

**MODERN JUDAISM: GELOTOLOGICAL STUDIES AND
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract. *This article examines the main directions of modern Jewish studies through the framework of gelotological research and the analysis of contemporary religious experience. Based on classical Judaic texts, diaspora theory, and the works of modern Jewish philosophers such as Jonathan Sacks, David Hartman, and Daniel Boyarin, the study investigates how Jewish identity has evolved under the influences of globalization, secularization, and digital transformation. The paper also explores the relationship between religion and cultural adaptation in both Israel and the Jewish diaspora, focusing on how traditional faith practices interact with modern social realities. The findings indicate that modern Judaism represents a dynamic synthesis of continuity and innovation, where historical memory, spiritual ethics, and cultural creativity sustain the vitality of Jewish religious life in the 21st century.*

Keywords: *Judaism, gelotology, diaspora, religious experience, globalization, identity, digital religion, tradition and modernity.*

Judaism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, has maintained its faith and identity through centuries of exile and renewal. The Jewish experience is deeply shaped by the historical condition of galut (exile), which became both a symbol of suffering and a source of resilience. Gelotology provides an academic framework for analyzing how Jewish people sustain faith and culture in dispersion,

transforming displacement into spiritual creativity.² In the 21st century, Judaism has evolved into a multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing religion, culture, and global ethics.

Historical Background. The Jewish notion of exile originates from the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century BCE, later reinforced by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. These traumatic events gave birth to a theology centered on memory, return, and moral responsibility.³ Over centuries, Jews in diaspora developed strong intellectual and communal institutions — synagogues, yeshivot, and charitable organizations — to preserve their faith and identity.⁴ The Enlightenment and the Haskalah movement of the 18th–19th centuries introduced secular knowledge and social integration, reshaping Jewish self-understanding in modern Europe.⁵

The Formation of Modern Jewish Identity. Modern Jewish identity reflects a balance between religion and culture. Many Jews today define their belonging through heritage, ethics, and historical consciousness rather than ritual practice alone. In the United States and Europe, Reform and Conservative movements emerged as responses to modernization, promoting inclusive values while retaining spiritual depth.⁶ Orthodox Judaism, however, continues to emphasize the authority of Halakha (Jewish law) and traditional observance. Despite theological differences, all branches share a commitment to memory, education, and justice — core elements of Jewish continuity.

Gelotology and the Religious Experience. Gelotology interprets exile not only as a historical condition but also as a spiritual metaphor. Living in diaspora has encouraged Jews to reinterpret sacred texts in ways that speak to their diverse environments.⁷ Rituals such as Passover, which commemorate liberation from Egypt, gain renewed meaning as expressions of resilience and hope. In diaspora life, religion intertwines with collective memory and cultural creativity, transforming exile into a space for moral reflection and innovation. Jewish education and communal institutions remain the central vehicles for transmitting faith and identity across generations.

Digital Judaism and Global Communication. In recent decades, digital technology has opened new possibilities for Jewish learning and worship. Online Torah study, virtual synagogue services, and global discussion forums allow Jews from different continents to share religious experience and cultural expression. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms like Sefaria and My Jewish Learning became essential tools for maintaining spiritual connection.⁸ This phenomenon, often called “Digital Judaism,” reflects a new form of gelotological adaptation — where dispersion is countered by virtual unity. Through digital networks, Jewish identity becomes more accessible, participatory, and inclusive.

Globalization and Ethical Renewal. Globalization has challenged traditional boundaries of religious identity but also expanded opportunities for intercultural dialogue. Jewish thinkers such as Jonathan Sacks and David Hartman argue that Judaism must engage with universal ethics while maintaining its covenantal roots.⁹ Concepts like *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) illustrate how Jewish thought bridges faith and global moral responsibility. The modern Jewish experience thus serves as a model for how ancient religious traditions can remain relevant in an interconnected world.

Israel and the Diaspora Relationship. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 redefined the meaning of Jewish existence. For many, Israel represents both a spiritual homeland and a political realization of collective destiny. However, diaspora communities continue to play a vital role in sustaining global Jewish life through education, philanthropy, and cultural exchange. The relationship between Israel and the diaspora demonstrates a productive tension between rootedness and dispersion — a hallmark of the gelotological condition.¹⁰

Conclusion. Modern Judaism stands as a living example of how tradition adapts to modernity without losing its essence. Gelotology reveals that exile, often seen as a symbol of loss, can also be a source of creativity and renewal. Through religion, culture, and technology, Jews continue to transform dispersion into unity, embodying faith in action.¹¹ In the face of globalization, Judaism preserves its moral

vision while offering a universal message of resilience, justice, and spiritual continuity.

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