
TITLE "Peretz Smolenskin's Nekam Berit as a Response to the Russian Pogroms of 1881: A Translation and a Literary-Critical Analysis of the Novel"

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Peretz Smolenskin's Nekam Berit
as a Response to the Russian Pogroms of 1881:
a Translation and a Literary-Critical Analysis of the Novel

by
Steven Adams

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Ordination

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Referee: Dr. Werner Weinberg

Thesis Digest

Nekam Berit ("Revenge of the Covenant") is a novel written by Peretz Smolenskin as a response to the Russian pogroms of 1881. Smolenskin reaffirms his belief in Jewish Nationalism and denies the validity of the Enlightenment point of view. The effect is dramatic and, to some people, was probably persuasive.

The novel is written in three parts. Each part takes place in a different setting. The story begins in the "capital city", presumably St. Petersburg, with a student gathering. Part two is set in the rooming house of the main character, Ephraim Ben-Hagri. The third part of the story takes place in Ben-Hagri's home town where he visits some childhood friends and the local synagogue.

In a three page introduction Smolenskin describes, in an embellished, abstract style, the uncertainty of the future and the different spirits of the young and the old generations. The rest of the first section describes a debate among Jewish college students in which all sides of the ideological struggle of the times receive a hearing. Ephraim Ben-Hagri, the hero of the novel, believes that the Gentiles will accept the Jews if the Jews are willing to modify their religious practices and live more like the Gentiles.

The second part of the novel takes place on Easter Sunday, which falls on the fifth day of Passover. At the Gentile-owned rooming house where Ben-Hagri lives he receives two letters from his parents. His father's letter describes a pogrom in his home town. His father has lost all hope for harmony with the Gentiles. His mother disagrees and believes that this was an isolated event which will blow over. For the moment,

Ben-Hagri chooses to believe his mother's opinion of the event.

In the third part of the novel Ben-Hagri visits some of his childhood friends. At first he is treated well by the mother and sister of his "friends", but when his childhood companions return from a hunting trip they ignore and insult Ben-Hagri. First he considers violent revenge. Instead he joins his fellow Jews, marching mournfully to the synagogue on the Ninth of Av. Ben-Hagri converts to Jewish Nationalism. His revenge, the "revenge of the covenant" (hence, the name of the novel) is to rebuild the land of Israel. A short paragraph describing the disgrace of Ephraim's mother and the death of the Enlightenment conclude the story.

This thesis is a translation of Nekam Berit followed by a literary-critical analysis of the novel. Most of the analysis is of an original nature, since other sources on this story are scarce. This analysis includes a plot summary, a look at literary styles and themes, and a study of the novel as an expression of Smolenskin's response to the pogroms. In essence, Nekam Berit serves as a contemporary document for the clash of ideologies among East European Jews at the time of the decline of the Enlightenment, and the rise of Jewish Nationalism.

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Introduction

When I was an undergraduate college student, one of my professors said that history is not a "true" account of what has happened in the past. Rather, it is a study of what people believe to have happened in the past. This distinction stresses the fact that all accounts of history are subjective. In this thesis I will be dealing with a highly subjective account of a specific period of time. Nekam Berit (for the title cf. Lev. 26 : 25) is a novel set in Eastern Europe during the time of the pogroms of 1881. This novel is also a vehicle for promoting Peretz Smolenskin's views of Jewish Nationalism.

In the process of writing this thesis I have translated Nekam Berit and analyzed the novel as a work of literature and as an ideological response to the pogroms. I have done this in the following manner. First I have provided some information about Smolenskin's life and literary influences. Next is the translation of the novel. Utilizing this translation I have presented an analysis of the novel. This is followed by an analysis of the literary elements of the novel, such as characterization, use of names, language style and themes. Finally I have endeavored to analyze Nekam Berit as Smolenskin's response to the 1881 pogroms. I did so by explaining how Smolenskin presents his ideology of Nationalism and how he discounts the Enlightenment within the novel.

The process of translation is inherently complex. Translations of the same work can vary according to their purpose. The translator faces the challenge of trying to be faithful to the original text, while providing a text which makes sense in the language of translation. The purpose of this translation of Nekam Berit is to analyze the text.

Therefore I often tried to retain Smolenskin's style of expression. As a result, the English sounds awkward at times, but is still readable and understandable. Smolenskin's use of Hebrew differs from current Hebrew usage. The sometimes awkward English text actually conveys the awkwardness of the original Hebrew text. This translation is intended as an accurate, working translation rather than a smooth, literary one.

Nevertheless, some adjustments were necessary to produce this translation. As I shall discuss in the second chapter of the analysis, the sentences and paragraphs are often unusually long. As much as possible I divided the text into shorter sentence units. I also divided long paragraphs into shorter ones. My decisions of where to divide sentences and paragraphs are based on the flow of the text. Yet, even some of the "shortened" sentences seem long by modern English standards. Another problem is that Smolenskin seems to have been careless about verb tense and noun number. Also the beginning and end of quotations were not clearly marked, which required that I make a decision about this. I tried, to the best of my ability, to be faithful to Smolenskin's intended meaning, as I perceived it, while dealing with these textual problems.

This translation is based on the 1968 reprint of the 1905 Warsaw edition of Nekam Berit. I also consulted two other available texts for comparison (see Bibliography) and noted occasional text variations with footnotes. For easy reference I included the Hebrew page numbers of the 1905 edition, in parentheses in the left-hand margin. In the analysis section of this thesis I have used footnotes for sources other than the 1905 text of the novel. However, when referring to material or information from the story itself, I have typed the Hebrew page number in

parentheses at the appropriate places in the text of the analysis. This is a more practical and useful method for referring to the source, due to the nature of this work and the frequent references to the text of the novel.

Due to the scarcity of sources dealing with this novel, most of my work has been original scholarship. I could not have succeeded in this task without the assistance of family, friends and teachers. In particular, I wish to thank Dr. Werner Weinberg for his expert guidance and limitless patience. This thesis could not have been completed without his insights into Hebrew idioms and usage and his assistance in organizing the total project. I also wish to thank my fiancée, Gail Goldblatt, for encouragement and inspiration. In addition to many helpful suggestions of how to complete this task, she helped me find the strength and purpose to continue, when the work became frustrating. I'm glad we could share this accomplishment together, and look forward to sharing a lifetime of achievements in the future.

Now we will begin our study of Peretz Smolenskin and his novel Nekam Berit. I have tried to provide an insightful analysis of a significant novel, largely ignored until now. This work is only a beginning. The fiction of Peretz Smolenskin is like a frontier, waiting to be explored. Working on this thesis has increased my interest in this topic, while providing knowledge of Smolenskin's thoughts and perceptions. I have found this work to be an emotionally and intellectually satisfying experience.

Peretz Smolenskin

Peretz Smolenskin was born in Monastyrstchina, a town in the White Russian province of Mohilev, in 1842. During the early years of his life Peretz was exposed to incidents of persecution against the Jews. His eldest brother was forced into Tsar Nicholas I's army and never returned. Peretz's father was forced to leave home due to false accusations, which a Polish priest brought against him. Peretz's mother worked hard to support her six children as well as she was able.

The education of Peretz and his older brother Leon was a top priority in the Smolenskin household. After a while, Peretz's father was able to return home and help provide for his sons' education. Peretz exhibited much scholastic ability. By the age of five he had already been introduced to study of the Pentateuch and some Talmud. Peretz's father died when he was ten years old. A year later Peretz left home to study at the Yeshivah in Shklov. His brother, Leon, who had preceded him to Shklov, helped make the young Smolenskin's adjustment to the Yeshivah easier.

While studying at Shklov, Peretz was introduced by his brother to some ideas of the Enlightenment. He learned Russian, read some modern Hebrew writings and began to associate with other "enlightened" Jews. His non-traditional interests led to problems. The people who supported him with meals began to withdraw their support. First Peretz fled to the Hasidic center of Lubavitch, where he stayed from 1858-1860.

However, Smolenskin could not accept the irrational, superstitious life of the Hasidim. He wandered to various towns within the Pale of Settlement, supporting himself as a cantor's assistant, a teacher of Hebrew and Talmud, and even occasionally preaching in synagogues.

In 1862 Smolenskin arrived in Odessa. He spent five years there working as a Hebrew teacher while he studied modern languages. In Odessa Smolenskin was exposed to more modern notions of Judaism. He gave up his traditional religious practices, but maintained a strong attachment to the Jewish people. It was also in Odessa that Smolenskin's literary career began in 1867 with an article criticizing M. Letteris' translation of Goethe's Faust into Hebrew. Also the first few chapters of his novel Ha-To'eh be-Darke ha-Hayim ("The Wanderer in Life's Paths") were written at that time.

In 1867 Smolenskin left Odessa. He travelled through Rumania, Germany and Bohemia. Finally in 1868 he settled in Vienna. Smolenskin had originally hoped to study in a secular university. When he was unable to do this he decided to pursue his literary career. He founded the Hebrew journal Ha-Shahar ("The Dawn") which he edited from 1868-1885. This journal became a forum for intellectual Jews who were disenchanted with the Enlightenment. When Smolenskin observed the results of the Enlightenment among West European Jews he found a Judaism lacking in spirit. Although Smolenskin had himself abandoned traditional Jewish practices, he felt that a sense of Jewish Peoplehood could provide the spirit lacking among "enlightened" Jews of the West. Smolenskin became the leader of what has been called "The National Progressive Movement."

Through the journal Ha-Shahar Smolenskin published many of his novels and essays. Aside from Ha-To'eh be-Darke ha-Hayim (1876), a

highly autobiographical novel about an orphan wandering through parts of the Jewish ghetto, he wrote Gemul ha-Yesharim ("The Reward of the Righteous" - 1875); Ha-Yerushah ("The Inheritance" - 1884)*; and Nekam Berit ("Revenge of the Covenant" - 1883). In these novels Smolenskin wrote about Jewish life, mostly in the ghetto of Eastern Europe. While Smolenskin was a Jewish nationalist most of his adult life, his ideas in this area developed and gained intensity. In his earlier novels Smolenskin alludes to some sort of Jewish national entity, of which the Hebrew language is a major element. In Nekam Berit, however, Smolenskin explicitly describes his ideal of rebuilding the nation of Israel on the land of ancient Israel.

As I have already suggested, Smolenskin did not believe that the Enlightenment provided an answer to the problems of the Jews. He correctly noted that, especially in Eastern Europe, certain barriers to Jewish participation in secular life would remain. Also, the Judaism of the "enlightened" Jews lacked the type of spiritual uplift which Smolenskin felt was essential to Jewish identity. He travelled through part of the Russian Pale in 1880 to see how well his ideas had spread. He was gratified at the influence his ideas seemed to have had.

Peretz Smolenskin saw assimilation as a futile attempt at being accepted in Gentile society. He felt that sooner or later the bubble would burst, and Gentile resentment of the Jews would surface in violence. The small-scale persecutions of Jews in Rumania and Russia during the 1870's might have influenced Smolenskin's thinking on this matter. The

*Ha-Yerushah was never actually completed. The last section of the novel was being written while Smolenskin's health was deteriorating. 1884 is the date he stopped working on the novel.

widespread, government sanctioned pogroms of 1881, just one year after his trip to Russia, confirmed Smolenskin's fears and strengthened his belief in the nationalistic solution to the problems of the Jews.

The novel Nekam Berit was Smolenskin's only complete literary response to the pogroms of 1881. Following the completion of Nekam Berit Smolenskin's physical and mental health deteriorated. He died in 1885. The development of Smolenskin's Jewish Nationalism parallels the development of Zionism in general. Smolenskin's ideas pre-date the Zionism of Herzl but his views, especially during his later years, seem almost prophetic. In Nekam Berit, to which we now direct our attention, Peretz Smolenskin created a dramatic presentation of his nationalist ideas. Indeed these ideas have survived the death of the Hebrew author Peretz Smolenskin.

נְקָם פְּרִית

מעשה שהיה והיה ויהיה בכל מקום ובכל זמן

ואצרך ואחקי לברית עם לאור נויס לפקוח עינים עורות
להוציא ממסגר אסירי מבית כלא יושבי חשך.
(ישעיהו ס"ב.)

קסר לעד לדור



מאת

צנ"ה.

(ראה אור במעם הראשונה בהשחר שנה העשתי עשרה חוברת י"א וי"ב.)

ווייען תרמ"ד.

ברוסס של געאָרנ בראַג, (המנהל ס. סטאלענסקיין.)

NEKAM BERIT

(Revenge of the Covenant)

A Tale of What Has Happened, Is Happening and Will Happen
in Every Place and at Every Time.

"I have kept you and given you as a
covenant people, a light for the
nations; to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out the prisoner from
confinement, and those sitting in the
dark out from prison."

(Isaiah 42:6-7)

It Shall Be Told Forever and Ever

by
Peretz Smolenskin

Part One

The Young Men's Secret

- (5) Not even a prophet is able to reveal to a spirit its path beforehand. He knows that if the north wind and the south wind were to meet then there would be a wavering struggle between them. One will prevail over the other and in the tumult of their storm they jointly amplify the storm which in its course makes the earth quake. Not one living being stands before its fury. Every wise-hearted soul, however, is unable to imagine, to find a reliable account for all of the stimuli and motives behind the path which the spirit plots for itself. Thus who can reveal the path of a person's spirit?

A new spirit has passed over the youth, the students of the schools in the capital city. It was a spirit which was foreign to them and to their fathers. It woke them up and aroused them. It placed its message into their mouths as it now appears in the gathering of students, composed of many students who will be the ones healing or killing sick people; those who shall build palaces and span bridges over the land, on water or in the spirit; those who shall discharge true judgment or shall pervert justice. Each as the opportunity presents itself to him, after he has gone forth from the university and the sages have layed their hands upon his head.

Young people are the delight of every people and land, the hope of every nation and people. It is to them that the old people look after they have spent their own days in vain - and the goal, the vision of their lives is still there, beyond them. Their people

did not look to this desire, to be a shining light. Their light and the hope of their lives' visions perished with their lives. It was as if the messenger of salvation took out all of their spirit, which was burning like a river of fire in the heat of their youth. In the days ahead they closed their lips in the confinement of a prisoner, in a prison of custody and servitude. Their souls were consumed by all of this, because the visions of their lives from youthful days have become disappointments. Their friends, whose souls desired only position - concerning this, wonders caused evil to fall upon those in office in order to close their mouths. They too withdrew at the time of their old age when they knew that this also would not succeed. All of them together, (6) who saw the graves of desires and hopes; they raised their eyes toward the youths. On the threshold of their lives' end, the hope returns. As they observe, the strength passes on to the heirs of their portion, who are still going along their paths. They will ban war. They shall aim at their goal and perhaps they will not miss the mark ...

A nation which has been defeated on the high places of a battlefield is in distress. The nation becomes a servant doing taskwork. On its back the conqueror treads. Heavy-footed and haughty he amasses his might. The oppressed person understands that he is too helpless to rise up and greet his oppressor. The youths, however, will become a fortress protecting him and a comfort for his soul. He will fill his quiver with them, with the vision of his spirit and he shall not be ashamed of them. He believes he will see their hand raised, a hand exacting eternal vengeance ... In each and

every distress which a tyrant and evil one brings upon a nation or a person he eats the remnant of the innocent ones and he drinks the blood of the ones who labor in sorrow and darkness. The oppressed people, even in the secret of their tent sigh, but they don't cry out because of the arm of the mighty ones, lest he hear their voice and they be accused and he crush them, their wives and their children, lest he also set upon them the staff of wickedness because of them. Therefore they see terror and they are afraid but they suppress their sights. The youths, however, envision angels - heavenly beings - all of whom have come down to avenge the blood of innocent people before, until the yoke of a woman and her children had risen upon them. They are not afraid of mischievous speech because they only bring their soul to the sacrifice.

The youths will become magnificent, becoming a people dwelling secure. Neither a tyrant's sceptre from within nor the hand of an enemy from without shall be set upon him. He will rely on them because they magnify their work and they do marvellous things and they raise their people to the highest level. But they are merely imitating the living - seeing the source of new life in a place where death has set a harvest for those who walk before them. The youth knows this and he became excited and fermented like wine for every higher purpose and is drawn after each high work. He is secure in his strength to do marvellous things. He soars on the wings of his spirit and he passes across out to the infinite reaches, ignoring obstacles and obstructions. Yet before his soul was confined by material fetters to the place and the time, they struck, before his soul was afflicted with the labor of the road. Hope was disappointed

even before his chief desire floated, and the light of the living beings' opinion and their circumstances and their perversity was there even before he brought the darkness and the destruction in the interior of his soul ...

(7) Also here many youths, full of life and hope, have come and assembled. They shout aloud and are stirred with excitement and a commotion. Nevertheless, this torrent of speech is not like the outpouring of speech of all other youth gatherings. It is not pride or arrogance which opens their lips. Not even to be magnified in strength do they increase the power in their lips. For truly their faces reveal to everyone that they desire to do great deeds and secret things. They desire with all their heart, and their souls burn coals to do one of these wonders - or even all of them together - which all the people are waiting to see done by their children in the next generation. But a gloomy spirit hits the youths' spirit and subdues it. Each eye can behold it in them.

They know their own grief, for no one has placed his confidence in them. The thousands of eyes of the generation who will make room for them are not raised upon them. And at the time of the end, when he goes and does not return, then he shall have himself a burial along with all his hopes, if he had not prepared a gravedigger during his life.

Who are they, in whose breast is hidden the strength of youth, and as they become prematurely old they request only advice to be exalted, and to be delivered from distress, but not to cheer or to shout or conquer? They are the sons of Jacob! Sons of this people which was unable to return and to establish the hope after it fell sevenfold. That which he envisions in the youths is that which he saw

in his own soul and in his ancestors: Only they who carry the burden of life and distress, they shall lack the doing of great deeds; like lonely wanderers in a desert wilderness each one guards his own life and seeks its preservation as long as chance has not brought him before the jaws of a lion. And when he arrives that far then he passes away and there is no memory of him.

Thus is the portion of their children after them. Will they not also live like them without a future and a hope? For what can be the hope of the individual even if God's strength be his? And if the fathers wandered in the wilderness and were buried in deserts of sand which lacked roads or paths and they fell prey to the teeth of evil, surely their children whose hands they taught to swim in the sea of knowledge, even they are dispersed from their place, and each one is carried his own separate way upon the waves of the stormy water. They celebrate and they move about like drunkards. All their wisdom is swallowed up for they have no path. Before, they escape the angry waves only that they fall into the mouth of a sea monster or beneath the waves. They fall and rise in the great sea and will be lost from the midst of their community.

This is the dealing of the parents toward their children, for what is their own hope? Like all inhabitants of the land these Jews do not think. The Gentiles will not look to them with pride, and they (8) will not become a splendor to them.

Won't he be raised by them at times in sorrow? And even while he stored salvation, he was too miserly to give them a portion. And for whom do they, who carry the banner of life, labor? Is it for their ancestors who also during their lives wrote on their children's

cradle, "You who are coming here, give up all hope"? Or is it for the rest of the people of the land who are like a thorn thrust into their eyes - their lives, their labor and their desire together?

If they seek honor, then they receive double disgrace. If they become wise, then shame becomes their reward. If they strengthen their heart to protect their honor, then they are banished from the community like insolent ones. If they strive for peace it will be very bitter for them because then they are the fearful ones and cowards. Where, however, is the peg upon which they hang the burden of their lives and their desires?

Nevertheless they, the living, survive also if they do not think much, just as the dead die without knowledge. In the heart of the youths are born many ideas and desires, even without account or goal. And also these who assembled here today, it is the spirit of the youths that gathers them. They speak and converse today as if they were not the delight of their people and the joyful hope of the entire generation. A mighty and strong voice is now heard sometimes from the mouth of one and sometimes from another speaking to his colleague with the strength of his feelings.

"In front of all our comrades I tell you that you have done great things, for like a hero of importance your reproaches are a disgrace to yourself and insult all of us. Forever your deed will be remembered," called out one of the students, fired up with dark eyes that flashed. All of his being said that not with the speech of a hypocrite did his spirit erupt. As he turned toward one of those sitting at the table, before whom was a glass of beer toward which he looked all the time, the man spoke to him. The person to whom

the speaker directed his words was a man about twenty-two years old, of splendid appearance. His cheeks were round and full, as if they were carved from pure marble stone. On to the paleness of his face is added the splendor of his dark hair, falling down onto his temple, down to his shoulders, and over half of his forehead. His dark eyes distribute peace and calm and happiness. Something like a laugh hovers on his red lips, which only a small black moustache covers. As they are now raised to answer to the person speaking to him, his well-formed stature becomes visible.

- (9) The eyes of all the assembled, which are drawn toward him together, as if by a magical spell, attest that he is the man whose spirit has gathered them here. But something like a disappointed hope appears right away on every face as he answered with a gesture. "Please, please, don't laud my actions exceedingly, for I have not done great deeds. He has insulted me and I slapped his cheek. Thus the matter was finished. So what else is there for us to say?" When he finished his words he returned to his place.

One of the assembled people arose suddenly, like an arrow shot from a bow. He was a tall man, about twenty-four years old. In a voice shooting flames of fire he opened his mouth and spoke, he too in the language of the land, like those speaking before him. He called: "Gentlemen, behold, a great thing has brought us here. It is a great thing, which has the power to change all of us, and to pave a new way for us; to set within us a new life and a new spirit. This is a propitious moment for us, and Heaven forbid, may your spirit not become discouraged, even if Ben-Hagri refuses to carry the burden of glory which they load onto his shoulder.

"I do not know what motivated him to speak the words which were like snow, drowning the fire of emotions which were ignited in our heart by him. I do not know if this is the heart's response, or foolishness tied to our hearts, from the day's of our youth, to trust in the future. The day will come on which our portion will be secure in our hand, and each hand will not bring us wickedness. For salvation shall blossom for our people like a rose. His glory will sprout from the earth like a flower which is covered with soil.

"I do not know what is in his heart. It is all the same to me, what he thinks on this day. But this I know, that great are the wonderful deeds which men have done for the masses; and because of which they became great men. Until the last generation the end of their deeds was not in their first consideration. They did something which perhaps would quickly be forgotten like a dead person from the heart, had it not been that the event placed something extra upon it. But he turned his face and therefore he was establishing a foundation for a powerful fortress.

"Thus we glorify the deed of Ben-Hagri, even if he refuses to see it as we see it. It is sufficient for us to know that the Prince N. loves, and is a friend to Ben-Hagri since he called to him in front of the whole community and the young women enveloped him. A despicable Jew. Ben-Hagri slapped him on the cheek before everyone. This matter was great and much respected, for it is in his power to open our eyes to know and understand our situation, to see and to execute righteous judgement. All of our effort to seek love is empty; vain is our hope to see the barrier which they set up between us and between (10) the Gentiles falling behind us. The hate is established forever;

shame and disgrace is the portion of our cup. From those who were raised in knowledge to those who sought knowledge, as from those who spurned any knowledge to those who were far from knowledge. But today will become the start of a new path, and become the end of the path which we have chosen until now. Thus we exult the work of Ben-Hagri even if he rejects our praise."

Many of those assembled clapped their hands as a sign of thanks, and a few nodded their heads at him. Ben-Hagri raised his head. Light laughter, like mockery, passed between the lips of his mouth. Without leaving his place he answered gently: "If the thanks are addressed also to the Prince, then together we shall divide the spoil."

"Not in mockery," called the man with added strength to his speech. "Didn't I say that sometimes a man does great deeds without realizing it. Surely, so it is also for the praise one addresses to the Prince. For he was like an interpreter for the feelings of thousands of his brothers, which they concealed inside of themselves; but he revealed his heart.

"When he is angry at you, it is not only against you that he sends his tongue, it is not the glory of your name that he seeks to bring down, but rather the entire people. So the entire people is indeed guilty if you do not speak according to his heart. Or because you dared to speak soft words to a woman upon whom he sets his eyes. In this matter it was shown by plain sight and not by a riddle that the rules of nature are established forever. Thus the disgrace of Israel stands forever. As one is unable to teach a cat that it is useful not to lie in wait for the mouse if you also fill his stomach with fattened swans, thus in vain is all of your work to give to your people honor in front

of the Gentiles."

"If we toil only in vain to teach the cat knowledge, let us leave and go for our own good," said one of the students.

"It is not so," called the speaker, "but we may teach the mouse to stand up for himself, or then we may bring wisdom into the heart of the cats, that they not hunt for prey. And Ben-Hagri points the way to action and thus he will be exalted."

"Therefore we shall establish a school for mice," called one from the gathering.

"No, my brothers. Don't jest, because we have not all gathered here for that," uttered a young man, about twenty years old.

(11) "Not one of us denies that a new spirit has come suddenly into our midst without our knowing from where this spirit has come. How much we all feel that this is the time to act for our people.

"The sages who were before us did not do good when they turned their back to our unfortunate people. They rejoiced over every good piece of flesh which came into their possession at the time that all of their people were dying in front of them in immeasurable grief. They were like those who flee from the battlefield, in order to join the enemies' army.

"But, as for us, a different heart and a new spirit has been given to us, because we desire to do things for our people and our brethren. This event has gathered all of us together. Come, let us not spend this hour in words of vanity. Rather, let each person offer advice of what we must do. I hope that every one of us is prepared to do according to his obligation and behest - Behold, Ben-Jacob said that we are like mice in the midst of cats. Will one

who doesn't choose a lie cause himself to be disappointed? Isn't it thus? Are we not different from an assembly of the rest of the students?"

"No, it isn't so. If we don't approach them then they will approach us," called the student who spoke about establishing a school for cats.

"No, no, please don't speak those words. Perhaps you do not understand how great the road is between approaching and actually meeting. If we approach, they do not set their hearts upon us. If we meet and we come into their assembly then they will endure us, while we have not raised up even one of them. Just that we become a burden to them, we could see this if only we wanted to see ..."

"Then what are you suggesting to do?" called the same student.

"I'm saying that according to the words of Ben-Jacob, we shall teach the mice to stand up for themselves, and then we shall bring wisdom to the heart of the cats, that he shall not search for prey."

"Yet, my brothers, all of this is only talk," said one of those who was sitting. He was a man who appeared to be about thirty years old. He already completed his college degree and is called a skilled physician, but he mixes in all of the student gatherings as previously, and they all respect him. "Now, they don't search for us as prey, and they don't smite our bones and our flesh. If truly we have not been destroyed, it is because their heart is not yet completely with
(12) us as brothers and friends. They don't treat cruelly the children as did their ancestors. Therefore there is hope that the next generation will be wiser even than their fathers and it will be better than they were. Ben-Hagri,

all of this assembly was for you. Let your opinion be first. What shall we do today?"

Ben-Hagri arose, opened his lips calmly and said, "I have already made known my words and my opinion. This occasion has not changed, even a little, my opinion and my spirit. This has always been my word, that we have the obligation to draw near, because we have distanced ourselves from the Gentiles. That is why we have become ostracized. Only we by our customs and clothing, and our delusions have placed upon ourselves disgrace in the eyes of the people to the extent that they are fearful of us or they detest us. In all the ways of our lives, in the laws of eating and drinking, in our clothing, in our prayers which we pray like crazy people, and in all the ways of our lives we distance every heart from us. Then after all of that we request that they honor us and that they draw near to us!

"Those who are able to draw near will draw near, and those who detest us are not able to draw near. We can't do anything except teach our brethren to know the value of the Gentile, to love him and respect him, to learn his language and his customs, to speak in a clear language like him, and above all to forget that in the past there was a wall separating us from the Gentiles. We shall then assimilate with them, and we will be like them. In one generation they will forget all the words of hate and accusation. That is how I have always thought and that is how I think even today. Concerning this matter we must increase newspapers in the language of the land, in order that we shall teach the people the language. We shall educate them to be considered like the Gentile. But as long as one chooses strange ways, as long as one speaks in a different tongue, as long as one prays in a different language there is no hope that

he will become like the Gentile."

"I shall add to his words," called the young student, "that as long as one prays in different houses of prayer and to a different God ..."

"Do you also believe that they hate us for the sake of the faith?" asked Ben-Hagri.

"Not only for the sake of the faith, but rather also because of the faith. They hate us because they hate us. Thus they have inherited from their fathers and from their fathers' fathers.

- (13) They hate us because they believe we killed their messiah. They harbor a grudge against us because we (the minority)* are insolent, not hearing all the words of the majority or doing according to all that they command. They hate us as all people hate the sect or the faction which separates from them. They seek faults in it.

"All which they fear in us will be a perversion to them, a horrible deed. If they don't find in us that everything is blameworthy or abominable, then it will be enough that we have a different faith. What will encourage them to abandon the hate with which they were born and brought up, to turn and love us? Indeed they will be satisfied by hands full of contentment when they see us eating pork and wearing clothing which is not in accordance with the law of Israel."

"So what are you saying that we should do? To return to the houses of study or to trade with the Gentiles in wine, grain, etc.?"

* This word is found only in the text on which this translation is based, the 1968 reprint of a printing from 1905. It is absent from both the 1883/4 and the 1918 editions which I consulted in this work.

"I am not a representative for congregations of the people of Israel that I should say what to do regarding all of the nation. Rather it is as a friend to students of the Hebrew schools who seek to do something for the people that I make known my opinion. I even say that it is very good to increase the newspapers in the language of the land. But not in order to change our brethren into Gentiles. Rather, so that they will fight our battle. They announce their sin to the transgressors, right to their face. They stand up in the breach all of the time to turn away wrath from the unfortunate people because it is not violent."

"And this you help to die like a leech," called Ben-Jacob.

"What are you saying?" asked the doctor.

"I am saying that we must teach the people the knowledge not to go after vanity, not lead them astray to believe that it has the power to set up a memorial for itself. It sees and knows that which is before it so that disaster does not befall it suddenly. All of our toil, which we have labored to do until today amounts to chaos. Now if only we return to unite with our people so that they don't each stray to his transgression, and don't add to the provocation of war, man against his friend. Then all hope is not yet lost. We save our souls and there is no falling off into evil unintentionally. Instead of disaster occurring, the evil is destined to come to us and easily it is broken. By our own power we destroy our homes and we dwell on the streets, but in a little while there is not any place even on the streets."

"Behold, in the words of the Hebrew author, what's
(14) his name, speaking today," called someone from the crowd.

"However, the oppressor still does not protect us, and we have no desire for a prophet like Jeremiah."

"And when you fall into the hands of an oppressor, then a prophet like Jeremiah will not be of use to you anymore. Hear, my brethren. Upon you is the behest to set your heart to this matter. This author who sees only evil and rebuke is correct. Surely, only he sees honesty, but they are all smitten by blindness. Oh, that the heart of our people understand his words and heed his voice. Then perhaps the sorrow, when it comes, will not be great.

"Behold, we the youths must sense that which the elders did not sense. We must see light and not shut our eyes. We, whom the fire of religious zeal did not consume, and all the rest of the desires of the elders will not dull our hearts; - we must listen and hear what is in his mouth, even ask his advice. More than what he lets us hear openly in a book, he utters with his mouth. As a man listens and lends an ear, all his bones say, "The thing which I've heard today is the truth."

"Does he tell you his words from the place where he lives, from a distance of three hundred miles?" called one mockingly.

"Yet even this! You are not at all ashamed. This author walks amongst you these few days, but not one of you knew anything of his coming. Behold, most of you are great only according to his words. You have become that which you are today. If he had not opened an eye for you or your fathers then you would have sat in a yeshivah until today, or you would have peddled in tattered rags. You want to receive mankind's honor. Do you trample your glory into dust with your own legs? If only this writer was a writer for a people

who know how to condemn his honor, then his name would be carried on the lips of all the city dwellers and you ..."

"But we do not know him or his thoughts," called two or three. "What are you saying to us? They who understand his language will honor him."

"I am also prepared to give honor to this author," called Ben-Hagri. "Even if his judgements today are not good in my opinion, I know still of that which he did to open the eyes of the blind. Now I will surely honor him much, like a man who speaks as one who thinks (15) without being partial. This thing is very dear to us, and my soul has yearned much to hear what this author has said to you."

"This man pours his spirit upon me until I, in one hour, became different. Lo, all of you know that I too went out to redeem my people, like all of the great redeemers, when they sought to change its mind by placing a mask upon its face. I have lived by this religion and I have been satisfied with joy. It seems to me that I am like a redeemer and a great man. I have only come to him in order to reprove his people. A different spirit was with him to turn the heart of the youth away from the Enlightenment, toward which they had previously been drawn. I am dismayed to see however, that to this day I have spoken words without spirit.

"The first of my words to him was, 'What do you desire on this day? That we should return to our earlier ways, to hide in mysteries, to be separate from the Gentiles, or to mix the cup of beer for farmers with their drunken grandfathers; we, our wives, our sons and daughters?'

"To this he replied, 'I do not yet know what will be proper. Whether we will be hidden and separated or whether they hide us

in the dark and separate us with a strong hand. What good is it for us to teach our sons to mix the cup of beer for the farmers, or to teach our sons the law of the farmers, to become drunk from beer - we, our wives, our sons and our daughters? We don't fall below the Gentiles in knowledge. So too, with regard to righteousness, judgment, the spirit of faith and ability. What else do we lack that we are being considered as foreigners of the land? Is it not because our way is not like the ways of the people? These are its ways. According to them, we should only teach this law.'

"Thus he answered me. His words made me speechless, immediately. Nevertheless, I thought of words with which to respond to him. Strong spirited I said, 'Nevertheless, do not say that we must leave all the knowledge which we have acquired for ourselves, because we are not yet inheriting all the honor for its price.'

"As if in a sigh breaking forth from his heart he responds next. 'Didn't I say the same? But return, and don't be one who ascends. Heaven forbid that you should wear pride as your uniform, taking all of the honor and greatness only for yourselves, because from you alone the teaching has come forth to pursue and seek knowledge. If the Gentile youths speak like this, they are correct. Their teachers, their parents, their priests and their judges together enclose the way of knowledge with stones, and place it before all as a monster.

- (16) It is not so for us. We had an obligation and a command to pursue knowledge. Long before that, our fathers were commanded to teach their children Torah. Long before, our fathers sought knowledge.

"What is the knowledge for all people? It is not to examine the early days which have passed over his people and his land, to understand the ways of his fathers and to know what is good

for him? They sought this knowledge with all their heart. This knowledge was like a source of life, and an honor to them all. Do they have iniquity because a new generation arises which rejects his knowledge and chooses foreign knowledge? Did our fathers sin because their people were to them like a center for their logic and their desires, whereas however, they placed all their thoughts on it? For like all of the nations - first they sought the knowledge of their souls and afterwards a strange knowledge too. Or is it because of their sons who forgot their people and considered knowing only that which is foreign to them, their spirit and all which touches the inheritance of their people, yet is to them a disgrace? He should not retreat from the knowledge which teaches a man to love his people. But he does so, betraying his people and his spirit.'

"Then he calls out aloud, 'Understand and know what is his and know that which his heart contains. But the man of Israel should not say: It is good that the foreigners are different from me because of my knowledge. He should not send forth his soul in vain hope in order to cause the disgrace of his fathers to be forgotten, or to cleanse the filth of his name in the waters of knowledge. It is not Israel who rejects knowledge that they reject, but rather the name of Israel. If he has no knowledge they will visit upon him the iniquity of the foolishness. If he hoarded treasures of knowledge then his knowledge will be accounted to him as sin.

" 'Hate does not seek justice. The libel is not based on strong pillars. The two of them do not search for truth. But our blind scouts hear the word of our enemies and they believe that the word of their mouth is the meditation of their heart. These believing

scouts misled all of the nations in vain, empty faith; in a faith which is the hardest of all the faiths. Is not this faith of the haters with demons and evil spirits? If we believe in demons and are far from them then the evil is not great; but if we believe in evil spirits and go after them, then indeed we are lost. Our word will be justice if we say that more than all the evil and lying faiths, our faith reverberates in the righteousness of mankind and in the uprightness of the Nineteenth Century. These wise scouts are masters of the false faith.

(17) "How did they spend their days, and what was their teaching? Didn't they cast aspersions on every prayer and supplication into which our fathers poured their heart? They also spoke a prayer and supplication. At first they arose, those who arouse dawn, guarding the morning and together they burst into song: Hope Israel! Hope for the patience and benevolence of nations! Hope for love, Hope for honor, Hope until your soul departs. The afternoon worshippers arose after them and they enjoined the people to transfer the offering before them to their enemies, forever. They made an offering from that which came into their hand, all the inheritance of their fathers and the gladness of their delights. However, all of these did not help. Now we see that we must pray the evening prayers. The day has departed and all of our labors have accounted for nothing. We have toiled but we have received no rest. This is the time for each man to return to his tent. Perhaps there we will find the rest which we have sought in vain."

"These are all words of a preacher or of a jester," called someone from the crowd.

"May God be gracious to you for your great wisdom," called Ben-Jacob. "Even I have spoken like that on my account. But he is not perplexed and he says, 'Who is it who made the law? Words of truth are heard even in the gale and the storm, in crying and a loud voice. It is for us to know if the words are true or not. Regarding my people I shall not hide, because the crazy jester is dear to me, who in truth tells his listeners the way which is before them, and in good faith he preaches. A priest in the House of the Lord shouts and screams and is stirred. He sends forth his words like hailstones. His heart is full of hypocrisy and deceit. He humbles the pride of the innocent and the knowing. He covers the ways of the grand evildoer.'

"He returned a word to me and reproved me because my lie is not true, or even then I thank you. But I do not intend to judge your utterance because I speak like a preacher or a jester. Are not these his words. I call them to all who hear: Understand judgment, and afterwards you shall speak."

"But we already know all of these things," called Ben-Hagri, like a man who is unable to hear much idle talk. "We listen to all of this but it is not done. What is there to do? Did he tell you that too?"

"Indeed, I also asked him that," answered Ben-Jacob. "And he answered me saying: 'The teacher must teach that which is not done. Those who delight in life and events will teach us that (18) which we must do. We must teach in a few words that it is folly and a disgrace to kiss the hand which smites; to bring forth our souls in thanks and praise to a violent person who destroys all of our labor and leaves for us only a remnant so that we are able to return and to succeed greatly with that remnant, and he is able to return and

destroy us. It is a disgrace and a great evil to our soul. Rather flee to the array of the refuge and refuse to be his slave forever. But a heart without knowledge utters sighs like this. This is the end to the words. If you seek true, eternal peace then cease speaking lies and engaging in wickedness. Speak in a clear language.

" 'It is too much for us to fight a battle which we cannot win. Behold we must leave the place of our position and fall into the camp of the enemy to be slaves to him forever. But don't speak emptiness and vanity again, saying that with your sword by your side and the bow of the archers in your hand you will fall into the camp of the enemies and without surrendering they will greet you cheerfully and make peace with you. The sword is on your side, it is the name Israel; and the archers' bow is in your hand, it is the faith in whose name you call out whether by a loyal heart or only with your own mouth. As long as you do not send forward these instruments of war for which they would proclaim an eternal war against you, you don't dare to approach the enemies' camp to request peace.'

"These were his words. I am boasting because I understood the insight of his words, but I did not make a vow to observe and to do them. This is the thing which kept my spirit alive to request, even I, to gather a group of students so that we can go together to this author and hear living words which have not been heard in the camp of Israel until today."

The words of Ben-Jacob did not miss the mark this time. The faces of most of the listeners gave testimony to them until their hearts were touched and they were ready to say immediately: "We shall do and hear."

Ben-Hagri whom they also recognized before him no longer opened his mouth like a victor. Nevertheless he was courageous to continue fighting and he boasted. He no longer spoke his words gently, as before.

"If all of us together acknowledge that this author is a prophet and you are a divine voice for his words, yet do you not also acknowledge that now one does not require a prophet and one does not pay attention to divine voices. As long as he does not give signs that his eyes see honestly the evil which is in front of our faces; (19) as long as you do not tell us the name of the sign or miracle which we understand; thus it is, that you only say emptiness to cause us to fear his words. For the days of fear and the bitterness of your heart have passed by, never to return, and we don't see all the evil and darkness."

"You request a sign or miracle," called Ben-Jacob. He nodded his head and he moved his lips in both mockery and sorrow. "A man whose eye sees himself, he perceives the apparent without any mirror in his finger. To what are his eyes closed? Every word of his lips is vanity. You request signs. The author already gave them to you, from the beginning, not even in secret. Are not the signs which he gave indeed enough to open the eyes of the ones who desire to see them? Who is he, who lies about the great, reliable sign which has already been given; they are not secure for us because of the wrath of the enemy, and because the hand of judgment rests only upon us and it does not anoint our head as on the day of wrath? Who dares to say that it is not so?"

"Don't we see with our eyes every day that we have made ourselves despised with every scorn in all of the newspapers? Also,

our enemies write thick scrolls and books about us. In them they make terrible false charges about us, our fathers and our religion which make the hair of the skin of all who hear them stand on end. In the book of laws is it not explicitly written that the person who does this carries his own iniquity? For in this matter he violates the rule, "Don't instigate strife or quarrels between peoples nor between religions." To insult systems of one faith, even without extending a tongue toward those who swear in its name and without spreading hatred between the inhabitants of the land, even this is a criminal offence according to the creed of the land. Is a man innocent if he breaks a law of another faith?

"They cast every filth and abomination in front of us without protest. Is this not a reliable sign that the law and those who keep it do not spread their wings upon us? Are not all who do evil to us by deceitful speech guilty? Why are they afraid to extend to us also the hand of violence? If it will yet be like this in the land, that the people are not enamoured with us, it is not because he considers us as inhabitants, rather it is because he has not considered doing this. He has not yet tried to send forth his hand against other armies and their souls in broad daylight. If he would try once to do this, then he will not turn again from it. There are no more doors or bolts for his spirit, that it might break open and make terrible names.

- (20) "Who is this next to us, blowing the trumpet that the guards of the judgment should arise to protect our body and our strength more than our honor? If they rise up who knows whether they will not toil in vain? Many years shall pass before the crowd will begin to believe in the matter, yet a period seven times longer will pass before

he will be successful in turning his heart away from a faith to which he has adhered. According to the judgment of the authors, all of whom always assail us, the people have begun to believe today that we are inferior to the Gentiles, that we are evil men and sinners, that we have accomplished all of our success from that which is theirs; and that therefore what is done to us - is it not according to the judgment of all the land? It is a sign and a wonder that each man tells us our way to our faces and he is not to be blamed. As however, the crowd will begin to observe and to do the statutes of this faith, then every judge and guard will be unable to turn his heart away from it. So too, will the vision of our eyes prove to us that not every judge nor every guard wants this. You have seen all this, and you see it every day, and you are requesting signs?"

For a moment all of those who were gathered were silent. There was no other person in whose mouth there were rebukes against these words until Ben-Hagri arose. At that moment he spoke, trembling, "I do not deny that which is yours, because you achieved your aim with these words of yours. The things which are a wonder to you have touched our bones and our flesh. Thus we feel the hurt when a man's hand touches it. In the greatness of our pain we forget justice. We say "sign and wonder" to the misleading light or the passing shadow. Everyone who speaks like this finds for himself a hearing ear and he takes it to heart.

"I still remember when I was a small boy. I came with my father to the house of prayer to hear the eulogy which a preacher uttered for the death of one of the great rabbis, who was a relative of my father's father. Therefore, my father came to the house of prayer, which he had not done for many years. He also took me with him, in spite of my mother who was unwilling to allow me to come

into the congregation of men who run like savages, behave crazily, and shout aloud like horses in the stable, in a house which they call God's house. The preacher said many things and proved to everyone that it was an obligation and command to cry for this one who has gone, because he was great in his generation. Great in the generation to which the one who dies has no compensation. But in the iniquity of the generation the righteous one dies in the eighty-third year of his life. God counts the tears which they cry over the death of a
(21) righteous man, and he places them in his flask in remembrance. He does not weary of promising this world and the world to come as a reward for the crying which the hearers cry for the death of the righteous man. However, the gates of tears were locked at that time. No doubt this was so because of my father, whose beard was shaved and because of me, for I came in a garment of one of the unclean creatures to the house of the Lord. When the preacher saw that his strength was used up for nothing, that he brings out his soul for vanity, he wept and cried bitterly. He passed his handkerchief over his eyes once, twice. But all these did not shed even one tear drop. Suddenly, he changed his voice. He left his talk about the righteous man and the greatness of his learning, called in a loud voice, 'The small will become a thousand and the young one will become a mighty nation!

"The small lad of Israel goes to serve in the army, as is the lot of a thousand of his brethren. The young man will be sent to a distant land, to a mighty nation; to a nation which does not understand his language.'

"It was as if the hand of God had touched every eye and the tears flowed. The sound of a sigh of despair rose to the heavens. The women broke out in a bitter voice, crying; and the men did so after

them. Who was there in all of the congregation who was not missing a son or a brother, or who was not sick and anguished that in a little while the day of the punishment would still come? The preacher found pleasure in his success because they all burst out crying over the eulogy.

"This is the matter which you spoke in our ears, until the heart of all of us was touched, as if it had been pierced by a sword. Doesn't our soul grieve every day concerning them? Yet this is the stumbling-block which all day we devise plans to remove from our path. But this is not a sign and a wonder because just as they forsook us, thus they gave us their indignant words and mocking. We must remember that we had days more evil and terrible than these, that there were days in which they did not even allow us to be seen in any house of the Gentiles; days in which all of us together were like an abominable, detested creature and they did not differentiate between a sage and a simpleton, between the righteous and that which is abominable and polluted. Behold, these few years boundaries have been removed. We are even beginning to see ways of life. There are among us men who already have found ways of life. Their place is familiar to them and no one calls in their ears anymore: 'Humble and demean yourselves, Go away!'

"Insults of troubled letters, are they not only the survivors of the menacing hate which, like a wall of iron, separated between us and between the Gentiles. But now the wall has fallen, and there yet remain in its place stumbling-blocks and piles of sand.

(22) Yet they indeed blind our eyes as the wind carries them and they cause our feet to stumble. It is an empty vision, if a man says that these

stones and piles of dust will suddenly become slingstones and a hammer in the hands of those who hate us enough to smite our souls. Everyone who knows judgment judges uprightly, because at first the barrier fell and in its place there remain ruins. As the days become many the wind scatters slowly the few survivors. With the help of hands toiling with pleasure and with talent they purify even the place of the upheaval, and there shall be no more memory of it. If, however, we do not rise up to repair the breach of that barrier it will totter and fall, and again it will rise on its ruins."

Many hands raise up glasses and they call out: "Long live Ben-Hagri!" They look scornfully at Ben-Jacob as if he had been smitten back disgracefully, never to rise again. Ben-Jacob distorted his face and wrinkled his forehead as if he considered whether to give some response or to abstain. When he saw the scorn on the faces of many, he no longer governed his spirit. He said, "This is what I said to you at first, that no sign and wonder is of use to blind men. Have you considered this for judgment? You said that the wall fell and the barrier tottered; You call upon the wind to scatter the dust away from our border? Behold, this wisdom is the wisdom of the bird, hiding his head in the snow as he flees from his pursuers. In all that you said there is not even one true word. It is only a misled vision and deceitful magic, and captures the heart of those who love enchantment.

"You remind us of the days in which we were led astray, but you forget that in those days we did not wish to draw near. Our fathers were wiser than us. They understood perfectly that when they draw near and arrive, then they push them back with an arm and

a shoulder. Are they honored thus? They dwell in their home and in front of their people they are honored. Their enlightened sons do not understand this. They become a disgrace to people and nod their head to their brothers. These enlightened ones climb, as in the days of a certain generation, to ascend the mountain to the place where the Gentiles dwell. But every day they will push them back and they will roll in the great depths. In disgrace they will smite them back, and they can do nothing, because the balls of their feet have been uprooted from the heritage of their brothers. They did not reach their heart's desire. They returned to climb to the highest heights. They were smitten back again. To this they call: "The partition has fallen!" A few naughty youths burst forth to climb on the fence, and to steal the fruit of the fruitful garden, and they make themselves like lords (23) of the garden! But when he gets hold of them, he breaks all their bones. We are as naughty youths breaking into a strange garden to steal fruit, in the eyes of the Gentiles.

"The wall has not yet tottered, and the partition has not fallen. Rather, those guarding the garden brought stone, sand and piles of dust plentifully, and they set a rampart around the fence. When one of us approaches the wall they pour slingstones upon us. They sprinkle dung on our faces and piles of sand in our eyes until we are unable to find the way of escape. These stones and piles of dust which you see, my brothers, behold they are not from the partition. It stands in its place. They place more upon it so that a foreigner will not approach it. The days which you say were evil for you were truly evil and bitter; but these days are much more evil than those. Surely, then we were dealt with not according to the judgment of all the land. Yet judgments were given to us. All of the masses knew

that the judgment protects us. No one dares to exploit the little judgment which had been given to us. Now every man raises his hands to do judgments to us as it occurs to him.

"Then our enemies amongst the leaders of the people were few. Most of the nobles and the ministers of the king set their eyes upon us compassionately, and said good things about us. With all their heart they sought to bring wisdom into our hearts. They strengthened our hands to know and have understanding. They rejoiced when they saw that our heart understands. In front of us they praise our ability, in order to encourage our spirit. But now all of them hate us. Their meditation and their reasoning all day is only to keep us far from the fountains of knowledge and to give us disgrace and degradation. How evil now is our fate, since then!

"Since we have been disgraced and degraded we have learned from our youths to find bread according to our estimated need. We have an abundance of bread, all the days of our lives. Now we go astray with our youths as we chase after a misleading light, and we hope for secure fortresses. When we become men we shall not even find bread of disgrace and degradation. When disgrace and degradation are broken we will have found righteous men who spoke to the heart of the people, to endure us and to be merciful to us. They teach the merit of our perverted appearance and concerning our twisted ways. Because, with a mighty hand they led us to them and they prophesy a good future for us. For the Gentiles it is the time to remove the yoke from our neck and the burden from our loins.

"Now tolerance and mercy will not be heard in the entire land, but rather hatred and the fury of vengeance; only to keep far
(24) from us all their aims. There were days of hope for us, but not even

our hope has been disappointed. Nevertheless, they find in our midst blind ones who are not ashamed to say publicly there were evil days, but now good days have come! Rejoice in the good days if they will allow you to rejoice as you love! But what shall we say to the blind ones? Don't we know that the blind ones do not see the wall? Only when they come to it and when they hit their heads against it, then they know that it has not yet fallen down."

"What are you saying to do now?" asked the doctor after he turned this way and that and saw that Ben-Jacob had no response.

"I? Am I a teacher for a great man? Do I bring forth my spirit with my words? I have only been the divine voice for the spirit of the author who responded to me with his words. If you are seeking advice, turn away and go to him and heed advice if you desire it."

Every member of the gathering divided into parties and each one stated his own opinion. A few said that they do not have to seek an opinion from a man who turns things upside down, who misleads the youths away from the knowledge and who prophesies to them that evils were not, and they will not come. The spirit of knowledge rises up and will not descend again. The wheel of time will not turn backwards for it will hurry on its course. The iniquity is upon those who delay its turning.

A few arose opposed to them who inclined after Ben-Jacob. He struck their words until the doctor stated his own opinion, that they do not have to go seeking teaching from that author. But this matter is good and proper in their eyes, to gather and give him honor. After this, even Ben-Hagri nodded his head as a sign that it is pleasing in his opinion. They hurried and decided to do towards them according

to this matter publicly on the day of the coming holiday.

Part Two

The Binding Together of Nerves

Ben-Hagri moved to and fro. He sprang back and almost fell from his chair as he looked unintentionally at a small, polished mirror which stood on the table, because it revealed much. He is amongst deceivers!

- (25) His friend and the man of his nature, the polished mirror was forever sitting in this room. Forever they knew that he derived satisfaction from it, and it didn't cause him sorrow even once.

On this day, in the morning as he rose from his bed, he put on a cheerful look, he put on his garments and trimmed his moustache to go out and greet the landlady for the holiday. First, he met this companion of his and his face was beaming. When he returned after washing, his cheeks became redder than before. Then he turned toward this companion and did not leave immediately. Concerning him, and all who are in the house, however, it was not his because he was a sojourner here. He found eternal tranquility. He sat here until--until this letter carrier came, in an hour, and placed two letters in his hand. They changed the appearance of all the matters which faced him. He perceived them only in his imagination. All the earth was seen in its outward appearance. That which is considered seriously, immediately becomes a rebellion of foreigners. Now he unintentionally sees that even the most raised and exalted had become desolation. Even the glory of his face became disfigured. What did he have?

He had stayed in this room four years, from the time when he came to the capital city to devote himself to his studies. The landlady, the widow of the general, who was a pretty woman about thirty years old,

liked him very much; not just for his appearance, his manners and his movements, all of which send forth grace, but rather for his love of regimen and the cleanliness of his room which she had not thought she would see among Jews. No, among the college students she quickly makes good that which she distorts when she speaks the praise of his face to him, his love of regimen and cleanliness, and the praise which he hears because of this love again places upon him a guard not to disturb, even for one moment the regimen of the objects of the room. As if they were holy vessels, thus he would have been afraid to reach out and touch one of the objects and move it from its place.

If something evil occurred, so that he carried in his shoe a grain of sand or dust into the room (this kind of trouble did not even come to him once during the year because he did not hurry to leave the place in which they clean shoes of mud and mire) then he would have closed the room tightly and with his handkerchief he would have cleaned the floor until it would shine as before. This is the thing that stopped him from bringing his friends to his house. They did not go out from the source (26) of his origin. From time to time when his friends asked to visit him at his home he used to say, "Is the house of students a tavern, that only there they are able to do what their heart desires, and that they can disturb the resting of strangers?" Thus all of his companions kept far from his house.

But he was not like a stranger, rather he was considered to be a master in the house in which he sojourns. Like one of the members of the household he was involved in every joy and every holiday which the landlady celebrated, and not only like one of the chief guests but rather like the master of the house was he considered. Because of him, she kept

far from her house also Prince N. who had lived in her house together with Ben-Hagri when he received a slap from this quarrelsome man. This matter gave him double happiness in his heart because it pleased all who came to the house. They were all Gentiles and they were men of renown, yet in this place he saw eye to eye with them. Amazement destroyed all the hate of the religion. They drew near to him, who knew in his heart that he is a Jew, in love and honor like one of them. Indeed no one was familiar with his language and his ways. He was even very careful to conceal the matter whenever he was able to. Not even once did he mention a Jewish name.

Nevertheless wasn't it correct that all who came to the house, each one drew near to him as if he was a member of their group? Wasn't it a reliable sign that only the Jews were guilty in this matter, because they did not draw close to him as brothers and loyal companions? Why did they all fear their origins? Why were their ways, foods and holidays different from the rest of the people? Why do they mention, from time to time, that there are still Jews in the land? If they had only done as he, because this name was already considered to be atrocious, and no man was separated from his companion.

He went out of his house full of Torah and the fear of God before him; from a house which had become an honor and glory in Israel, and through it they were always blessed. His father was destined, since the days of his youth, to become a great man in Israel. Despite this, he did not become arrogant and he made fun of deceitful fools. He became a light, giving light to all seeking light. He guided his sons in the path of knowledge, so that now he would become a model for all seeking light and knowledge. He even keeps the Torah of his father and mother.

Therefore when he came here, to the city of the king, and when he found (27) a dwelling in the house of an honored, Gentile woman, he continued to learn about the ways of the Gentiles, and of their desires.

The day was the first day of the Gentile Easter holiday. He even called it a holiday like them.* His heart was very wide for all of this, and for the good hope that in yet a little while he would see with his own eyes that all the masses of the house of Israel will make Passover on that day alone. But they become unclean in the eyes of the Gentiles, cleaning their filth. They should discard the idols of their fathers - the Pascal lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs - and rejoice for the redemption and the rising together . . .

On the morning of that day his heart thought pleasant visions like these. He saw light, joy and splendor. But a small cloud appeared before him as this holiday reminded him that the day was the fifth day of the Passover holiday for the Israelites. On that day he and the gathering of students had made plans to go and visit the honored Hebrew author. As he remembered this, because then they finished speaking thus, he considered and reckoned in his heart. He found that this day pleased him because it is also the first day of the Gentile holiday. The

*The following text appears at the point indicated above only in the 1884 printing. I've chosen to omit it based on the flow of the story without it in the other two texts. I include it here for reference: "Unleavened bread for the Gentile Easter and the tender, stuffed pig which was in front of him on the table were placed before them, so that he could observe the holiday according to each of his judgments and statutes. For all of this his heart rejoiced very much. But not from the lips or an outward sign was the kiss which he gave to the landlady. When he greeted her with a holiday greeting and when he responded to her words with sincere words, indeed he came to life again! All the faithful Gentiles answered when they heard the cry: The Messiah has come to life again!"

landlady would not be startled when she sees him wearing holiday garments. She will not think that he did this to honor the holiday of the Jews. Therefore, now he was dressed in holiday clothes when he returned from washing. He remembered what came out of his mouth and like a cloud of sorrow he covered his forehead.

Thus I brought forth the word of my mouth and I had to confirm it. But is it possible that even I will go to visit that author who rises up to destroy all the world which was built for the sake of peace? As I go there I show to everyone that I already honor him. Can I honor the man who drives the end away and places obstacles in the path of the faithful redemption? Had it not been that he and his companions were many who, in those days, did as before.

Now he was situated amongst the students, they who were destined to become a light to all of the people. A company of the obscurantists who had affirmed and accepted observance of the Passover holiday according to the Jewish law, while they had not visited the house of prayer for many years. They are moving backwards! What is our hope if the youth go backwards? They grasp onto vanity and words of deceit, saying, "We are a people. We must celebrate the holiday of our people!" No, I shall not commit a lie in my soul. I will not go! Even this author was like (28) one of the obscurantists, turning the heart of the youths backwards. It is not for men like us to give him honor in public. He is also doing great evil with his prophecies of evil which will not come about, and when he brings fear and fright into the hearts of those who hear him. He comes between brothers. Truly, the great evil is when he proclaims the vision of his own heart as a matter of truth. Suddenly they trust his words.

Who is this one who stood at the secret of times and revealed hidden things from darkness?

The future belongs to us and to our sons, but the hopes fall silent in darkness. Yet we shall see with our eyes the harmony of all the world. It is time that the Jews assimilated with the Gentiles and became one with them. These prophets of vanity and the ones listening to their voice hidden in holes lie down in their shame. Time goes forward and does not return. The spirit which lives in the ways of the Enlightenment runs and does not stumble. He laughs at every obstacle!

I shall not go. This will be my glory in the days ahead, that I did not give my hand to the wayward ones who will become a disgrace in the end. While he still encourages his heart not to raise his word, the letter carrier brings two letters.

"A letter from my parents!" he calls out joyfully. "They are sending me holiday greetings. They also observe the two holidays, for Israel and for the Gentiles. It is a sacrifice for my grandfather, but they are sending me greetings for the Gentile holiday!"

While he is still thinking, he tears open the envelope and confusion grips him as he reads the first words. "My beloved son. The news of the telegraph no doubt frightens you much, but I am not guilty . . ."

"The news of the telegraph? No news has come to me!" he called out in astonishment. Then he continued to read more:

I have not sent you that news because I thought it is enough if the trouble comes at its time, and you would yet hear the trouble which has come to us. However, many people pleaded with me to tell you this thing, so that you would hurry to make this known to the newspapers. We also sent this to the newspapers who are not considered our enemies. You already know these.

Indeed, my son! The world is dark for us. We waited for light, but here is the darkness of the shadow of death. We wished for

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peace, but here is terror. We did not make this matter known by the telegraph line because we were afraid, lest they would interfere with it. But I will try to describe to you in the letter this terrible, menacing scene; a sight which, to see it, kills a man even before the hand of the robbers has touched him.

On the first day of the holiday they passed a rumor in all of the city that the Gentile is preparing himself to rise up against us and to annihilate us. The heart of all the people fell. But we laughed at them and at the cowardice of their hearts. Nevertheless we finished speaking, after which most of the city dwellers begged us to come to the district governor and request that he place a watch over the city. As you yourself understand, I was the chief speaker. How frightened I was. Disgrace covered my face when he let us at first wait about a full hour. Afterwards, when we were brought to his office he faced me as if he didn't know me, as if he had not eaten in my house for ten days, and as if he had not played cards with me the day before yesterday.

He stood in his place and asked with an angry face, "What do you want?" Words left me when I heard his voice. But after a few moments passed, I was encouraged to say to him that the rumor which they were passing around the city annoyed the heart of many of its inhabitants because they are Jews. I do not even believe the word because I know that the governor who rules the city will not allow evil to touch us. Nevertheless, I wished to be an advocate for them in order to calm their spirit.

"What do you think?" called out the governor in an excited voice. "That forever you can suck the blood of the Gentiles and you will not be blamed? That forever you will be masters and you will rise higher and higher, and the Gentile descends lower and lower by your cunning and your deceit which you lay on these innocent people? That you will bring for yourself the wealth of innocent servants and you will eat; and you are busy with falsehood and deceit? The people are unable to tolerate you and your deceit. If they rise up to take back from you that which belongs to them, then they are doing this according to justice, because you made all of this wealth from what belongs to them. They are doing to you according to the fruit of your deeds."

The room spun like a wheel and the men who were in it around me, as I listened to his charming utterances. They were like thousands of voices in my ears and a million blasts of fire in different, strange colors flew against my eyes. I was like one crazy from what my eyes saw. In the first moment hot anger overpowered me and ignited fires in my heart until I almost turned into a tearing tiger. I nearly fell upon the one speaking

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to me to destroy him entirely. But his last words sent a frost into my heart. I trembled like a leaf. I was not able to stand in my place, or even to open my mouth. Instead of me, Ben-Joseph opened his mouth and his calm words were heard. This thing increased the horror in my heart.

I had become excited and I could not find words. Ben-Joseph, who spent most of his days in his trade and in the house of study is not frightened and he speaks calmly! He answers the governor thus, "If there is no help for us through you, we now have no other way except to request help from the capital city!"

The governor erupted at this utterance. He stamped his foot and cried out, "And if you are impudent enough to do this I shall destroy you in the dungeon of your lives!"

Ben-Joseph, however, was not content. He said, "We do not know yet if it is in your power to destroy us in the dungeon of our lives. But this we do know for sure, that you have the obligation to protect the city. If you will not do this, and state this clearly, we will thank you for it. For the Jews are more numerous than the Gentiles and the blood of your brothers will fall upon the head of those who inspire rebellion and do not do what they are obliged and commanded to do. I shall not deny that you will find rebellors who will do evil things to us, rob, plunder, even kill people. But we shall not hide in the secret of our tents. We shall stand up for ourselves and we shall strike back at our enemies."

All the bones of the governor shook from anger. Again he cast fear that if indeed an instrument of death is found in the hand of a Jew then he would be hung on the tree. Nevertheless he called, "Therefore go to your homes. The Gentile is very righteous in his desire to deal with you justly. I will not allow him to do this. I'm not doing this for your sake, but rather because I detest all rebellion. Return to your houses and I will guarantee for you the peace of the city."

On the evening of that day the plague began. The destroyer came to all of the houses and demolished them without leaving any stone in place. He broke and cracked into fragments all that came into his hand which was too heavy for him to carry home. He poured out his wrath over us all night. On the next day no one rose up to help us - not the policemen, not the soldiers. But when a group of men, some of our brothers, gathered to defend their lives and their homes then the police hurried, as if they had suddenly risen from the depths of Sheol, to drive them out or to place fetters on their hands.

Thus they went from house to house. They destroyed, demolished, smote, cracked and did every sort of wicked thing outside for

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all to see. They also attacked our house. They demolished and plundered all which was in the house. They even stole the ornament from the neck of Ruhama. Had not the neighbors who hurried to help her closed her in the cellar we would have seen much more trouble and grief. Your mother and the children were closed up in a cellar which protected them because the iron gates did not open to the murderers. They layed there two days and two nights without any food or drink. After my strength was destroyed by the killers and I fainted, I was brought to my neighbor's house. But my wounds were not serious. Only my broken hand caused me great pain. All forty of the wounded were hurt more than I. Twelve have already died in addition to the three who had been killed in the street.

Not even a chair to sit on has remained in our house. Not only were the windows and doors broken into pieces, they also destroyed the roof. Meanwhile I, your mother and your sisters are at my father's house which the murderers did not attack. They said that he did not do evil to anyone, and even did good things towards the Gentiles. By my father's word many people and their houses were saved. He did not fear anything. He went out and into the midst of the upheaval and spoke to the heart of the murderers, to turn their wrath away from the destruction. All the time he called out to them, "Is it not better that you take all of this for yourselves than if you destroy it, and then neither you nor we shall have it!" All the while they applauded! They took that which was in their hands to seize it, and what was left they did not take. Only two days later, when there was nothing anymore to destroy and the destroyers were wearied, then did the armed policemen and soldiers come out onto the streets.

What shall I tell you my son? In your soul you understand the feelings of my heart when I see the multitude of my brothers, twenty thousand men, women and nursing infants allowed to be trampled upon like mud in the streets! My wife and small infants are enclosed like wild animals in a cellar without light, a bed, a cover, food or drink. My daughter was in the hands of murderers who robbed her of her ornaments and almost also her honor. My house was destroyed to its foundation. All which was in it was allowed to be stolen and I don't intend to return.

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My soul is in the hands of killers. Not by their compassion upon me was I saved from death. But all of this is as naught against the horror which sent its cold into my heart, to see the looters and the destroyers who promenaded wild, with only a shirt and pants covering their nakedness, with a strong neck, powerful strides and bare arms they promenaded by the hundreds. Cheering songs were on their lips, as if they had burst into a besieged city after a terrible battle. Each face emitted murder, blood and drunkenness. Their eyes were filled with blood like the eyes of wild beasts. Many innocent people, with fear and

horror on their faces were driven away before them from house to house, from street to street. It was as if the sufferings of Hell were impotent to create something like this. Everything precious and holy was trampled on in the streets. Young women were trampled on in front of their parents. This spectacle made me desperate so I could not rise up again.

Not only are they murderers and robbers, not only did I see the oppression of the innocent ones and the perversion of justice, but there is no human being in the land. They are wild animals, who have just had their cage opened before them. The vision of my life and my hope, to draw near the hearts of my brothers to the Gentiles sunk in the mire of murder and lechery. If only this had effected us to draw near to our brothers, even then Heaven forbid for us a deed like this. Only a wild animal can be called friend, and brothers have become jackals. Not only people without a name, poor Gentiles, but also many who were middle class and even aristocrats. The man who stole the jewelry from Ruhama's neck is one of the prominent men whom I know and you know him also.

It is bitter for me, bitter my son! My heart is not sick about the house and the money which were plundered, not even about my honor and strength which went up for one moment during the chaos, because all these things happen during life. But all of these were plundered by murderers on the streets without an assailant. They are those whom I devoted all my life to call my brother! For this my soul cries and moans in its anxiety forever. The visions of my life have been destroyed forever. Until today I thought that my path was certain before me and the purpose of my life was before my eyes. Now I see that it was a deceptive dream. I will never recover from this disaster which has broken my heart. The consolation and apology which I hear today from the mouths of men of my coreligionists, from the Gentiles, were in vain because I know that falsehood and hypocrisy are beneath their tongue . . .

Be comforted my son because in yet a little while I will be strong again. Perhaps then we can summon you and together we can go outside of the country to rest a little bit.

Alarmed, excited and astounded, Ben-Hagri held his head when he (33) finished reading. He was like a man who returned to his dwelling place and it, with all which was inside had been consumed by fire. Like a man who has no true words in his spirit he runs here and there in the room. He forgets, for a moment, the landlady and the order which she loves, and

he tramples with his feet upon the carpets and the floor which yesterday she polished with wax so that it would be clear as a polished mirror for her. He also placed his hand upon the many utensils which stood on the table. He raised utensil after utensil. He held it in his hand, considered it and then stood it up in another place. It was as if this was his desire, to change the room and everything which was in it in front of him.

Suddenly, as if startled by the action of his hands, he closed the door tightly and sat in his chair. He put his two hands on the table and placed his face in their palms. He sat for a long time like a perplexed man. His heart considered many thoughts and feelings. They were innumerable, and welled up within him. But all of them together passed before him in a mask until he did not recognize them.

He felt despair and sincere anguish as he had never felt before. Was it his father's hurt and the destruction of his house and peace that did this to him? Or was it the interpretation of the dream, that he had dreamed until now to unite the house of Judah with the Gentile house to make them unified? He went unintentionally after the ones who call him and hallow him, whom he set as a wonder for his people. Was it regret which destroyed his conscience, because he had been deceived until today and did not obey the speaker of righteousness? Or perhaps he was embarrassed at his father, that he turned from his way and uttered grief like a depressed woman? His heart did not cease adding strength to his way, but he saw terror and was afraid and he sat back. He will even speak like one of the obscurantists! This he did not know in his soul. He did not even seek a reckoning to know this at that time.

Suddenly his heart was like light chaff, carried on the wings of his spirit. Like thick clouds his thoughts flew over his face. He did not even recognize their appearance. He only felt that his soul mourns over him and his skin hurts him, as if now the smiting hand had rested upon him.

But slowly, the wings of the spirit weakened. He turned back from the hostile flight. His father's house and all which was in it, before his birth (which he heard his father telling in the morning of the dew of his youth. It was engraved on the tablet of his heart like all which (34) his eyes have seen) passed before him alternately in a vision of his heart. His old father's house, the biggest and prettiest of the houses in the city; and his old father, as if he was alive, standing before his eyes - a handsome man with a white beard which goes down onto his garments, and all of his manner is calm and tranquil. His brothers and even the Gentiles sought his advice, they looked forward to his help.

From all of them he received praise, aside from his mother, his father's wife. Only her soul could not find honor and contentment in his house when her mouth proclaimed like this again and again, that they anointed his way with vessels of religious statutes and the fear of God. There she found herself a nest and she layed her egg. She grew and matured and increased statute upon statute, prohibition upon prohibition. She felt some distress. This was her very dainty and pretty daughter before whom barons kneeled. She grew up with wealth, honor and greatness. Noblemen of the land, rulers and their gold were members of their home. Her father built houses for the government. Power and reputation were always his among the great men of the land. He was a man of abundant generosity. Thus he lent to many nations and they sought gold for the

rulers. He did not raise his engraver, and even afterwards he did not request an accounting from them and he was not like a creditor to them. They loved him and they praised him, and he was respected on all lips. On the day of the accounting, when they gave him his payment from the government, even they knew his ways. They all knew from the beginning that there was no injustice in him.

All of her days were feast, gladness and studies in which she did very well. She became renowned and a glory. As with her mind, she captivated people with her music. She was accustomed to always hearing this. Even if in her father's house they did not destroy the wall of religion in pride, nevertheless, it once happened that on the Sabbath day she played the harp, and her father did not even know. Also, when she was invited to a feast and rejoiced with Gentiles she did not often ask if the meat was salted according to religious law. So she did not request many accounts of whether the one holding her right hand when she danced was Jewish.

Her father did not know this and no one revealed it to his ears, because all the members of the house knew for sure that if a man dared to do so then blessing would be lifted from the master of the house much more than he could endure. It happened previously that when one of the God-fearing members of their family who taught the children Talmud, (35) dared to reprimand the young lady for she had done something not according to religious law, that suddenly they arranged his residence outside and he never returned to that house.

Indeed, fear of his God was the foothold of this stranger. But when he extended his hand, he did not allow a man to request accounts. So too in his ways with God, he considered a man as a sinner for whom atonement

is useless, who thinks to interfere between him and between his God. Thus his daughter did not feel any distress during her youth in her father's house - only that she loved her father and respected him much. Therefore she turned a deaf ear from hearing the sound of the prisoners in the pangs of her love, all of whom together made weeks of oaths, that they would die deaths of love sickness if she would not send her words and heal them . . .

How narrow for her is the place in the house of her husband's father; where eyes were open to all the customs of the house, and the law was one for both the fathers and sons. Who knows whether she felt redemption for her soul right away; were it not that she loved very much her handsome husband among men. His appearance and wise heart are second to none among all the men whom her eyes saw. He cared for her with love and devotion. He comforted her in secret for in just a little while the end of the days of being locked up would come. Soon he would prepare for himself his own house and no man would see them there. He did maintain his word, because in his house he prepared everything according to the customs of the land. He did not inquire much about food, drink and the sanctity of the Sabbath.

While he did conceal this from his parents, she too did not dare to say to her in-laws that in her house not everything was done according to religious law. Nevertheless, this was known to the old man. From the time when he refused to eat bread there, even when his son's bride tried to persuade him, from that time on it was as if there was a gap between the old man and between his son and his son's bride. This gap widened from day to day.

In his son's house they moved forward. From day to day his wife threw the mask off of her face. She also led him after her with the charm of her words until he shaved off his beard and on the Sabbath Day the house became a place of meeting for Gentile friends. Jews no longer came to the house. They prepare food and drink and smoke before everyone.

For many days the old man's soul mourned his son, and refused consolation or making peace with him. But when this son was born to them and his mother announced her desire, that she would refuse to enter him into the covenant of Abraham our father, only then did he consume his wrath and come to his son to stop him from doing this, because this was (36) against his soul. His bride agreed to the old man's request. She continued to placate his spirit, because she had never considered doing this. It is only for thus that she said this thing: because she knew from the start that when this matter was known to the old man then he would calm down and hurry to come to their house. Her soul yearned to see his face. The old man's face beamed concerning this matter; and so also after she announced that for the feast they would bring new utensils, because she could not give a guarantee of whether the utensils of her house were kosher, according to strict observance of the commandments.

All the people of the city praised her concerning her wisdom in this matter. Both the progressive and the God-fearing. For in the meantime the young people increased who insult religious statutes haughtily. The majority among them rebelled and saddened the spirit of their fathers maliciously and with arrogance. The bride of Shlomo Ben-Hagri became a wonder in wisdom and honesty of purpose because she didn't go as far as her companions.

All of this, which the young Ben-Hagri heard in the dawn of the dew of his youth passed over his face now, and his heart widened in the wisdom of his mother. He also remembered this: when his father's father and his mother made peace between them after the quarrel, which they fought at first. This was when he wished to educate the youth according to the way of the Jews, but she refused to obey him and only wished to send him to a Gentile school. Afterwards they compromised - he would visit a Gentile school yet a Hebrew teacher would teach him the Hebrew language and Talmud. He remembered each one of the many gifts which his father's father imparted to him when he recited before him a chapter of the Holy Writings or a section of Talmud. He also remembered the praise which they spread everywhere they came, about the power of his knowledge in the Talmud, because it aroused his spirit to learn, even though his mother did not even once praise him concerning this knowledge of his. Not even one of the people who came to the house sought to test his strength in these studies as she had done for all of the languages and the sciences.

All of these passed before him. His Bar Mitzvah day, when he read the maftir, his father's father gave him phylacteries and an expensive gift. Where are the phylacteries? . . . But the gift is still in his hand today. His lot was always honor, tranquility and contentment. He inherited great honor from the honor of his father's father, a man like whom none could be found in the city, in Israel and among the peoples, who pledged his heart not to care for him with love and devotion. Even (37) his mother said from time to time to his father in the privacy of their dwelling that the old man was like an angel in her eyes. She never judged because he gave and continues to give them money. Afterwards, when they became poor at that time because their money was for food for one of the

nobles, he spoke not a word. Now that they are living on his generosity he doesn't mention to them even a word in matters of faith and religion.

She always remembered his benevolence. Also, afterwards, when her husband became an administrator in the state treasury and his salary was quite high, she no longer expected the goodness of his father. She continued to teach the children not to desecrate the Sabbath in front of the old man and not to mention pork or any forbidden food in his presence. He remembered all these things, and yet even this, that many companions befriended him from the Gentiles, and that in the house of Prince M. he was like a member of the house. He even remembered Yael, who drew near to him as if he were his brother . . . And suddenly his heart yearned for her. This was five years in which he did not see her face . . . Have five years truly passed? Like one day . . .

At that moment he glanced at the mirror's reflection and was alarmed . . . Now he again arose from his chair and spoke to himself: "Not by any means! Only a hand which harmed irresponsible and mischievous ones was guilty of this. The Gentiles had an innocent and upright heart. Which land on earth is there that has no irresponsible ones or mischievous ones? They are terrified of the hand of justice and a raised arm will be broken immediately . . .

"But with regard to my father, a man who is a wonder to all mankind. A man to whom a governor of the state said, 'If only all Jews were like you; then there would be true peace already in the land.' And he found the strength to answer him, 'If only all the Gentiles were like me, then it would be much better still.' All hearing the reply from his mouth praised him. If a hand came down violently on such a man the district governor's face would be filled with shame! Indeed, the pillars of peace

and unity are weak."

He called to his soul and sighed bitterly. Again he sat down at the table. He wished again to read his father's letter, but now he saw the second letter. It was a letter from his mother, on the table, and he had not seen it until now. In the passion of his soul he tore open the envelope hastily and read it:

(38) My precious son! It is very sad for me that they saddened your heart with this bad news. If this matter had depended on me, I would not have told you anything of this. Why do we multiply words about an evil event which surely, like a temporal cloud will pass and they will not remember it? When it is known to the Gentiles that we are spreading the news in all of the land then it will be right for them to hate us. For we proclaim their disgrace publicly. Truly they are ashamed of the empty deeds and some are afraid,

If only this wicked event had not cast a spirit of gloom into your father's heart. Then I would already have forgotten it, but your father suddenly became different. The hand of fear was upon him for evil. Behold, we are Jews and even if we have much knowledge and wisdom, our hands cannot summon the strength to place courage instead of cowardice into our hearts. Would that you, the children of the next generation, will be happier than we. Your father sees terrible visions. He is disappointed in his faith in knowledge and unity. He prophesies evil for us. Thus the hand of terror touched him until he believes he has seen things with his eyes which have not been.

"Turn to your heart!" his mouth told them because the aristocrat Ben-Shebama, your friend in school - you were like brothers and loyal friends - because this respected philanthropist sent forth his hands in violence and he robbed the jewelry of Ruhama! All of my responses are in vain. The spirit of dizziness which cast fear upon him revealed strangeness. Thus he errs even today, and my soul mourns this matter much.

You will find a house through bricks and we will find other utensils as compensation for house utensils. However, your father's spirit was alien to the spirit of the time. Therefore my soul mourns much. Thus strengthen your heart my son, not to have strange thoughts rise upon your heart to turn you backwards. Only a crab walks backwards, not a human - a master of knowledge. Strengthen your heart and also strengthen your father's heart. Perhaps you will see him and all of us

soon, because we are planning to leave the city until we return and build our house. Your father's heart longs to be out of the land, because within a moment the land of his joy became cursed. I and your sister have been persuaded that we will go to the capital city and there we shall see you. Write also to him and request that he come there and show everyone that you are my son!

Your mother who loves you
as the apple of her eye.

"Ah, this is a wise heart. A splendid woman! The strength of her heart is greater even than the strength of my father's heart. The student did not blend in her a spirit of dizziness in the days of disgrace. Therefore she has a heart full of strength and courage. How lofty are her thoughts! She judges righteously that it was only an event. An evil (39) spirit passed in the land and she was soon cleansed of it. If my father's house had a plague for her, do therefore foundations of knowledge totter and will the rest of this generation become like nothing? If only you were here, my mother, I would kiss you as a compassionate mother, as a loyal teacher. In you is a spirit of knowledge and courage! You poured some of your spirit upon me. I even show to everyone your delight, because I am your son in body and spirit."

This letter revived his spirit until he forgot again the room and that which was in it. He walked around its length and its width. He moved every house utensil from its place. Suddenly he was startled like a thief who is discovered. A hand knocks on the door. At that moment he remembers the landlady and he hurries to display the chairs in their place, and also to straighten out the bed adornments on the floor. He passed his handkerchief over the floor to remove a spot which his shoes had left behind.

All of this was done immediately. When they knocked again on the door he opened it calmly, as if he had not heard the first time. He was startled, however, when he saw that it was not the landlady standing before him, but rather two of the students who met to go to visit the Hebrew author. He was perplexed a moment and did not know what to do. But suddenly he grabbed their hands and brought them to the room. He asked, "What brings you here?"

The two students looked at his face in wonder, and one of them said, "Have you forgotten that we have arranged on this day to give honor to the author at the house of prayer?"

"I have come to the conclusion that I will not go," answered Ben-Hagri.

"Really? Even if you give us your hand? Even right now?"

"What more is it now than before?" asked Ben-Hagri without compassion.

"Didn't the terrible news come to you from the many cities and from the villages, in which the Gentiles arose to swallow and to destroy our brothers at one time?" answered the two students. They called out the names of all the cities except for the city of his father's dwelling. "They are not speaking secretly that they are annihilating the rest of our brothers. The prophecy of the author has come true. Perhaps it still drew near as he has not even considered."

"It was also like this there!" called Ben-Hagri and his face fell a lot, and his hands dropped.

(40) "Also there? Thus you hear that in other cities in addition to the cities which we mentioned it was like this! After all this you say that today you will refrain from going with us!"

"Indeed, after all of this and because of all of this!" called Ben-Hagri and he was encouraged. "Now the obligation is upon us more than before to do much, because we are loyal sons of the land. For here are these pogroms, but the hate is like a wick's flame which goes upward before it is quenched forever. These pogroms came to an end and thus they are destroyed. After them the sun has come out in its glory. There will be one judgment for us in the land. Heaven forbid for us to become enraged quickly and to send abominations upon all of the land and its inhabitants because of the sin of a few rioters, who disturb the law . . ."

"It was not a few law disturbers. Rather the Gentiles, like one man, arose to kill, to destroy and to plunder," called the two students together.

"And when we are by ourselves and there is no stranger with us we must acknowledge that the sins of our people are many, so that there comes an end to patience. The Gentiles see their fortune in the hands of strangers, in the hands of lazy wine and beer sellers who do not do any work. They relax from the wealth of strangers and they increase their treasuries. Why is this a surprise in our eyes if they rise up in the end to return to them the spoil which has been stolen from them? They execute vengeance upon the scoundrels and ceased from the oppression of their hands, or then they returned and they were pitied.

"I shall not go with you, and even you will not go if you have knowledge and judgment in your heart, because with this you will raise anger with the Gentiles. For you show to everyone your animosity and your desire to take revenge. Behold the days of the test have come to us, to stand in judgment. Will our heart be found honest with the people and the land, and we do not proclaim their disgrace on the streets? Or

will it appear to everyone that we are sojourners in the land and our heart rejoices in its disgrace?"

"One of us is crazy," answered one of the students. "And after we are all of one mind today. Even those whose hearts were not like our hearts these seven days, even they have turned from their way and are ashamed of their foolishness. Only in you does the strange spirit, which took the heart of all the blind-eyed and stupid ones still beat. Therefore only you are the crazy one. Your folly will punish you on a day of wrath at the time that even to you it is said: 'Jew,' 'Ephraim' (41) and not 'Mister Ben-Hagri.' When he finished his speaking they turned their faces and slammed the door so that the door-posts shook.

"Jews!" Ben-Hagri called after them and his heart was excited and palpitated strongly.

Part Three

Revenge and Recompense

Ben-Hagri was not very happy in the days of idleness in his father's house. This was not the house which it had been before, and this was not the rest which always prevailed in it. His father's mouth used to utter something like a king's speech to his mother, and his mother's wish was like Divine Law to his father. But now . . . if indeed words of quarreling were not heard in the house and in many houses in Israel, they were considered as homes of tranquility and calm. If only there was peace there like the peace of this house, even now. However only someone poor from his youth could rejoice in a meal of vegetables and a son without a home - in the poorhouse.

Not thus does a man eternally secure, trust in his father's treasury, because all the desires of the heart are gathered to him. If one of them is missing, in an instant he worries, depressed over the lack. He does not say, "plenty, sufficient for the remnant of the refugees." Thus he went and does not return. He cries unceasingly.

Thus Ben-Hagri felt in his soul. In his father's house is a deficiency which cannot be measured. Indeed his father returned to his strength but his spirit is not sound within him. From the day when the horrors of the robbers turned against him he was terribly afraid. From then on he feared for his soul and for his city, and even for the entire congregation of the Israelites. At times he sighed like a sick boy and looked around him as if hearing the shouts of robbers from afar. He looks at his daughter and trembles. But even all of these are as if not

considered, because it is only a sickness of the spirit and he carries it. Even the members of his household carry with him his yearning in love. But the name Israel passed through his lips at moments, while previously the name of Israel was not even heard once in that house. Thus he remembers today the name of Israel, from time to time, and when he remembers it thus it excites him and he is afraid.

This matter was a chastisement to his mother much more than all the terrible punishments which befell her in those days. For what hope of a generation will come if the enlightened ones of the people, those who (42) became bright lights in the deep darkness in order to drive out darkness, if also they return and take an interest in their father's vanity? And what is the worth of a woman's life - trained to see and be seen, to hear and cause her words to be heard, to receive a blessing from everyone who hears her and sees her face - if the doors of her house do not open for visitors from the aristocracy of the Gentiles? The mother was sad-spirited as she sat alone and her husband was not with her. The father was sighing and depressed when he separated himself from the crowd of the house. Even Ruhama, who before had been filled with the spirit of life and an eternal light shone from between her black eyelashes, even she sighed sometimes when she looked toward her father. Something like a mask of sadness covered the splendor of her forehead and clouded the gleam of her eyes. All of these things grieved young Ben-Hagri's heart much.

He was unable to make peace between his father and his mother, and to draw their hearts near because they did not reveal their spirit. A quarrel did not break out between them and like before, thus also today, one rejoices to do the desire of the other. To cause his father

to rejoice - joy of his spirit and strengthening his heart, he was unable to do this. He knew this from the start, because they do not give healing to the heart with words of love and sympathy. Because of all of these he did not find rest in his father's house as he wished in the days of the idleness, which carried his soul to them that time with all the strength of his feelings.

More than his father's house, his grandfather's house became a terror for him. Until now he had left and come to that house and he was content with plenty of love and generosity. He also had to keep his mother's commandment not to anger the heart of the old man, not to raise an insult upon his lips nor scorn for one of the commandments of the Torah or the customs of the Israelites. But if he set before him a barrier then his heart trusted that in peace he went out of the house, as he had come into it and achieved favor from the old man. But now however, the word of thunder and fear of the coming day is heard there, and also a curse for the robbers in midday. All of these excite his spirit without rest.

But more than all of these, the news that many school students met agitated his spirit. They joined together in a nationalist association saying, "Summon contributions of money and a donation of men in order to return and rebuild the ruins of Zion." Also many of the old men joined and they blessed their faces. In his old father's house they talked about this matter and his face lit up to them. He also made a large contribution. To rebuild the ruins of Jerusalem! Woe to them, to ears which hear thus! Behold, thus this people suddenly returns from a
(43) perpetual rest to call aloud on the name Zion, and the land of Judah!

Behold, they were always smitten concerning this because they separated themselves from their neighbors, and did not consider themselves like the Gentiles. Here they return to their vomit, to widen the breach and to make an eternal separation between them and between their Gentile brethren. "Woe! How have you, the Nineteenth Century, suddenly fallen with all your priests and your seers together? Behold, this is your doing! Since you called upon the name of your guests and at the time of the end when yet you almost turn your back to the century that possesses you, you turn aside suddenly rebellious atonement. You stamp your feet and you turn over the plate. You pour out the milk of your breasts in front of the ones giving you suck! Indeed, there is no one desiring a life such as this," he said to himself, "and how great is my heart's pain because I know the sorrow of my mother's soul. For she is the one who sees straightforward. Also my father's eyelids have been covered by the shadow of death!"

When he poured out his soul into his mother's lap, her advice was that he seek consolation for himself in the company of his friends of old in the mansion of the nobleman M. There his raging spirit will calm down. His mother's advice was like the word of God in his eyes. For while he was still a boy, he had come and gone to the nobleman's house as into his father's house. Also he and his household always visited in his father's house. Didn't he listen to the school lessons together with the sons? They were more like brothers than friends to him, for all of the time during a school vacation they spent at his father's house. Also the nobleman's daughter always called him, "my brother". This naughty lass was already a young woman. These five years I have not seen her face and certainly she has matured and become

prettier. We shall see how she will speak to me now. Will she also now take my right hand and race me? There it will be peaceful for me . . .

There his spirit rested from its storming when the face of the young woman, who had matured and become prettier, lit up for him and she extended her hand to him with the love of companions and siblings. She clearly expressed her joy to see him in the splendor of a person who had become a man. Also her mother showed him signs of love and gladness. They requested that he stay with them a few days until the sons and their friends would return from the field, for they had left yesterday to go hunting. Oh, how joy filled all the chambers of his heart until it was on the verge of bursting when the young woman invited him on the second and third day to accompany her on the road.

She went out to ride on her horse and he was on her right side.

(44) They passed wonderful hills and valleys. For a long time Ben-Hagri had not seen the splendor of the field. In the capital city he saw sins blossoming like the grass of the field, and tyrants like mighty cedars; deceit bringing forth bread and the wine cellars overflowing with tears of oppression. But the land brings forth its plant and its garden produces its seed.

They are already forgotten from his heart and calmly his eyes explore all which surrounds him. The flax stalks which raised their heads shining before the sun, they grew very high, so that when he passes among their rows with the young woman, they become a shelter over them on both sides. Corn and wheat fields which bear an abundant crop, they bent their heads as if they were speaking to each other lovingly, and like waves of water passing over the surface of the entire valley, seen from afar. Fields of grass for the animals which extend until the end of the horizon are as

if covered with a greenish paint. All the precious stones are embroidered on it with colors of a championship of myriads. Also the whistling of the herds and the sound of the shepherd on his flute, with the rushing of the river waves upon the pieces of stone. All of these spoke in but one language, the language of love.

Ben-Hagri's lips also moved and opened a little, like the lips of a small boy trying to repeat the words of one speaking to him. All of the time that he passed, with the young woman, in the flax field, they were hidden from everyone's sight and from the entire world. His heart whispered a word. It aroused him to make it heard in the ears of his companion. Yet, although his heart felt the language which he heard, nevertheless his lips were unable to express this into the ears of the young woman. He was like one drunk from the wine of his feelings - all of the time that they rode and also afterwards, when they returned and sat down at the table; and even after that, when the young woman went into her room to rest. She advised him to sit in the garden . . . He did as she said and saw the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden. Only the snake was not inside of it . . . Was the snake indeed already the dust of his bread and would not come to the garden of the Tree of Life?

Who is this whispering into his ears. "What if the young woman loves you and if she gives her hand to you - and if also her parents . . . ? Not a feeling of remorse and not a quarrel of families, only peace and tranquility. The sincere vision of all the wise-hearted ones, and the words of the prophets of peace and knowledge will rise forever . . . You shall eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge and you shall become God-like. You shall become a wonder for all of your brother's broken

(45) sons whom the spirit of wandering has seized today. It has stirred them and removed them from their place."

Certainly it is not the voice of the snake, but rather the voice of the Nineteenth Century that distributes the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge with a generous hand. She says more: "Hold on to the Tree of Knowledge and don't weaken . . ." In the vision of his spirit he sent forth his hands to grasp the twigs of the Tree of Knowledge, as if it stood before him. But this flourishing tree was not in the garden. Instead he was laying down in his room on the bed. And since it had a mouth its voice was heard saying, "Surely he is very handsome, charming to the heart and a delight to the eyes. But woe is me, because he is a Jew . . . What will my brothers say? What will the nobleman Ben-Shebama say? He is jealous of him. This is a good thing. I shall draw near to him and arouse the jealousy within him. The jealousy will increase the love . . . how lovely are his lips. Oh, they are created for kissing. And his gentle hand is like the hand of a delicate young woman. I shall draw near to him . . ." Has the tongue of the snake spoken here? No, even here the spirit of the Nineteenth Century walks around in the garden of knowledge according to the spirit of the day . . .

Even if the snake's tongue is not touching the meditation of his heart, yet he feels as if the venom is inside of him, as if his blood has been poisoned. Suddenly it is as if a fire is burning and boils like a bubbling pot. It agitates him very much. It rises to his head, settles, and descends to his heart. Thus he returns to his surroundings. He doesn't stop for a moment. Like a dreamer he sat down and looked around him. He sighed, laughed, stirred, stood up, sat down, reclined, layed down and jumped up from his place until he was called to the room

of the lady of the house. A light of seven-fold hit his eyes when he came and looked at the face of the young woman, as if beams were coming out from her face and from the splendor of her forehead.

He came into a big room which had four windows. Its walls were covered by cedar panelling with carvings around it like a frame beneath the covering. In the middle stood a big table, and around it many big chairs - all the work of a craftsman. An expensive carpet covers the entire floor and on the table is a very large samovar, which is polished so that it shines and glitters in the light of many candles. The tray on which it stands and all the utensils which stood on the table glistened and scattered beams of light.

The young woman sat on a chair, her head leaning on the wall behind her. When he came in she gracefully waved her hand to him as a sign that he should come near and sit by her side. When he gave her his hand, she held it. Warmth passed through all of his skin, from head to foot. He (46) sat down by her side and did not know if it was the samovar or his heart that was seething. He heard the sound of his excitement. Even before he could open his mouth the door opened and the young woman's two brothers, his friends from youth, came into the house, and after them also Ben-Shebama who had been a companion of Ben-Hagri previously.

Ben-Hagri uttered his greetings to the members of the household and to Ben-Shebama like a drunkard, but he did not look at them when he spoke to them. For the faces of the household members circulated surprise. Ben-Shebama's face paled and reddened alternately until almost stammering, he answered his greeting. His hand was cold, as ice, as he was holding his hand. He did not see all of this and he was like one diving into an abyss of light. It was the eyes of the young woman which spoke to him much.

Only when the lady of the house also came into the room did they each sit down in his place with a glass of hot tea in their hands. The sons told their mother and their sister what they brought with them from the hunt.

Now the woman asked Ben-Hagri about the capital city, then she was quiet. It almost killed his spirit and he was astonished about himself, because he did not know what had happened to him until now. He made an effort to return the calm to his heart so that he would hear all which they say to him and he would put his words in order in a sentence when he responded. Ben-Shebama looked with angry eyes from time to time at Ben-Hagri who sat to the right of the young woman. When she saw this the young woman spoke to Ben-Hagri more and looked at him with a laughing face. The sons did not pay attention to the words of the rest of those sitting. They only spoke about their hunting. Then they arose from the table, took their mother's hands and led her to their room to see the venison. Also Ben-Shebama went out with them to show his venison too. His face warned him that he was doing this rebelliously.

Ben-Hagri was left alone with the young woman. When she got up from her place he also got up and went after her. But what is this? Why did his face become suddenly pale, like a dead man's face; his hands trembling and his feet shaking, his eyes as if they were deceived and his lips dropped? What happened to him? Also the young woman was terrified for a moment when she looked at his face. But instantly her spirit was calm and a light laugh passed through her lips when she looked at him without love and said, "What happened to you?"

"My lady, gracious young woman!" called Ben-Hagri in a sick voice. The young woman nodded her head as if she sought to strengthen his heart

so that he would bring forth all of his spirit.

(47) "My lady," he called again as if he was having difficulty speaking.

"What is this on your heart?"

In amazement the young woman looked at his face because she did not expect to hear this from his mouth. In a moment, however, a light laugh passed through her lips as she said, "Don't you see that the square of gold is an icon of a man?"

"My lady!" Ben-Hagri called with more strength. His voice expressed sadness without end. "Remove this jewelry and throw it to the ground, but no! Don't touch it with your pure hands. Throw it off and trample it with your feet, because it is a disgrace!"

The young woman looked at him in horror and considered much whether he wasn't confused. She said, "I don't understand your words. You speak in riddles!" Suddenly she turned and the appearance of her face was graceful. She said, "Or perhaps the icon makes your spirit rebellious, because you want to place there a sanctuary for another man's icon."

"Truly, you do not understand my words. How my heart grieves to teach you the meaning of the words. Only when it kills me shall I utter something like this; but know that this jewelry is stolen."

"You must be out of your mind," answered the young woman and she moved back a few steps.

"If only it were so and I had not seen you, a splendor of the maidens, carrying the gold of the robbers on her heart. Know that they robbed this jewelry, in broad daylight, from the heart of a young Hebrew woman . . . on the day of the fury . . ."

"May the name of God be blessed!" answered the young woman, and she inhaled. "You have alarmed me with your words . . ."

"Truly it is so," added Ben-Hagri without hearing the young woman's words. He called out, "I know the young Hebrew woman and I know the jewelry. I give my testimony that this jewelry is hers and they stole it from her in broad daylight."

"What have I to do with the Jewish . . . or Hebrew woman? Whether previously it belonged to her or not? The jewelry was given to me as a gift from an honorable nobleman!" The young woman answered and moved her hand as a sign that he speaks vanity.

"But I am saying to you that the jewelry is stolen . . ."

(48) "What are you talking about?" asked the lady of the house when she saw her daughter's face disseminating anger, and Ben-Hagri's face which was emitting sorrow, mercy, horror and amazement all together.

"This gentleman said," the young woman spoke as she turned toward her mother, her brother and Ben-Shebama, "that this jewelry, which is on my neck, has been stolen from a Jewish maiden!"

"Truly it is so," called Ben-Hagri in a strong voice. "Therefore, throw it away. Don't spoil your beauty, for the man from whose hand it came to you is a robber in full daylight. . ."

Only the sound of a slap on the cheek, which echoed, was heard from every corner of the house. It was the reply to all of Ben-Hagri's words, and Ben-Shebama gave him this response. Ben-Hagri stood in his place as one struck by thunder. Thousands of thunder peels made a noise in his ears, and many myriads of thunderflashes flew against his eyes with every sight and color. It seemed as if not he, but someone else swung his hand to return the insult to the one who disgraced him. He only felt this, that his hand was raised to atone for his insult, but at that moment six hands grabbed on to him. They threw him down the stairs. A strong, loud

laughing voice burst out from the room and it appeased even the roar of a thousand thunders.

"Jew! Do you like the price of the jewelry? And what if I increase it a little?" A voice was heard from the window which was open. A laughing, loud voice shouted again from the sky. But none of these touched even the heart of the unfortunate one who became like a stone. He also did not know when all of his clothing was stained from the dirty water which was poured out through the window onto his head. For it was as if at one time all of his bones were broken. Thus he could not summon the strength to stand on his feet after he was dragged outside. He couched beneath the tree without seeking any accounting of whether it was the Tree of Knowledge. He sat as if his understanding had left him, and looked at the darkness before him, without thinking anything. For all desires and all thought left him. He was like a block of wood.

The noise from the house had already ceased. The laugh of the mirthful ones was heard no more. Also, the light of a candle was no longer seen from behind the window which was closed tightly. Ben-Hagri did not (49) hear nor see any of this; he was as if laying upon his bed resting. Thus he did not consider getting up and seeking rest for himself. Suddenly he was disturbed, as if he was awakened from a fearfully deep sleep by the sound of a dog who was barking loudly. It was the dog of the gatekeeper who was going around the outside of the mansion before closing the gate. He jumped upon him in the dark and the gatekeeper hurried and drove away the dog. He grabbed the hand of the one who was laying down, because he thought that he was a thief hiding and he raised him up.

How alarmed he was when he saw by the light of the small lantern, which was in his hand, that it was Ben-Hagri. It was as if he was mocking,

because he could not put words in order to apologize. It was almost crazy, the vision of his eyes, to see the gentleman sitting under the tree. Thus he stood in his place and scratched his earlobe and also his forehead. Suddenly his eyes lit up and he said, "I understand sir, that without a doubt you are waiting here for someone . . . Here is the place of the meeting . . . What are you doing outside? Come to my house; there is no one there and silence of the grave for all young men and maidens . . . my room is before you . . ."

Now Ben-Hagri opened his eyes and looked at the one speaking to him. But it was as if he remembered something of all which had happened. He shuddered and a trembling passed over all of his flesh. He regained his strength and brought his hand to his pocket and gave a gift of silver to the gatekeeper without speaking a word. He only motioned that he would go. The gatekeeper nodded his head and said, "Do as you wish, but do not lie here all night under the tree."

Ben-Hagri also did not respond to this request. Instead, he arose and he walked away a little bit. When the gatekeeper turned his back and left him, he took out a revolver from his pocket and placed a bullet into it. When he had placed his hand into his pocket to bring out money he had found a bullet. It was as if a new life came into him. He was very agitated and he started to feel pain in his skin. When he got up and when he walked in the dark about a quarter of an hour he slowly remembered again what had happened to him. He stood and cried out, "I shall atone my disgrace with his blood!"

His lips had been closed for almost two hours, as if he was dumb-founded. Now when they opened he spoke again, repeated and said a third time only one thing, "I shall atone my disgrace with his blood!" While

he repeated his words he took the weapon of death in his hand and aimed it toward the mansion. Many hours passed and he didn't think any thoughts. He did not seek an account of his deeds, he only walked here and there in the dark, like a scout on guard. He waited for the light of morning, for (50) a time when he could see again the face of his insulter.

Before dawn, dew covered all of the square and he felt cold in his bones. Now he remembered that he had left his coat in the mansion. Without knowing the reason why, there rose suddenly, a memory of the young woman on his heart, because of the garment. He began to seek an account of her deeds, the deeds of her mother and her brothers. "Was her voice also heard among the voice of the mockers? Not by any means! But . . . She is not like this! She is exalted among daughters! However, the jewelry . . . the Jewish woman's jewelry . . . She did not cast it off . . . it was a gift to her . . . Hell, Damnation!" he called suddenly.

He left from his place and the echo of his voice was heard in the forest. "Weren't these the words of my father, that Ben-Shebama was the one robbing Ruhama's jewelry? But my mother reduced his word to naught and I forgot it. Ben-Shebama, where is he, the one who steals in full daylight? He comes to the house and she takes gifts from his hand, but she does not throw them away, even when she heard that it was stolen, because it was stolen only from a Jewish woman. She too shares the spoil with the robber! Behold, they are all like this, these are their ways, their thoughts and their deeds. They have cast me out disgracefully . . . They are the robbers . . . Will my soul not take revenge on a nation like this? I shall take revenge, one revenge, and when I submit myself to slaughter by the hands of the killers - this will be my consolation: that I return revenge to my enemies, judgment to the robbers and thieves, to

those who cause disgrace, the shame of mankind.

From moment to moment the storming of his spirit increased, and his heart beat much. His hand was raised from time to time toward the place where the mansion was and his lips whispered only, "revenge, revenge," without pausing. The rays of dawn were visible in the eastern extremity, red like blood. They almost didn't have the strength to break through the dew which spread its wrap over heaven and earth. Ben-Hagri again walked around and spoke to himself as a stormy sea. Very slowly the sun-rays broke forth, moving between openings of the dew clouds. The valley appeared in all of its glory. A tranquil rest is in all the ends of the land. In every place where the eyes look, the generous hand of nature, which does not make any separation between family nor between tribe and language, is seen.

The spirit of what fills his eyes also comes to Ben-Hagri. His hands become almost weak. In the unending pain of his heart he cries, "But upon whom shall I set my vengeance? They are all together deviant rebellers, (51) friends of thieves and murderers. These are their souls' delight. Shall I wave my hand to wipe them all out from beneath the heavens? Indeed thus it is; they are all together. They shall be considered thus. And these are their intentions concerning us, but we wander about like sheep. We are like sheep to the clipper and we are like sheep to the slaughter . . . Your true judgment, my father, arises as the dawn . . . Your eyes saw your error, but we erred much more. The vengeance is not ours! It is not for slaughtered sheep to rise up before their killers. It is for them to hide in secret places or to prepare their necks.

"Also you are a stranger to me. You belong to our foe and not to us," he called out when he turned his face toward the revolver. "Or

perhaps you, too, will rise up against me? All of them have set upon us, all around. Your wickedness will not be greater than the wickedness of all rising up against us. What will come from me if you rise up against me? What is the hope of my life when I fear death? . . . Death and an orphaner on each of our footholds. What is there for us to attach onto all our enemies? Also, is it for our foes to send a hand upon others or upon their soul? You do not belong to us!" He threw it away far. At the sound of its falling the bullet burst forth with a thunder and shaking and hit the tree. As if he had sent his hand forth against a man whom he had condemned or had slain, thus Ben-Hagri was terrified by the sound and hurried to flee. He ran with all his strength toward the city without looking behind him.

As he went he was immersed deep in his thoughts. He was suddenly awakened, as a man wakes from his sleep, to the sound of cows and goats which a small youth was guiding. It was the herd of the city and when he raised his eyes he saw the shepherd boy stealing away and fleeing from a vegetable garden where he had eaten to his heart's content, even carrying some produce in his bag. Fear enveloped him as he heard the whistling of the youth which warned him of the man coming toward him.

"How I pity you unfortunate one," Ben-Hagri said to himself. "Here you were born and grew up at a time when robbery and stealing were still forbidden. You have not yet learned to steal in broad daylight and to establish your shelter, you devoured the strength of the Jews. The children who grow up at this time will be happier than you. They will no longer be disciplined not to steal and rob . . . But the Lord will guard you from every evil. He will guard your soul." He continued to speak to himself when he saw that the shepherd tried two or three times to jump over

the fence, but he fell back.

"Don't hurt your leg with a stone or with a tree because of a drop of your pure blood. Thus they will sacrifice thousands of my brothers (52) to slaughter. Didn't the days of the Feast of Matzah draw near?" he asked himself. He looked here and there with perplexed eyes. "It is all the same. The Passover sacrifice is prepared for us every day. Many hands are ready for our feast day . . ."

Suddenly he looked here and there as if he was alarmed by what came from his lips. He did not know honestly who it was that spoke like this in his ears. "Was my mouth truly the one who spoke these things? Have I ceased to be a sage in the eyes of all the intelligent ones? Behold, milk and honey was always beneath my tongue. Who poured poison and viper's venom onto it? Woe to you, short sighted ones! Lo, this is the fruit of your malicious deeds, for you uprooted the seed of peace; but you planted strife, contention, eternal enmity and blood vengeance! I drew near to them my soul, my life, my understanding and the judgment of my heart; but they, with the disgrace of enemies, insulted me back! What do they wish from us, that we pay them with love in exchange for their hatred?"

A strange laugh burst out of his throat. Something like mockery and the disgust of his soul was visible on his face as he spoke again. "But to them both our love and our hate are as naught. How they pay attention to our powerless anger, to our helpless vengeance, and to all our feelings which like an unborn child do not see the light, and like stones of a slingshot which hit the heart of the marksman rather than the goal. Who will arise for us against the evil-doers? We have only righteousness and justice. But these, they are poor and they go astray. Before a fist or

an arm their faces are imprisoned in a hiding place.

"Ha! Would that we had a fist instead of righteousness; strength of arm instead of the uprightness. Or then also our voice would be heard . . . a fist! Thus truly it is a fist which allows us to smite the disgrace in our lives. Thus it will be done for us! We have sinned and we have rebelled, all of us. Our fathers sinned against their morals, our mothers against their teachings; and we raise the head in pride and it becomes our splendor because we were the sons of bitterness! My ear has already heard all of these. The purity of my eyes has seen all of these and it calls with its throat unceasingly: 'You call the jackals brother, and the poisonous snakes who discharge, companion. Soon all the earth will be filled with poison and venom.' Why should we cry out for justice? Behold they are only doing a little, we have done much. They arise to kill the flesh, but we have already destroyed the soul and we are destroying the spirit. . ."

- (53) A few barefooted Jews, their heads bent like mourners passed by him and they disturbed him from his thoughts. "What is this? Have they been driven out of their lodgings, and did they destroy their homes? But they are not fleeing and others are coming after them. They all go to one place! What are they doing? Mourning for Jews! 'Do you understand, you most unfortunate ones, how great will be your reward? Behold, the hand of your sons and your grandsons was upon you.' " He called after them and nodded his head.

For a long time he walked around the streets and looked around him, still before he turned toward his father's house which was on the edge of the city, because he refused to disturb the peace of the house during the morning. Also he felt distress as he remembered his mother; for what

would he say to her and what would he hear from her mouth?

Suddenly he shuddered because the sound of wailing excited his spirit, and his ear heard something very terrible. It was like the sound of sticks for killing, the sound of men and women and even children uniting together and it agitates dust. His heart immediately became stone but immediately he was stirred up and in a fearful voice cried out. "Murderers! Behold you return to prepare a massacre. This is the voice of my brothers, their soul is too weary for killers, even I am against you. I return revenge to the enemies! Where is it, the gun? This has also become my calamity! I threw it away like a weapon in which one takes no delight. From it justice goes forth for the oppressed, come what may! I shall die this time the death of the righteous; my end shall be like the end of all my brothers who sacrificed their soul for the sanctity of God! I am with you in sorrow!"

When he cried out thus, he jumped like a lion to the place from which the sound came out. It was the big synagogue in the city. Firmly, he tore open the door. He jumped back, like one crazy from what his eyes see, when he saw the large crowd sitting on the ground like mourners over a corpse. They were barefoot and their heads were bent. Their eyes were a source of tears and their voice disturbed the spirit and terrified the heart. For a moment he stood in his place as one made crazy by the vision of his eyes, because he did not understand the scene. In his eyes he was like a crazy person or a dreamer. He almost began to deceive his soul that his heart only saw an evil dream and he spoke emptiness. But suddenly, as if a hidden hand grabbed him, lifted him up and threw him to the earth; thus he fell down suddenly upon the ground. With a strong hand he removed the shoes from his feet in a moment, and he threw

them away. With his two hands he struck his head and gave voice to a cry which stilled all of the voices for a moment. He set a voice in a cry which terrified every heart and shook the pillars of the house. This voice was like the voice of the army commander, a battle thundering (54) marvelously. For after him they all added force to the wails and to the sighs until strength gave out.

The storm of a hundred broken hearts mixed with the heart storm of one who was broken a hundred times. It became a tempest making all who touched it tremble like a driven leaf. The cry of a daughter of Judah, who had been trampled underfoot and was despised like rubbish, rose up to the heavens. It was as if they breathed a new spirit, as all of their spirit killed them; it was as if they renewed their strength when they revived their tears. Thus they became strong, even after Ephraim Ben-Hagri became silent, and no longer made his voice heard. For he only spoke aloud two or three times and suddenly his throat was strangled. He sat on the ground, his head between the palms of his hands, he looked in front of himself and was silent.

Thus he sat for a very long time. Darkness and desolation were within his soul until one voice touched his ears calling, "How pleasant it is for me to eat and drink at the time when I see the dogs steal your young lions!" This voice touched the strings of his heart and shocked them, because it was the voice of his father who had also come on that day, the Ninth of Av, to the Lord's house, which he had not done for many years. Now Ephraim also set his eyes on the book and with his lips uttered the words of the lamentation, "Zion, do you not ask . . ." His eyes began to flow with tears like a fountain of water. He cried and continued to cry; and he felt immeasurable calm in his crying.

It was as if he had been buried until now, alive, in piles of dust which pressed down on his heart like a heavy stone. But suddenly all of these were removed by a man's firm hand. He was anxious for his relief. Thus he felt another stone falling from his heart. Also his heart, which was like stone, it was as if it quickly flew away and left its place; and instead of it came a heart of flesh.

When he arose from his place at the conclusion of the praying he looked around him. It is as if his eyes see a new world, a world of unity, love and brotherhood. But before he succeeded to bring an accounting of his thoughts, the old man came up to him in the glory of his stature and in the brilliance of his grandeur. He raised his hand and placed it on his head, as he called out with a trembling voice, "God has educated my son, Ephraim." The old man's face, sending forth honor and uprightness; his eyes in which tear drops glistened like sapphires; his long, white beard which goes down to his chest, and upon which tears roll like drops of dew; his voice in which consolation, hope and forgiveness are all heard together, dispersed around holy reverence. Not only upon the heart of Ephraim's father, but rather upon all who surround them did he pour a spirit of grace and mercy to turn the heart of the fathers to the sons and the heart of the sons to their fathers.

- (55) Also, the rest of the youths, who came together with their fathers to the Lord's house, and their heart had not been with them, when they saw the scene they humbled themselves and all together they yielded. They requested pardon, forgiveness and atonement from their fathers and they vowed with perfect heart to return and to hold on to their fathers' refuge, and to be loyal sons to their people from this day forward. The mourning was turned into joy; the fast day and the cries for a good day

for all of these broken hearted, to fathers and sons together.

Behold, these are the good days for Israel, after being pursued like chaff before the wind, after being like dust to tread upon, and after its blood was poured out with its tears and its heart, then it returns and finds consolation, power and strength to carry and to endure all which comes to it. If, however, he looks at his dwelling and sees quiet . . .

All the sons continued to become acquainted and to make vows to return with a peaceful heart to their people, and Ephraim became great. Suddenly, a high spirit came over him and he called, "I have sinned and I erred very much. But now, as I return and I see my injustice, I shall make a vow to bring a sacrifice to my people; a sacrifice to atone for my sins. Behold, I shall go up to the land which was the cradle of our youth, and the joy of our hope forever. I shall go wandering far away and I shall wander after my heart between its pieces!"

"What are you saying, my son?!" called his father who stood silent until now shuddering.

"I shall fulfill my words! I shall take revenge on our enemies. I have sworn to take revenge and I will take revenge. Behold, I have devoted my life, my strength, my righteousness and my honesty to the Gentiles. All of my desires and my orientation were to unite us with them, in love and brotherhood, to forget all of the past and to set eyes and heart to the future, one for all of us. Also we arose to destroy the name of Israel, but in love and willingly. Yet behold, they came and intended to destroy us with wrathful cruelty and with shouts of murderers as they have forever been accustomed to doing. Therefore thus we shall do to them: from this day, as long as there is breath in me,

I shall sacrifice my soul and my strength to re-establish the destruction of Zion, to give a crown to the lost people, to make it strong and firm. No trouble nor any affliction shall move me. Every generous heart of the youth will burn and seize with me.

"This will be our vengeance, that we will revive what they kill and we shall re-establish that which they destroy. Whoever is for our (56) people, come to me. Behold the flag of vengeance on which we shall glorify the name of Jerusalem! Not by might and not by power; not with the fist of the wicked and not with blood and murder; but rather by spirit! We shall see revenge against our enemies, the revenge of the covenant, which we are making from this day forward; that each man will be a helper to his companion, and each man will say to his brothers, 'be strong and strengthened' for our people and the land of our fathers!"

In the eyes of all the crowd he was like a prophet of God, when he spoke. It was as if their eyes saw in him the messenger of redemption. Thus they looked toward him and they swarmed. Ten of the youths, wearing school uniforms, gave him their hand with an oath and with a promise to go after him and to respond according to all which he responds. It was as if the messenger of redemption had already come and redeemed them from all their troubles. Already they had established their house upon Mount Zion, on pillars that shall not move. Thus the faces of all who see and hear the words of the prophet lit up on that day and in the days to come . . .

* * * * *

There was only one soul in the city. But now messengers came to her and she cried like a mourner over the solitude. She was Ephraim's

mother, who cried without a pause for her father-in-law, for her husband and for her son. For honor had departed from them and they did not continue to raise their head among the Gentiles . . . How could her eating and drinking be pleasant to her, when the Gentiles were not invited to the meeting? How can she raise her face, if her only son became an apostate for her and for the Nineteenth Century. Thus she cries in secret. There is no one to console her. For also her friends and her companions, from among the Gentiles, have heard. Her companions were glad. Even the governor of the city asked her when he met her on the city street, "When are you going to see the face of understanding?" She fell down, the Nineteenth Century fell and it will not arise.

The End

The Analysis

1. General Overview of the Novel

Nekam Berit is the story of a person's ideological transformation. Ephraim Ben-Hagri is introduced to us as an enlightened Jew. He believes that the reason the Gentiles have not openly accepted the Jews is because of the barrier put up by the Jews themselves. Ben-Hagri is an optimist about the future for Jews in Europe. He believes that if the Jews are willing to make themselves more presentable, then in a generation or two Gentile prejudices toward them will disappear. Ben-Hagri maintains his optimism, even when he hears news about pogroms in many towns, including his home town. Finally, however, he changes his opinion. After he is the victim of insults, delivered by Gentile childhood friends of his, he decides that his efforts have been futile. Not only does he return to the Jewish community, he becomes a spokesman for Jewish Nationalism and a return to the land of Israel.

Nekam Berit is a literary outlet for Peretz Smolenskin's ideological views. He seems to be saying that in light of the pogroms of 1881 there is only one choice left for the Jew - to rebuild the Jewish homeland. Smolenskin has chosen a powerful literary tool for that purpose, the reluctance of Ben-Hagri. If someone so strongly convinced about assimilation and enlightenment could change his views, couldn't anyone? When even he admits that the pogroms indicate serious problems for the Jews, then the reader should be convinced that times are indeed bad. In addition, the choice of a character going through a transition of this sort provides an opportunity for a look at human psychology. We are made

aware of Ben-Hagri's thoughts and inner turmoil as he is forced to change his ideas.

This story seems to be set in Russia, although this is never explicitly stated. Ben-Hagri is living in the capital city, most likely St. Petersburg. During the reign of Tsar Alexander II (1855-1881) government policy toward the Jews was liberalized. Some Jews were allowed to travel and even live outside the Pale of Settlement. Many Jews attended secular universities. This is the environment in which Ben-Hagri has moved from the town where he grew up to the capital city. At home he had some close Gentile friends. In the capital city he lives in a house owned by a Gentile lady and associates mostly with non-Jews. Ben-Hagri has maintained a minimal tie with other Jewish students in the capital city, which is described in the opening chapter of the story.

Nekam Berit was written in three chapters. According to Smolenskin in a letter written to the Hebrew author M. D. Brandstatter*, who assisted him in editing Ha-Shahar, the third chapter of the novel was written first and afterwards he wrote chapters one and two. Reuven Breinin** suggests that the concerns of chapter three - Ephraim Ben-Hagri's return to his people and his land - were closest to Smolenskin's heart. After he wrote this he set the stage for it with the first two chapters. The presence of foreshadowing and the carefully set-up drama may be the result of the order in which Smolenskin wrote this story.

*Printed in Breinin's introduction to Nekam Berit, published in 1918 by Kadima Publishers, New York.

**Ibid.

The text of Part One, "The Young Men's Secret", begins with an introduction in the long-winded, embellished, abstract style which Smolenskin often uses. Smolenskin describes the uncertainty of the future with the opening words, "Not even a prophet is able to reveal to a spirit its path beforehand." For more than three pages Smolenskin describes the spirit of the old and of the new generations, setting the stage for the story.

The story itself finally begins at a gathering of students. Ben-Hagri is being lauded for slapping the face of a Gentile who insulted him. But Ben-Hagri, a twenty-two year old student, does not view his deed as anything great. A twenty-four year old student, Ben-Jacob, takes a different view. He feels that this event should force the students to realize the barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. The debate continues throughout the chapter with Ben-Hagri representing the assimilationist point of view and Ben-Jacob often quoting an author who supports a return to life among the Jewish people and a rejection of the Enlightenment. Ben-Jacob has come to agree with that author and decides to visit him together with some other students. Ben-Hagri fails to be persuaded by the words of the author or by Ben-Jacob.

Chapter Two, "The Binding Together of Nerves," is set entirely in the house where Ben-Hagri lives. The title refers to the news Ben-Hagri receives through the mail and how it affects him. Before reading the letters Ben-Hagri notes how appropriate it is that the day which the students chose to visit the author is both Easter and the fifth day of Passover. His assimilationist beliefs are expressed in his hope that someday the Jewish and Christian holidays can be combined. This, plus the way in which he describes his landlady's goodwill to him, add to the

shock which Ben-Hagri will receive when he reads the first letter.

The first letter is from Ben-Hagri's father. He expects it to contain holiday greetings. Instead he finds a description of a pogrom in his hometown. His father's house was destroyed and a nobleman stole a necklace off his sister's neck. His family is hiding in the basement of a neighbor's house. The local police and soldiers allowed the violence to continue; unhindered. Ben-Hagri is taken off guard by this letter. He is noticeably shaken as he recalls his youthful days in his parents' house. Finally he calms down and remembers the second letter, from his mother.

Ben-Hagri's mother paints a very different picture of events. She thinks Ephraim's father is crazy for being so upset. She thinks the troubles will quickly pass. Ephraim is torn between his parents' two accounts of events. When two students stop by to remind him about hearing the Jewish author he says he has decided not to go. For the moment, at least, Ben-Hagri has chosen to believe his mother's version of the events.

The third and final part of Nekam Berit, "Revenge and Recompense," begins with tension. Smolenskin paints a picture of family strife. Ephraim's parents seem to have separated over their different responses to the pogroms. His father has given up hope for any reconciliation with the Gentiles, but his mother has maintained her belief in assimilation. She suggests Ephraim visit his childhood friends, the sons of the nobleman. She says that this will calm his fears. When he arrives at the house of his "friends," the brothers are out hunting. Their mother and sister greet Ephraim cordially and entertain him for a few days.

Finally, the brothers arrive home with a friend, Ben-Shebama. The brothers and Ben-Shebama practically ignore Ben-Hagri. They are more interested in talking about their hunt than in seeing an "old friend." After they have left the room Ben-Hagri notices some jewelry that the sister is wearing. It is the jewelry which was stolen from his own sister Ruhama. When he claims it was stolen off her neck by a nobleman Ben-Shebama, the apparent culprit takes offense and slaps Ben-Hagri. Someone pours dirty water on Ben-Hagri through a window, while the brothers insult him and chase him out of the house.

During the night Ephraim contemplates violent revenge for his insults. Instead he vents his anger by shooting a pistol at a tree, at dawn. He runs away from the house, through the countryside toward his home town. Along the way he notices many sad-faced Jews marching toward one place. At first he thinks there has been another pogrom and he voices his allegiance to his suffering brethren. Actually it is the Ninth of Av and the Jews are walking toward the synagogue.

At the synagogue, Ephraim rejoins his people and is reunited with his father. Then he rises up to speak. He declares that the day of sadness has become a day of joy. He suggests revenge for the insults suffered - not violent revenge but revenge of reaffirming the Jewish nationalist covenant. Revenge can be obtained, suggests Ephraim, by rebuilding the ruins of the Jewish homeland. People pledge to follow Ephraim Ben-Hagri, who has suddenly become a prophet in their eyes. The reluctant hero has been transformed into a leader of Jewish nationalism.

The final paragraph of the novel describes Ephraim's mother. She is the only Jewish soul left in the city. Her Gentile friends have rejected her. She is insulted and persecuted. As she has fallen, so has

the spirit of the Nineteenth Century, the spirit of the Enlightenment; and it will not rise again. In this fashion Smolenskin "buries" the Enlightenment in Judaism, replacing it with the rebirth of a Jewish homeland. Thus he also completes Nekam Berit, his literary response to the Russian pogroms of 1881.

2. A Literary Critical Analysis of Nekam Berit

In Chapter One of my analysis I described the plot of Nekam Berit. My intention was to present a picture of how the story flows, highlighting what I consider to be the most significant aspects of the story. At this point I will examine the novel on the basis of characterizations, language and style, use of names and themes.

a) Characterizations

Characters in a novel are tools in the hands of the author. The characters in Nekam Berit are used by Smolenskin to represent opinions and perspectives. Some of the lesser characters in the story seem like caricatures. The main characters, especially Ephraim Ben-Hagri, are presented as more complex individuals with both convictions and doubts. Yet even the more complex characters are used by Smolenskin to symbolize types of people.

Let us begin with Ephraim Ben-Hagri. We have already noted that he represents the individual who believes in the Enlightenment and assimilation. At times he seems extreme in this position. That he has no fear of the Gentile can be seen by his response during the student gathering (p. 9), "Please, please, don't laud my actions . . . He has insulted me and I slapped his cheek." On p. 12 Ben-Hagri states his position thus:

This has always been my word, that we have the obligation to draw near, because we have distanced ourselves from the Gentiles. That is why we have become ostracized, only we by our customs and clothing have placed upon ourselves disgrace in the eyes of the people to the extent that they are fearful of us or they

detest us. In all the ways of our lives, in the laws of eating and drinking, in our clothing, in our prayers which we pray like crazy people and in all the ways of our lives we distance every heart from us.

Ben-Hagri believes that the Jews are responsible for the way the Gentiles treat them. It is their responsibility to change. Even after hearing about the pogroms in his own home town and in many other cities he seems to be firm in his convictions. Two students suggest that because of these horrible events Ben-Hagri should change his opinions and go with them to hear the Hebrew author. But he says (p. 40), "Indeed, after all of this and because of all of this (I will refrain from going with you)! . . . Now the obligation is upon us more than before to do much, because we are loyal sons of the land."

Ben-Hagri's actions and lifestyle, in addition to his words, create a picture of one devoted to assimilation. Ben-Hagri lives in the house of a Gentile woman. We read that (p. 26), "he was involved in every joy and every holiday which the landlady celebrated." Ben-Hagri celebrates the Christian holidays and felt that all Jews should do the same. He prefers associating with his landlady's Gentile friends who, "drew near to him," more than with the Jewish students. In fact, Ben-Hagri is embarrassed by other Jews and blames them for not being friendly to him nor to the Gentiles. This is expressed in the text clearly (p. 26):

" . . . wasn't it correct that all who came to the house, each one drew near to him as if he was a member of their group? Wasn't it a reliable sign that only the Jews were guilty in this matter, because they did not draw close to him as brothers and loyal companions? . . . Why were their ways, foods and holidays different from the rest of the people? Why do they mention, from time to time, that there are still Jews in the land? If they had only done as he, because this name was already considered to be atrocious and no man was separated from his companion."

When Ben-Hagri says, "no man was separated from his companion," he seems to be expressing his own embarrassment. He believes that if the Jewish name is, "considered to be atrocious," even he will feel the repercussions. On one level he is an extreme assimilationist. Yet Smolenskin has left subtle indications that he was not really so extreme. He may be embarrassed by other Jews, but at the same time he admits that he himself is a Jew and the behavior of other Jews affects him. He feels some responsibility for their actions. In other words, he is unable to separate himself totally from the Jewish community.

There are other indications of Ben-Hagri's identification with the Jewish people. We first encounter him in a gathering of Jewish students. Even though Ben-Hagri preaches assimilation he still participates in Jewish student gatherings. For a while he even considers going with the students who had decided as a group to visit the Hebrew author. Regarding this (p. 24), "even Ben-Hagri nodded his head as a sign that it is pleasing in his opinion." When he later refuses to go, that may actually be an indication that he is a little insecure about his opinions. If he believes strongly that he is correct in promoting assimilation, he should not be afraid to face the author who has a different opinion. At that point in the story Ben-Hagri may be afraid that the author will persuade him to change his opinion.

Another indication of the fact that Ben-Hagri was not totally convinced about his own ideas is how quickly and drastically he changes them. His eventual, sudden change is foreshadowed by the way he immediately responds to his father's letter. Rather than disbelieving the letter, he is clearly shaken. This one letter, the first news he has heard of the pogroms, has a major effect on him (pp. 32-33). "Alarmed,

excited and astounded, Ben-Hagri held his head when he finished reading. He was like a man who returned to his dwelling place and it, with all which was inside had been consumed by fire." Ben-Hagri's "secure" ideas may not really have been so secure. Temporarily, this one letter causes him to consider changing his opinion. However, his mother's letter helps him justify his original beliefs, for the moment.

Eventually Ben-Hagri does change his opinions. Not only does he discard his faith in assimilation, he actually becomes a spokesman for Jewish nationalism. The fact that he returns to the Jewish people and the Jewish nationalist cause is itself an indication that Ben-Hagri was not an absolute assimilationist. At first he is described as believing that he is, but the course of his life proved that even he could be drawn away from assimilation.

Ephraim Ben-Hagri is a complex character. Part of his complexity is the fact that he is the son of two, different parents. His father had been raised in a traditionally observant home. As a child he lived according to Jewish tradition, yet he yearned to leave his father's house and (p. 35), "prepare for himself his own house and no man would see them there." Ben-Hagri's mother was born to wealthy parents. They gave their children a traditional Jewish education and were generally observant Jews. But the children were also exposed to many non-Jews who respected her father. While still at home Ben-Hagri's mother secretly broke Jewish laws such as playing a harp on the Sabbath and eating non-kosher foods (see p. 34). She also longed to set up her own, "Enlightened" household.

Ephraim's mother and father strove to be "modern, assimilated Jews." His mother led his father away from Jewish practice as (p. 35), "they moved forward . . . She led him after her . . . until he shaved off his

beard and on the Sabbath Day the house became a place of meeting for Gentile friends." His paternal grandfather was upset by this. When Ephraim was born his mother agreed to have a ritual circumcision and to serve kosher food at the feast which followed. Yet his parents still transmitted to him the ideal of harmony with the Gentiles through assimilation. Despite apparent agreement concerning assimilation in those days, the events of later years would accentuate the differences between his mother's and his father's natures.

The pogroms mark a change in the relationship between Ephraim's parents. Ephraim's father loses his hope in the future. In his letter to Ephraim he states (p. 32), "The vision of my life and my hope, to draw near the hearts of my brothers to the Gentiles sunk in the mire of murder and lechery." He expresses his disgust when he notes that the persecutors included the educated noblemen as well as lower class Gentiles. If even his former friends, the upper class Gentiles, have turned against them then there can be no more hope for assimilation. Eventually he returns to the synagogue, where he finds his son on the Ninth of Av.

Ben-Hagri's mother separates from his father because of the way he responds to the pogroms. In contrast to him, she maintains her faith in the spirit of the Enlightenment, which Smolenskin refers to as the "Spirit of the Nineteenth Century." Regarding the pogroms, she asks in her letter to Ephraim (pp. 37-38), "Why do we multiply words about an evil event which surely, like a temporal cloud will pass and they will not remember it?" She views the pogrom as an isolated case. It is nothing more than a temporary setback in the goal of making peace with the Gentiles. She appears again at the end of the story, as the last person to believe in this goal. As she falls, so does the Enlightenment.

In the first part of Nekam Berit a student named Ben-Jacob plays a role. He is the person who refutes Ben-Hagri's words. Ben-Jacob is a major character in the first part of the novel, but thereafter he is never mentioned. Ben-Jacob is twenty-four years old, two years older than Ben-Hagri. He is also ahead of Ben-Hagri in another way. Ben-Jacob describes himself as one who sees his past mistakes and is ready to start out on a new path, which Ben-Hagri will also do later in the story. To him, the old path was the way of the Enlightenment. The new path is a return to the Jewish people, a vague hint of some sort of Jewish nationalism. Thus he states (p. 13):

I am saying that we must teach the people the knowledge not to go after vanity, not to lead them astray to believe that it has the power to set up a memorial for itself . . . Now if only we return to unite with our people . . . Then all hope is not yet lost.

Ben-Jacob seems to have believed in the Enlightenment until he met the Hebrew author who was able to change his opinion. Our picture of Ben-Jacob himself is a limited one. Much of the time that Ben-Jacob speaks, he is describing a discussion which he had with the Hebrew author. Our picture of Ben-Jacob, therefore, is actually a composite of Ben-Jacob himself and the Hebrew author.

One may be tempted to ask who the Hebrew author represents. Smolenskin probably avoided naming him intentionally. In this way the Hebrew author represents all writers of that period who are in favor of Jewish nationalism and autonomy. One particular writer may have influenced Smolenskin's characterization of the author. In 1882, Leon Pinsker published his own response to the pogroms called Autoemancipation. It is worth noting that while writing this, Pinsker was travelling in Europe.

In Vienna, Smolenskin might have had contact with him. It seems likely that Smolenskin was aware of Pinsker and his work and that Pinsker had some affect on the characterization of the Hebrew author in Nekam Berit.

Some of the words attributed to the Hebrew author are similar to those of another Jewish figure, Dr. Max Lilienthal. In 1841, Lilienthal was invited by the Russian government to help them set up Jewish secular schools. Lilienthal could not understand why a special effort was being made to educate the Jews, who were already more literate than the Russian masses. In Nekam Berit, the Hebrew author similarly notes the superiority of Jewish learning, as well as Jewish values. He says (p. 15), "We don't fall below the Gentiles in knowledge. So too, with regard to righteousness, judgment, the spirit of faith and ability."

Whoever the Hebrew author in Nekam Berit may be, his main purpose is to present Peretz Smolenskin's own point of view in the story's opening debate. Other less central characters appear briefly in the student gathering. Their main purpose is to pose the questions which the main characters will discuss. They also provide a variety of views. All of the characters in the first part of the novel are used to represent Jewish positions and ideologies. Their words introduce us to themes which will continue throughout the story.

In part two of Nekam Berit a character by the name of Ben-Joseph is introduced. He is the outspoken, non-assimilated Jew who angers the governor of Ben-Hagri's home town. Ben-Joseph only appears in the letter from Ephraim's father, but he is a strong contrast to the character of the senior Ben-Hagri. Another person also appears occasionally and indirectly. This is Ruhama, Ephraim's sister. Her character is never developed. She is simply the helpless, innocent victim of the Gentile

violence. In a sense, she represents the people of Israel, throughout history. The governor of the region is a representation of the once friendly Gentile who has suddenly turned his back on the Jews.

In the third part of the story, a few Gentiles make an appearance who repeat the behavior of the governor. Ephraim's childhood friends, never mentioned by name, are no longer friendly to Ben-Hagri. Part of their characterization is presented in Ben-Hagri's expectations and memories. These were the friends who were (p. 43), "more like brothers than friends to him." When he meets them this time, however, they ignore him and even insult him. The nobleman Ben-Shebama is worse. He is a friend of the brothers who Ephraim also knew as a child. He is the person who stole the necklace from Ruhama's neck. He represents the Gentile who not only turns his back on the Jew, he persecutes them. The sister and mother of Ephraim's childhood friends are friendly at first. The sister even makes him think she likes him. Actually she is using him. Her character represents the Gentile who teases the Jew into thinking that he is accepted, then rejects him. In this fashion Smolenskin has created characters who represent various types of people, both Jewish and Gentile; and whose feeling, thinking, speaking and acting typifies both the inner-Jewish struggle and the tensions between Jew and Gentile in the last decades of the Nineteenth Century.

2. b) Language and Style

Peretz Smolenskin was a resourceful Hebrew writer for his time. He was creating original literature in a language which was experiencing a rebirth. In this section of the analysis I will first discuss language forms which Smolenskin used in Nekam Berit. Then I will describe his use of powerful imagery, his use of sarcasm and some other literary techniques which Smolenskin used.

Modern Hebrew did not develop out of a vacuum. The early writers of modern Hebrew had a number of places to look for language models. For Peretz Smolenskin, the Hebrew Bible provided much of guidance he needed. He used words and idiomatic expressions from Biblical Hebrew. However, this was not enough. Rabbinic and Medieval Hebrew sources provided some help, but not enough. Smolenskin found it necessary, at times, to create words for items of the modern world which had not yet received a Hebrew equivalent.

Smolenskin draws upon the Biblical narrative, especially with regard to his use of the Hebrew letter vav. The vav conversive of Biblical Hebrew, which changes the tense of the verb, is used consistently in Nekam Berit. Also, the vav consecutive, which can mean "but" or "then" as well as the usual "and", is also common. As a result there are many long Hebrew sentences connected by vav's, which I chose to separate into shorter sentence units in accordance with modern English usage. In some cases, however, there was no way to shorten the sentence. This will provide the reader with a taste of Smolenskin's actual Hebrew style. For example, on page 5 we find the following long sentence, which I have already shortened from the Hebrew:

It (the new spirit) placed its message into their (the students') mouths as it now appears in the gathering of students, composed of many students who will be the ones healing or killing sick people; those who shall build palaces and span bridges over the land, on water or in the spirit; those who shall discharge true judgment or shall pervert justice.

In addition to the vav, other conjunctions such as gam (also) or aval (but), are used to separate parts of long sentences. I used these words as signals of where to begin new English sentences. Also, unusually long paragraphs were common. I similarly divided these paragraphs in the English at what seemed to be logical places.

Another aspect of language which Smolenskin draws on is the use of Biblical Hebrew verb tenses. The forms which we call future tense today are more correctly classified as imperfect verbs. Often I had to make a choice of whether to translate these words as future or as present tense verbs. The perfect form of the verb could usually be translated as a past tense in English.

Smolenskin's resourcefulness is seen in his attempt to create words. The noticable examples are those which have not survived to the present day. For example, in his father's letter (p. 28), the phrase kav barzel, which literally means "iron line", is his word for telegraph. Today the same phrase is sometimes used to mean train, locomotive, but never telegraph. The phrase (p. 12) alim l'itim, which literally means "leaves for times" or "periodical leaves", is used to mean newspapers or periodicals. And the phrase (p. 47) tzel-tzelem-ish, literally the "shadow of a man's image", means an icon, or in its context possibly even a crucifix.

Smolenskin was also resourceful in his use of imagery. Certain Biblical phrases suggest imageries based on their Biblical context. It

is possible that some of the phrases were simply chosen because Smolenskin knew of no adequate alternatives in Hebrew. Most of the time, however, the words and imagery were conscious choices. For example, when the students responded to Ben-Jacob's words favorably (p. 18), their words were the same as those which the Israelites said to Moses, concerning God's commands (Exodus 24:7), "We will do and we will obey." For Smolenskin, these students are the new generation of Israelites listening to their Moses.

In another example of Biblical imagery, Ben-Jacob responds to Ben-Hagri's faith in the Enlightenment with these words (p. 22), "These enlightened ones climb, as in the days of a certain generation, to ascend the mountain . . ." The certain generation probably refers to those Israelites in the Sinai wilderness who went up to a mountain (Numbers 14:40-45) which they were not supposed to climb. They were smitten by the Amalekites and Canaanites, just as the "enlightened ones" in Nekam Berit were smitten by the Gentiles.

One use of Biblical imagery which I found to be particularly interesting occurs near the end of the story. When Ben-Hagri is sitting in the garden of his Gentile friends' house, after riding with their sister, he envisions the Garden of Eden before himself (p. 44). This image conveys his feeling of being in paradise while being with the young woman. It also provides some foreshadowing of events. Just as Eve enticed Adam, so this Christian maiden in Nekam Berit entices Ben-Hagri. More significantly, the paradise of Eden has been lost. The paradise of Ben-Hagri's childhood will also soon be lost. Like Adam and Eve, Ben-Hagri will be expelled from this paradise, to which he can never return. Smolenskin's choices of Biblical imagery in these examples

are intentional and serve specific literary purposes.

In addition to Biblical imagery, Smolenskin utilizes other types of vivid imagery to express his ideas. During the student gathering Ben-Jacob quotes the Hebrew author when he expresses the fact that any Jew who maintains his identity is an annoyance to the Gentiles. He likens this to one who enters his enemy's camp, carrying weapons and expects to make peace with the enemy. He says (p. 18), "The sword is on your side, it is the name Israel; and the archers' bow is in your hand, it is the faith in whose name you call out . . ." Ben-Hagri's mother warns her son not to move backwards, away from the Enlightenment, when she writes in her letter (p. 38), "Only a crab walks backwards, not a human."

Here are other examples of vivid imagery used within the novel Nekam Berit. Ben-Hagri likens the violence of the pogroms (p. 40) to the last outpouring of smoke from the wick of a flame as it is extinguished. His mother calls the pogrom (p. 38) a "temporal cloud", which will quickly pass. The students at the meeting debate whether or not the "wall" between the Jews and Gentiles has been knocked down. At the very beginning of the story, Smolenskin uses storm imagery to express the conflict of differing spirits. By using such vivid imagery, Smolenskin creates a way for people to "visualize" abstract ideas.

Smolenskin's writing also includes a degree of sarcasm. He uses sarcasm to ridicule certain types of people. At the very beginning of the novel his tendency to be sarcastic appears. It is used to ridicule the "enlightened ones". He describes (p. 5) medical students as those, "who will be the ones healing or killing sick people." Engineers seem ridiculous as they, "build palaces and span bridges over the land, on

water or in the spirit." Finally lawyers, according to Smolenskin, will "discharge true judgment or shall pervert justice." One who reads Nekam Berit should be aware of the sarcasm in order to understand Smolenskin's message well.

One literary technique which Smolenskin employs is the careful choice of words. When he speaks of an oppressor (p. 14), the Hebrew word he uses is tzar. This sounds like the word sar which refers to the Russian Tsar. He purposely uses the word, subtly hinting at a connection between the two. Throughout the novel, Smolenskin refers to the Jews as "Hebrews" or "Israelites". Behind the choice of these Biblical names is Smolenskin's nationalist perspective. He chooses words which conjure images of the days of nationalism in ancient Israel.

The use of dialogue, rather than action dominates the story. This allows for an interplay of ideas and quickly indicates character changes. The description of Ben-Jacob's debate with the Hebrew author eliminates the need for Ben-Habri to hear him speak. The likely debate has already been presented to us. Smolenskin's decision to write in the omniscient third person allows us to know what the characters are thinking. This is helpful as we watch the metamorphosis of Ephraim Ben-Hagri.

Finally, in spite of all the tools which Smolenskin has used skillfully in composing Nekam Berit, he carefully leaves certain things undone. The unnamed characters, the unidentified "capital city", as well as other unspecified elements of the story serve an important purpose. On the title page Smolenskin calls this story, "A Tale of What Has Happened, Is Happening and Will Happen in Every Place and Every Time." Smolenskin has used just enough descriptions to present clearly his ideal of Jewish nationalism. He has also left out just enough data to

make this story a universal story; one to which persecuted Jews of any time of place can relate.

2. c) Use of Names

In Nekam Berit Peretz Smolenskin has chosen character names of symbolic significance. This was a common tool used by writers of the late Nineteenth Century. Smolenskin's decision to do this adds definition to his characters. First of all, not all characters are given names. Those characters who are given a name are thereby singled out as significant characters. Also the names define where they stand on the debate of nationalism versus assimilation. At times these named characters seem more like caricatures than real people. In fact, they are tools of the author, used to present various points of view.

Let us begin with the name Ben-Hagri. At first I considered translating this name as "The Ishmaelite" (i.e. the descendent of Hagar). Until the end of the story Ben-Hagri represents the assimilationist point of view. He is likened to the descendent of Abraham who does not follow his father's religion. Calling him "The Ishmaelite" however, would incorrectly give the impression that he is not Jewish. I decided instead to preserve the more subtly symbolic nature of the name itself by calling the character simply "Ben-Hagri." Smolenskin develops this symbolic name as the character develops. As Ben-Hagri begins turning back to the Jewish people he is referred to by his more Jewish first name - Ephraim. Ephraim Ben-Hagri is a character who exhibits both the assimilationism which his last name symbolizes and later the sense of belonging to the Jewish people which his first name symbolizes.

Ben-Hagri's counterpart in the first section of the story is Ben-Jacob. While Ben-Hagri represents the line of Abraham's descendants who have not maintained their father's religion, Ben-Jacob's name means "Son

of Jacob" or Israelite. Ben-Jacob represents those who have maintained the religion and peoplehood of their ancestors. In Chapter Two Ben-Hagri's father mentions, in his letter, an outspoken Jew by the name Ben-Joseph. He similarly is faithful to the Jewish people as opposed to those who favor doing whatever will please the Gentiles.

In the third part of the novel we are introduced to a Gentile aristocrat whom Ben-Hagri has known since childhood. This nobleman is named Ben-Shebama. The symbolism of this name can be seen if we read it as the Hebrew word bama, indicating a raised position, preceded by the conjunction she- which means "which is" or "who is." In other words Ben-Shebama is "Mr. Aristocrat." He represents the upper class Gentile who participates in the pogroms. Not even someone of his stature is above stealing jewelry or harming an innocent person.

Finally, it is worth noting that all named characters, Jewish and Gentile alike, are given names which include the word Ben, meaning "child of." This may simply have been Smolenskin's style of giving names in Hebrew. Yet when he writes all characters, whether they are Jewish or not, are subject to his method of Hebrew naming. I chose to preserve his style of naming in my English text, rather than modify what is a significant element of this novel.

2. d) Themes

On the surface level, Nekam Berit is the story of how one individual, Ephraim Ben-Hagri, changed from being an advocate of assimilation into a prophet of Jewish nationalism. However, beneath the surface, Peretz Smolenskin has weaved a number of themes which deal with the ideologies of Nineteenth Century Jews. Other themes deal with aspects of human nature and life itself. In this chapter I will present the major themes of Nekam Berit and discuss how Smolenskin dealt with them.

The main theme of Nekam Berit is the rise of Jewish nationalism. This is a concern close to Smolenskin's heart. Throughout his life Smolenskin's idea of Jewish nationalism developed and became more defined. Similarly, his passion for nationalism grew. The development of this theme in Nekam Berit parallels the development of this idea in Smolenskin's life.

In Part One of Nekam Berit Jewish nationalism is a vague idea. At that point in the story, Jewish peoplehood would be a better name for this ideology. Ben-Jacob speaks (p. 11) of the young generation to whom, "a new spirit has been given . . ., because we desire to do things for our people and our brethren." A sense with and for the Jewish people is expressed, rather than the idea of a secular Jewish state. Pride in Jewish values and learning is a part of this peoplehood, but no mention is made of setting up a Jewish homeland on the soil of Palestine.

The vague "Jewish peoplehood" of which the Hebrew author and Ben-Jacob speak in Part One contains one element of particular importance. This peoplehood is based on the belief that assimilation will not work,

and on the willingness to exist as a separate entity. Ben-Jacob asserts (pp. 12-13) that the Gentiles hate the Jews simply because they are Jews, and nothing can ever change that. The Gentiles will always find some fault with the Jews, some reason to hate them. While no specific mention is yet made of establishing a separate Jewish state, the sense of alienation from non-Jews is a natural step in the total process.

Once the Jew sees no chance of becoming a citizen of the state, he must look elsewhere for his identity. In Nekam Berit there is only one alternative, belonging to the Jewish people. Once a person accepts the existence of a Jewish people, it is logical for him to consider specific elements of peoplehood such as language, laws and land. In Nekam Berit Ben-Hagri stubbornly opposes the idea of Jews being separated from the Gentiles, until he faces their hatred himself. Then even he accepts the view that his identity is with his own people - the Jews. Once he returns to the Jewish people he can begin to speak of a separate Jewish existence in Israel.

The first mention of actually rebuilding the nation in the land of Israel is found in Part Three. Ben-Hagri is bothered by (p. 42):

The news that many students met . . . They joined together in a nationalist association saying, "Summon contributions of money and a donation of men in order to return and rebuild the ruins of Zion."

At this point Ben-Hagri bemoans the actions of the students. However, at the end of this chapter Ben-Hagri himself admits that Jewish nationalism is the only choice for a Jew. Having rejoined the Jewish people in his home town synagogue Ephraim Ben-Hagri says (p. 55), "I shall sacrifice my soul and my strength to re-establish the destruction

of Zion." Concerning the insults of the Gentiles he says, "This will be our vengeance, that we will revive what they kill and we shall re-establish that which they destroy." The Jews' vengeance, the revenge of the covenant, is to rebuild the land of Israel as a Jewish homeland. This is the fully developed statement of the theme of Jewish nationalism.

A second, related theme in Nekam Berit is that the ideology of the Enlightenment is no longer valid. In order to present this theme Smolenskin first creates characters who advocate Enlightenment ideas and assimilation. In the student gathering Ben-Hagri is the main advocate of the Enlightenment. He debates Ben-Jacob, who believes that the days for believing in the Enlightenment have passed. Smolenskin uses the term "the Nineteenth Century" to refer to the Enlightenment. Just as the Nineteenth Century has almost ended, so the time for the Enlightenment has also passed.

In Nekam Berit, a trust in the Enlightenment is equated with false optimism. In the story's introduction Smolenskin writes of the youth (p. 6). "They shall aim at their goal and perhaps they will not miss the mark . . ." Smolenskin continues by noting that a youth, "Soars on the wings of his spirit and he passes out to the infinite reaches, . . ." but, "Hope was disappointed even before his chief desire floated." In other words, Smolenskin is saying that the hope in the Enlightenment was doomed from the start.

Speaking through the mouth of the Hebrew author (p. 15), Smolenskin notes the superiority of Jewish learning. Then he continues to describe how differently knowledge is viewed by Jews and by Gentiles. With regard to the Jews, he says, " . . . from you alone the teaching has come forth to pursue and seek knowledge." Concerning the Gentiles, however,

he states that, "Their teachers, their parents, their priests, and their judges together enclose the way of knowledge with stones, and place it before all as a monster." How can the Enlightenment, which stresses the quest for knowledge, succeed if the Gentiles fear true knowledge? In Eastern Europe this was a very relevant question. If the Gentiles feared knowledge, as the average, illiterate Russian peasant did, then being an enlightened person would make one a threat and cause alienation instead of acceptance. This is perhaps Smolenskin's strongest refutation of the Enlightenment.

In Nekam Berit, those who oppose the Enlightenment are portrayed as intelligent, perceptive people. They are the ones who see the signs before them. The author, who used to trust in the Enlightenment is portrayed (p. 15) as now turning the youths away from it. He has seen the bad omens of the future. On the other hand, those who remain faithful to the Enlightenment seem to be blind to certain events. The insult which Ben-Hagri receives from the nobleman at the beginning of the story is one sign. He doesn't attach any special importance to it, but some of the students see it as a sign of Gentile hatred for the Jews. One student, presumably Ben-Joseph, says (p. 10), "Thus we exalt the work of Ben-Hagri even if he rejects our praise." At another point in the discussion Ben-Jacob says (p. 19), "You request a sign or miracle . . . Are not the signs which he (the Hebrew author) gave indeed enough to open the eyes of the ones who desire to see them."

A related theme in this story is how passion can blind people. Those who wish to see the truth will, while those who are caught up in their beliefs will be unable to see things clearly. On an ideological level, Ben-Hagri was so involved in trying to assimilate that he could not see

the signs of the Gentile hatred. Ben-Hagri was even willing to consider marrying the Christian sister of his childhood friends (p. 44). However, in the passion for her love, he was blind to see that he was being used. The signs were clear, such as when he hears her say (p. 45) that she will draw near to him, only in order to arouse Ben-Shebama's jealousy, but Ben-Hagri chooses not to see the obvious at that point in time.

The potential for human change is an important theme in Nekam Berit. Human change is necessary if Smolenskin hopes to win "converts" to his cause. He hopes to draw people away from the Enlightenment towards Jewish nationalism. The potential for human change is demonstrated by the changes which the characters in this story undergo. Ben-Jacob and the Hebrew author have given up their previous trust in the Enlightenment, in favor of Jewish peoplehood. Ben-Hagri's father changes his ideas as a result of the pogroms. Ben-Hagri himself changes when he experiences the hatred of the Gentiles first hand. It is easy for Ben-Hagri to maintain his faith in assimilation, until the proof of its failure touches him directly.

The need to change is based on the uncertainty of the future. The pogroms point to the uncertainty of future Jewish life in Eastern Europe. The meaning of the pogroms will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter. Uncertainty about the future is itself a theme in Nekam Berit. The novel opens with the words (p. 5), "Not even a prophet is able to reveal to a spirit its path beforehand." Beforehand no one could predict which direction the characters in the story would choose. This much, however, is certain. The way of the past, the Enlightenment, is the wrong direction. Smolenskin believes that eventually the correct path, Jewish nationalism, will be clear enough for all to see. And so,

on the last page of the novel (p. 56) he symbolically buries the Enlightenment with these words, "the Nineteenth Century fell and it will not arise."

3. Nekam Berit as a Response to the Pogroms of 1881

So far I have provided an English text of Smolenskin's novel, Nekam Berit, an overview of the novel and a critical analysis of its literary features. These are the walls of our house. Now it is time to put on the roof. In other words, the remaining task is to explain how Nekam Berit serves as Smolenskin's response to the Russian pogroms of 1881. To do so I will build on the material which has already been presented. First I will discuss how Smolenskin deals with the pogroms. Then I will describe how he presents his nationalist response.

On the title page of Nekam Berit in the Hebrew text, the title is followed by this sentence: "A Tale of What Has Happened, Is Happening and Will Happen in Every Place and at Every Time." This expression of the timeless meaning of Nekam Berit is followed in the 1905 Warsaw edition (but not in any other edition) by the words, "Concerning the evil events in Austria." Because the latter is lacking in the earlier printing I doubt that Smolenskin wrote those words. However, someone was trying to suggest a specific context for the story.

The 1905 Warsaw edition of Nekam Berit might be a response to pogroms in or near Austria-Hungary. In 1902, for example, there was a pogrom in the town of Czeszochowa. Also, the infamous Kishinev pogroms of 1903 are likely to have been a reason for the reprinting of Nekam Berit. The original, however, probably has its source in the pogroms of 1881, which are believed by many to have been government sanctioned.

Indeed, that is the impression Smolenskin gives in the novel. First of all, the students (p. 39) who stop at Ben-Hagri's room call out the names of many cities in which Gentiles arose to harm the Jews. In 1881

the outbreak of violence was similarly widespread. Also, Ephraim Ben-Hagri's father describes (pp. 30-31), that the policemen and soldiers refused to protect the Jews. However, when some of the Jews tried to defend themselves (p. 30), "then the police hurried . . . to drive them out or to place fetters on their hands." Smolenskin seems to be alluding to Gentile violence which was supported by government authorities. The description of the pogroms in Nekam Berit is consistent with the reality of the Russian pogroms of 1881.

Smolenskin was inspired to write Nekam Berit by the "days of fury" directed against the Jews in 1881. However, as I've previously noted, Smolenskin avoids being specific about dates, places or people. The pogroms of 1881 are a fact of life for Jews in the diaspora. These pogroms are a repetition of centuries of persecution. The Jews of Eastern Europe experience this type of hatred again and again in later years. Yet for Smolenskin the 1881 pogroms are significant for anyone willing to admit the truth, as he sees it. The pogroms of 1881 clearly mark the end of any hope for Jewish acceptance in East European society.

Prior to 1881, Jews could justifiably believe that their life in Eastern Europe would improve. Some Gentiles, especially from the upper class, were fair, sensible people and the government protected the Jews. The year 1881 marks a turning point. After 1881 it is clear that even most upper class Gentiles hated the Jews, and the government would not always protect them. In Nekam Berit Smolenskin shows the pogroms to be a turning point for Jewish-Gentile relations. Ben-Hagri was free to slap the Gentile nobleman who had insulted him (p. 9) without fear of reprisal before the pogroms. However, when Ben-Hagri raises his hand in response to Ben-Shebama's slap (p. 48), he is held back, slapped and

thrown down the stairs. This is all done to him by former friends. On an individual basis, Ben-Hagri faces the reality of the Jewish situation which is described in his father's letter.

In Nekam Berit, the Jews are portrayed as being helpless to defend themselves against Gentile violence. Only one solution to this problem is suggested, in light of the pogroms - Jewish nationalism. Unity with other Jews will provide strength and hope. Life in an independent Jewish nation will provide both protection and revenge from the insults of the Gentiles. Using Nekam Berit as his literary tool, Smolenskin presents this response to the pogroms. All characters in the story are heading toward this ideology. Former "enlightened" Jews, such as Ben-Jacob and the Hebrew author, have become believers in Jewish peoplehood. No one is described as moving away from Jewish nationalist beliefs. There are no former Jewish nationalists - only those who currently are or those who will become Jewish nationalists.

In Nekam Berit Smolenskin presents a character with whom most readers can identify. At one point or another Ben-Hagri is almost every type of Jew. He starts out as a dedicated assimilationist, yet he had both a good Jewish and secular education. He is also somewhat curious about the writings of the Hebrew author. After he receives his parents' accounts of the pogroms, Ben-Hagri is a confused Jew, in a state of transition. He is still an "enlightened" Jew, but now he has some doubts. After being insulted by his childhood friends, Ephraim becomes a believer in Jewish peoplehood. He symbolically returns to Jewish traditional life briefly, as he joins his brethren who are praying in the synagogue on the Ninth of Av.

In Peretz Smolenskin's opinion it is inevitable that all Jews will become advocates of Jewish nationalism. Everything in Nekam Berit points to this goal. Ephraim Ben-Hagri reaches his highest level when he rises in the synagogue and speaks up for the cause of Jewish nationalism. He turns the sadness on the Ninth of Av into joy. Smolenskin is saying to us that any Jew who accepts the cause of Jewish nationalism can turn sadness into joy. Smolenskin's response to the sorrow and suffering caused by the pogroms is to present the alternative of building an independent Jewish homeland in the land of Israel. This response to the pogroms of 1881 is presented by Smolenskin with drama in Nekam Berit, which he wrote shortly afterwards, in 1883.

Conclusion

Approximately one hundred years ago, the Jews of Eastern Europe experienced one of the worst episodes in Jewish history. After more than twenty years of liberalized policies under the reign of Tsar Alexander II, hopes were raised by Jews concerning the future. These hopes were shattered by the pogroms of 1881, which demonstrated how deeply most Gentiles despised the Jews. Some Jews joined anti-government movements, many emigrated to the United States, and a large number chose to rebuild the Jewish nation in the land of Zion.

Nekam Berit is a novel which describes the pogroms of 1881 and how they influenced people to believe in Jewish Nationalism. The author, Peretz Smolenskin, was himself an advocate of this ideology. In many ways, Smolenskin's ideas resemble those of Zionist leaders - ideas expressed by people such as Theodore Herzl more than ten years after Smolenskin's death. Nekam Berit, written shortly before Smolenskin's death, contains a clear statement of his nationalist ideas. The novel is a tool which he used to convince people of his political ideas. It is also an original piece of literature, written in Hebrew, the language which Jewish nationalists revived as a language for modern literature and for speaking.

In the process of writing this thesis, I have translated Nekam Berit into English. The translation has been provided for the purpose of analyzing the novel and in order to expose the English reader to the literature of Smolenskin. The analysis of the novel involved writing a plot summary, a study of the literary techniques used by the author, and notes on some elements of history reflected in the story. Historical

fiction usually presents a carefully biased view of events. I have described Smolenskin's perception of the pogroms and how he utilized this story to promote his ideology.

Now that my work on this thesis has been completed I feel a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, I am aware of how much more could be done to analyze this novel. I have reached my intended goal; I have fulfilled my stated intention of translating the novel and analyzing its content and meaning. This work is only a first step into a virtually untouched area of scholarship. It is my hope that this work will be followed by efforts of others who appreciate the significance of Smolenskin's fiction. I personally have found much significant information about Nineteenth Century East European Jewish life in Nekam Berit.

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