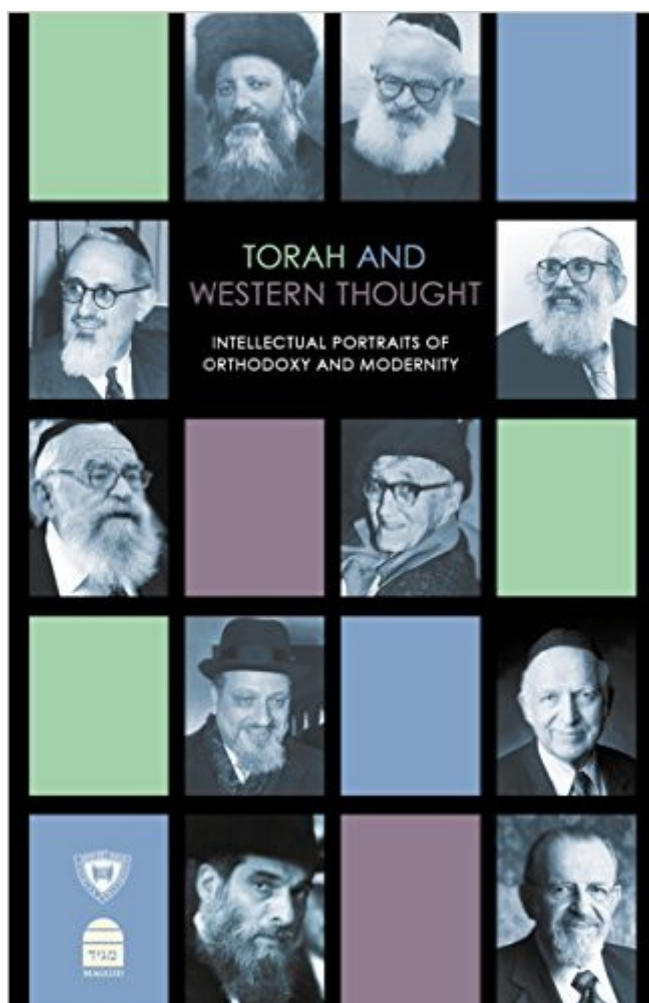


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# Torah And Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits Of Orthodoxy And Modernity



## Synopsis

Even as the twentieth century will be remembered for the West's loss of faith, Jewish Orthodoxy experienced in that very time a golden age of leaders and teachers who sought to bridge the world of Torah and that of the West. Some of these Torah figures were deeply impacted by an academic field, such as philosophy or literature. Others developed a Torah-based perspective on developments within the West, such as the rise of Zionism, democracy, or biotechnology. Still others reflected on the very nature of religious knowledge. The Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University invited twenty-first century thinkers to paint intellectual portraits of these luminaries, illustrating how each figure bridged the worlds of Torah and the West in a unique way. The essays are meant to inspire Orthodox Jews and all intellectually engaged individuals of faith to learn from the lives of these luminaries, and to have the courage to bridge these worlds as well. Great thinkers examined in this volume include Rabbi Yehuda Amital, Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, Prof. Nechama Leibowitz, Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein, Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Dr. Isadore Twersky. With essays by contemporary scholars Rabbi Shalom Carmy, Rabbi Dr. Carmi Horowitz, Dr. Alan Jotkowitz, Dr. Yehudah Mirsky, Dr. Daniel Rynhold, Rabbi Dr. David Shatz, Rabbi Dr. Meir Y. Soloveichik, Yael Unterman, Rabbi Dr. Itamar Warhaftig, Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, and Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier.

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## Customer Reviews

In this age when pulpit rabbis speak almost solely about medrish (despite the correct form being midrash) and the moralistic comments by medieval Bible and Talmud commentators rather than the true meaning of the biblical words and statements, it is a Godsend to read about modern highly respected intellectual rabbis and a woman who are part of this world and time, and not of some idealistic amorphous past. This volume offers an intellectual, yet easy to read, portraits of how Orthodox thinkers made both Torah and modern thinking part of their lives and how it affected their thinking and behavior. The three editors collected nine biographies of: Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook (1865-1935) who became the first chief rabbi of Israel, then still retaining the name the angered Romans gave the land, Palestine. He was a mystical thinker, but much of his writings are accessible to rationalists. Contrary to many pulpit rabbis, he stressed that not only Torah students but even farmers and other laborers are loved by God and should be thanked for their contribution to the survival of Judaism. Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog (1888-1959) who served as chief rabbi of Israel. I remember that in 1951, when my family were in Jerusalem to bury my grandfather, I asked him to give me his autograph on a Lira note (the early monetary system of Israel). He said he would like to do it but it would violate the law of bal tashchit, that we may not waste what God created. I replied that it was just the opposite. If he did not sign the note with his autograph, the note would disappear within a few years. If he signed it, it would be valuable, and would be saved. Rabbi Herzog laughed out loud. He signed the note and called in the Sephardic chief rabbi and others to tell them the story. The man had a sense of humor.

I am trying to think of some ways to describe this that are useful to most people. In one way, it feels like an undergraduate philosophy text-- as in, it goes on and on and on and yet there is very little (demonstrable) wheat for all the massive amount of chaff. In another way, it feels like an undergraduate English class-- as in, there are something like 36 million books that have been written and some academic can choose any half dozen (fiction ones) that are written by people that have been dead for a long time and speculate what they \*could\* have meant and thought about society as it exists today (that they never lived to see). And after you have worked out a consistent argument about what they might have thought/ meant..... \*so what\*? (Of course, you can only take these classes after you have taken out student loans in the same way that you can read someone's speculation about the true meaning of the VOLUMINOUS writings of these 10 different rabbis that are profiled here.) And after you have paid for this book of speculation of what some rabbi could have thought..... \*so what\*? The first chapter was about Rav Kook, but he was dead even before the State of Israel was properly independent (1935). What could he have thought about conditions

on this side of life is anyone's opinion. What else is the book not? It is not a consistent treatment of some finite number of topics and a discussion about what this ribble of rabbonim wrote on said topics. (The Shulchan Aruch is more consistent in this sense. The works of the Rif, the Rosh, and the Rambam were compared across a very large number of topics and conclusions were actually reached.

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