NOTES FOR WEEK THREE: Jews and the Enlightenment

1. In the 18th century, traditional beliefs were challenged: Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) inspired the Haskalah movement in 18th-century Germany.

2. Haskalah (Hebrew: חָשָׁכָה; "enlightenment" or "education" from sekhel "intellect", "mind"), the Jewish Enlightenment, was a movement among European Jews in the 18th–19th centuries that advocated adopting enlightenment values.

3. Haskalah differed from Deism of the European Enlightenment: seeking modernized philosophical and critical revision within Jewish belief, a lifestyle acceptable for emancipation rights, assimilation to the Gentile community, motivating establishment of Reform and Neo-Orthodox denominations. Opposition to resurgent mysticism and traditional scholarship. But it wasn’t until the late 19th century for secular Jewish ideologies to replace traditional Judaism.

4. Mendelssohn’s German translation of the Torah provided an entrance to cultured German circles.

5. Those Jews who participated in the enlightenment began in varying degrees to participate in the cultural practices of the surrounding Gentile population. The birth of the Reform movement: leaders rejected the continuing observance of those aspects of Jewish law which they classified as ritual, as opposed to moral or ethical.

6. In Germany and the West, followers of Haskalah adopted German as their spoken and written language for everyday interaction. But for Jews in Poland and in Eastern Europe, non-Haskalah Jews retained Yiddish and traditional religious practices.

7. Its founder was Yisroel Baal Shem Tov, who was born in Okop, a village in Podolia around 1700. The name can mean Israel "master of the good name" (bal shem-tov) or "good master of the name" (balshem tov).

8. Traditional Jewish scholarship (whether biblical, Talmudic, or kabbalistic) was relegated to secondary or tertiary importance in the traditional Jewish ladder of prestige, in itself a revolutionary societal change.
All About Yiddish, Prof. Jim Kohn

YIDDISH WORDS FOR FOOD:

Bagel: from Ger. Beugel, "a round loaf of bread": a hard roll in the shape of a doughnut.

Bialy: abbrev. "Bialystoker": a flat roll with a pool for onions.

Blintz: fr. Ukrainian "pancake": a pancake rolled around a filling, often cottage cheese.

Borsht: fr. Slavonic: beet soup served hot or cold, with a dab of sour cream.

Challa: fr. Hebrew "challah": a braided loaf of white bread, glazed with egg white.

Gefilte fish: from Ger. "stuffed fish": cakes of chopped fish mixed with eggs, salt and onions, pepper.

Halvah: fr. Turkish "helva", Arabic "halwa": sweet mixture of honey, ground sesame, with chocolate mixed in.

Kasheh: fr. Russ. "porridge", cooked cereal, but also used to describe a difficult situation.


Knish: fr. Ukrainian, little dumplings filled with groats, grated potatoes, onions, chopped liver or cheese.

Kreplach: from Ger. "kreppel" Fr. "crepe", a triangular square dumpling like ravioli with chopped meat or cheese, served in soup.

Latke: fr. Slavic "pancake", usually a potato pancake, often served at Chanukah.


Shmeer: fr. Ger. "Schmiere", grease, a spread on bread; also to bribe.


Tsimmes fr. Ger. "zum essen" to eat, a side dish of mixed cooked vegetables and fruits, slightly sweetened.