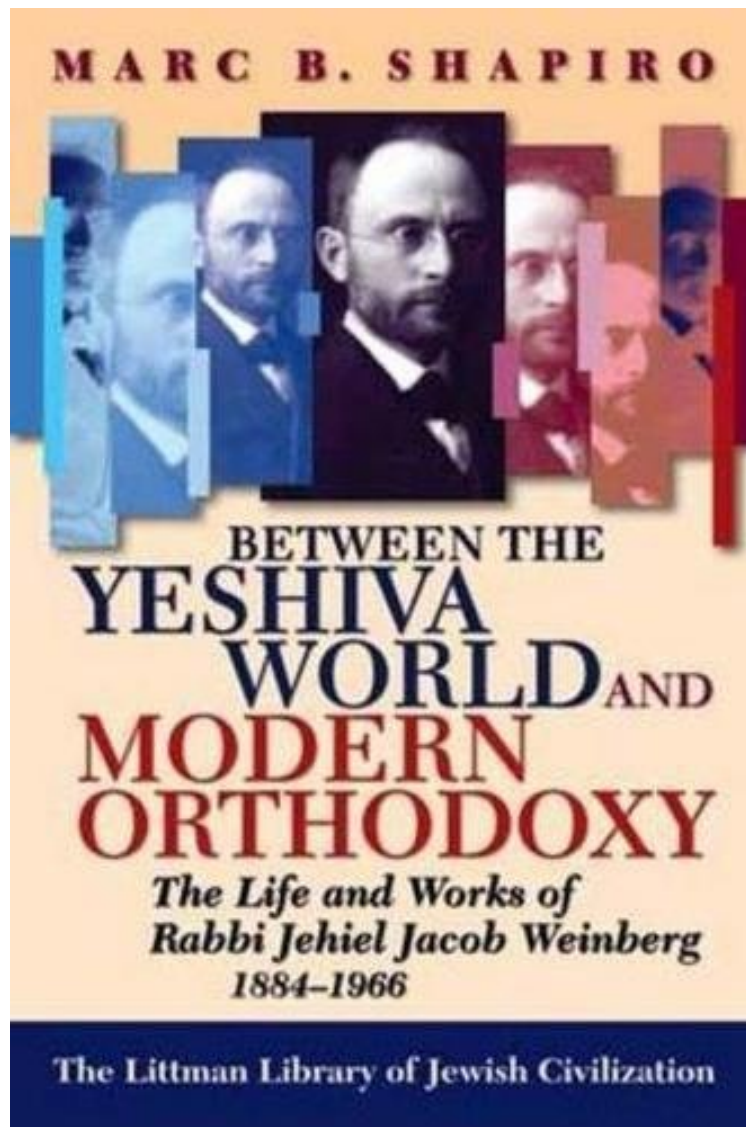


[Pdf free] Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966

Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966

Marc B. Shapiro

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#568988 in Books Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 2002-06-01 Original language: English PDF # 1
6.20 x .90 x 9.20l, .0 #File Name: 1874774919296 pages | File size: 68.Mb

Marc B. Shapiro : Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great Book about Modern Orthodoxy By Phineas P. Shapiro captures the life of Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg and tries to be as fair as possible when he talks about him. The only thing missing is more concrete examples of certain themes in the book. 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Ed Kalksteina little boring 7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. riveting By Michael Lewyn I went to a modern Orthodox shul when I lived in Washington, and I now go to a shul in Jacksonville that is somewhat more "yeshivish" (i.e. not Hasidic, but less liberal than my prior congregation) in orientation; this intellectual biography of R. Weinberg gives me a better idea of the intellectual roots of both wings of Orthodoxy. Both modern Orthodoxy and Yeshiva orthodoxy have their roots in 18th and 19th century Europe. In Germany, relatively modern thinkers such as Samson Raphael Hirsch and David Hoffman favored a synthesis of Orthodoxy and modern culture, embracing art and literature to the extent compatible with halacha. These ideological ancestors of modern Orthodoxy argued that Judaism could (in the author's words) be a "decisive spiritual force for humanity" and "provide answers to the problems of morality and social justice which confront modern society." By contrast, in Eastern Europe, rabbinic scholars based in yeshivot (educational institutions devoted to Torah study, comparable I suppose to rabbinic seminaries today) tended to favor isolating Jews from the secular world, and focusing purely on Torah study as opposed to secular learning. So now when I go to shul and hear a rabbi telling us to "love the world" or to be suspicious of the "nations of the world", I hear the voices of rabbinic intellectuals who died a century or two ago. Some more specific things I learned: *The level of hostility between some yeshivot and Zionism. In the Slobodka yeshiva where Weinberg studied, forty students sought to form a Zionist group. The administration forced them to disband by not just threatening to expell them from the yeshiva, but also to revoke rabbinic ordinations of students who had already received them. *The troubled relationship between German Orthodox and East European Orthodox Jews. Early in the 20th century, German Jews tended to see East Europeans as primitives - partially for irrational reasons (East Europeans were poorer, and Germans viewed Yiddish, the common East European Jewish language, as a mere corruption of German) but partially for good reasons as well. East Europeans often left Jewish education outside the yeshivot to untrained lay teachers, while rabbis focused their attentions solely on the best and the brightest. And until after World War I, East European Jews commonly made no effort to educate girls, causing girls to gravitate towards secularism. But in the last years before Hitler, a countertrend emerged. Germany's loss of World War I and postwar turmoil made German culture seem less appealing, and the "Torah only focus" and mysticism of East European Jewry seemed more appealing to some German Orthodox Jews. *The intellectual origin of intra-Orthodox disputes about woman's issues, many of which were addressed in Weinberg's writings. For example, Weinberg argued in favor of bat mitzvahs, but other Orthodox decisors were more skeptical. The halachic issues were as follows: there is a halachic rule that Jews should not imitate gentile practices, or by implication the practices of non-Orthodox Jews. Medieval authorities are split over how broadly this rule should be interpreted; some favor a broad interpretation (which would bar bat mitzvah ceremonies, on the ground that such ceremonies were originated by non-Orthodox Jews). Others interpret this principle narrowly, arguing that gentile practices may be permitted if adopted for a good reason (a view favored by Weinberg). In addition, there is a policy dispute over whether bat mitzvah ceremonies in fact cement girls' ties to Judaism. Generally, the modern trend seems to be in favor of liberalization in this area, despite the oft-touted "move to the Right" among Orthodox Jews. My shul in Jacksonville has bat mitzvah ceremonies, and a woman's right to vote and hold office (which was opposed 80 years ago by such leading authorities as Abraham Kook and the Chofetz Chaim) is no longer controversial, except in certain narrow areas such as intra-synagogue governance.

The span of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg's life (1884-1966) illuminates the religious and intellectual dilemmas that traditional Jewry has faced over the past century. Rabbi Weinberg became a central ideologue of modern Orthodoxy because of his positive attitude to secular studies and Zionism and his willingness to respond to social change in interpreting the halakhah, despite his traditional training in a Lithuanian yeshiva. But Weinberg was an unusual man: even at a time when he was defending the traditional yeshiva against all attempts at reform, he always maintained an interest in the wider world. He left Lithuania for Germany at the beginning of the First World War, attended the University of Giessen, and increasingly identified with the Berlin school of German Orthodoxy. Although initially an apologist for the Nazi regime, he was soon recognized as German Orthodoxy's most eminent halakhic authority in its efforts to maintain religious tradition in the face of Nazi persecution. His approach, then and in his later halakhic writings, including the famous Seridei esh, derived from the conviction that the attempt to shore up Orthodoxy by increased religious stringency would only reduce its popular appeal. - Using a great deal of unpublished material, including private correspondence, Marc Shapiro discusses many aspects of Weinberg's life. In doing so he elucidates many institutional and intellectual phenomena of the Jewish world, a number of which have so far received little scholarly attention: the yeshivas of Lithuania; the state of the Lithuanian rabbinate; the musar movement; the Jews of eastern Europe in Weimar Germany; the Torah im Derekh Eretz movement and its variants; Orthodox Jewish attitudes towards Wissenschaft des Judentums; and the special problems of Orthodox Jews in Nazi Germany. Throughout, he shows the complex nature of Weinberg's character and the inner struggles of a man being pulled in different directions. Compellingly and authoritatively written, his fascinating conclusions are quite different from those presented in earlier

historical treatments of the period.

`A splendid biography . . . a superlative book, elegantly written, fastidiously researched, providing us with rare insights into Orthodoxy's encounter with the modern world as reflected in the life of one of its most complex figures . . . This is scholarship of a high order.' Jonathan Sacks, *Le'ela* `It is to Shapiro's credit that Weinberg's life is painstakingly mapped out and his ideological profile carefully portrayed . . . should be read by every serious student of modern Jewish history.' Morton J. Merowitz, *Shofar* `This is a first rate, scholarly book. The author has expended considerable energies in exhuming hitherto unavailable biographical material . . . he has also drawn on, and partially catalyzed the creation of, an oral history by interviewing an impressive cross-section of individuals . . . To this wealth of raw material he has brought an integrating intelligence and judicious melding of disparate sources to create a vivid and ultimately convincing portrait . . . The rewards for the reader's investment are substantial.' Mechy Frankel, *Tradition* `Measured, careful, well-written, and critical yet respectful . . . The great strength of Shapiro's study lies in his ability to "locate" Weinberg in each of the successive locales in which he found himself . . . based on a rich selection of contemporary and scholarly sources . . . a fine work of intellectual history and a worthy example of rabbinic biography written in accordance with the best standards of academic scholarship . . . Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy, an admirable piece of scholarship in its own right, is also part of an ongoing conversation within Orthodoxy that students of contemporary Jewry should find of no less interest than historians.' Gershon Bacon, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* `This first-class, definitive monograph . . . of genuine distinction . . . Beautifully executed . . . The dissertation itself deserves nothing but admiration. It is well-organized and well-written, intelligent in every aspect, lovingly researched but economically set forth . . . Shapiro tells us what we need to know and does not over-research or over-sell his subject. Here we have critical learning, not hagiography. Unlike equivalent studies of other Orthodox figures, however, Shapiro also preserves perspective, balance, proportion, and above all coherence, in telling the story. Here we have the definitive account of an important subject in the study of the twentieth-century history of Judaism. No-one has to go over this subject again. For a first book, that is as high praise as I can imagine-or for a tenth book, for that matter. Shapiro takes his place among the most promising and interesting and intelligent scholars of his generation.' Jacob Neusner, *Journal of Religion and Theology* `This excellent study . . . is more than a first-rate intellectual biography. It is a portrait of Orthodoxy in the modern world . . . Shapiro combines exhaustive research with exquisite scholarship; this is not self-serving hagiography but a balanced historical study deserving a very wide audience.' Stephen D. Benin, *Religious Studies* `Important . . . a remarkably well-written biography, and even those with little understanding of Orthodox Judaism will find it interesting and informative.' Jack Fischel, *Metrowest Jewish News* `The author demonstrates an impressive command of a broad range of primary and secondary source materials.' Robert Brody, *Journal of Jewish Studies* `Marc Shapiro has written a fascinating book . . . His erudition is impressive.' Alan Unterman, *Jewish Chronicle* `A refreshing pleasure . . . Shapiro's scholarly account of Weinberg's remarkable life and turbulent times happily avoids the panegyric tone that has too long dominated the field of rabbinic "biography", offering instead a detailed look at a rabbi of great learning and character who nonetheless strayed and erred about grave matters and who was, by the end of his life, a tragic and lonely figure . . . arguably the best biography of a twentieth-century rabbi yet written, a work of serious scholarship that greatly enriches our understanding of the history of European Judaism.' Allan Nadler, *Forward* `A full-scale study of the life and writings of Jehiel Weinberg . . . that goes a long way toward clearing up the mystery surrounding the man. Shapiro's signal contribution is to present Weinberg in the round: both the public and the private figure.' David Singer, *First Things* `We are indebted to Marc Shapiro for his brilliant work that brings to life this major halakhic personality.' Simcha Krauss, *Edah Journal* `With impeccable authority, Marc Shapiro has written an important account . . . an important historical study by a masterful Jewish scholar of a central aspect of Jewish life all too frequently neglected by secular and non-religious Jews . . . No understanding of modern Jewish history can be considered complete without an understanding of how Orthodox Judaism encountered the modern world. Shapiro's study of the life of Jehiel Jacob Weinberg is a major scholarly contribution to our comprehension of that world.' Richard L. Rubenstein, *Congress Monthly* `Marc Shapiro's excellent new study dedicated to the life and philosophy of Rabbi Weinberg is certainly one of the finest pieces of contemporary Jewish scholarship . . . This is a monumental study of a great man and a great rabbi. It breaks new ground in biographies of "Gedolei Israel" as Rabbi Weinberg is depicted as a human being, warts and all. Few events are glossed over-his family, philosophy, friends, and career are all discussed in detail without the usual embellishments. In addition, this study offers the reader a detailed view of the complexities of Orthodox Jewish life in the twentieth century . . . This book serves not only as a study of Rabbi Jehiel Weinberg, but as a memorial to the vanished world of German Orthodoxy.' Zalman Alpert, *Algemeiner Journal* `Shapiro's exemplary biography marks the onset of a new stage in biographical scholarship about leading Orthodox personalities . . . Shapiro's mastery of rabbinic and historical sources, the fact that no relevant archival or published source is untouched, the superb contextual studies, the 1,037 enriching and critical footnotes, make this a classic.' Gershon Greenberg, *AJS* `Thoroughly researched and highly readable . . . an excellently written book, highly recommended for all college-level libraries.' Yisrael Dubitsky, *AJL Newsletter* About the Author Marc B. Shapiro holds the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg

Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania. A graduate of Brandeis and Harvard universities, he is also the author of *The Limits of Orthodox Theology* (2004), published by the Littman Library.