

legally recognized. Recognition can come through judicial interpretation. It's "hard not to be an 'originalist' in some sense" when interpreting the Constitution, Sen says, but even that leaves a lot open to discussion about "what exactly of the original enterprise needs to be preserved": the specific language used or the "constitutional motivation." Interpreting the Constitution in light of the motivations at its core—the Framers' vision of a system that would "make room for people with divergent interests and values to live together"—Sen argues, is a more compelling method for keeping it modern.

Surprisingly, adhering to a strict textual interpretation of the Constitution does not proscribe some accommodation to modern ideas. Over time language evolves, and some of the words of the Founders today mean something quite different than they did in 1787. As a result, even a strictly textual reading will change over time. Though the evolution of words and our ideas about human rights may not correspond exactly, it's important to acknowledge that judges who embrace originalism are not just machines but interpreters of words, which, as Samuel Johnson put it, "are but the signs of ideas."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

A Jewish Revival

THE SOURCE: "The American Jewish Revival of *Musar*" by Geoffrey Claussen, in *The Hedgehog Review*, Summer 2010.

OVER THE LAST DECADE, A small, obscure movement has made inroads into non-Orthodox

American Jewish culture. *Musar* began in Lithuania in the 19th century as a reaction to the extremely scholarly, text-focused Jewish culture that dominated. (The Hebrew word *musar* can be loosely translated as "morality.") Led by Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810–83), proponents argued that text study alone does not lead to greater moral character. Instead, adherents must engage in frequent and rigorous introspection and develop practices to address their character flaws. In certain important ways, the revival of *musar* today is, like the

Musar, a rigorous Jewish ethical practice from Lithuania, is gaining adherents in America.

impulse behind its Lithuanian predecessor, countercultural, rejecting the prominent American feel-good ethos of self-esteem coddlers. But, argues Jewish Theological Seminary doctoral candidate Geoffrey Claussen, "there are ways in which the revival of the *musar* movement is encouraged by strong trends in Jewish culture and in the broader American culture."

The practice of *musar* is no walk in the park. It calls for "introspective meditation and journaling, conversations about one's moral situation that elicit critical feedback, chanting and visualization exercises that engage the emotions, a deep commitment

to the ethical and ritual requirements of Jewish law, and engaging in acts of kindness beyond what the law requires." The work is highly individualized. It aims to foster the virtues of "love, justice, compassion, generosity, reverence, faith, humility, equanimity, and patience."

Salanter's hopes for a mass movement were never realized in Lithuania. Traditionalists rejected his methods in favor of more intellectually driven moral education, and liberals were turned off by *musar's* piety, favoring more Western approaches to morality. The would-be movement more or less died out when a large portion of its followers were killed in the Holocaust. Some of those who survived emigrated to America, but few continued to teach the practice. One prominent American rabbi is said to have thought that Americans were not equipped to handle the enormous work that *musar* requires.

Strangely, this movement is now flourishing in America, and particularly among non-Orthodox Jews. Though *musar's* rigor and intensity certainly don't appeal to everyone, some of its elements are a good fit for American Jews. Studies have shown that Americans prefer solitary meditation to group worship. Jews—often alienated by impersonal synagogue services, an ancient liturgy, and prayers in a foreign language—are no exception. Perhaps the most appealing aspect of *musar* is that it speaks a universal language, asking Jews to become more ethical people, not just "better Jews."