism among many Jews? Wine describes how the “Yiddishist” and “Zionist” national movements both took hold in Eastern Europe during this period—how were these visions of nationhood similar or different from one another? What do you think is the explanation for the decline of “Yiddishism” and the concurrent success of Zionism, and could it have been otherwise?
4. In the section of this chapter entitled “Jewish Socialism,” Wine writes of what would become one of the most important ideological movements in modern Jewry: “Socialism came into its own in the middle of the nineteenth century, when cities were being transformed by industrialization. Urban poverty and slums were becoming very visible, the rising expectations of workers were triggering rebellion, the money economy was experiencing painful cycles, and children of the middle class were available to become managers and ideologues of protest. Of the many varieties of socialism, the most successful was Marxism, sometimes called ‘scientific socialism.’ Marx...maintained that his socialism was based on the iron laws of human history, that the human story was the story of class warfare, and that a final utopia would be ushered in by a violent revolution against the current managers of the industrial system” (page 386, Kindle Locations 7047-7054). What are your thoughts on the popularity of Marxist socialism among Jews of this period? Does the explanation rest in the traditional prophetic and rabbinic belief in taking care for the poor? The hope of ending

antisemitism? Some other reason? Why do you think this imagined “Jewish utopia” in fact “turned out to be a Jewish nightmare, a prison of failed dreams and lost opportunities” (page 392, Kindle Locations 7150-7151)? Do you know any Jewish socialists who are active today, and are there echoes of this history in their efforts?

5. In the section of this chapter entitled “Holocaust,” describing the worst calamity to ever befall the Jews, Wine describes Hitler’s rise to power in terms eerily reminiscent of certain recent events. He writes: “Europe was stunned by the Depression. Liberals were helpless. Conservatives, the voice of the old aristocracy, worried about social upheaval. But the Communists and Fascists were salivating. They thrived on chaos. In Germany a new fascist party called itself the National Socialist German Workers’ Party—national for patriotism, socialist for economic reform, German for the veterans and Workers for the potential audience. A former Austrian corporal in the German army, Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), became the charismatic leader of the Party....[T]he economic catastrophe became his trigger for success. His Party militias were stronger and more numerous than those of the Communists. And his propaganda sang to the wounded pride of German patriotism....” (page 399, Kindle Locations 7254-7264). Is it inappropriate to draw comparisons between Hitler’s rise to power and the ascension of the so-called “alt-right” in the United States in 2017? Or is the Holocaust *sui generis*, an event so horrible it belongs in a category all its own? Do you think the Allied Powers bear any culpability for Hitler’s success, for their efforts at devastating the German economy and humiliating the German people following World War I? If an event as barbarous as the Holocaust could happen in a modern, industrialized nation such as 1930’s Germany, could it happen anywhere?
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X. Zionism and Contemporary Judaism

1. In the third paragraph of this chapter, Wine writes: “There have been many genocides in human history, but none as systematic and ruthless as the Nazi extermination of the Jews” (page 405, Kindle Locations 7398-7399). Why do you think the Nazis were so successful in their horrific effort? How might the modern Jewish community, indeed the world, be different today had Hitler never assumed power? What is the legacy of the Holocaust and the Second World War for contemporary Jews?
2. In the section of this chapter entitled “America,” Wine writes that, before 1910, “[m]ost American Jews did not have the comfort of feeling deeply rooted in America or the attachment that time and familiarity provide” (page 407, Kindle Locations 7430-7432). Do you think most American Jews today know the “comfort of feeling deeply rooted” in the United States? What does being “rooted” mean to you? Do you suppose that other minority groups in America have a similar feeling of “rootedness” or lack thereof?
3. A bit later in this chapter, Wine writes that “[i]n North America, the only respectable way to retain ethnic identity was through religion. Scots were Presbyterians, Germans were Lutherans, Irish were Catholic, Greeks were Greek Orthodox. For secularized Jews in a secularized culture, religious affiliation became the last resort of ethnic identification” (page 409, Kindle Locations 7459-7461). Did you, or others you know, come to know Judaism as a “religious affiliation” growing up? Do you know others in the Jewish community who still maintain the centrality of religion as the core of Jewish identity? Is this perhaps a more recent phenomenon than many realize? What are some of the other aspects of Jewish identity that resonate with you, apart from religion?

4. The section of this chapter entitled “Israel” begins with the following: “When the Zionist experiment began, few Jews imagined that it would succeed.... But Hitler and the Holocaust changed everything. The destructive power of antisemitism changed Jewish perspectives and expectations. Jewish anger and desperation made the Jews in Palestine the focal point of Jewish redemption” (page 413, Kindle Locations 7523-7526). Do you agree that Hitler “changed everything” with regard to the modern State of Israel? Would there be a State of Israel today, in your opinion, if not for the Holocaust? Is Israel the answer to the world’s threat of antisemitism, or does more work need to be done to combat hatred and discrimination in Diaspora nations? Does more work need to be done in Israel as well, perhaps?
 5. In the section of this chapter entitled “The Soviet Rebellion,” Wine describes the saga of the Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s: “When the Six Day War seized the attention of the world, Soviet Jews were reborn as Jews. They were filled with enormous ethnic pride for the courage and audacity of their Israeli brothers. Many of them felt empowered enough to demand the right to immigrate to Israel. Others demanded the revival of Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union. The Soviet government refused both requests. Over several years there emerged a group of defiant Jews called ‘refuseniks,’ the people who were refused the possibility of leaving. The world press publicized their plight....In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s the Soviets allowed many thousands of Jews to emigrate, most to America and some to Israel....Over one-half of Soviet Jewry now resides in either Israel or America” (pages 428-429, Kindle Locations 7806-7816). If you are old enough to remember this period in history, what are your recollections of the struggle of Soviet Jews? What do you make of the successful efforts of American Jewish leaders to close doors of immigration to the United States in order to shepherd Soviet Jews to the State of Israel? What are your thoughts on Israel’s reception of these immigrants, especially those who are the products of mixed marriages? All in all, should this be considered a success story in contemporary Jewish history, or a failure of some segments of organized Jewish life to extend full rights and dignity to their fellow Jews?
 6. In the final section of this chapter, entitled “Diaspora,” Wine discusses the diversity of contemporary organized Jewish life and the emergence of new streams of Judaism, including Reconstructionism, Jewish Renewal, and Secular Humanistic Judaism. Contributions of these new streams include Mordechai Kaplan’s conception of the Jews as “an international people” and of “Judaism as the culture and civilization of this historic people” (page 441, Kindle Locations 8020-8021); the emergence of Jewish New Age religion, inspired by the “massive invasion” of Eastern religion and the yearning by “thousands of young people for an experience called “spirituality” (page 443, Kindle Locations 8040-8041); and Secular Humanistic Judaism’s “attempt to weave the connections of the Enlightenment—reason, humanism, and dignity—around the comfortable setting of Jewish kinship and family” (page 445, Kindle Locations 8072-8073) in a Judaism emphasizing reason, courage, and human power. Is this diversity good or bad for the Jewish people? What new forms do you imagine Jewish identity and belief will take as the 21st Century marches on? What old forms will fade away, and which others will be re-discovered? What is the future of the Jewish people in your view, and how do you hope to contribute to this future?
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XI. Epilogue

1. In the fifth paragraph of this chapter, Wine writes: “Along the way the Jewish nation has hosted many powerful ideologies,” including: “the cultic mythology of the El, Asherah and Baal religion”; “the theology of the protest prophets”; “the ideology of the Zadokite priests”; “the belief system of the Rabbis”; “the mystical tradition of the Kabbalah”; “the ‘rational theology’ of the Hellenized philosophers like Maimonides”; “the Enlightenment enthusiasm of the radical Haskalah”; “the Marxist ideology of the radical socialists”; “the liberal philosophy of bourgeois capitalism, “ and “the self-affirmation of New Age religion” (page 448, Kindle Locations 8181-8193). What, if anything, makes all of these belief systems “Jewish”? Is it legitimate for a present-day Jew who subscribes to a contemporary secular ideology such as socialism or New Age belief, to claim ancestry as well from the rabbis or the cult of El? Why or why not?
2. In the next section of this chapter, entitled “Jewish Success,” Wine writes: “The greatest era of Jewish life is the present. Despite the Holocaust, never before have the Jews, both individually and collectively, possessed more wealth, more power and more influence. The global economy, which the Jews helped to pioneer, now embraces the planet.... The emerging global culture, which rests on the achievements of science, has dramatically raised the standard of living for over one-half of the people on our planet” (page 450, Kindle Locations 8216-8226). Do you think most modern Jews, whatever their beliefs, would agree with the characterization that the greatest period in Jewish history is *now*? How do we reconcile the enviable position the contemporary Jewish community finds itself in with that same community’s myriad anxieties about its own future? What period do you consider “the greatest era of Jewish life” if not our own?
3. What is your assessment of Wine’s predictions in the section of this chapter entitled “Jewish Future”? Will the “expanding secularization of Jewish life” (page 453, Kindle Locations 8265-8266) in fact continue? Do you share Wine’s forecast of “the growing importance of Israel” (page 456, Kindle Locations 8323-8324)? What of Wine’s predictions on antisemitism (page 456, Kindle Locations 8329-8334)? Wine wrote this book before his death in 2007; how many of his predictions have come to fruition?
4. At the conclusion of this book, Wine writes: “Very early in their history, the Jews tasted the possibility of becoming a world people. This development may be their most enduring contribution to the world” (page 458, Kindle Locations 8360-8362). What does it mean to be a “world people”? Are there any other such “world peoples” besides the Jews? What, if anything, truly binds together all world Jews? How much diversity is it possible for a people to accommodate and still remain one people?