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Julian Morgenstern:
A Personal and Intellectual Biography

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

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Digest

This work examines Julian Morgenstern's life through several lenses: his formative years as a student, his professional involvement as professor and president of a rabbinical school, his biblical scholarship, his theology and his final years in retirement.

We begin by setting the stage. Chapter One examines the history of the Reform Movement up to Morgenstern's time, and the religious culture of the America of his childhood. Morgenstern's ideas parallel the dilemma of Reform -- universalism and particularism in conflict and concert with each other. His life provides an interesting prism through which to view the development of the Hebrew Union College and the American Reform Movement.

Chapter Two is a description of Morgenstern's early years, including his student days at the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College. It includes his graduate studies in Germany, and concludes with his time spent as a congregational rabbi in Lafayette, Indiana. From humble beginnings he rose to great prominence, and this chapter examines the means by which he was able to achieve early success.

Morgenstern's career as professor and president at HUC is the subject of Chapter Three. This is the largest chapter, chronicling both Morgenstern's history and the history of the institution he headed for more than a quarter of a century.

Chapters Four and Five focus, respectively, on Morgenstern's scholarship and ideology. He was a prodigious writer and a frequent orator, and we have record of his writings and addresses. These chapters analyze selections from both genres, and include references to how his works were accepted in their own day.

Chapter Six describes Morgenstern's years after his retirement, and concludes with an account of his last days. Nothing has previously been written about this period in his life, about which information was gathered from Morgenstern's relatives.

The work ends with an evaluation of Morgenstern's career, scholarship and ideology. We have the benefit of time to reflect back on his life and career, and to assess his contribution to the school, the people and the Movement with which he was affiliated.

Preface

Julian Morgenstern (1881-1976) was a rabbi, biblical scholar, historian and leader of the Reform movement for more than seventy years. He was Professor of Bible and Semitic Languages at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati from 1907 to 1947, and President of the College from 1922 to 1947.

Morgenstern enrolled as a student at Hebrew Union College in 1894, and was ordained in 1902. His was a nineteenth-century education that came to a conclusion at a time when the world was changing more rapidly than he could have imagined.

His leadership in the Reform movement came at a pivotal juncture, when the character of Reform Judaism was changing due to increased numbers of Eastern European Jews. How did Morgenstern respond to these changes? During Morgenstern's career, European Jewry was all but destroyed during the Holocaust. How did he respond to these atrocities? One year after his retirement, the State of Israel was born. What did this non-Zionist Jewish leader have to say on this critical issue? Reform Judaism was becoming more traditional. How did this Classical Reformer react? His field of expertise was the Bible. During his lifetime the nature of biblical studies changed. How did he respond? Were his ideas accepted by his peers?

Finally, Morgenstern was an ambitious leader. He took upon himself great

responsibilities and achieved fame in his own lifetime. Can he be separated from the history of the Hebrew Union College where he spent so much of his time and energies?

Let us examine Julian Morgenstern - the man, the rabbi, the scholar.

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Chapter One: Historical Background

In order to understand Julian Morgenstern, it is necessary to look at the history of the Reform movement up to his time. Morgenstern's thought was influenced by the founders and pioneers of Reform in Europe. For example, he relied on the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* model of scientific study developed by Leopold Zunz. He looked to the ideas of Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim, prominent German reformers of the nineteenth century, to help him form his own ideas about Liberal Judaism. Morgenstern also looked to his predecessors at the Hebrew Union College for inspiration, particularly Isaac Mayer Wise and Kaufmann Kohler.

As much as Morgenstern was influenced by the non-Jewish world of scholarship, he remained deeply planted in the Jewish world, and primarily in the world of American Reform. His ideology, as we shall see, was informed by examining ancient Judaism's place in the wider world, and drawing analogies from those findings to contemporary Judaism's place in the modern world.

In this chapter we will briefly survey the origins and development of Reform up to the period of Morgenstern's childhood. This analysis should guide the reader through the successive chapters that deal specifically with Morgenstern's life and career, which were played out against the backdrop of the wider Reform movement. Morgenstern's ideas parallel the dilemma of Reform -- universalism and particularism in conflict and concert with each other.

No specific date or event can be heralded as the beginning of the Reform Movement. The trend towards liberalization of theology, worship and practice began after the Enlightenment in Western Europe, and spread as ghetto walls fell and Jews began more and more to participate in Western Culture. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was the first prominent Jew to achieve a measure of reconciliation between modernity and Jewish tradition. It was the new openness of Germany to Jews which had allowed Mendelssohn access to Western literature and culture, so it makes sense that he would stress universalism and commonalities between Judaism and Christianity in his own writings and speeches. As Meyer points out, Mendelssohn "was a reformer of Jewish life, but - with slight exception - not a reformer of Judaism."[1] Thus he cannot be legitimately identified with the official beginnings of the Reform Movement, which in time would come to reform not only Jewish life, but the foundations and principles of Judaism as well.

It is important to note that the first reformers did not intend to create a denomination per se. Rather, they were attempting to reform all of Judaism to meet the needs and desires of the modern Jew, as well as the demands and practices of Western culture. When it became clear that there were large segments within Judaism that would not accept reforms of liturgy or theology, the Reform Movement felt free to institute far-reaching changes for those who would accept them. It took a number of years for the Reform Movement to emerge on its own

as an entity separate from traditional Judaism. As we shall see, Morgenstern foresaw the day when Reform Judaism would cease to exist and there would be "American Judaism," comprised of Reform, Conservatism and Modern Orthodoxy. His vision was of varieties of Judaism indigenous to different countries. Morgenstern understood Judaism to be a purely a religion, and not a nationality.

In the nineteenth century European Reform Judaism spread East and West. But it was in America that Reform met with its biggest success, and it was in that milieu that Julian Morgenstern was born, raised, and spent the vast majority of his life.

American Reform Judaism in the early nineteenth began with one congregation in Charleston, South Carolina. By the 1870's the "movement's" center was Cincinnati, where Isaac Mayer Wise prompted the creation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873), the Hebrew Union College (1875) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (1889). Numerous congregations throughout the United States affiliated with the UAHC, and HUC graduates went on to serve those pulpits and join the CCAR. It is important to note that Morgenstern spent his formative years in Cincinnati, as a child and as a student at HUC and the University of Cincinnati.

Direct Influences on Morgenstern

The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 defined Classical Reform Judaism, to which Morgenstern adhered his entire life. This Platform, written almost entirely by Kaufmann Kohler (who hired Morgenstern to teach at HUC), remains controversial because it differs so radically from traditional Judaism on the points of revelation and practice. Some excerpts from the Pittsburgh Platform will shed light on the type of Judaism with which Morgenstern identified:

> We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as priest of the one God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domains of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age, and at times clothing its conception of Divine Providence and justice dealing with man in miraculous narrative.
>
> We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state... We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.[2]

David Philipson, who was Morgenstern's congregational rabbi in Cincinnati, was also a staunch supporter of Classical Reform Judaism. Philipson was a rabid anti-Zionist and a powerful member of the HUC Board of Governors. His influence on Morgenstern was felt throughout the younger rabbi's career. Philipson was a member of the first graduating class of HUC, taught at the College for a time, and was a force in the movement for sixty years.

Indirect Influences

It is helpful to look at the general religious culture in America during Morgenstern's lifetime. As a child of the Midwest, Morgenstern was socialized in a Protestant and Catholic environment. His family's Judaism was not hidden, but the tendency was toward Americanization at the expense of particular Jewish identification. Cincinnati was a largely German city, and Bene Israel Congregation, with which the Morgenstern family chose to affiliate, was German as well. As has been noted, the Reform movement began as a Central European phenomenon, particularly German in nature. In the United States its earliest adherents were Central Europeans, and the Hebrew Union College and its patrons were predominantly German. Julian Morgenstern never was comfortable in settings with Eastern Europeans, a fact that would distance him from the vast majority of American Jews during his own lifetime.

Chapter Two: Early Life, the Years in School and the Pulpit Rabbinate

In 1861 the eight-year old Hannah Ochs came from Germany to Cincinnati with her family. Ten years later, Samuel Morgenstern came to the United States alone from the town of Frankfurt am Main. The two were married, and in time would have three children - a daughter and two sons. The Morgenstern children were Rose, Julian and Irvin. The elder of the two boys, Julian Morgenstern, was born on March 18, 1881.

The family lived in St. Francisville, Illinois when he was born, and in 1883 moved to Vincennes, Indiana, just ten miles away. Rabbi Leon Strauss lived in their home for several months, during which time he taught Julian to read English and Hebrew. Julian entered public school in 1886, and was advanced to the second grade because of his reading ability. In Vincennes, a small town of fewer than five thousand inhabitants, populated mostly by French immigrants, the family was called "Morningstar," the English translation of their German name.[1] Morgenstern did not attribute this informal and temporary name change to any act of antisemitism, but to the French unwillingness to pronounce German. His was a childhood free of antisemitic attacks or overtures; consequently he would always feel comfortable around non-Jews.

In 1887, Samuel and Hannah moved the family to Garden City, Kansas for one year. Later in life, his vocation and avocation clear, Julian Morgenstern would write that "In Garden City, Kansas, where there was no public library, and

where, not at all surprisingly, the family collection of books was exceedingly scanty, I had no wide choice in my reading. In consequence I read over and over again a small Bible History, as it was called... Whether that stimulated in me a love of the Bible and an interest in history, I cannot say; it may have."[2] Morgenstern wrote that because he moved so regularly as a small child, he had few regular playmates until they finally settled in Cincinnati. Consequently, his leisure time was spent in the house reading what was available. He did get along well with other children and found great pleasure in social interaction, but he was a bookish child by his own admission.

In Vincennes, where there was a synagogue, the Morgenstern children had been able to receive some Jewish education. But in Garden City, where the Jewish population outside of their home was practically non-existent, Morgenstern wrote that his "formal religious education was nil."[3] Other than fasting on Yom Kippur, eating matzah during Passover, and lighting candles during Chanukah, there was no Jewish ritual in the home. The man who was to become president of Hebrew Union College did not even attend a Passover seder until 1902, shortly before his ordination.[4] As a result, he would always feel slightly uncomfortable in traditional Jewish settings. In autobiographical statements written at the end of his career, he bemoaned his own lack of training in ceremonies and customs, especially when compared to that of his colleagues and students who were raised in Europe, or in traditional American homes. As we shall see, he did endeavor to change the

curriculum of Hebrew Union College to help make students with backgrounds similar to his more comfortable with traditional Jewish observances.

At the age of seven, Julian moved with his parents and siblings to Cincinnati, Ohio. Hannah Ochs Morgenstern's family was still there, and Samuel was able to find steady employment as a bookkeeper for a wholesale clothing company in that city. His son described him as having tried his hand "at grocery, notions, candy, clothing and lace, with only moderate success."[5] Not terribly successful at business ventures himself, Samuel would seek another occupation for his elder son.

With its large Jewish population, as well as the Hebrew Union College and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Cincinnati offered many more opportunities for Jewish education than had St. Francisville, Vincennes or Garden City. It was the American center of Reform Judaism, with which Morgenstern would identify for the rest of his life. In Cincinnati the Morgensterns affiliated with Bene Israel Congregation, whose rabbi, David Philipson, was a prominent leader locally and nationally. At Bene Israel on Mound Street, Morgenstern's formal Jewish instruction began. He attended Sunday school, and was confirmed with his class at the age of thirteen, reading publicly from the Torah for the first time. It was 1894, and Samuel Morgenstern was concerned about what direction his son's educational endeavors should take. As Julian wrote later, "The one thing... which I had demonstrated clearly, at least to the satisfaction, or lack of satisfaction, of my parents, was that I was in no way qualified for a business

career."[6] So at the age of thirteen he entered Hebrew Union College. His entrance was due in large part to the tutoring provided by senior rabbinical student Isaac E. Marcuson, and to the influence that Rabbi Philipson had with the Morgenstern family, encouraging Samuel to send his son to his alma mater. Philipson was also a member of the faculty of the College, and would remain an important part of Morgenstern's life (sometimes as a thorn in his side) for more than forty years.

Hebrew Union College was less than twenty years old when Morgenstern began his training there in 1894. It was located in a converted house in downtown Cincinnati, and Isaac Mayer Wise, already in his mid-seventies, was still president of the small institution. Morgenstern spent eight years at HUC studying towards ordination. From 1896-1901, he was also a student at the University of Cincinnati. He was a popular student with evident leadership ability, being elected president of his class at the university for his senior year at UC. He was president of the Students' Athletic Association, and played football for the University during one game (which they lost). He was also asked by Acting HUC President Mielziner to read one of Isaac M. Wise's addresses at the first Founder's Day in 1902.

His years as a student at HUC were not unpleasant. "I always managed to get good grades, though it could hardly be said that I was an outstanding student... I became a rabbi, I suppose, more by inertia than anything else."[7] He never felt a "calling" throughout his student years, and admitted to skipping more than a few classes during those years, and to playing pranks more than studying. "I cannot say that I enjoyed my studies at the Hebrew Union College, or that I was a

particularly apt pupil. I cannot say even that I found these studies interesting. The then faculty of the College were all estimable, kindly gentlemen, but, with the exception of Dr. Isaac M. Wise, its founder and first president, and the saintly, beloved Dr. Moses Mielziner, not one impressed me as a stimulating person or even as a good teacher."[8] What Morgenstern did take from his years at HUC were memories of positive relationships with his peers and, once he was able to articulate them, goals and dreams for how he would like the school to operate and educate its students in later years.

Morgenstern was the associate editor of the *Hebrew Union College Journal* in 1902, and wrote two pieces that were published that year, "The Psychology of Zionism" and "The Revival of Grace Before and After Meals." They provide some understanding of his ideas as a student.

His piece on Zionism criticizes the majority of Jewish nationalists for choosing Zionism out of "pure feeling," rather than as a result of an "earnest and conscientious search for a better plan."[9] He asserts that sentiment rather than reason is the prime motivating force for most people, and that this is inadequate for real progress. He accuses Zionists of rationalizing Zionism after they have pledged their loyalty to it, rather than examining it fully before becoming involved. This article is not surprising, since it was not until after the State of Israel became a reality that Morgenstern desisted from criticizing Zionism.

Having been raised with practically no ritual, it is interesting that Morgenstern would write an article on the importance of prayer at mealtime. Just

one month after his article on Zionism, he wrote that "Rationalism is alright in its place, and certainly it has its place in religion. Yet no creed can exist entirely without ceremonial."[10] He asserts that rabbis at that time were proposing home ceremonies for Reform Jews, but were not specifying what ceremonies would be appropriate. Morgenstern offered mealtime prayer as a possibility for "expressing our thankfulness to God." He proposed a simple, English prayer rather than the traditional *motzi* and *birkat hamazon.*

In the spring of 1902, Julian Morgenstern was ordained as a rabbi by Mielziner, the acting president of HUC after Wise's death in 1900. "I became a rabbi at the age of twenty-one with, I am quite sure, the most minimal and abysmal Jewish knowledge of any rabbi ever ordained through all Judaism's history."[11] Morgenstern had no idea what direction or shape his new rabbinate should take, so he followed his parents' urgings and went to Germany to meet his father's sisters and their children. There he learned the German language over the summer, and in September of 1902 he met up with Judah Leon Magnes in Heidelberg. Magnes had been ordained at HUC in 1900, and was studying for his doctorate in Germany. Morgenstern credits Magnes with inspiring him to study Semitic languages. He studied Arabic grammar for two months and then began his formal training in Berlin; he would continue in Heidelberg for his doctorate in Semitics.

Feeling that his preparation for the rabbinate at HUC had been lacking, he registered for two courses at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*

in Berlin. The Hochschule was the preeminent liberal seminary in Europe, but Morgenstern found it to be "both dull and unrewarding."[12] He left after a very short time, uninspired and more than a little put off by the whole experience. In his early twenties, he was searching for meaning and consistency in his studies. Uncomfortable because of his lack of experience with Jewish ritual and practice, and regretting his apathetic years at HUC, he was slowly emerging as an eager participant in directing his own education.

Critical study of the Bible became popular in the late nineteenth century, principally the Wellhausen School and its documentary hypothesis (see Chapter Four). Germany was, and is today, a center of biblical criticism. Though his training was not in Bible per se, the subjects he studied are closely related to the Bible. They all rely on a critical study of the Ancient Near East and its customs and peoples. Morgenstern studied in Berlin and Heidelberg with leading Assyriologists and scholars of the Ancient Near East who impressed upon him the importance of critical analysis. The significance of biblical criticism in the life and thought of Morgenstern cannot be overstated. Christian theologies in the nineteenth century used the argument that the Torah was not divinely revealed as a polemic against the validity of Judaism in the modern world. How could Judaism be justified in the light of modern science that can all but disprove its historical authenticity? Jewish scholars appropriated methods of criticism, in hand with reforms of ritual and theology, to make Judaism valid in light of these polemics.

For Morgenstern, the science of biblical criticism and an analysis and reshaping of the world that produced the Bible were at the core of his religious understanding.

In Heidelberg, Morgenstern was finally satisfied with what he was doing. "During this year in Heidelberg my ideas and convictions at last began to crystallize. A system of Jewish belief and faith, in positive accord with the results of my studies, and a program of Jewish life and service were now taking definite form."[13] Perhaps by accident and the influence of meeting with Magnes, Morgenstern found his niche in the historical study of the Bible and the Ancient Near East.

Though he confessed to detesting philosophy because of a poor professor at the University of Cincinnati, Morgenstern would become an important ideologist in his own right. In Germany, his thoughts on revelation and religion were beginning to take shape: "No doubt largely as the result of Semitic studies, particularly in the field of Assyriology, it began to dawn upon me with steadily increasing insistence that not all the statements and narratives of the Bible, not even those of the Torah, the Pentateuch, could be literally true and objectively historic."[14] This realization would guide his further academic interests as a critical Bible scholar. As a thinker, he attempted to draw lessons for the modern world from the stories and narratives he found in scripture. The questionable historicity was not the important piece, since the texts themselves held meaning beyond their own sources.

Armed with a Ph.D. in Assyriology from the University of Heidelberg, and an English-language dissertation entitled "The Doctrine of Sin in the Babylonian Religion," Morgenstern returned to the United States in 1904. He had been offered the opportunity to do further research in Assyriology at the British Museum, but declined in order to return home.

One reason why he struggled to complete his European doctorate in just two years was his engagement to Helen Thorner of Macon, Georgia. The two met in 1899 in her hometown when Morgenstern was on his way back to Cincinnati from Jacksonville, Florida where he served his first High Holy Day pulpit. Morgenstern had stopped in Macon to visit the local rabbi, his former tutor Isaac E. Marcuson, whose wife was Helen Thorner's sister. Julian Morgenstern and Helen Thorner were engaged when he was still a student in Cincinnati, and were married in Macon at the Thorner home in April 1905.

Morgenstern's long-awaited return to the United States reunited him with his family and his fiancée, and brought him to his first and only assignment in the congregational rabbinate -- Congregation Ahavat Achim in Lafayette, Indiana. The Morgenstern's only child, a daughter named Jean Hannah, was born there in 1906. By this time Morgenstern was in his mid-twenties, and was confident that the rabbinate was right for him, and he for it. "Not once did I ask myself whether I had done wisely in becoming a rabbi. I felt now that it was my calling, in the most literal sense, that God had indeed summoned me to His service and had guided me in my preparation for it, that he had steered me somehow in all my

drifting, and brought me into the right channel."[15] This was a far cry from the boy whose father and rabbi determined that his lack of business acumen alone made him suitable for the rabbinate.

His time in Lafayette, Indiana helped Morgenstern to further shape his philosophy of Jewish practice and his skills as a teacher and preacher. It would also be beneficial later in his career when he would make it his business to have his hand in rabbinical placement for HUC graduates. On the years spent in Lafayette, Morgenstern waxed sentimental, calling them "happy in every way." Bernard J. Bamberger, a rabbi who served Temple Israel in Lafayette some years after Morgenstern was there, wrote that "When members of the congregation spoke of their former Rabbis, the name that invariably called forth the warmest and most affectionate comments was that of Dr. Julian Morgenstern. - Not because of his scholarly attainments or his fame as President of the Hebrew Union College. They remembered him as a kind and tireless pastor and friend, who had given them so much of himself."[16]

His time in Lafayette was limited to three years because, in 1907, he was invited to join the faculty of Hebrew Union College to teach Bible and Semitic languages.

Chapter Three: Professorship and Presidency

Though his student days at Hebrew Union College were by his own admission unremarkable, Julian Morgenstern's maturation between 1902 and 1907 led to an invitation to join the faculty of his alma mater.

HUC in 1907 was still located in its first permanent home, a converted mansion on West Sixth Street in downtown Cincinnati. Kaufmann Kohler had been serving as its president since 1903, and thus had not known Morgenstern as a student. Indeed, by 1907 Kohler had managed to radically alter the curriculum of Morgenstern's alma mater so that it would conform to his own ideology and practice. He eliminated the study of Modern Hebrew as well as the required study of Semitic languages, and curtailed the importance of Talmud in the curriculum. Having served a long and distinguished pulpit career before coming to HUC, Kohler was keenly sensitive to the demands of the congregational rabbi, and his course of study for students reflects those interests. Courses in sociology, pedagogy and homiletical *midrashim* were first taught during the early years of Kohler's administration. He also introduced biblical criticism into the curriculum of HUC, something which Wise had forbidden. Kohler's chief interest was the prayer service and its attendant sermon.

Unlike his predecessor Isaac Mayer Wise, Kaufmann Kohler was a religious thinker of deep conviction. A Classical Reform Jew, and the author of much of the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 that defined Classical Reform Judaism,

he placed prophetic Judaism and universalism far above particularistic ritual and a narrow interpretation of Jewish law. He forbade the use of *tallit* or *kippah* among the students, particularly during the daily worship in the HUC chapel which was intended to inculcate in the students a vision of Classical Reform as he saw it. Academic freedom among the students was limited insofar as it interfered with this vision. On the point of Zionism Kohler was even more rigid: hope for a return to Zion was antithetical to his understanding of Reform Judaism and was suppressed at HUC.

Because of his strong beliefs on so many topics, Kohler sought for students young men without formed opinions of their own whom he could impress with his ideas. Likewise with members of the faculty, Kohler would not tolerate convictions contrary to his own; in 1906-7, three professors who were sympathetic to Zionism left HUC at least in part as a result of ideological clashes with the president.

One of the most dramatic losses HUC suffered was Max Margolis, the Professor of Bible. Margolis was an experienced teacher and bible critic, who would go on to serve as editor-in-chief of the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Bible in 1917. (Ironically, Kohler also served as a member of the editorial board). To replace Margolis, Kohler chose Julian Morgenstern.

The permanent faculty that Julian Morgenstern joined consisted of the following five men: Kohler (theology), Sigmund Mannheimer (Hebrew), Ephraim Feldman (philosophy), Gotthard Deutsch (history), Moses Buttenwieser (Bible)

and David Neumark (philosophy). Within a few years, there would be changes and additions to these ranks as Kohler settled into the presidency and reshaped the College. Just twenty-six years old in 1907, Morgenstern was the youngest of the faculty, yet his European doctorate gave him prestige despite his youth and inexperience as a teacher. His older colleagues came from various backgrounds, most having been born in Europe and reared in Orthodoxy. As a native American who was not raised in a traditional Jewish home or rigorous academic milieu, Morgenstern most closely resembled the typical HUC student during the Kohler years. Toward the end of his presidency Kohler would appoint two of his own young ordinees to the faculty, namely Solomon B. Freehof and Jacob Rader Marcus. Morgenstern, Freehof and Marcus would all live into their nineties, and exert profound influence on the Reform Movement.

Though Morgenstern was happy in his pulpit rabbinate, he was ready to leave after three years. His interest in academics had been fostered in Germany, and was all but being wasted on his sermons in Lafayette. "And so when... I heard that there was a vacancy upon the faculty of the College, I wrote to Dr. Kaufmann Kohler... and made formal application for the post."[1] On June 28, 1907, the secretary of the Board of Governors, acting on that body's behalf, sent Morgenstern the following letter: "Dear Sir: I take pleasure in advising you that upon recommendation of President Kohler, you have been appointed a member of the Faculty for one year at a salary of $2100 per annum, the term beginning September First."[2] In response, Morgenstern wrote: "Gentlemen: In reply to your

communication of the 28th... informing me of my appointment to the Faculty of the College, allow me to express my appreciation of the honor thus conferred upon me, and my pleasure in thus being able to return to and serve my Alma Mater, and our Judaism. I need not say that it shall be my ambition to serve the College truly, and in every way possible."[3] Morgenstern was hired specifically to teach Bible and Semitic languages. He later wrote: "I entered upon this new service with enthusiasm and with the firm resolve that, so far as lay within my power, my students should get in their preparation for the rabbinate all that which I had missed. Actually, I should have been filled with misgiving and trepidation, for, as I realize now, my preparation for teaching at the College, even with two years abroad and such research as I had been able to pursue in the midst of my rabbinic duties, was far from adequate. Fortunately, I had learned how to work."[4] This discipline would allow him to balance his many competing responsibilities throughout his career.

As a young professor, he was generally well-liked by his students. In his earlier years at the College he was not much older than many of them, having been ordained just five years before he joined the faculty. Among the students he earned the nickname "Morgy," though none would call him that directly. In the 1920's there was a near revolt amongst students over Morgenstern's attempt to impose discipline.[5] He knew the students intimately and in a variety of settings: classroom, dormitory, student pulpits, rabbinic placement. Naturally, hostilities toward the College in particular and the Reform rabbinate in general would be

directed toward him. Nevertheless, he recalled "I think that the students of the College felt that I understood them, and so they were drawn to me and I to them... I knew the soul of a student of the College, and especially of one American born and educated, and I sought earnestly to minister to it."[6] In reality, he had his "boys" who were loyal to him, and would curry his favor.

Because he had spent some time in the pulpit, serving congregants' needs, delivering sermons, and working with clergy of other faiths, Morgenstern attempted to tailor his lessons to reflect the reality the students would face upon ordination. According to one student:

> Though most of his career was was spent in academic surroundings and in academic pursuits, he remained close to the spirit of the average Jewish layman. He understood and respected uncomplicated people. His own simplicity baffled many students of this writer's generation, who themselves were driven by the self-conscious urge to become intellectuals and esthetes. For here was a plain Jew who did not aspire to be either a philosopher or a poet, but was content with the straightforward piety of *gemilus chasodim* [deeds of lovingkindness] and *talmud Torah* [study of sacred texts].[7]

Another student wrote that "Looking back at my years of study at HUC (1935-1940), I would say that there were not many inspirational moments. The only teachers that I recall as very good were Morgenstern, who taught a marvelous course on Amos, and Dr. Marcus, who was an excellent teacher of history."[8] Still, there was a good deal of non-practical grammar and text emendation that went into his Bible classes. His studies in Germany had led him to *Wissenschaft* (scientific) research and diligence, and a dedication to an unimpassioned reading

of the ancient document. But he injected a good deal of himself and his own ideas into his courses, some would say even too much of himself. His student Sylvan Schwartzman, who would later join the faculty himself, recalled that "In (Morgenstern's) wonderful course on Amos, some of the students began to feel that, due to the considerable number of emendations that the professor was introducing, they were getting an excellent course in Morgenstern, but very little of Amos."[9]

In his early years at HUC he published little, a few pieces in the *CCAR Yearbook* and the *HUC Monthly*. He had two articles in the *CCAR Yearbook* before becoming president of HUC: "The Significance of the Bible for Reform Judaism (1908) and "The Foundation of Israel's History" (1915). He was hired as an assistant professor, promoted to an associate professor in 1910, and full professor in 1913. He was to become quite prolific as his philosophy of Judaism and his approach to the Bible became clearer. He was building a following among the students at the College, and was seeking leadership roles within the faculty; in 1909 he began taking the minutes at faculty meetings as secretary.[10] He was also active in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, serving as its corresponding secretary in 1907-8, and recording secretary from 1908-12. In his capacity as corresponding secretary, just after being hired by HUC, he faced the uncomfortable task of mediating between those faculty who were members of the CCAR, and their patrons who served on the Board of Governors. He was compelled to ask the Board of Governors to cover the expenses of faculty

members to attend the CCAR convention, which request the Board promptly denied. Despite any embarrassment that his dual role might have caused, Morgenstern remained active in the rabbinical organization as well as the Alumni Association of the College. He published articles in the *CCAR Yearbook*, and actively participated in the debates on resolutions before the Conference. He appeared to be a voice for reconciliation during the deliberations, seeking to help both sides to look at a given subject from an objective point of view.

Morgenstern's activities in the CCAR, or at least his voice in the debates on resolutions, diminished after his election to the presidency of the College. He removed himself from participating in the deliberations once his position of leadership at HUC was secured. During the CCAR's 1922 discussion of the possible ordination of women rabbis, for example, he rose only to say that as acting president of HUC he could not participate in the debate. He feared that his statements at the Conference would undermine his authority with the faculty, who had already discussed the matter. His concern with the issue of the ordination of the women was whether or not it was practical at that time.[11]

The support of rabbinical graduates of HUC would be necessary for him to become president, especially because it would be from their ranks that any other potential candidates would be drawn. While Kohler had been ordained in Germany even before HUC was founded, by the time of his retirement the school had existed long enough to produce graduates old enough, and with experience enough, to succeed him in the presidency.

Clearly Morgenstern wanted to succeed Kohler. He placed himself in positions of leadership and authority, including becoming president of the HUC Alumni Association in 1917, and chair of the CCAR Nominations Committee. He was gathering support among the Board of Governors, and positioning himself to run for the presidency of HUC.

In 1921, Kaufmann Kohler was seventy-eight years old, and had been president of HUC for eighteen years. Even before he announced his retirement that year, Morgenstern had desired the office. "I must have been at the College for ten years or more before the thought suggested itself that I might aspire to an even larger and higher service... And so the ambition was born within me to become the successor of Dr. Kohler."[12] His activities within and without the College proper served to further this goal.

At the June 29, 1921 meeting of the Board of Govemors, the officially appointed committee to choose Kohler's successor recommended that William Rosenau of Baltimore become president of Hebrew Union College. Two members of the committee, Carl Pritz and Oscar Berman, wrote a dissenting recommendation suggesting that Morgenstern be elected Acting President until a more thorough search could be conducted. After much debate it was decided to postpone the vote until after the High Holy Days, and to ask Kohler to remain in office for the time being. Kohler assented to the Board's wish, and the matter was taken up again on November 1 at the regular Board of Governors meeting. The

committee charged with recommending a successor reported that no agreement had been reached among its members. Later that same day, in a special meeting of the Board (without the Advisory Board present), the members voted ten to seven to elect an Acting President until a permanent successor could be decided. Morgenstern, David Philipson and Henry Englander[13] were all proposed. Philipson, who was present at the meeting, declined. Philipson wanted the office very much, but knew that he did not have the votes to win. The votes were tallied as follows: ten for Morgenstern, six for Englander and two for Philipson. A motion was then made and passed to record Morgenstern's election as unanimous.[14]

On November 3, 1921, the same secretary of the Board of Governors who had signed the letter offering him a professorship fourteen years earlier signed the following letter: "My dear Dr. Morgenstern: I have the honor to inform you that at a meeting of the Board of Governors held on Tuesday, November 1, 1921, you were elected Acting President of the Hebrew Union College to take effect immediately. It was also voted that the salary of the Acting President be fixed at a rate of Seven Thousand Dollars per annum, payable monthly."[15] This was the same salary that Kohler was receiving. Morgenstern accepted the offer immediately, and set about implementing plans for the school, which he had begun to devise years earlier. In his report to the Board of Governors on December 27, 1921, fewer than two months after his appointment, Morgenstern recommended the following changes: an emphasis on Hebrew grammar, summer study for

rabbinical candidates, general exams in Hebrew language and Bible for all students, and a reorganization of classes to make the best use of student and faculty time. He also suggested that faculty appointments be made in the fields of Midrash/Homiletics, Theology, History, Bible and Sociology.[16] In April 1922 he recommended to the Board of Governors four new faculty members in these fields. Most notably, the chair in Jewish Sociology was created for practical work in the rabbinate.

The Acting President's efforts did not go unnoticed; in May of 1922 William Rosenau, who was still being considered for the presidency, wrote to Alfred Cohen, the President of the Board of Governors:

> Since then [the early part of November, 1921] he [Morgenstern] has given excellent service and demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that his selection [as Acting President] has greatly benefited our institution. He has, in accordance with present needs, not only helped to reorganize the curriculum to be put into execution next September, but he has also made valuable suggestions to this end. He has reorganized the faculty, nominated new candidates, whom the Board has elected, and thusly proved his marked academic efficiency and his broad academic judgement. He has won for himself both the confidence of the student body, and as I learn from various sources, that of the Alumni of our Alma Mater.[17]

Rosenau went on to recommend Morgenstern's election as President permanently. Morgenstern was elected to succeed Kohler permanently in the fall of 1922, when he was forty-one years old.

Perhaps as a result of Morgenstern's "dark horse" candidacy for the presidency, whereby he sneaked past the likely candidates Philipson and Rosenau,

he knew that the support of these two leading rabbis would be crucial to any success he might have. Or more accurately, their lack of support, or even attempts to undermine him, would be disastrous. According to Jacob Rader Marcus, Morgenstern was beholden to Philipson and Rosenau throughout his tenure, and would under no circumstances refuse anything or any request to either of them.[18] Rosenau lived in Baltimore, and was not as problematic as the Cincinnati-based Philipson. Nearly thirty years earlier Philipson had urged Julian Morgenstern to attend HUC as a student. Now the younger rabbi had won an important contest over his mentor, and the older rabbi would never forgive him for it. As the following excerpt from Philipson's diary in December 1927 indicates, he harbored resentment against his student who had beaten him for the job that Philipson coveted:

> There have been diagnoses of the situation [lack of spirituality in Reform Judaism] by more or less capable spiritual doctors. I have just read one set forth by M.[orgenstern] at the International Conference of Liberal Jews, held in London in July, 1926. Knowing the man as I do, his statements are really to laugh. He has not a grain of spirituality in his make-up. His talk about the lack of spirituality in Reform Judaism is little short of *hutzpah*, coming from such a source. When Montefiore or Mattuck, men of fine spiritual insight, deplore this condition, their words deserve respectful consideration. But not M.'s. A scheming politician, who reached his present high position by wire-pulling methods.[19]

This was not a ringing endorsement of the new president of HUC, by any means. As a member of the Board of Governors, Philipson continually placed obstacles in Morgenstern's way.The strained relationship continued until Philipson's death.

The new president's goal from the outset was to enlarge the faculty and the scope of the curriculum of the Hebrew Union College. Above all, he sought to provide students with what his own rabbinical education had been missing, both in content and inspiration. He had his hand in nearly every aspect of HUC during his presidency. He handled admissions, decided upon the curriculum, taught courses and controlled placement of graduates. He even umpired the baseball games held on the back lawn of the College. A student reminisced that "The senior class dinner was held at the home of Dr. and Mrs. Morgenstern where many of the seniors encountered for the first time artichokes and finger bowls. The finesse that the men used on these was alleged to determine their future pulpits."[20] He was interested in the lives of his students, and sought to shape them, to some extent, in his image. One of his last ordinees recalls that "He represented the Midwestern Protestant rabbi. He thought that students from the big city needed to be taught manners, and he instituted strict rules in the chapel and dormitory."[21] Students were expected to remain unmarried, or lose financial assistance. The president required tie and jacket in his classes, and expected attendance at chapel services by faculty and students.

Morgenstern balanced all of his duties and interests well. His mornings were spent at his home on Burton Woods Lane in North Avondale, writing and doing research for scholarly books and articles. The afternoons were dedicated to running Hebrew Union College. This he did from his office, and with the help of one secretary. His time at the College was divided between teaching his courses,

meeting with members of the Board of Governors, corresponding with rabbis in the field and applicants for admission, traveling to meet with donors and speak at UAHC congregations, and raising funds for the College. This last task was difficult, and would help lead to Morgenstern's early retirement.

Raising money was not Morgenstern's specialty in any event. He had come from a very modest and humble home, and being a Cincinnatian, the local aristocracy on the Board of Governors knew this. Money was raised during the boom of the 1920's, and a dormitory and gymnasium were built on the campus. Plans were made to expand the College even more considerably, and a successful fundraising drive was executed towards that end. Adolph S. Ochs and Julius Rosenwald spearheaded the campaign that raised more than $4,000,000 by 1929. Those funds enabled the College to survive the Depression, though expansion was necessarily delayed. Economic circumstances in general were not in Morgenstern's favor for most of his presidency.

As president, Morgenstern chaired the faculty of the Hebrew Union College. He exercised complete control, yet would back down if the faculty "bared its fangs." Likewise, if the students presented a united front on any issue, Morgenstern would acquiesce to their demands. According to Marcus, Morgenstern never willingly promoted a member of the faculty, and did not offer pay raises.[22] He seems never to have been a peer of the faculty members during his presidency, remaining distant from them as he administered the school.

During the 1930's and 1940's, it became clear to the Jews of America that Hitlerism was destroying European Judaism. This was a difficult position for many in the Reform Movement in America because Germany had been the birthplace of Reform Judaism, and several members of the HUC faculty (including Morgenstern himself) had studied in Germany. Others on the faculty, or in Reform congregations throughout North America, had been born in Europe. Nearly all still had relatives there.

For Morgenstern, whose student days at Heidelberg had been a time of crucial personal and academic growth, his connection to Europe and European Judaism was strong. He sought a way to help save some students, rabbis and scholars through his position at HUC. It was his finest hour, and would prove successful, elevating not only his own stature, but that of the College as well. First-rate students and scholars were brought to Cincinnati to continue their work.

The Refugee Scholars Project, as it came to be known, began when five rabbinical students from the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the liberal rabbinical seminary in Berlin (by then demoted by the Nazis to the status of *Lehranstalt*, or "institute") were invited to continue their studies at HUC.[23] These five men came to Cincinnati in 1935 with the intention of returning to Germany when conditions there improved. Decidedly more traditional in their approach to Reform than were the majority of students at that time, they were welcomed by Morgenstern and permitted to continue their traditional practices at HUC.[24] One

student from the Vienna Jewish Theological Seminary was also brought to Cincinnati to study for ordination.[25]

The Refugee Scholars Project also enabled Morgenstern to bring eleven academics to Cincinnati, saving many of them from almost certain death in Nazi Germany. By taking advantage of HUC's position as an academic institution, Morgenstern was able to arrange for these men to come to Cincinnati with the promise of work. This is especially remarkable when considered in light of the times -- the Great Depression had forced down faculty salaries and student enrollment had dropped. Nevertheless, conscience impelled Morgenstern and the Board of Governors to make room for more during those tight times. Because of his tireless and largely unnoticed efforts, Abraham Joshua Heschel, the most notable of the scholars saved, called Morgenstern "the least appreciated man in American Jewry."[26]

The program to save refugee scholars was expanded just before *Kristallnacht* in late 1938. At the Board of Governors meeting on October 20, 1938, Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof of Pittsburgh, a former member of the College faculty, recommended that a committee be formed to determine what further efforts HUC could venture in this regard.[27] It was decided to create a "Jewish College in Exile" at the Cincinnati campus, where refugee scholars could spend two to three years in residence. Morgenstern contacted Ismar Elbogen, who had been affiliated with the *Hochschule* in Berlin but was then already living in New York, regarding these plans. Elbogen provided a list of men who might be eligible

and interested, from whom Morgenstern chose nine: Alexander Guttmann, Franz Landsberger, Albert Lewkowitz, Isaiah Sonne, Eugen Täubler, Max Wiener, Walter Gottschalk, Abraham Heschel and Franz Rosenthal.[28] In the following months Morgenstern would enlist the aid of other rabbis and lay-leaders to intercede on these men's behalf with the State Department in order to obtain visas for their entry into this country.

The primary obstacles in bringing these scholars to the United States was convincing the State Department that they were members of a teaching faculty, rather than just research professors, and that the *Lehranstalt* was indeed an institution of higher learning on par with Hebrew Union College. The laws forbade emigration for scholars going to a school of higher status than that with which they had been affiliated in Europe. As has been mentioned, the *Lehranstalt* was formerly the esteemed *Hochschule* until the Nazis unjustly and arbitrarily demoted its status. Unfortunately, due to impediments from the State Department and the difficulties encountered with United States consulates abroad, not all of these men were able to escape. Many of them, however, did come to America and to Cincinnati. Several remained at Hebrew Union College until their deaths or retirement.

Like the rabbinical students from Berlin and Vienna, these scholars were accustomed to a Liberal Judaism more conservative than that of the American-born and trained students and faculty at HUC. Heschel, in fact, came to the realization that American Reform was not for him, and took a job at the

Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York. Many of the scholars were Zionists, and had come from traditional homes. Their arrival changed the composition of the faculty in both style and sheer number.

Just as Morgenstern was settling into his presidency in 1922, a rival rabbinical school was coming into existence in New York City. Stephen S. Wise created the Jewish Institute of Religion as a seminary intended to serve all of American Jewry. Wise himself had been accepted to study at HUC, but had chosen instead to study for private ordination in Europe after earning his doctorate at Columbia University. He was an ardent Zionist, and founded the JIR for like-minded students whose ideas would not have been welcomed at HUC during the presidency of Kohler, who had earlier purged the faculty of Zionists. Ironically, though Morgenstern was at the time a non-Zionist, he created an atmosphere that allowed for freedom of choice and expression on the issue of Zionism. Indeed, there were Zionist students and faculty members at HUC throughout Morgenstern's tenure.

Wise's lay leaders met with representatives of the College while the JIR was still on the drawing board to attempt to work out a cooperative effort between the JIR, HUC, and the UAHC. There were disputes and misunderstandings over intentions, funds and the nature of governance, and so no agreement was reached.[29] With the collaboration of Wise's Free Synagogue, the JIR opened its doors and soon procured prestigious faculty and guest lecturers, as well as students

for the rabbinical program. Without question, many of those students would have otherwise gone to HUC. In fact, Wise had planned a summer school program in 1920 with the hopes of attracting HUC students to his nascent JIR. He was not timid about his intentions, belittling HUC and its faculty openly and in the presence of those gathered for the summer school.[30]

In time, relations became more cordial between the rival schools, and cooperation was possible. Wise accepted an honorary degree from HUC in 1945, and indicated to Morgenstern an expression of cooperation "On behalf of the highest interest of liberal Judaism."[31] In 1947 the JIR granted honorary degrees to both Morgenstern and Nelson Glueck, his successor.

For more than twenty-five years the Jewish Institute of Religion operated independently, with Wise as its president. During that time Wise was also occupied with issues of politics in this country and the creation of the State of Israel. The Jewish Institute of Religion cooperated with HUC and the Jewish Theological Seminary in bringing Ismar Elbogen to the United States. With Wise's health failing in the late 1940's, and Morgenstern's retirement imminent, it was decided to merge HUC and the JIR into one school, which was consummated in 1950, with two campuses. HUC's new president, Nelson Glueck, was chosen to head the combined institution.[32]

Openness was a hallmark of Morgenstern's time in office. He allowed variant opinions to be expressed from the chapel's pulpit, and chose faculty

members whose ideas ranged from the traditional to the radical. He recognized the need for positive outlets by students, and encouraged student publications and physical activity. For the dedication of the gymnasium, he wrote the lead article for the *HUC Monthly* in April 1924, urging exercise for everyone at HUC, both faculty and students. He confessed to tipping the scales at 204 pounds before realizing that physical activity was important to keep the mind sharp! A dormitory was built on the campus so students could spend more time studying and less time commuting from boarding houses in Avondale. The dorm became the center of life for most students, and was in some cases nicer than the homes from which they had come.

Not all was bright, however, during Morgenstern's administration. As an autocrat, he was the object of scorn by those disillusioned with the College, especially the students. He exercised almost total control over their lives as students, and his hand continued to guide them after ordination as long as he managed rabbinic placement. He also continued to teach courses in Bible and chair the faculty after his election to the presidency. Indeed, his hand was in every project at HUC. From time to time student emotions would flare, and Morgenstern would have to respond. In 1925, for example, a group of students petitioned the faculty to shorten in-class quizzes that had grown to resemble full-scale examinations.[33] There were also petitions to increase scholarship availability, especially after the Stock Market crash and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. In the 1940's there was a major faculty-student dispute over

the granting of the Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters degree. The faculty insisted on awarding the degree only to superior students, and the students complained that this made the academic degree more prestigious than ordination. After all, one had only to pass the examinations to be ordained. The students protested with a petition, and the faculty would not yield. It was a bitter debate, but it passed after one year. Morgenstern's style of leadership was such that he would usually retreat if the students or the faculty protested in a united fashion.[34]

Though freedom of expression was allowed, Zionism became a divisive issue at the College as it did also amongst its alumni. In 1943, after publicly denouncing Revisionist Zionism, forty-five alumni of HUC signed a petition denying Morgenstern's legitimacy as a spokesperson for Reform Judaism on the issue of Zionism.[35] As we saw from Morgenstern's article written when he was a student, Zionism was a point of contention at the College for many years.

In 1945, Morgenstern had spent several months away from the College convalescing in Atlantic City. In his absence three faculty members administered the school as an Interim Administrative Committee.[36] On September 13, 1946 he announced to the Board of Governors his intent to retire from the presidency the following year; he would become President Emeritus. His successor, Nelson Glueck, invited him to continue teaching even after retirement, which he did until 1949.[37]

Morgenstern's presidency spanned twenty-six years, and his professorship forty-two years. During that time the College changed a great deal as an institution, as did its faculty and students. From his earliest days in the presidency Morgenstern had sought to reorganize the curriculum and instruction to serve the needs of American Judaism and the modern rabbi. He hired faculty members trained in disciplines he believed were necessary for rabbinical students to study, and made HUC an institution open to outlooks contrary to his own.

Morgenstern remained committed to *Wissenschaft* scholarship and Classical Reform Judaism, though many of his students and colleagues, and the overwhelming majority of American Jews, were by that point of Eastern European traditional backgrounds.

Morgenstern did change as a person and a scholar, particularly regarding his views about Zionism. The horrors of the Holocaust and the need for a Jewish homeland in light of Nazi oppression opened his eyes to this reality. Most importantly, the Jewish world changed while he was in office. In 1947 there were no more great centers of Jewish life or learning in Europe -- the focus was America and Palestine. On both of these centers Morgenstern had much to say.

In the chapters on his scholarly activities and his ideology, we will look at how Morgenstern's views on the Bible and Jewish history evolved, and yet remained internally consistent.

Chapter Four: Scholarship

Julian Morgenstern's academic specialty was critical biblical scholarship. His earliest academic interest was Assyriology, which he discovered quite unintentionally in Germany. By the time he came to Hebrew Union College as a faculty member in 1907, though, Bible and Semitic Languages were his areas of interest.

The chief early influence on Morgenstern was the Wellhausen School of biblical criticism. This mid-nineteenth century school was based on the documentary hypothesis. Following is a synopsis of Wellhausen's theory:

> He argued that the first five books of the Bible, or rather the first six (Genesis to Joshua), were composed in the time of the exile, when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed and many of the Jews and all their leaders were deported to Babylon. This complex of books of the Bible was put together by a slow amalgamation of originally independent documents. The earliest of these were the two documents J (where God was called Jahweh) and E (where God was called Elohim). J and E were combined into JE. The Deuteronomic corpus Dt was attached to JE. At the same time another independent work Wellhausen called Q because it told of the four (quattor) covenants (with Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses) was formed. Q was enlarged to make a Priestly Codex and then this enlarged Q was united to JE + Dt to form our Hexateuch, the first six books of the Bible. Wellhausen acknowledged that J and E went through a number of recensions before being combined, and so did JE, Dt and Q, but he insisted that these complications should not obscure the fundamental simplicity of the story. Set aside Deuteronomy, and the rest of the Pentateuch could be explained as the combination of just three independent documents, J and E and Q (what is now usually called P for Priestly Source).[1]

Wellhausen based his hypothesis on the research of Graf, and this combined theory dominated biblical scholarship for more than a century. The hypothesis has largely been discarded in recent years as inadequate for explaining the entirety of the Hebrew Bible, and as being overly simplistic. It does, however, provide a model for how the text can be analyzed.

In the nineteenth century, historical criticism of the Bible was understood to be the province of opponents of Christianity, or of a few leaders within the church.[2] German universities took over the leadership in this discipline, and soon criticism became practically the only acceptable method of Bible interpretation. At the heart of Wellhausen's school is the belief that the prophets predated the law (Torah), and thus are more authentic expressions of religiosity. God spoke first and directly to the prophets, and only later was an intercessor (Moses) needed for divine communication. By analogy, reasoned the Christian scholars, the New Testament (wherein God/Jesus deals directly with people) is a superior form of religion to Judaism. This anti-Jewish sentiment runs throughout much of the Christian exegesis of the nineteenth century.

For the Jewish side, nineteenth-century critical scholarship centered on rabbinic texts.[3] Jewish scholars found the academic study of the Bible to be burdened by Christian theology, which viewed the Hebrew Bible merely as a forerunner to the New Testament.

Morgenstern was aware of the Christian scholarship on the Old Testament, and desired to reclaim the Hebrew Bible for Jewish scholarship, particularly

Reform Jewish scholarship. In the Introduction to *The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Approach* (Shocken, 1965), which had been published originally in 1919, Morgenstern wrote:

> We have also had numerous scientific interpretations of Genesis, almost all by non-Jewish scholars. Their work has been almost entirely analytic in character... The present work aims to be a popular scientific interpretation of Genesis, but an interpretation which is not merely analytic, and therefore largely negative and destructive, but which is also, and more pronouncedly, synthetic, constructive and Jewish... It proceeds with deep love and reverence for Judaism and its teachings and practices and for Jewish tradition and history.[4]

Morgenstern freely criticized the text of the Bible, but he maintained a respect for, and allegiance to, the contents thereof and their significance to the Jewish people. In his address at the opening exercises of HUC in September 1923, he said: "For to the Jew the Torah is still, and must ever be the word of God, his source of knowledge and inspiration."[5] It was not divinely revealed, however.

Morgenstern credited the influence of Professors Delitzsch and Meissner in Berlin for his interest in antiquities. At Heidelberg he studied closely with Bezold and Becker, writing his dissertation under the guidance of the latter. He seems not to have been troubled by the lack of Jewish support for his vocation in Germany or in the United States, and associated himself with the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Oriental Society, both of which were heavily populated by non-Jewish Bible scholars.

He was not involved in the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Bible (Philipson, Kohler and Margolis served on the editorial board), perhaps

because he was too new in the field. He taught Bible to Jewish Sabbath school teachers at the Hebrew Union College Teacher's Institute, and to Christians during the summers in Kentucky for a number of years.

Morgenstern recalled later in life the path that he took to a lifelong study of the Hebrew Bible:

> During those Berlin days (1902) I experienced my first, inner, spiritual struggle; at least I think it was the first. No doubt largely as the result of Semitic studies, particularly in the field of Assyriology, it began to dawn upon me with steadily increasing insistence that not all the statements and narratives of the Bible, not even those of the Torah, the Pentateuch, could be literally true and objectively historic. Particularly was this the case with the traditions and legends about the patriarchs... Now it struck me with insistent force. It left me bewildered, but not greatly distressed. Daily for some weeks I walked to and from classes at the university with the question constantly pressing me: What is the truth, and what does this mean for the history of the Jewish people and what for Jewish doctrine and tradition? I even wondered occasionally whether I could function honestly as rabbi, with these steadily growing doubts and intimations in mind. Gradually, however, confusion was dispelled and doubts vanished... Above all else, I learned then the important lesson, that science and knowledge in the abstract have little meaning and less value until they are linked closely with life and become guides and impulses to progress in the realm of the human mind and spirit and forces making for richer and happier living.[6]

Most likely his maturation while in Germany helped Morgenstern to understand more clearly some of the concepts that were too complicated for him in his late teens. This quote encapsulates the force behind his scholarly writings, and his intention to make the ancient stories and descriptions come to life for the reader. Though his style of writing is at times difficult to follow, particularly because of his long sentences, a connection to contemporary religious ideals can almost

always be sensed. He was a modern religious leader using the Bible to understand modern religion based on its ancient foundations. Toward this end he employed highly imaginative theories and reconstructions of the text.

As a reviewer of his book *The Fire Upon the Altar* wrote in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1964): "One is always certain, on picking up a book by Professor Morgenstern, that he will be stimulated by something different, a new angle of approach, a new reading of material, a closely reasoned thesis of which no one else has ever thought."[7]

Morgenstern served as the president of the American Oriental Society (AOS) in 1927, and of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis (SBLE) in 1941. In his presidential address to the SBLE, at Union Theological Seminary in December 1941, he spoke of the need for biblical science and scholarship to remain strong, and for higher biblical criticism to stand firm in the face of its critics. He said: "... The Bible, in all its parts, has its setting in time and history and can find its truest and most inspiring interpretations only in relation to history, to thoughts, to doctrines, institutions, movements, events, aspirations as these gradually unfolded in the history of Israel and its neighbors... The long established postulates of biblical science must now be evaluated more searchingly and responsibly than ever before."[8]

In the days of Isaac Mayer Wise, when Morgenstern was a rabbinical student, biblical criticism was forbidden at Hebrew Union College. Kaufmann

Kohler introduced it as a discipline into the curriculum, and consequently his Bible faculty employed it. Philosophically opposed to orthodoxy in practice and in thought, Morgenstern's Bible classes at HUC did not seek to present the Torah as a divinely revealed document, and in fact denied revelation at Sinai. As his student W. Gunther Plaut noted, Morgenstern's *Wissenschaft* (scientific) training enabled him to literally cut up the Bible and deconstruct it. Plaut recalls that Sheldon Blank, another professor at HUC in the 1930's, actually had students bring two copies of the Hebrew Bible to class - one for recitation and the other to be cut up and re-configured into an order which the instructor found more historically or literally accurate.[9] This was troubling for some European-born students, who knew a Liberal Judaism less radical than this, and for those who had been reared in Orthodoxy with a reverence for the text itself. According to Plaut, Blank and Morgenstern were cut of the same cloth, and employed similar methods in their approach to the Bible.

Every word of the scripture was open for interpretation and rearranging. To those who believed that Biblical science would necessarily lead to a denial of the importance of the Bible, Morgenstern had this to say:

> To these very questions (the authority and validity of a human-written Bible) Biblical science does give a most positive answer. It tells us just what the Bible is and when it was written; and if it cannot tell us the names of the authors of the various parts and books, it can tell quite satisfactorily what kind of men these authors were, when they lived, what religious views they held, for what purpose and under what conditions they wrote, and what value, historical, religious, ethical and spiritual, their writings have. It tells, too, most clearly,

> emphatically and uncompromisingly wherein the Bible does differ radically from all other books, is truly the Book of books, and what inspiring message and eternal significance it has for us Jews today and will have for our children and our children's children until the end of time. Contrary to the first impulsive thought, Biblical science is not destructive at all, but thoroughly constructive. It does not uproot the foundations of religious belief, as so many think, or timorously wish to think, but re-enforces them and builds them deeper and ever deeper, so that the religious structure resting upon them may stand securely forever amid all the tempests of doubt, superstition and ignorance. No, Biblical science has not taken the Bible from us. Rather it has given the old Bible back to us, re-interpreted and with larger message and deeper more eternal significance than ever before.[10]

Morgenstern's method of scholarship is no longer held in high regard. He possessed a vivid imagination, and freely created theories based on the slightest hints, allusions or connections in the text. One might almost say that his scholarly exercises were more *midrashic*[11] than historical in nature. In a review of his seminal work *Amos Studies I*, a reviewer wrote that "The case is presented with a wealth of learning, with due freedom in textual criticism, and with acute reasoning. Yet it fails to be convincing, in spite of many suggestive points. No theory of the structure of a prophetic book can find acceptance today unless it can be made applicable to a large portion of the surviving literature... Further, the reconstructed passages do not create a favorable impression... On the literary side, then, the theory is hardly convincing."[12] The hypothesis to which the reviewer referred was the cornerstone of Morgenstern's thesis for the book, namely that sections from the Book of Amos were compiled out of order and at a date different than was widely accepted.

His theories relied heavily on his knowledge of the ancient Near East and its indigenous cultures. Particularly in regard to his studies of life cycle events and the calendar, Morgenstern drew upon local customs to shed light on the origins and development of Jewish ritual and ceremonies. In his introduction to *Rites of Birth, Death, Marriage and Kindred Occasions Among the Semites*[13] (HUC Press, 1966) he wrote:

> This (rite of repelling or casting out evil spirits) might be called magic by some; by others it might be termed religion... It was transformed into religion when these spirits had ceased to be conceived of as impersonal, mechanical powers and had become personalities... From these primitive beginnings, in part at least, religion has evolved. Sacrifice developed, became systematized, and in time invested with new, larger and more positive meaning. Incantation and homage grew into prayer and reverence. Many of our own cherished rites and ceremonies today had their beginnings in ancient belief and practices. The study of rites and ceremonies, their origin and history, is therefore of more than passing interest and significance.

In this study of Semitic life-cycle events he provides a historical background for the practice of circumcision, and the banishment of evil spirits at the times of marriage and death. It is worthwhile to note this persistent interest in ceremony by a man whose life was devoid of such practices. As a member of the faculty reported, "Morgenstern was a Classical Reform Jew in every sense of the word."[14] He believed that ritual was largely primitive, and could best be understood in its original historical context. He did encourage the use of rituals for the sake of increased religiosity and spirituality in the life of the Reform Jew (e.g. blessings at

mealtime, as described in Chapter Two). The origin of the ritual, he said, did not demean its sanctity if it is appropriate for the modern day.[15]

When he was younger, and before he enjoyed the prestige of the presidency of the College, members of the CCAR would take him to task for his ideas. In 1908, for example, his address to the Conference entitled "The Significance of the Bible for Reform Judaism in the Light of Modern Scientific Research" was debated by older colleagues, who accused Morgenstern of essentially not making any sense.[16]

Let us explore one example of his creative scholarship in order to understand how imaginative were some of his ideas. In an article titled "The Dates of Ezra and Nehemiah," he asserted that there was a catastrophe in Jerusalem in 485 B.C.E.[17] He believed this because Ezra and Nehemiah were believed to have rebuilt Jerusalem after the return from exile, and so there must have been a calamity immediately preceding the permission from Persia to rebuild. He goes on to speculate how the destruction took place, using biblical verses from other books as evidence for this theory. His conjecture includes an analysis of Ezra's personality, and his fitness for leadership. It is a fascinating exercise in recreating the world of the Bible. Its validity is questionable, however, as the theory was never widely accepted. He returned again and again to the episodes of 485 B.C.E. in his articles in the *Hebrew Union College Annual*.

He also turned his attention to the Christian Scriptures. In 1966 he published *Some Significant Antecedents of Christianity*. This volume, like that on the rites of the Semites, attempts to find correlations in practice and belief between different groups. In this case, he is showing his reader some of the Jewish roots of contemporary Christian practice. His chapter headings include "Jesus the 'Teacher'" (in which he brings to bear knowledge of the Essene community of Qumran), "Jesus as the Suffering Servant" (in which he makes classical Jewish arguments against reference to Jesus in the Book of Isaiah) and "The Time of the Passover in the Synoptics and in John" (in which he adds no new evidence, but only relies on the works of Christian scholars). This was one of his final pieces, written in Georgia when he was already over eighty years old. The review in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* was scathing, summing up with the assertion that "[Morgenstern] has put forward an interesting and novel thesis, but has failed to provide adequate substantiating evidence. Whether such evidence exists at all is very much in doubt."[18]

Jacob Rader Marcus described Morgenstern as having been "very harsh in his classes."[19] He was frequently narrow-minded in his search for answers, and did not suffer foolish answers easily in his class. He would often begin stating a hypothesis by asserting that "It takes only a moment's thought to realize..." Or he would reply to a student who had read aloud without being fully prepared, "Now that was not exactly outstanding, was it?" Morgenstern continued to teach Bible

courses throughout his presidency and even after his retirement. He offered elective courses to students, primarily in the graduate department, until he left Cincinnati permanently in 1960. Thus he was able to influence more than four decades of rabbinical students and their attitudes to the Bible. For many reasons, perhaps as a result of his severity in class, and the use of outdated methods, his books are no longer used for scholarly purposes. In particular, none of his later works, written in retirement, are referenced in any of the major encyclopedias or anthologies of biblical literature. A few scholars here and there refer to *Amos Studies* or *As A Mighty Stream* in their own works.[20]

It is worth noting, however, that the two most popular contemporary Reform Torah commentaries do include references to his 1919 work on Genesis, cited earlier in this chapter.[21] Both make mention of his work on the relationship of biblical narratives to Semitic customs in the Ancient Near East.

Under Morgenstern's presidency, the *Hebrew Union College Annual* (HUCA) was founded. This scholarly publication's first volume appeared in 1924, and continues to be published to the present day. Its articles are of a scholarly nature, and cover a variety of subjects. Though many of its articles are the work of Hebrew Union College faculty and alumni, its contributions are not limited in this way. The HUCA is a respected forum for ideas from many quarters of the scholarly world. Julian Morgenstern was actively involved in the HUCA from the time of its creation until well after his retirement. He served on the Board of Editors from 1924 to 1954, and as its Chairman from 1949 to 1954. Through

forty-one HUCA volumes, from 1924 to 1970, Morgenstern had an original article in each issue. Two volumes of the HUCA were dedicated in his honor: in 1947, upon the occasion of his retirement from the presidency, and in 1961, in honor of his eightieth birthday.[22] To obtain some appreciation for the scope of Morgenstern's interests and scholarly activities over four decades, the following is presented as a list of the titles of his HUCA articles, as well as the volume in which each was published:

Volume	Title
I	*The Three Calendars of Ancient Israel*
II	*Moses with the Shining Face*
III	*Additional Notes on the Three Calendars of Ancient Israel*
IV	*The Oldest Document of the Hexateuch*
V	*The Book of the Covenant*
VI	*The Gates of Righteousness*
VII	*The Book of the Covenant - Part II*
VIII/IX	*The Book of the Covenant - Part III*
X	*Supplementary Studies in the Calendar of Israel*
XI	*Amos Studies I*
XII/XIII	*Amos Studies II*
XIV	*The Mythological Background of Psalm 82*
XV	*The Historical Antecedents of Amos*
XVI	*Psalm 48*
XVII	*The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting*
XVIII	*The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting - Part II*
XIX	*Psalm 8 and 19a*
XX	*The Chanukkah Festival and the Calendar of Ancient Israel*
XXI	*The Chanukkah Festival and the Calendar of Ancient Israel II*
XXII	*Two Prophecies from 520-516 B.C.*
XXIII	*Isaiah 63:7-14*
XXIV	*Two Prophecies of the Fourth Century B.C. and the Evolution of Yom Kippur*

XXV	*The Loss of Words at the End of Lines in Manuscripts of Hebrew Poetry*
XXVI	*The Decalogue of the Holiness Code*
XXVII	*Jerusalem 485 B.C.*
XXVIII	*Jerusalem 485 B.C. II*
XXIX	*The Message of Deutero-Isaiah in its Sequential Unfolding*
XXX	*The Message of Deutero-Isaiah in its Sequential Unfolding II*
XXXI	*Jerusalem 485 B.C. III*
XXXII	*Amos Studies Part Three*
XXXIII	*The Book of the Covenant (Part Four)*
XXXIV	*The "Bloody Husband"(?) (Exodus 4:24-26)*
XXXV	*The Cultic Setting of the Enthronement Psalms*
XXXVI	*Isaiah 49-55*
XXXVII	*Further Light from the Book of Isaiah Upon the Catastrophe of 485 B.C.*
XXXVIII	*The Hasidim - Who Were They?*
XXXIX	*Lag Ba'Omer - Its Origins and Import*
XL	*Isaiah 61*

Though some of the sequential articles bear the same title, each of the essays is unique. Some of the articles were subsequently developed into whole books.

For more than six decades Julian Morgenstern was engaged in the study and dissemination of biblical scholarship. Though his cavalier approach to the text was not widely accepted, it does provide insight into his reasoning. He was a product of a *Wissenschaft* education, and combined that training with a variety of approaches to the Bible throughout his long career.

Chapter Five: Ideology

In addition to his scholarly works in the field of Bible, Julian Morgenstern was also a reflective thinker in the area of Jewish history, theology and philosophy. Primarily a spokesperson for American Reform Judaism, Morgenstern used his position as president of the Hebrew Union College to advocate his theories on a number of questions. In this chapter we will examine his ideology through his writings, many of which were originally delivered as formal addresses to the students and faculty in the chapel of HUC or to other audiences.

Morgenstern was not known for brevity, either in his academic writings or his public lectures and speeches. He opened the academic year each fall at HUC with an address, and students would wager on the length of the talk. There was an intricate system of speculation, which went something like this: one student would be the designated time-keeper, and another student would sit in the choir loft up and behind the lectern in the chapel. From his perch, the second student would hold up a certain number of fingers to indicate how many pages remained of the President's prepared text. One student apparently lost the coveted balcony job because he indicated that only one page remained yet Morgenstern continued to speak for ten minutes![1] Regardless of the students' opinions of these addresses or their length, Morgenstern used the occasions to express his ideas and his particular philosophy of Judaism and Jewish history.

Many of his writings and lectures contain similar material throughout, expounding his belief in the need for higher biblical criticism, in the human authorship of the scripture, of the authority of history rather than commandments. Like Isaac Mayer Wise, Morgenstern believed that a time would come when there would be a uniquely distinguishable American Judaism, rather than separate movements or branches labeled "Reform" or "Conservative" or "Orthodox." In speeches and articles, some of which we will examine here, Morgenstern spelled out his beliefs concerning the Jewish past, and his vision of the Jewish future. His theological *magnum opus* was the book *As A Mighty Stream*, which is a collection of some of these many orations, published in 1947.

Events since Morgenstern's death in 1976 have not proven his vision to be accurate. The American Jewish community remains disjointed, and trends indicate that Reform Judaism, and the Jewish people as a whole, will find its largest center in Israel. The Reform and Conservative movements remain separate, and Modern Orthodoxy is moving further to the right.

Though Morgenstern was not a prophet, there is value in examining his ideas. He was a nineteenth-century thinker who developed in the twentieth century, and brought classical Jewish texts to his understanding and analysis of contemporary events and trends. Morgenstern did not live in an ivory tower, but combined his academic life with the administration of a rabbinical seminary. This dual role helped to shape his ideas, even though he was unwilling or unable to adapt to certain changes in circumstance.

He was able to convey the same basic message over the course of five decades, in each instance tailoring his philosophy only slightly to address the present situation. He always began by giving a synopsis of the history of Israel, and drawing an analogy to the contemporary Jewish world. This methodology is best summed up by the title of one of his articles, "With History As Our Guide."

The Bible as a Religious Source

In March 1916, as a young professor at Hebrew Union College, Morgenstern wrote an article for the *HUC Monthly*, which he called "God in History: A Jewish Contribution to Civilization." In this essay he stressed the importance of progress in history, and attributes this value to Israel's recognition that revelation is ongoing, and the more people progress the better they will be able to understand God and the world.

In light of his later writings, both philosophical and scholarly, it is worthwhile to observe the consistency of his style and pattern. One would, in fact, be hard-pressed to discern differences in the style of writing between 1916 and 1966, or in the manner in which he constructed an article. Morgenstern's form remained the same throughout his career, and is parallel to his academic and professional interests. He moved from the Bible, and the Ancient Near East that produced it, to the contemporary world around him in America, from whose perspective he drew conclusions about God and the scripture. He maintained that

God was a force in the lives of our ancestors, and remains a force today. What has changed is how we relate to God, or how we understand God's role in the universe. In ancient times, when people knew less about science and the natural order, God was feared more. Today, humanity has a greater responsibility because we are capable of accomplishing more than we were in the past. The same will hold true of the future, once the present is past. In any event, God is the constant; humanity is the variable.

Julian Morgenstern's thought did not vary much throughout his long career. He maintained an allegiance to Classical Reform Judaism, even as he changed his mind on the issue of Zionism as a result of the Holocaust. He had never been a rabid anti-Zionist like his predecessor Kohler, but neither had he strongly supported the idea of a Jewish state. He was deeply committed to America, and believed that history had a special purpose in making this the freest and most successful Jewish community the world had ever known.

American Judaism

Central to Morgenstern's philosophy was this notion of an "American Judaism." In 1921 President Harding had signed legislation dramatically restricting immigration into the United States. This would further change the nature of American Judaism, which had already undergone a revolution of sorts with the influx of more than two and a quarter million Eastern European Jews

since 1870.[2] Morgenstern was accustomed to the Western Europeans who had arrived earlier, such as the Germans around whom he was raised in Cincinnati, and with whom he associated in Reform circles. His failure to recognize and account for the masses of Eastern European traditionalists would hinder his philosophy from growing in such a manner that it could be widely acceptable.

In 1923, for *The American Hebrew*'s issue commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Morgenstern wrote a lengthy article entitled "American Judaism and the Hebrew Union College." In it he wrote:

> In one of his most striking essays, recently published, Achad Haam says. "Judaism in exile cannot develop its individuality in its own way. When it leaves the Ghetto walls it is in danger of losing its essential being or, at best, its national unity; it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism, each with a different character and life, as there are countries of the Jewish dispersion."
>
> I am profoundly grateful to Achad Haam for this clear and frank statement of the Jewish problem. He has formulated a basic truth of Judaism's history.
>
> But instead of "in danger" he should have said "certain." For it is an incontrovertible fact that in every land in which we Jews have come to dwell in the centuries-long course of our history we have evolved a distinctive type of Judaism. It rested invariably upon and reaffirmed the eternal basic principles of Judaism, but it adapted these principles to the life which Jews had to live as natives and citizens of the respective states.
>
> In this way the various historical types of Judaism evolved in different lands. Babylonian Judaism in the East, Hellenistic Judaism in Alexandria, Sephardic Judaism in Spain, Ashkenazic Judaism in Germany, Russian Judaism in Russia. In this way, too, Judaism remained a religion of life, of the present-day life of its people; and perhaps for this reason more than any other it managed to survive

> through all the many centuries of persecution, the uncomprehended wonder of the world.[3]

Morgenstern went on to describe in detail the historical background of some of these communities throughout the world, and how each has developed uniquely as a result of the indigenous culture. He reasoned, on the basis of these other communities, that there would necessarily come to be an American Judaism, as well. This American Judaism would resemble, not surprisingly, Reform Judaism. What he did not account for was the great diversity within Reform even in the early 1920's, brought about by the Eastern European influences. It may have been naivete or an unwillingness to recognize the inevitable.

He also drew a distinction between Reform Judaism in general, and American Reform Judaism in particular. In 1944 he told the students and faculty at the Hebrew Union College:

> Ours is American Reform Judaism, or American Progressive Judaism, if that title be preferred. It has Judaism in common with all the expressions of our religion throughout time, past present and future, for it is, in principle and in practice, historic Judaism. It joins eagerly with all progressive interpretations of Judaism in basic philosophy and general program. But, likewise, it has its own identity, personality, program as American Reform Judaism in reaction to the American environment and in its obligation to be a creative spiritual force in the evolution of a truly American people, nation and way of life.[4]

The first native American to become president of the Hebrew Union College, Julian Morgenstern was fiercely loyal to this country. He recognized the unique freedoms afforded to Jews in this land, and went out of his way to publicly

praise the United States as a kind of "promised land" or Garden of Eden, the land for which our people had been hoping and praying. He was a non-Zionist for most of his life, preferring instead to build up Judaism on these shores. He did not visit Israel (or Palestine, for that matter) until 1963, when his daughter accompanied him to attend the opening of the Jerusalem campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. In 1944 he stated that "Palestine and the Jewish fortune and destiny there, no matter how this may captivate our imagination, stir our emotions and enlist our enthusiasms and energies, can be with us American Jews only a secondary issue, command only a secondary loyalty, and impose only a secondary obligation even upon the most ardent Jewish nationalist, who, at the same time, proudly regards himself as an American."[5]

In September 1945, Morgenstern spoke to HUC about "Unity in American Judaism: How and When?" Already by that time the atrocities in Nazi-controlled Europe were becoming clear, and Morgenstern had long been involved in bringing students, scholars and their libraries to America. He warned those assembled that "Our own American Jewish community has been catapulted by historic circumstances into the position of the largest, richest, freest and strongest Jewish community in the world. Our influence is far-reaching, our opportunity for service to the household of Jacob immeasurable, our responsibility immediate and pressing."[6] His thesis in this speech was that in order to cope with and perhaps solve the great troubles in American Judaism, the American Jewish community needed to unite. Here he pushed his agenda for a unique American Judaism,

across denominational lines. He referred to the Reconstructionist Movement as a competitor of Reform, but with basically the same ideals and goals. He would come to respect Reconstructionism for its bold statements rejecting the concept of Israel as a chosen people, and sought their cooperation for his agenda.[7] He then outlined the obstacles to unification - dogma, practice, belief, politics. Still, he was optimistic that this American Judaism will come to be.

In 1953, Morgenstern spoke to the members of Temple Ohabei Shalom in Brookline, Massachusetts, on the occasion of the congregation's one-hundred and tenth anniversary. His sermon was entitled, not surprisingly, "American Judaism."

The Role of Reform Judaism

In 1929 Morgenstern addressed the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in San Francisco on the topic "Judaism and the Modern World: A Tribute to Moses Mendelssohn in Celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth (September 6, 1729)." He described Mendelssohn as an "unconscious hero of Reform Judaism," and credited him with having opened the door for Reform in Europe. Morgenstern asserted in this address that Reform Judaism is the latest in a series of changes that the Jewish people have always undergone. He drew a parallel between the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., and the ensuing modifications to Jewish practice that were necessitated by exile, and the response of Reform Jews to the changed world of the Enlightenment. He drew the

analogy further to include the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., and the creation of Rabbinic Judaism. He saw Reform as only the most recent incarnation of an adaptation to the general milieu.

Morgenstern made the bold statement that Reform Judaism should have begun in the fifteenth century, rather than in the nineteenth century. After briefly running through the history of European Judaism, he stated:

> But meanwhile Israel and Judaism were in the Ghetto; and the (Jewish) Reformation, which by all the laws of history, should have been born, and was on the point of being born in Judaism when the Ghetto walls closed around it, was checked and retarded for four hundred years. And while culturally and scientifically and religiously the world without went forward rapidly and vastly, Judaism in the Ghetto stood still, or almost still, for four unhappy centuries.
>
> It gave itself whole-heartedly to the unvarying, punctilious performance of its traditional ritual and ceremonial... Out in the great world - there the soul of the Jew longed to be.[8]

His conclusion in this address was that the Reform Movement in America must not isolate itself from Progressive Judaism around the world, but must cooperate, through the newly formed World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), to perfect liberal Judaism everywhere. In so doing, Israel will fulfill its mission to be a "light unto the nations." Morgenstern was active in the WUPJ, and corresponded with its leadership. He also attended several WUPJ conventions, and addressed the delegates.

Morgenstern did have a clear conception of Reform Judaism, and did not hesitate to express it. In that aforementioned address in the chapel in October 1944, he also said:

> As a religion whose basic authority is its history, Judaism is ever the resultant of the constant, ceaseless fusion of two primary forces, tradition and environment. The harmonious synthesis of its past with its present creates and sustains its program of life and action and its visions, hopes and plans for its future. In significant contrast, Orthodoxy, on the one hand, unduly stresses the past and would shut its eyes completely to the present. And on the other hand, Assimilation, for this and this alone is the true antithesis of Orthodoxy, stresses the present and would erase the past altogether. Each fears the present and seeks in its own fantastic way to evade its imagined dangers, the one through cowardly submission, the other through willful negation of reality. Reform alone faces the present confidently and serenely and looks forward into the future hopefully and with dauntless faith.[9]

Zionism and the Jewish People

October 16, 1943 witnessed Morgenstern's most controversial Opening Day address, entitled "Nation, People, Religion -- What Are We?" It was in this speech that the HUC president stated:

> It [Zionism] has run the entire gamut of modern racial nationalism. Zionism embraces the very modest hope of the restoration of Palestine as the center of a new, positive and intensive Jewish cultural life, as well as the extreme, Revisionist theory of Jewish nationalism, practically identical with Nazi and Fascist attitudes. Revisionism holds that the bonds of Jewish racial nationalism are eternally indissoluble, that there can be only one Jewish homeland, only one land in which the Jew can ever feel himself completely at home. Eternally, the Revisionist says, a Jew remains a member of the Jewish racial nation.[10]

Morgenstern's comparison of Revisionist Zionism to Nazism and Fascism angered the Zionists within the Reform rabbinate, who questioned Morgenstern's authority to speak on behalf of the Movement. The press had quoted Morgenstern as having compared Zionism in general, not specifically the Revisionist variety, to Nazism and Fascism. A petition was circulated among alumni, protesting the president's statements (see Chapter Three). Morgenstern had joined the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism when it was created in 1942, and had signed a petition protesting the CCAR's resolution supporting the use of Jewish military force in Palestine.

According to Ezra Spicehandler, Morgenstern told him in 1947 that the Jews would never have a state "unless they fought for it." Spicehandler also indicated that once the State was established, Morgenstern spoke in the chapel in support of Israel Bonds. Meyer describes Morgenstern's "lukewarm conversion to Political Zionism following the war."[11]

"A Program for Judaism and for the Jewish People" was the title of Morgenstern's opening day address at HUC in 1946. As in previous discourses, he began with an historical outline of the issue he will address, and then applied it to the modern day. In this instance he began with the prophets of ancient Israel, and the distinction they perceived between Israel the people and Israel the nation. He concluded his introduction with the powerful statement:

> All this is not merely my personal opinion or interpretation. It is the message of the prophets. It is they who affirm that restoration to Palestine need not imply nationalism, nationhood, political independence, but rather the peoplehood of Israel and its survival unto eternity. Israel must and will survive; that is God's will. But its survival is to be, not for mere physical existence, but for a great, divine, eternal purpose, the fulfillment of its destiny. Such is the testimony of Israel's prophets; such is the teaching of Israel's history.[12]

He goes on to recount the horrors of the Holocaust, and the resulting preoccupation with Jewish survival throughout the world. Noting that the three largest remaining Jewish communities are located in America, Russia and Palestine, he re-emphasized the importance of building a positive Jewish existence here. He dismissed Communist Russia as a lost cause for its Jewish inhabitants, and for all religions. As for Palestine, even at this late date, just two years before the creation of the State of Israel, he insisted that a political Jewish state was not the best solution. He preferred Jewish-controlled areas within Palestine, and supported the mass migration of Jews to that land, from countries other than the United States. In 1908, when speaking before the Central Conference of American Rabbis, he had outlined a theory that political administration is not what the Jewish people do best. For this reason, a Jewish State would not be advisable. A Jewish homeland, yes, but one administered by others more capable. Everywhere else in the world Jews were concerned merely with survival; in America there is the freedom and the opportunity to focus on more complex needs. Using the message of the prophets who preached after the destruction of the

Temple, another dark period in Israel's history, Morgenstern urged his listeners to remember that God has not forsaken the Jews.

By 1953, when he spoke in Massachusetts, the State of Israel was a reality, and Morgenstern had changed his public stance on Zionism, openly supporting the Jewish State. He was also forced to contend with the changing face of Reform Judaism, as more and more Reform Jews came to the Movement from other backgrounds. In his address, he urged Reform Jews to continue to be modern, even in the face of the traditionalism that was encroaching on Reform. He urged a balance between modernity and orthodoxy, maintaining still that it is possible for there to be an American Judaism that would cut across denominational lines.

Chapter Six: Retirement and Final Years

By 1947 the world was dramatically different from what it had been when Julian Morgenstern became president of Hebrew Union College twenty-six years earlier. The prospects of a merger with the Jewish Institute of Religion were good, and the lay leadership of the Cincinnati school was eager for a president who would be successful in raising funds for HUC in the post-war economic boom. These conditions, combined with Morgenstern's extended leaves of absence due to bouts with pneumonia, led to his early retirement from the presidency at the age of sixty-six, four years before mandatory retirement.

In retirement, Morgenstern continued to teach. He offered elective courses in Bible to graduate and rabbinical students, and maintained an office at the College. When HUC merged with the JIR, both Morgenstern and Stephen S. Wise were named President Emeritus of the combined institution. Morgenstern continued his association with the *Hebrew Union College Annual,* and for several years after his retirement from the presidency, served as its editor. Intellectually, he remained active by writing scholarly articles and by maintaining correspondence with his "boys," ordinees who were serving pulpits throughout the country.

In his personal life, Morgenstern took great pride and pleasure in his family during retirement. His daughter Jean and her husband, William Greenebaum, lived out of town, but made frequent visits to Cincinnati with their two sons, Billy

(William Greenebaum II) and Juni (Julian Morgenstern Greenebaum). Jean, Billy and Juni spent winter and summer vacation with the Morgensterns. Billy came to Cincinnati to study at HUC, where he was ordained in 1957, and lived with his grandparents while he was a student. Morgenstern took great pride in his grandsons and their achievements, coaching them to read from the Torah at their confirmation, and bringing them with him to see his favorite Cincinnati Reds play baseball.

After his retirement, Morgenstern spent a great deal of time caring for his wife, who suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. There was a full-time nurse who lived with them in their home on Burton Woods Lane, because Helen's care was too much for him to handle alone. When she died in 1960, Jean and William moved their father to Macon, Georgia, to live with them in their home.

Helen Thorner Morgenstern had been raised in Macon, and she and Julian had been married there. By coincidence, William Greenebaum found employment outside of Atlanta in the late 1950's, and he and Jean moved to Macon. It was natural for Julian Morgenstern ("Gaga" to his grandchildren) to move to be with his daughter after his wife died. The Morgensterns were always close with the Thorners, and Eveline Thorner (Helen's unmarried sister) lived with them in Cincinnati. Another unmarried sister lived in Macon with Rabbi Isaac Marcuson and Rose Thorner Marcuson.

In Macon, Morgenstern continued to write articles and books and to correspond with his former students, especially Bernard Bamberger and Jacob

Rader Marcus.[1] He remained physically active in his old age, walking for several miles outside each day. As he grew older, into his nineties, Jean hired a teenager to walk with him after a neighbor alerted her that she had seen her father wandering into the street. According to his grandson, Julian Morgenstern Greenebaum, Morgenstern knew every child and dog in the neighborhood, and was beloved by people in the community.

Morgenstern became frustrated in his last years because of his isolation from the world he once knew. He was almost completely dependent on his daughter for his care, and she also assisted him with his research for his final works. In September 1970, he wrote a letter to HUC-JIR President Nelson Glueck, explaining his desire to come back to Cincinnati for a time to live in the dormitory and resume working on a book which he had begun in the 1940's, but had put off completing until his retirement. He described the importance of the book, and requested Glueck's assistance in allowing him to live at HUC, and continue his research with the aid of a rabbinical student. Attached to the letter is a hand-written note from Jean Greenebaum:

> Dear Nelson - I'm sorry that I must add this supplement to Daddy's letter.
>
> Daddy will be 90 in March. He is suffering the failings and infirmities that accompany old age. I do not like to go into detail. His care is almost a full time job for Bill and me. He requires constant supervision (I dole out nine pills plus other medications daily) -- as you can readily understand. He resents our supervision and the loss of his independence, and refuses to accept the idea that he cannot take care of himself anymore. His memory and hearing are both about gone completely; his sight is poor and he is unsteady on his legs.

> What he has written you is really a subterfuge... His reason for wanting to come to live at HUC is not to use the library for his references, but to get away from Bill's and my supervision and care. His intention is to spend the rest of his life at HUC, not just a limited time while he uses the library.[2]

She concluded by asking Glueck to handle the matter diplomatically. It is ironic that within a few months Morgenstern would be sending a letter of condolence to Glueck's widow, for Glueck died in February 1971 after suffering from cancer. Morgenstern would not return to Cincinnati.

In 1971, for his ninetieth birthday, Jean and William arranged a party for their father. A number of his students came to Macon for the celebration, and many more sent letters of congratulations. Throughout his career, he had maintained a distance from most of his colleagues, and had been feared by many of his students. In retirement, he seems to have become a different person.

Though he remained relatively active for a man in his nineties, Morgenstern's health was deteriorating. He suffered from eye problems, and wore a patch for a time. He suffered briefly from cancer of the tongue, but recovered. As his daily regimen of medications grew, and as his daughter aged as well, it was decided that Morgenstern move into an assisted living facility in Macon. He lived there for the last several years of his life, and died in his sleep on December 4, 1976 at the age of ninety-five. Jean had been preparing to leave town, and went to check on him when she realized that he had died.

His funeral service was held at the HUC-JIR chapel in Cincinnati, with his colleagues Samuel Sandmel and Sheldon Blank, as well as HUC-JIR President Alfred Gottschalk, officiating. He is buried at the United Jewish Cemetery on Montgomery Avenue in Cincinnati.

In front of a simple headstone engraved with the name "Morgenstern" are four markers which record the names and years of birth and death for Hannah and Samuel Morgenstern, Helen Thorner Morgenstern and Julian Morgenstern. All that remains to indicate the final resting place of the former president of the Hebrew Union College is a marble slab with the words: "Julian Morgenstern: 1881-1976."

Conclusion

Julian Morgenstern was a pioneer in the field of Jewish biblical scientific research. His imaginative readings and interpretations, based on his analysis of the Ancient Near East, led to fantastic theories and textual emendations. He took Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis and created dozens of his own ideas. Not much attention is paid to Morgenstern the Bible scholar today because the techniques he used have been replaced by other methods of interpretation. In his own day, his work was respected if not fully accepted by his peers.

In his younger days as a professor, he was considered the "great white hope of Reform Judaism,"[1] coming to power at a time when most respected rabbis were a generation older and European-born. His limited Jewish upbringing, and what he was able to accomplish for the Jewish people despite that background, is testimony to his perseverance.

Morgenstern is known today primarily for his efforts on behalf of the refugee scholars; it is clear that there was much more to Julian Morgenstern than the creation of a program that helped to save many people's lives. His enduring legacy may very well be the fact that he brought men like Abraham Joshua Heschel to America, but there is value in the man beyond the people with whom he associated.

His wishful idealism and allegiance to Classical Reform Judaism make him seem out of place in the Reform world of today. His inability or unwillingness to recognize the significance of millions of Eastern European Jews coming into the American milieu handicapped his ideology, barring him from clearly understanding the vast majority of Reform Jews during the waning days of his career. It is doubtful that he would recognize Reform Judaism, though he might be pleased that it has not remained stagnant. He stressed the importance of progress in Judaism, yet was hindered by his visceral allegiance to Classical Reform. He wrote that the Pittsburgh Platform was really valid only for those who voted for it in 1885, yet he never moved that far from its doctrines. Jacob Rader Marcus said that his greatest downfall was not being able to recognize when a change of course was needed most.[2]

About his personal life, very little is known. His students did not know him well, as there was a certain formal distance maintained. He ruled the faculty of the College, maintaining distance from even his colleagues. He kept his private life to himself and his family, and reveled in his daughter and grandsons.

Julian Morgenstern was both a simple and a complex man. He rose from humble beginnings to lead the Reform movement for more than a quarter of a century, with varying degrees of success. He lived in a modest home and drove an inexpensive automobile, yet dealt with wealthy aristocrats to garner support for the College. He possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish text and history, yet

was equally at home on the baseball diamond. While none of these characteristics is extraordinary or mutually exclusive, they do paint a picture of an interesting personality.

Julian Morgenstern was the first graduate of the Hebrew Union College to become its president, and he ordained more than two hundred men to the rabbinate. He shaped the College to his liking, and made it an academic institution of great renown, in the process raising the level of the Reform rabbinate. He raised up many disciples, and thus has had influence on the Reform movement beyond his own lifetime. His *shalshelet ha-kabbalah*, his chain of tradition, stretches to our own day.

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* (New York, 1988), 13.
[2] *Ibid.*, 387-8.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1] Biographical questionnaire, September 5, 1951, Morgenstern Collection, AJA.
[2] Louis Finkelstein, *Thirteen Americans: Their Spiritual Autobiographies* (Harper Brothers, 1953), 254-255.
[3] *Ibid.,* 255.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Biographical questionnaire, May 5, 1956, Morgenstern Collection, AJA.
[6] Finkelstein, 257.
[7] 9/5/51, AJA.
[8] Finkelstein, 257.
[9] HUC Journal, Vol. 6, No. 5, Feb. 1902, pp. 103-4.
[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. 6, No. 6., March 1902, pp. 127-8.
[11] Finkelstein, 257.
[12] *Ibid.*, 261.
[13] *Ibid.*, 262.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid.*, 263.
[16] Bernard J. Bamberger, "The Impact of Julian Morgenstern on American Jewish Life," *CCAR Yearbook* 17 (1957):1.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1] Louis Finkelstein, *Thirteen Americans: Their Spiritual Autobiographies* (Harper Brothers, 1953), 266.
[2] Morgenstern Correspondence, AJA.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Finkelstein, 266.
[5] Avi M. Schulman, *Like a Raging Fire: A Biography of Maurice Eisendrath* (UAHC Press, 1993), 13.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Bernard J. Bamberger, "The Impact of Julian Morgenstern on American Jewish Life," *CCAR Yearbook* 17 (1957),1.

[8] Wolli Kaelter, *From Danzig: An American Rabbi's Journey* (Pangloss Press, 1997), p. 56.
[9] Stanley Brav, ed. *Telling Tales Out of School: Seminary Memories of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion* (Cincinnati, 1965), 108.
[10] Morgenstern Correspondence, AJA.
[11] *CCAR Yearbook*, Vol. 32, 167.
[12] Finkelstein, 268.
[13] Philipson was a member of the Board of Governors, a former faculty member, one of the first graduates of HUC, and rabbi of Bene Israel in Cincinnati. He was also Morgenstern's early mentor. Englander was a member of the faculty, several years older than Morgenstern.
[14] BGM 11/1/21, AJA.
[15] Morgenstern Correspondence, AJA.
[16] BGM 12/27/21, AJA.
[17] Board of Governors Correspondence, AJA.
[18] Taped interview with Jacob Rader Marcus, May 7, 1963, AJA.
[19] David Philipson, *My Life As An American Jew* (John G. Kidd & Son, 1941), 395-6.
[20] Brav, 107.
[21] Interview with Ezra Spicehandler, 11/6/97.
[22] Marcus tape
[23] For more on this subject see *The Refugee Scholars Project of the Hebrew Union College* by Michael A. Meyer in *A Bicentennial Festschrift for Jacob Rader Marcus*, Bertram Wallace Korn, Editor.
[24] These five men would all be ordained, and go on to distinguished careers in North America. They are Wolli Kaelter, Leo Lichtenberg, W. Gunther Plaut, Herman Schaalman, and Alfred Wolf.
[25] He is Joshua Habermann now of Washington, D.C.. For more on Morgenstern's correspondence with that institution, see *Rescuing Jewish Scholars and Redeeming Sacred Books* by Floyd S. Fierman (El Paso Jewish Historical Society, 1987).
[26] Bamberger, 4.
[27] BGM 10/20/38, AJA.
[28] BGM 4/19/39, AJA.
[29] For more on the creation of the Jewish Institute of Religion, see "The Creation of the Jewish Institute of Religion," in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly,* December 1968, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, 260-270.
[30] Letter from Jerome Mark to Julian Morgenstern, 11/7/22, Morgenstern Correspondence, AJA.
[31] Stephen S. Wise Correspondence, AJA.
[32] Information on the merger and the compromises which led to it can be found in the HUC Collection, AJA.
[33] HUC Faculty Minutes, AJA.

[34] Marcus tape
[35] Morgenstern correspondence with Joshua Loth Liebman, AJA.
[36] They were Nelson Glueck, Sheldon Blank and Jacob Rader Marcus. Their correspondence with Morgenstern during his absence is found in Morgenstern's Correspondence at the AJA.
[37] Morgenstern correspondence with Glueck, AJA.

Notes to Chapter Four

[1] J.C. O'neill, *The Bible's Authority: A Portrait Galery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann* (T&S Clark, 1991), 200.
[2] Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (MacMillan, 1963), 110.
[3] Jonathan and Nahum Sarna, *Jewish Bible Scholarship and Translations in the United States* (Society of Biblical Literature Centennial Publications, 1988), 93.
[4] Julian Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation.* (Schocken, 1965), 8-9.
[5] *HUC Monthly*, October 1923, 7.
[6] Louis Finkelstein, *Thirteen Americans: Their Spiritual Autobiographies* (Harper Brothers, 1953), 262.
[7] Edwin M. Good, *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1964, 84.
[8] *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1942, 2-3.
[9] Telephone interview with W. Gunther Plaut, 10/15/1998.
[10] Julian Morgenstern, *As A Mighty Stream* (Jewish Publication Society, 1949), 93-4.
[11] Midrash is a form of interpretation whereby a single word or even letter in the text serves as a jumping-off point for an imaginative discourse.
[12] T.H. Robinson, Review in *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1937, 122-3.
[13] This book was begun in 1921, but was put on hold when Morgenstern took over the presidency of HUC. He picked it up again in retirement, and worked on it with the assistance of his daughter. It was published with the aid of the HUC Alumni Association.
[14] Taped Marcus interview, May 7, 1963.
[15] Julian Morgenstern, "The Significance of the Bible for Reform Judaism in the Light of Modern Scientific Research," (*CCAR Yearbook*, 1908), 227.
[16] *Ibid.*, 243-8.
[17] Julian Morgenstern, "The Dates of Ezra and Nehemiah," (*Journal of Semitic Studies*, 1962), 1.
[18] John G. Gager, Jr., *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1968, 337.
[19] Marcus tape
[20] Isaac Jerusalmi, a graduate of HUC and now its Professor of Bible and Semitic Languages, mentioned in passing that it was Morgenstern's book *As A Mighty*

Stream that introduced him to Reform Judaism. Jerusalmi was living in Turkey, got a copy of the book, and wrote to HUC president Nelson Glueck after reading it. Alfred Gottschalk likened Jerusalmi's methods of classroom instruction to those of Morgenstern.

[21] W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* and Harvey Fields *A Torah Commentary for Our Times* (UAHC Press).

[22] In the 1961 volume there appeared an article about his life, written by Morris Lieberman. Both the 1947 and the 1961 volumes have his picture as a frontispiece.

Notes to Chapter Five

[1] Story related by Morgenstern's grandson, Julian Morgenstern Greenebaum, 11/5/98.

[2] Sydney E. Ahsltrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Yale University Press, 1972).

[3] "American Judaism and the Hebrew Union College," in *The American Hebrew*, January 19, 1923.

[4] Julian Morgenstern, "The Task of the Hebrew Union College," 10.

[5] Julian Morgenstern, "The Task of the Hebrew Union College," 11.

[6] Julian Morgenstern, "Unity in American Judaism: When and How?", 4.

[7] *Ibid, 13.*

[8] Julian Morgenstern, "Judaism and the Modern World," 9.

[9] Julian Morgenstern, "The Task of the Hebrew Union College," 8.

[10] Julian Morgenstern, *As a Mighty Stream: The Progress of Judaism Through History* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1949), 376.

[11] Michael A. Meyer, "Abba Hillel Silver as Zionist Within the Camp of Reform Judaism" in *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1996, 13.

[12] Julian Morgenstern, "A Program for Judaism and the Jewish People," 10.

Notes to Chapter Six

[1] AJA Correspondence, Morgenstern files. See also the Marcus collections.

[2] MS# 20, HUC-JIR Collection, Glueck Correspondence, AJA.

Notes to Conclusion

[1] Taped interview with Jacob Rader Marcus, May 7, 1963, AJA.

[2] *Ibid.*

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