

accepted their terms: Jews would strive to differ only in religion; they would become “Frenchmen of the Mosaic Persuasion.”

Napoleon carried the values of the French Revolution across Europe—literally breaking down ghetto walls and emancipating the Jews—but in most places, their newly won civil rights were revoked upon Napoleon’s defeat in 1815. In German states, where social integration had already begun, a generation of assimilated, educated Jews found themselves stranded when emancipation was withdrawn, often unable to work in professions for which they had trained, such as law, academia, and civil service. Some German Jews left the country; others attempted to remake themselves in a variety of ways, from religious reform (all the modern denominations of Judaism were born in this period, as part of the quest for emancipation) to conversion.

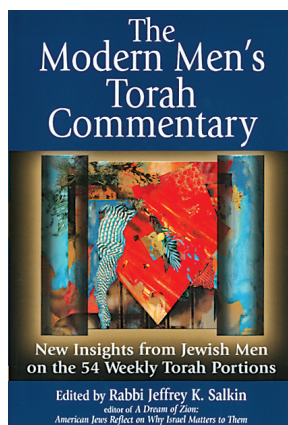
Gabriel Riesser, a leading advocate for Jewish emancipation and a member of one of the first Reform temples, rejected baptism for the sake of civil rights: “Nobody has ever obtained the esteem of others by begging for it,” he wrote. “The prerequisite for the esteem of others is self-esteem.” An elected delegate to the Frankfurt Parliament during the Revolution of 1848, Riesser helped draft a constitution for Germany. When the revolution failed, Jewish emancipation had to wait twenty years for the unification of the German state under Bismarck.

In his excellent popular history, Goldfarb narrates this story in sweeping strokes, relying on the published studies of historians. A host of personalities come to life—Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, and Moses Hess; Marcel Proust and Franz Kafka; Theodor Herzl, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein—described with a quote borrowed from

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French journalist Bernard Lazare: “Every Jew has his system, his idea of the world, his economic and social theory, his means of solving the problem of Jewish wretchedness, of anti-Semitism. He is a great builder of doctrines.”

Goldfarb illuminates the tensions of generations of European Jews living in societies where emancipation had to be won, where anti-Semitism continued to flourish, and where modern Jews now asked themselves, Who am I? What makes me Jewish? These questions remain at the heart of the Jewish identity crisis in “modernity”—the era that began with Emancipation.



### The Modern Men's Torah Commentary: New Insights from Jewish Men on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions edited by Jeffrey K. Salkin

(*Jewish Lights*, 331 pp., \$24.99)

Why a men’s Torah commentary, when the traditional rabbinic commentaries are all by men? “The great, often unspoken crisis facing modern liberal Judaism is the disengagement of its men,” writes Rabbi Jeffrey K. Salkin. Men, he believes, “need more and different entryways into Jewish study.” This book presents a paradigm for studying Torah with a greater consciousness of the issues that concern modern men.

With an impressive roster of contributors—Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis as well as professors of psychiatry, literature, and journalism—this collection uses the weekly Torah portions to discuss men’s lives as fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers; different aspects of their public, personal, and working lives; ways of dealing with mentoring, aging, health issues, loss, and love. As Rabbi David Polish

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puts it in “Mensching Up,” his *d’var Torah* on the adult encounter of Joseph and his brothers: “The whole saga is about the lot of them—our fathers, our brothers—growing, becoming *menschen*.... Perhaps we need to hear their story in a way our sisters do not.”

##### Good for the Jews: A Novel by Debra Spark

(*University of Michigan Press*, 272 pp., \$24)

Is it good for the Jews? The title of Debra Spark’s novel uses a familiar expression for putting Jewish security at the center of every issue. It also sums up the different worldviews

of two generations. Mose Sheinbaum, the 60-something hero of the book, judges all events by this litmus test. His 25-year-old niece, Ellen, refuses to view the world through his uni-dimensional lens. “What year do you think it is?” she asks him in one of their bantering exchanges. “It’s 1939. It’s always 1939,” he responds.

Loosely based on the biblical book of Esther, with characters that match all the main characters in the Purim story—Ellen for Esther, Mose for Mordecai, Alex for Ahasuerus, Valerie for Vashti, and Hyman Clark for Haman—the novel reads like a modern parody of the Purim story.

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