



Solomon Schechter

There are lots of different ways of being Jewish. Some Jews are Orthodox, some are Reform, some are Renewal. But I am famous for founding the United Synagogue of America, and I am considered the architect of the Conservative movement.

I was born in 1847 to a Chasidic family in Romania and I attended yeshivas in Eastern Europe. My father was a butcher and he taught me quite a bit. I learned to read Hebrew by the age of 3 and by the age of 5 I had completely learned the Torah. I learned so much that I eventually was asked to be a tutor to Rabbis! I became a

professor of Hebrew in London in 1899.

In 1902 I was recruited to become president of the Jewish Theological Society in New York city and I served in that capacity until 1915. During that time I founded the United Synagogue of America, later known as the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

I have always felt that Jewish law is very important. I don't think that compromising on the law just because it may be difficult to follow is very smart. Our religion has lots of "don'ts" – don't eat this, don't do this, don't do it that way, etc. It can be hard to follow all of the laws but it is so important to do so. I'm glad that I didn't give up when things got hard. When I first became president of the Jewish Theological Society, I had a hard time getting people to realize how important this organization was. Over the course of 13 years, our school only managed to attract and ordain 17 rabbis – that's not too impressive. But I kept bringing in excellent teachers and promising students and built an amazing library of books that rabbis really wanted to study and couldn't get elsewhere.

In 1913 I founded the United Synagogue and I hear that it now has over 800 congregations as members. Did you know that your synagogue, Temple Beth Abraham, is a member of the United Synagogue? It's true. And have you ever heard of the Solomon Schechter Schools? There are dozens of Conservative movement schools that are named after me, all over the country.

In addition to my work for the Conservative movement, I was also a big supporter of Israel. I so wanted to have a peaceful and safe homeland for Jewish people. One other thing I am remembered for is my discoveries in the Cairo Geniza. A Geniza is a place that Jews put books and ritual objects that are damaged and can't be used anymore, but which we don't want to simply throw away. Temple Beth Abraham has one where we put things like old prayer books. When the geniza gets full, we bury it. A very special geniza was discovered in Cairo, Egypt, and contained thousands of pages of documents that teach us what life was like for Jews many hundreds of years ago. I was lucky enough to gain access to the geniza and I was able to bring back to London thousands of documents which I sorted. I then published information about the contents of the geniza for everyone to read. This was such an exciting find for the Jewish people and the world and I was thrilled to be such a close part of it.

I died in 1915. One of my famous quotes you might like quite a bit. I said: "Gentlemen, in order to be a success in the American rabbinate, you must be able to talk baseball."