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Human Sacrifice in Ancient Israelite Culture

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ordination

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Advisor: Dr. Stanley Nash

Introduction

Of all subjects, why child sacrifice? Certainly we are aware that the Tanakh is filled with discrepancy, scribal error, manipulation, and anachronism, to name just a few of the challenges facing an investigation into a biblical question. Alternately, though, the bible is filled with consistencies such as the presence of stories of human sacrifice that have in recent decades been verified as irrefutably factual by archaeological discovery. Many have claimed that the notion of child sacrifice was dubious or have tried to explain it away. I assert that this is the easy way out. I have chosen to attempt a leap into a chasm of texts, the bottom of which hides a terror that my thesis advisor and I discussed at length and were hoping in some way not to discover.

I was first drawn to the idea of human sacrifice as a reality as it was explained to me in Dr. S. David Sperling's "P'shat and Parshanut" class during a discussion of texts and their commentaries in Exodus. Dr. Sperling suggested that close investigation of the p'shat leads a student to medieval commentaries that illustrate other linguistic functions or qualities of words or phrases that turn our age-old understanding of biblical notions in entirely new directions; all of this, I was prepared for. With the GKC and Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon under one arm, and the concordance and Jon Levenson's *Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* under the other, I opened the books and began.

Months before thesis proposals were due, I turned to Dr. Stanley Nash, who has taught me many of the intricacies and fundamentals of Hebrew. After reviewing together the biblical story of the Ammonites and their experience of human sacrifice, I was convinced that I should surely ask him to collaborate with me on this project. At that moment, I recalled the very lines of Pirke Avot attributed to Yehoshua ben Prechya

taught to me by Dr. Nash: "עשה לך רב וקנה לך חבר" yet just before this was a bold reminder to me from the sages "ובוטל מדברי תורה...יורש גיהנם".

My investigation would prove to be difficult. It involved refining my weaknesses, confronting a terrifying reality about my own people and my perception of them. It involved the overcoming of a great deal of ignorance on my part, ignorance that I believe is still perpetuated by many devout people of faith as well as religious institutions and their leaders and teachers.

Much of my intellectual work has been shaped by Dr. Sperling and Dr. Nash, as well as by Dr. Martin Cohen's evaluations of the historical development of ancient Israel and his insistence over a period of several discussions that there "most certainly was child sacrifice." My hope is to follow in the path of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* ideal so devoutly defended by another of my master teachers, Dr. Carole Balin; that is to say – my feelings have nothing to do with this historical survey. I may explain my motivations for pursuing this study, but my intention is not a creative or emotional one. I am proposing a scientific study of child sacrifice throughout early Jewish history.

After reading James Michener's novel *The Source* and discussing it with Dr. Nash, we considered the narrative of the protagonist whose worship offended us so much in the story. We studied Rashi's interpretation of the actual device designed for the sacrifice, as well as the nature of the Tophet and Rashi's admission that child sacrifice not only occurred, but that it was carried out in such a way as to drown out the screams of the immolated children so they could not be heard above the smashing of the Tof, the great drum. The journey became darker. After beginning to wrap tefillin, I discovered the necessity placed upon some liturgists to include Exodus 13:1-10 in *shacharit* services.

The binding sickened me, perhaps because of the subconscious association with the binding of Isaac. The absurd and apologetic explanations offered to me by the Artscroll siddur¹ are now more of a tickle of humor to me than anything else. This too I discussed with Dr. Nash.

At the end of a year and a half journey I was to ultimately discover that human sacrifice was not only prevalent in the bible, but also that this form of appeasing a god or gods has been prevalent throughout the known world in a number of cultures that extend far beyond the ancient Near East. I believe that human sacrifice is, unfortunately, in various ways an inherent part of the human psyche. Worship of this sort or the behavior that defines it has been described by a number of psychologists, sociologists and researchers, as well as Hebrew Union College's Dr. Norman Cohen and Dr. Carol Ochs, both of whom have written extensively on the subject in their own works and in their own ways. Each explains differently the psychology that allows this practice to persist in the modern world.

The worship of molech, the molech sacrifice, immolation and similar forms of *avodah zarah* that resemble human sacrifice can be found in every stratum and in every corner of global society. Its appearance ranges from subtle to obvious, dependant at times on economic class and ethnicity, yet no societal group is immune as this dark behavior seems an inherently human one, ironically devoted to the divine. In some instances it resembles much of its primitive forms, such as sacrifice of an individual or individuals killed via the use of a sacred implement. For example, the Yoruba, the largest single ethnic group in Nigeria has myths that refer to "twin infanticide" as an ancient practice

¹ The Complete Artscroll Siddur. Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1993. 9.

stopped by the divine intervention of "Shango." In England, archaeological excavators have reportedly uncovered physical evidence of child sacrifice at Woodhenge, a neolithic site in Wiltshire, in which a young child was buried with its skull split by a weapon. This was interpreted by the excavators as a child sacrifice.² In Brian Fagan's *People of the Earth*, he describes the rituals of Incan and in particular Aztec sacrifice, as well as the socio-economic conditions that may have ultimately lead to the cults incorporating human sacrifice into rituals.³ Comparisons could be made between many of these and the practices of the ancient Israelites, even though they are separated by oceans of time, history and geography.

In other, more contemporary settings one might argue that human sacrifice has been highly sublimated and takes on a number of understated forms, from ritualized actions such as symbolic reenactments during the Passover festival to everyday practices that elude our consciousness. Consider the American father who works to maintain a wealthy lifestyle. His constant need to work to maintain the fine things of the household results in his frequent absence, neglecting the needs of those who depend upon his presence, *not* his fortune for survival. Interestingly, it would seem that the father is innocent, and in many ways he is, for he has yielded to the prevalent cultural message in his consumerist milieu. He has answered the call of American commercial religion. In an attempt to secure his safety and that of his household he has offered up worship to the wrong god. He has not neglected to worship, but rather he has worshiped incorrectly. Our subject had devoted all of his time to the wrong cause for all of the right reasons.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_sacrifice

³ Fagan, Brian. *People of the Earth*. New York: Harper Collins. 510-11

I believe that this type of worship is based on a highly pressing psychological and physiological need, the insurance of the survival of one's self and perhaps one's own clan, tribe or nation. We often think little and understand less of human existence as it preceded the industrial revolution. Western thought as well as rational and proven properties of science, medicine and even perspectives of government were nowhere near the levels they stand at today. The understanding of physics, metaphysics and the cosmos was entirely based on the godhead. There was no infertility-there was the opening and closing of the womb by the deity or deities. It was also, of course, unlike today, where soil p.h., satellite imagery and global positioning systems determine one's knowledge of fertility in the field or farm. Had you made the right offerings to the right gods? Had you offended them in some way? Prayer, libations, offerings and idol purchases, incense and more could help. Blood, as Dr. Sperling has frequently stated, was the "Ajax" of its time, ridding you of sin, illness and wrongdoing. The alternative to turning away from your protective and often unpredictable gods often came in the form of death from disease, war or starvation, exposure to the elements, hordes of enemies at your gates, lead and mercury lurking in your water sources, madness and very bad teeth. Who in the ancient world, where infant mortality was incredibly high and birth control unavailable-who, when given those odds wouldn't consider the notion of immolation of the first born or of a particular "chosen" child? In this context it stands to reason that many people would.

I don't make any claim as to whether individuals were not emotionally moved, but the reality that certain rites such as human sacrifice occurred can't be denied. We must face these difficult realities of the lives of ancient Israelites. Women were chattel, Jews were slave owners, and the offering of one child may have meant little in terms of

morality or ethics to individuals or groups who were hoping to survive or who were taught or indoctrinated to believe that such behavior was an appropriate method of appeasement to the heavens.

I believe that the idea of "substitution" as posited by many scholars about the Akeidah, the idea that a ram or other sacrificial animal could replace a human sacrifice, is the sign of a clear revision by the reigning priestly and political classes - an obvious *deus ex machina* to what was a previously consistent practice within Israelite culture. This particular argument will be discussed in future chapters in light of Jon Levenson's theories as well as others. I posit that up until the destruction of Solomon's Temple, the going rate at some competing cult sites must have been "the greater the offering the larger the benefit." Women, children slaves, and many people were property - objects to be used for a purpose or function. The Bible supports this understanding of humanity; its laws declare it so. What came to be in Judaism over time is an entirely different matter.

We are, as Dr. Michael Chernick has often said, deeply burdened when we look into the past as "post-moderns" because our western sense, our American sense of individuality, individual rights and liberties simply did not exist in ancient Israel in the way we would hope that it might have. The tendency to see otherwise is self-delusional and serves to act merely as nostalgia, namely, the longing for an ideal that never was.

I will argue that various political and economic interests helped in forming many of our misconceptions about the widespread practice of child sacrifice by manipulating the biblical text. There are just so many hints about the very real practice of human sacrifice in the Tanakh-our texts are so riddled with this tradition that we can not look

away. As the great Carl Sagan was fond of saying, "Absence of evidence does not imply evidence of absence." Thus, we wait for archaeology to reveal the concrete.

Until that time when these theories can be proven, in my writing I have tried to follow an outline of all of the information regarding the ancient Israelite practice of human sacrifice that we do have. This work is an attempt to survey the Tanakh as well as a number of outside sources to determine whether or not child sacrifice was a practice found in ancient Israelite culture and what purpose it may have served, be it literary or literal.

Ancient Israelite Culture

In attempting to understand the possible existence of the practice of human sacrifice in ancient Israelite culture, it must first be determined exactly what defined this culture. Much of Jewish heritage and the Jewish *Weltanschauung* is based on the idea of Israel as separate, chosen, even culturally superior to other peoples, past and present. Yet through extensive scholarship and archaeological evidence, it has been determined that ancient Israelite culture did not differ entirely from that of its neighbors, nor are its neighbors as simple as was once assumed. In fact, it appears that the religion of Israel's neighbors was far more complex and sophisticated than that of the Israelite tribes.

Most of the historical understanding of Israelite religion has been taken primarily from biblical historiography, and attempts to show Israel as a separate people with distinct religious and cultural practices. This can be seen in biblical passages such as Ex. 23:23-24 and Judges 3:5-7. Exodus 34:11-16 offers a fully elaborated explanation of this view. In the passage, it is reasserted that Israel were not originally in this land that has been given to them by God. Israel's ethnic identity is then shown to be separate from others in their land. The Israelites are warned to not make covenants with their neighbors, and they are described in extremely negative language. Cultic objects used by these people are both alien and in need of demolition, because they anger Yahweh, who is a jealous God. This final point serves to prove that God is the only God who should be worshipped by the Israelites.

Israel's Canaanite Heritage

Yet despite these biblical assertions, Yahweh was not the only God worshipped by the Israelites, nor did the Israelites distance themselves from the others in their land. Canaan, it seems, was more than just ancient Israel's closest neighbors. "Contemporary scholarship is virtually unanimous in viewing Israel as an ethnically diverse group that arose within Canaan."⁴ While Israelite culture rejected some features of Canaanite religion, there are profound continuities between these neighboring peoples. A multitude of archaeological discoveries and research have changed the way that scholars now understand Israel's cultural identity. It is now believed that the Canaanites and Israelites were not of two fundamentally different cultures. Discoveries from the Iron I period, 1200-1000 BCE, show that not only do Israelite and Canaanite cultures overlap, but they were for the most part indistinguishable! There were certainly differences even within Israelite culture dependant on geography, as Israel in its early history was quite complex.

Continuity between Israelite and Canaanite cultures can be seen in their alphabets and languages. Inscriptions from the time attest to both linear and cuneiform scripts and language in the Iron I period cannot be easily distinguished using linguistic criteria as belonging to one nation over the other. Their material culture during the period of the Judges is also virtually indistinguishable. This can be seen from archaeological excavations that have found hewn cisterns, storage jars, and other items once thought to be clearly distinguishable as Israelite creations-such items have been found in the Israelite region of the highlands and the Canaanite valleys and coastlines.

⁴ Sperling, S. David. *The Original Torah*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 71.

Archeological discoveries have shed great insight into Canaanite culture, and these findings in turn allow us to have a greater sense of the relationship between the ancient Israelites and their Canaanite neighbors whom they so frequently admonish in the Bible. Mari letters, tablets from ancient Emar, and other Ugaritic texts have been found from the Middle to Late Bronze Ages (1950-1200 BCE) that provide a wealth of information about Canaanite religion.⁵ In 1929, Ugaritic tablets dating to the second half of the second millennium B.C. were discovered at Ras Shamra on the coast of Syria. The five deities presented in these Ugaritic texts are the patriarch El, the matriarch Asherah, the warrior Baal and his militant sister Anat, and an unnamed solar deity. These deities, as will be discussed shortly, were not worshipped by the Canaanites alone.

Practical religion in Canaanite and Israelite cultures also shows clear overlaps, as can be seen especially from the terminology of cultic sacrifices. Highly specialized terms for sacrifice show a common heritage held by these Semitic peoples. The following terms in biblical Hebrew all correspond with parallel words pertaining to sacrifice in Ugaritic and Phoenician: *Zevach*, which referred to slaughtered offerings to Yahweh (Ex. 10:25 Hos. 3:4) and to Baal (II Kings 10:19, 24); *zevach hayamim*, the annual slaughtered offering (I Sam. 1:21, 20:6); *selamim*, offering of wellbeing (Lev. 3); *neder*, vow offering

⁵ Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990. 6.

(Num. 30⁶, Deut. 12); *minchah*, tribute offering (Lev. 2:1-16), *kalil*, burnt offering (Deut. 33:10, Lev. 6:15).⁷

Rituals of expiation were Israelite and Ugaritic phenomena, and both biblical rituals and Ugaritic texts provide forgiveness from the deity. Biblical records as well as Ugaritic and Phoenician works show that both cultures had similar terminologies for priests and other cultic functionaries. "To be sure, parallels in terminology do not establish parallels in cultural setting in each of these cases. Yet cultural continuity appears likely in these instances. It is evident from many areas of culture that Israelite society drew very heavily from Canaanite culture."⁸

There were, of course, differences between Israel and its neighbors in the first millennium BCE. In contrast to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Syria-Palestine, worshippers of Yahweh emphasized acts of salvation that brought political triumph. In other religious practices, the offering of first fruits, as found in Deut. 26:1-11, celebrated the transformation of wandering Arameans to landholders. Israel's religious imagery was typically drawn from politics or government.

⁶ Num. 30:3

30:3 איש כדור נדר ליהוה אלהים שבעה שבועה לאסר אסר
על-נפשו לא יחל דברו בכל-היצא מפיו יעשה:

⁷ Smith, 22.

⁸ Smith, 24.

Monolatry, Monotheism, and the Multitude of Israelite Cults

Israelite religion borrowed a great deal from their neighbors in order to serve their primary purposes: cultic and military unity. As an oath board confederation, the idea of covenant played an important part of this development.

The genius of the Israelites' innovation was their remarkable ability to draw out the creative potential of concepts and institutions that Israel shared with its neighbors and to achieve new syntheses. The Hebrews borrowed their earliest script from the Phoenicians and their later script from the Arameans. They borrowed poetic forms from the larger Syro-Palestinian culture and laws from Mesopotamia. They borrowed the story of the great flood from Mesopotamia and the figure of Balaam from Transjordan. We should not be surprised, therefore, to learn that a covenant between divinities and human beings was also not an Israelite invention. Although the allegory of divine-human covenant was not unique to the Bible, the covenant assumed far greater significance in biblical writings than in other extant ancient Near Eastern literatures, because the allegory of covenant expressed the demands of Israelite monolatry, the notion that Israel must serve Yahweh and other gods.⁹

Israelite "monotheism" which has always been understood as the worship and belief in Yahweh and disbelief in other deities, is a fallacy. Various Canaanite deities have held central roles in Israelite worship. Many scholars now say that early Israelite religion was monolatrous, indicating that Israel worshipped Yahweh exclusively, it did not deny the existence of other gods and tolerated peoples who worshipped these gods. It was not until the exile that occurred after 586 that this monolatry is said to have transformed into monotheism. Scholarship such as this believes that the other deities were perhaps part of Israel's popular religion, but they were peripheral and essentially unimportant.

Such scholarship seeks to establish syncretism, defined by Mark Smith as "the union of religious phenomenon from two historically separate systems or cultures...a

⁹ Sperling, 73-74.

standard way of characterizing Israelite interest in deities other than Yahweh [which] de-emphasizes the importance of Israelite worship of other deities and practices forbidden in the Bible.”¹⁰ By using the category of syncretism, un-monolatrous practices can be easily relegated to “popular” religion.

The multitude of theophoric elements of proper names shows that while Yahweh may have been Israel’s most popular god, He was not alone. El, Baal and Asherah were part of Israel’s Canaanite heritage, and when Israel began to develop a system of monolatry, it was through a decisive act to break with their Canaanite neighbors.

Starting in 1929, Ugaritic texts have been discovered that prove that El was the name of the god who led the pantheon. “// appears often in earliest Old Akkadian sources without the case ending, unambiguously the divine name and not an appellative.”¹¹ He was called father of the gods in the Ugaritic pantheon, specifically known as the father of Baal. Various texts show that in a moment of sacrifice, El sacrifices his son Baal to death or slavery, an important point for our studies here. Philo even identifies El as the god who sacrifices his only son, Yachid. El was known in epithets as the ancient or eternal one, full of wisdom.

In the Bible, El is rarely used as the proper name of a non-Israelite deity. There is no real distinction between El and Yahweh as the god of Israel. In Judges 9:46¹², there is a reference to the temple of El Brit, which is a specific epithet of the Canaanites, a pagan deity. Yet the original connotations of these terms were probably unknown after the time

¹⁰ Smith, 4.

¹¹ Cross, Frank Moore. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997. 13.

¹² Judges 9:46

9:46 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כָל-בְּעָלֵי מְדִינַת-שָׁכֶם וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל-צִיִּיחַ בֵּית
אֵל בְּרִיחַ:

in which Yahweh was a distinct deity from El. Biblically, while Baal is a rival of Yahweh, there are no polemics against El.

With the exception of El Shaddai, most forms of the word El in Genesis are connected to patriarchal altars or places of worship. In these instances, El could be a proper name or a more general term for god. However, with the data known about El's importance in Canaanite religion, it seems more likely that El is a proper name, perhaps with the variations attributed to each variant cult forms of El.

The Unification of the Cultus under Yahweh

The name of the supreme Israelite god, Yahweh, is the causative imperfect of the Canaanite-Proto-Hebrew verb "to be." Yahweh displays a number of the traits and functions of El in early Israelite traditions. Yahweh is a judge and head of the divine council (Psalms 82, 89¹³), a king (Ex. 15:18, Deut. 33:16), creator and father (Gen. 49:25). "The early cultic establishment of Yahweh and its appurtenances-the Tabernacle, its structure of *qerasim*, its curtains embroidered with cherubim and its cherubim throne, and its proportions according to the pattern of the cosmic shrine-all reflect Canaanite models, and specifically the Tent of El and his cherubim throne."¹⁴

There are a number of early epigraphic sources showing the use of the name Yahweh. The earliest has been discovered on lists of place names from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries of Edom. The Mesa Stele from ninth century Moab displays

¹³ Psalms 82, 89

82:1 מזמור לאֱלֹהִים נֶאֱבַד בְּעֶרְחֵי אֵל בְּקֶרֶב
אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט:
89:7 כִּי מִן בִּשְׁחַק יַעֲרֹךְ לִיהוָה יִרְמָה לִיהוָה בִּבְנֵי אֱלֹהִים: אֵל
וַעֲרִין בְּסֹד־קִרְשֵׁים רַבָּה וְנוֹרָא עַל-כָּל-סִבְיָיו:

¹⁴ Cross, 72.

Yahweh as the name of Israel's god. Yahweh is also found in seventh and early sixth century letters from Lachish and Arad, as well as on an unpublished seal from the eighth century that reads "Belonging to Miqueliah, the slave of Yahweh" that is now in the Harvard Semitic Museum.¹⁵

Yet Yahweh was not always the only or supreme Israelite deity. This can best be seen in Exodus 3:13-15:

...When I come to the people Israel and say to them, "the god of your fathers sent me to you," they will say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, "Ehye asher ehye. Thus shall you say to the people Israel, Ehye sent me to you." Again God said to Moses, Thus you will say to the people Israel, Yahweh the god of your fathers, the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the god of Jacob sent me to you; this is My name forever, and by this I shall be remembered always.

3:13 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הֵנָּה אֲנֹכִי בָא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי
מַה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה אֶמַּר אֲלֵהֶם:
3:14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה
תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:
3:15 וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי
יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְּׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי לְדֹר דָּר:

This text shows a continuity between an Israelite religion of the past, that of the gods of the fathers, and the cult of Yahweh in later Israelite history. The fact that Yahweh has to be identified as the god of the fathers shows that in fact, at one time they were different. The old religion and the Mosaic, Yahwistic faiths were at one point distinct faiths, separated at least in their historical development. This can also be seen in Exodus 6:2-3. In this Priestly tradition text, God tells Moses that He revealed Himself to the patriarchs under the name of El Shaddai, but He was not known to them as Yahweh.

¹⁵ Cross, 61.

This clearly points to the historical differentiation between the faiths in their development.

Though the Israelite monarchy (1000-587 B.C.E.) attempted to foster a national religion and national god, this did not exclude the worship of other deities. In fact, the monarchy helped to encourage the inclusion of other deities into the Yahwistic cult. This was common in other ancient Near Eastern states as well, such as in Mesopotamia and Egypt. One can see this tolerance of other deities in biblical stories such as that of Solomon and his indulgence to the gods of his many foreign wives. Later, in the second half of the monarchy, Judean kings like Josiah helped to differentiate Israelite culture from its neighbors, and the fall of the northern kingdom helped to further the centralization of the cult and the criticism of outside practices.

The religious spectrum changed for the Israelites as a result of convergence and differentiation.¹⁶ Convergence meant that the various deities were combined into the figure of the one God, Yahweh, a process that began during the period of the Judges. At this time, El and Yahweh were clearly defined as deities, and even El eventually transformed into another aspect of Yahweh's personality. It is also clear from the disapproving writings of Elijah and Hosea that Israelites were worshipping Baal. These polemics serve both the prophetic writer and historians. From a historical perspective, the critiques of the prophets show that the worship of other deities must have been both widespread and threatening. The prophets used their polemics to encourage people to worship the "correct" way, but also defined Yahweh as a god who embodied the positive attributes of the other newly forbidden deities.

¹⁶ Smith, 7.

The second way in which the religious spectrum of the Israelites changed was through differentiation. Features of Israelite religion were rejected as being Canaanite, beginning the rejection of Baal worship in the 9th century B.C.E. Legal and prophetic texts continued the process of differentiation, separating those who worshipped other gods, those who prayed at the *bamot* or high places, and those who spoke with the dead, amongst other things. Even those many of these practices were part of ancient Israel's original heritage, they were criticized and labeled as non-Yahwistic.

By examining the idea of *berit*, covenant, one can see the ways in which allegorically, Israel serves as Yahweh's subject. Julius Wellhausen, the founder of modern biblical criticism, characterized the covenant allegory as a legalistic formulation. In his analysis, early Israelite religion was understood as 'natural', gradually evolving from polytheism to monotheism, away from its natural roots. The idea of covenant comes later, as it is an idea best suited to the postexilic Jewish community. It may have even been a late derivative of marriage allegory used by classical prophets such as Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Yet despite Wellhausen's assertions, philological evidence points recent scholarship in the opposite direction. By examining the word *berit* in greater detail, one finds that the word is not used for marriage in Hosea, and it is used only once in Ezekiel 16:8 and Malachi 2:14¹⁷. Under the Akkadian influence, the meaning of *berit* widened to mean contractual agreements of all kinds. "Hosea himself makes no claim that Yahweh is the sole god in existence, only that Israel as his bride owes him the fidelity that a wife

¹⁷ Malachi 2:14

¹⁴ ואמרתם על-מה על כריתתה העיר בינך ובין אשת נעוריך אשר אתה בנתתה כה והיא חברה ואשת בריחך:

owes her husband. All that Hosea did was to restate the old monolatrous demand, that Yahweh alone be worshiped, in a metaphor that had the potential to appeal to his contemporaries"¹⁸

The origination of a national conditional covenant can be dated relatively early. The Decalogue, conditional Mosaic covenants and Joshua 24 insist that Israelites worship Yahweh alone but never say Yahweh is the only god. Instead, they demand monolatry, worshipping one god where others may be presumed to also exist. The creation of a covenant allegory would have been most likely to occur during Israel's monolatrous stage, for by the terms of the covenant, great kings bound lesser kings by treaty, acknowledging that a lesser king could serve another master. Such an ideology makes most sense at earliest stages of Israel's political development, and the political allegory of Israel's covenant with Yahweh was more natural in its Israel's formative stages than the marriage allegory.

The covenant with Yahweh was the religious expression of the mundane cultic and military union of the different groups that had merged to form the people of Israel. A covenant with Yahweh was the allegorical statement of the emergent national unity. Yahweh, who was viewed as the force responsible for the emergence of the new group, thus became a partner in the confederation and, accordingly, the guarantor of the Israelite social order and its material prosperity. Joshua 24, for all its elaboration, retains formative traditions of the "oath bound confederation." Among others, the memory of the original diversity of the different groups is preserved in allusions to the gods beyond the river and the gods of the Amorites. In contrast, the marriage allegory, as enunciated by Hosea, preserves no memories of aboriginal diversity among the ancestors of Israel.¹⁹

¹⁸ Sperling, 66-67.

¹⁹ Sperling, 70-71.

Biblical References to Child Sacrifice

Archaeological findings and literary remnants from ancient Near Eastern cultures have shown that indeed, human sacrifice (primarily that of children) was a feature of the religious, cultic practices of many of these societies. And while there has been no such conclusive evidence regarding parallel practices in Israelite culture, there is at least a "...universal assumption that the great prophets of the late seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. had eradicated the scourge of child sacrifice from ancient Israelite culture."²⁰ Whether or not the practice existed at one time in Israelite culture, it is believed that at most, it was an early practice that was quickly and thoroughly discarded. Yet despite these assumptions, there are a number of biblical references to the practice of human sacrifice that must be analyzed carefully in an attempt to determine how widespread this practice was in ancient Israelite culture, and when, if ever, this practice was indeed finally suppressed.

In determining the place and prevalence of child sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, one of the most difficult and key legalistic passages is found in Exodus 22:28-29.

22:28 מִלְאֲחֶה וּדְמָעָה לֹא תֹאחֶר בְּכוֹר בְּנֶיךָ תִּתֵּן לִי:
22:29 בְּיָתְעֶשֶׂה לְשֶׁרֶף לְצֹאֲנֶךָ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים יִהְיֶה עִם־אִמּוֹ בַּיּוֹם
הַשְּׁמִינִי תִתְּנֵנִי תַתְּנוּ־לִי:

"You shall not delay offering the fullness of your harvest and the overflow of your presses. You shall give Me the first-born of your sons. You shall do the same with your oxen and your sheep. Seven days it shall remain with its mother, and on the eighth day you shall give it to me."

²⁰ Levenson, Jon D. *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. ix.

The majority of scholars refuse a literal reading of this text, seeing it as a general rule with allowable substitutions. While the latter part of the sentence, regarding animals, refers to the sacrifice of the first born, it is assumed that the former reference to humans implies that the first-born should be redeemed.²¹ This logic is in line with later texts in Exodus, such as Exodus 34:19-20, which explains that while every first issue of the womb belongs to Yahweh, all first born human sons should be redeemed.

34:19 כָּל-פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם לִי וְכָל-מִקְנֶה תִזְכֹּר פֶּטֶר שׁוֹר וְשֶׂה:
 34:20 וּפֶטֶר חֲמֹר תַּפְדֶּה בִשָּׂה וְאִם-לֹא תַפְדֶּה וְעִרְפְּתוּ כָּל בְּכוֹר
 בְּנֵיךָ תַפְדֶּה וְלֹא-יֵרָאוּ פָנֶי רִיָּקָם:

Exodus 13:2 also includes Yahweh's command that all first born humans and animals belong to Yahweh and must be sanctified to Him.

13:2 קִדְשִׁי לִי כָל-בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל-רֶחֶם בְּבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאָדָם
 וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא:

Additionally, scholar Roland de Vaux states, "It would be absurd to suppose that there could have been in Israel or among any other people, at any moment of their history, a constant general law, compelling the suppression of the first-born, who are the hope of the race."²²

Despite de Vaux's logic, one of the great difficulties in understanding Exodus 22 is that it, unlike the other aforementioned Exodus passages, does not offer a possibility of how one might avoid the literal sacrifice of a first-born son. One possibility, suggested by Jon D. Levenson, is that Exodus 22:28b "articulates a theological ideal about the special place of the first-born son, an ideal whose realization could range from literal to

²¹ Levenson, 3-4.

²² De Vaux, Roland. *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifice*. Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964. 71.

non-literal implementation, that is, from sacrifice to redemption."²³ It may have been a utopian ideal that never came to fruition, such as the concepts of a Jubilee year or the cities of refuge that, despite their inclusion as commandments in the biblical text, were never recorded as having been put into practice.

It is also interesting to contrast the legal statutes regarding the sanctification of the first-born in Exodus to those in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 15:19 begins the description of extensive legislation on the dedication of first born animals, yet blatantly leaves out any mention of first-born humans.

15:19 כָּל-הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר יוֹלֵד בְּבִקְרָךְ וּבַצֹּאֲנָד הַזֶּכֶר תִּקְדָּשׁ
לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲבֹד בְּבִכּוֹר שׁוֹרְךָ וְלֹא תִגְזוּ בְּכוֹר
צֹאֲנֶיךָ:

Since Deuteronomy was composed later than Exodus, it is possible that the absence of reference to humans was intended to serve as a hidden polemic against the practice of child sacrifice. It may have also simply reflected the customs of the times, indicating that by the time Deuteronomy was composed, the substitution of animal sacrifice for human sacrifice was all but complete. The concept of dedicating a child to Yahweh may have also been redirected into such practices as the dedication of the Levites to Yahweh's service, as is detailed in the Torah text. Post-biblical practices such as the ritual of *pidyon haben* also show the manner in which the dedication of the first-born has been sanitized, removing any possibility of literal human sacrifice.

In addition to legalistic prohibitions against (and perhaps, as in Exodus 22:8b, requirements for) human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, there are also a number of narratives in the text that deal with this complex issue. The two most complicated and

²³ Levenson, 9.

intricate stories are those of Abraham and Isaac and Jephthah and his daughter, both of which will be delved into extensively elsewhere in this thesis. The other narrative examples are less clear about the practice of child sacrifice, but are worth examining briefly here.

In the third chapter of II Kings, a story is told about Mesha, the king of Moab, who rebelled against Israel.²⁴ Towards the end of the chapter, the battle is clearly going Israel's way, and it looks as though Israel will be victorious. Mesha makes one last military move, taking seven hundred men and attempting to break through to the king of Edom, but to no avail. Finally, as a last resort, he commits an act that changes the outcome of the entire story.

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בְּנוֹ הַבְּכוֹר אֲשֶׁר־יִמְלֹךְ תַּחְתָּיו וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ עֹלָה
עַל־הַחֲמָה וַיְהִי קֶצֶף־גָּדוֹל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ מֵעָלָיו וַיָּשָׁבוּ
לָאָרֶץ: פ

He took his first born son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him as a burnt offering upon the wall. And a great wrath came upon Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land.

Though Mesha was not an Israelite and thus was not beholden to Yahweh's laws, this text is still of great importance in the attempt to gain an understanding of child sacrifice in ancient Israelite culture. First, the language of sacrifice is almost identical to the language used in both the Akeidah and the story of Jephthah and his daughter. In all three stories, the father makes an *olah*, a burnt offering (in the Jephthah story, Jephthah promises to take this action, though the actual sacrifice is never described). Also, in all

²⁴ II Kings 3:4

⁴ וַיִּשָּׂע מֶלֶךְ־מוֹאָב הָיָה נֹכַח וַהֲשִׁיב לְמֶלֶךְ־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵאֵה־אַלְף כְּרִים וּמֵאֵה אֲלָף אֵילִים צִמְרִ:

three stories, the child is described as the *bichor*, the first born or favored child. This is of great importance, and the significance of the sacrifice of the first-born son will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis. Finally, the verb *lkch*, to take, is used in II Kings and in Genesis (it is not used in Jephthah-again, this may be because the actual sacrifice of his daughter is not described in the text).

Perhaps even more striking than the terminology of the sacrifice in II Kings is its effect. After Mesha kills his son, the tide of the battle changes-a great wrath comes upon Israel and they are forced to retreat! One must consider a number of possible implications of this result. The biblical text does not present this turn of events as a coincidence-apparently, sacrificing the prince worked to appease the deity. If that is the implicit conclusion, one must ask-who was this deity who responded to child sacrifice? As a Moabite, Mesha probably would have been worshipping the god Chemosh, but his name is absent from the text, as is Yahweh's. This may have been for good reason. Had Mesha sacrificed his son to Chemosh and obtained a positive result, it would imply that another god besides Yahweh existed and had the ability to act, even against the Israelites. On the other hand, had Mesha sacrificed his son to Yahweh, who certainly had been known to either help or hinder the Israelites in their battles before, it would have been admitting that Yahweh appreciates and responds positively to child sacrifice. It is, perhaps, for these reasons that the narrator left the name of the deity as an intentional ambiguity.

Another interesting narrative that may delve into the subject of child sacrifice is that of the prophet Balaam. In Numbers 22-24, King Balak of Moab sends Balaam ben Beor to curse the Israelites. After much persuasion and a few divine visitations, Balaam

consents, and he and Balak make seven sacrifices on a series of *bamot*, high places. The first of these places is called *Bamot Baal*, the high place of Baal. *Bamot*, it should be noted, are primarily characterized as negative by the biblical author. While it is unknown exactly what the *bamot* were, the common understanding is that these were alternate places of worship for Israelites and other ancient Near Eastern peoples. The centralization of the cult at the Temple in Jerusalem brought about the destruction of these "high places" and the prophets rail against them, but the biblical record shows that people clearly kept returning to them and participating in the rituals that took place there.

After making these offerings at the *bamot*, Balaam finds himself unable to curse the Israelites, blessing them instead. Though Balaam's role in the Numbers story ends after chapter 24, the following chapter begins by revealing that the Israelites began to commit harlotry with the Moabite women. They began to offer sacrifices to the Moabite gods, eating and bowing down to them, and joining themselves to Baal Peor.

וַיָּשָׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשָׁטִים וַיַּחֲלֵהָם לַזָּנוֹת^{25:1}
 אֶל-בָּנוֹת מוֹאָב׃² וַתִּקְרְאוּן לָעֵם לְזִבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וַיֹּאכְלֵהָם
 וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶן׃
 וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַעַל פְּעֹר וַיַּחֲרֹאֲף יְהוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל׃³

While Israel was dwelling at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the daughters of Moab, who invited the people to the sacrifices for their gods. The people partook²⁵ of them and worshiped that god. Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and the Yahweh was furious with Israel.

²⁵ ו particle conjunction אכל verb qal waw consec imperfect 3rd person masculine singular

Brown Driver Briggs explains:

B449 אכל vb. eat – Qal 1. eat, human subject; mostly c. acc.; also sq. מן (eat of, -- some of, -- or from); sq. ב (eat of or at); as act of worship; of priests... p.37

Versions of this latter part of the narrative are recorded in other stories of Balaam in the Bible; Nehemiah, Micah, and Joshua all relate the story of Balaam the prophet advising the Midianites how to seduce the Israelites and thus bring disaster upon them.

The Rabbis also held Balaam as responsible for the Israelites heresy at Peor. They say that when Balaam realized he could not curse the Israelites, he advised Balak to tempt the Israelites to commit immoral acts, including the worship of Baal Peor. In the Talmud, the character of Baal explains that "The God of the Hebrews hates lewdness, and severe chastisement must follow."²⁶ While the Rabbis see the Israelites sins as being unchastity, not human sacrifice, the worship of Baal Peor could have additional negative connotations.

The worship of Baal Peor is mysterious, but Balaam's story offers a number of clues. First, though Balaam is described as the son of Beor, his father is never identified, and the phonetic similarities between "Beor" and "Peor" are unmistakable. Also, Balaam is labeled as a prophet of El, one of the first times El is used instead of Yahweh in a biblical passage after the story of the burning bush. As El was not only an alternate name for the Israelite god but also another deity entirely, worshipped by many others in the ancient Near East, Balaam could have been the prophet of another god. Using this reasoning, perhaps Balaam was not the son of Beor, but rather the prophet of Peor. Finally, as perhaps the best intertextual clue that this may be a story of child sacrifice, in Psalm 106:26,34-38²⁷, it is said that people are sacrificing children to Baal Peor. By combining these references, it could be that the immoral acts committed at Baal Peor did indeed include human sacrifice.

²⁶ B.T. Sanhedrin 106a.

וַיִּצְמְדוּ לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר וַיֹּאכְלוּ זִבְחֵי מֵתִים: 106:28
וַיִּכְעִסוּ בַּמַּעַל לֵיהֶם וַתִּפְרֹץ־בָּם מִגֹּפֶה: 29

לֹא־הִשְׁמִידוּ אֶת־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה לָהֶם: 106:34
וַיִּתְעַרְבוּ בְּגוֹיִם וַיִּלְמְדוּ מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם: 35
וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֶת־עֲצָבֵיהֶם וַיְהִיו לָהֶם לְמוֹקֵשׁ: 36
וַיִּזְבְּחוּ אֶת־בְּנֵיהֶם וְאֶת־בָּנוֹתֵיהֶם לְשָׂדִים: 28 37
וַיִּשְׁפְּכוּ דָם נָקִי דַם־בְּנֵיהֶם וּבָנוֹתֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר זָבְחוּ לַעֲצָבִי 38
כִּנְעַן וַתַּחֲנֹף הָאָרֶץ בְּדָמַיִם:

And they joined themselves to Baal-Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. Thus they provoked him to anger with their wrong doings; and the plague broke out upon them.

They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom Yahweh had commanded them; but they mingled among the nations, and learned to do what they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them, and they sacrifice their sons and their daughters to their demonic idols.

In an archaeological dig from Deir Alla in Jordan in 1967, ²⁹ an Aramaic inscription written on plaster walls described a prophecy from the *Book of Balaam*. The text consists of plaster fragments inscribed with black and red ink, found among the rubble of a building destroyed by an earthquake. Balaam is referred to as a son of Beor, prophet of Shamash, the sun god (who is known to have been worshipped by the Babylonians and Assyrians).

At most, these evaluations of Balaam may prove that he was a prophet of another god, participating in another religion's cultic practices, though there is no data outside of the Psalms passage to show that these practices may have included human sacrifice. However, the midrash has taken his story to mean just that.

²⁸ literally, it says they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to *shedim* (*shedim are demons, or perhaps demonic idols*)

²⁹ www.truthnet.org, www.wikipedia.org

people less and less time and attention and yet wished them to pay the dues they were required to pay for the general community establishment.

It was a result of these dire-circumstances and the increasing numbers of these disoriented Jews suffering from the terrible effects of the post 1650 depression, which incidentally included also many pogroms against the Jews, of which the Chmelnizkyi massacres of 1656 were the most significant, that Hassidism arose. The term "Hassid" means the pious one, but it was a technical term adopted by the Hassidim themselves. The leaders of the Hassidic community, including its putative founder, Israel Baal Shem Tov (1719-1760) had been parts of the old mitnaged rabbinic establishment. However, these leaders were not centrists; they were actually out of authority and in danger of losing much of their authority, and therefore they were in search of new constituencies within Judaism. These second and third echelon leaders of Jewry became the leaders of the Hassidic movement and ultimately brought to its people a sense of purpose and meaning in life by deemphasizing that which the large number of their followers could not do and that is to devote themselves to a life of placidity and study, but instead providing them with miraculous healing on the one hand, which essentially amount to psychological consolation, and on the other with a sense of growth and spirit filled with music and joy for their troubled souls.

The fact that these teachers were part of the second and third echelon leadership of the old rabbinic, and now we can call it mitnaged establishment is nowhere better seen than in the fact that the first great ideologue of the Hassidic movement was Jacob Joseph HaCohen of Pollona, whose great book *Toldot Yakov Yoseph*, a commentary on the Torah, which in effect presents a pro-hassidic polemic, had been one of the leaders of the

Mitnagdim. His work, which appeared in the year 1780, twenty years after the death of the Baal Shem Tov, precedes all other hassidic works including the texts of the *Shivhei ha-Besht* which appeared in two separate editions in the same year 1815. These new hassidic leaders eventually came to be called "Zaddikim". The term "Zaddik" means the righteous one", but a term "zaddik" in effect was a technical word to be utilized in opposition to the technical term rabbi. These zaddikim were in essence the direct followers of the miracle workers who themselves had been part of the mitnaged tradition. The miracle workers in the middle of the eighteen century who went around giving people consolation, healing advice and some sense of connection to Judaism and to God, which they thought they had lost.

The Hassidim eventually fell into many groups indeed on entire spectrum of groups, sometimes in sharp opposition to one another as they are until this day. They also showed opposition to the mitnagdim within the area of halakhah by adopting different prayer times, by different clothing and even different shehita knives, all within halakhah but all to show that they were separate and to maintain the separateness from the mitnagdim. They emphasized music and song, joy and gladness, and many of their musical tunes, not uninfluenced by the general environment, have become part of the classical heritage of subsequent Judaism.

By the end of the nineteenth century a new umbrella of movements emerged within the Jewish communities. Many of them were influenced by the "enlightened" Jews and comprehended large segments of the pre-modern Jewish population as their followers. They all had in common an increased secularization, which was a natural by-product of the development of modernization, and which became a live option in Russia

as it did in other countries as the nineteenth century moved on. This secularization meant that although these groups could rely on their religious ideology, it was not primary for them, and their working ideas could come from the ideas of the secular world around them. This was especially the case with the new concepts of nationhood and peoplehood, which had been developing their own mythology, certainly from the middle of the eighteenth century on and definitely after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, which in effect ushered in the era of romanticism, where all of these ideas took stronger root.

Within the Jewish group there were various nationalist groups. One of these was the Bund, or the league of Jewish workers, who were not interested in leaving their Russian settlement, but wanted to have their own cultural autonomy, or as they called it "national autonomy". They were interested in having their own language, which they claimed to be Yiddish, and various public rights for the language and in other areas for themselves as participants of a broader Russian community. One of the leading voices for this type of Judaism and similar groups was Simon Dubnow (1860-1941), the great historian of Jewry whose works on the history of the Jews of Russia and Poland and whose *History of the Jewish People* reflect this tendency toward the internal self-contained autonomous Jewish nationalism based around the Yiddish language and secular culture.

The other major group were the Zionists, who themselves comprised as an umbrella of organizations, one of the most important parts of which was the "Hovevei Zion". The Zionists adopted and incorporated traditional Jewish ideas such as the "Shivat Zion" and the centrality of the Hebrew language, but these were essentially subordinated to a nationalistic cause, which in effect was secular in nature. The Zionist organizations

in Russia grew enormously, and while they were at one with the fundamental ideas of the leadership of modern Zionism that came from Germany and Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), as expressed most particularly in his work *Der Judenstaat* (1897), nevertheless they differed radically with the Westerners who were also nationalistic, but were indifferent to the place, where Jewish nationalism should take root. Herzl was prepared to go to Uganda for example, and to organize a Jewish state in which German culture if not the German language and German type institutions were predominant; while the Eastern Zionists that is in the Polish and Russian areas, also wanted modern nationalistic institutions, but they insisted on Eretz Israel as the venue for a Jewish state and on the Hebrew language as the vehicle for its national and cultural expression. As this went on, the Eastern European Zionists won their battle, not after a long struggle and particularly with the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1904, where Hertzl suffered a great political defeat and died shortly thereafter.

Zionism was also reflected in various noble groups of *inteleghenzia*, who were meeting in private houses and salons. One of such smaller private groups was organized in Moscow by professor Zachrayev around 1890. Among those who were part of this group were Joel Engel, the editor of Russian-Jewish journal, "Rasviet", Abraham D. Idelsohn (1882-1938), the historian, Pesach Marek (1862-1920), an accountant who devoted his time to study Jewish history and culture and many others.

All of the above played a significant role in the future of Russian Jewry. Not less a significant role was to be played by the large number of Russian Jews who emigrated during the period of the great exodus of 1882 to 1910 and who spread throughout the

modern Western world, in which they took their place alongside all other elements of their modernizing societies.

4. NATIONALISM IN RUSSIA

When Jewish nationalism began to develop and to flourish in Russia, music, once again, played a significant role as one of the expressions of the entire nationalistic movement. The year 1898 could perhaps mark the beginning of the Russian Jewish nationalistic movement, when two historians Pesach Marek (1862-1920) and Saul Ginsburg (1866-1940) published an article in the journals, "Hamelits" (the Advocate), "Hatsefirah" (Morning), and "Voskhod" (the Dawn), in which they described their plan to issue a collection of Jewish folk songs. Devotes of the Haskalah movement, these two scholars, though being not professional musicians, were trying to look into the Jewish past hoping to discover a Jewish national music while the leaders of the Russian national musical movement, along with Rimsky-Korsakov and "Moguchayah Kutchka" were busy collecting their own Russian national resources. Jewish scholars and musicians along with Russian scholars and musicians began to tour throughout Russia, and in the Jewish case, going to the areas of the Pale of Settlement with a hope to find folk treasures. These two historians, Pesach Marek and Saul Ginsburg, were not the only ones who became interested in the history of Russian Jewry.

It was around during that time (1898) that Sholom Aleichem, the famous Jewish Yiddish writer, came across a folk singer and a poet named Mark Warshawski (1845-1907) and tried to convince him to publish some of his works. Warshawski, a professional attorney, lived in Odessa and liked to tour along the areas of Pale of

Settlement with the same interest as the others, trying to find as many original Jewish folk tunes and texts as possible. Joel Engel, one of the most significant Russian Jewish scholars and musicians, whose influence upon the Jewish nationalistic development in the years to come was extraordinary, so too was traveling in the Jewish areas looking for and transcribing Jewish folk melodies. He did so during the summer of the year 1897 after his historical meeting with Vladimir Stassov (1824-1906), one of the main leaders of Russian Nationalistic movement, historian and scholar, who was trying to encourage his Jewish friends to research and investigate their own Jewish resources.

It is important to mention, that although the publishing industry was well developed in Russia during the end of the nineteenth century, most of the original Russian as well as Jewish folk tunes, were still transmitted orally, this created a need for the composers interested in learning the "authentic" melodies to travel and to transcribe the tunes by themselves.

Many Russian scholars and musicians such as Anton Rubenstein, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nickolai Rimsky-Korsakov, along with Jewish scholars and musicians recognized the interactions and interrelationships between Russian and Jewish "authentic" art. This fact was especially true during the times when oral tradition was the predominant one, where Russian and Jewish folk melodies were transmitted orally from one generation to another. This explains the fact that during later years many well established Russian Jewish composers chose to take a Jewish folk tune and to develop it into the art song, based upon the traditional tune. Among the Jewish scholars, who accepted and supported the interaction between Russian and Jewish cultures was Eliyohu Orshanki (1846-1875), a publicist, who in 1866 came fore with the article, "On the

Isolation of the Jews", in which he illustrates the interaction between the Jewish folk song and Slavic folk song, as well as the influence of the music of Synagogue and Jewish folk song during that time.

It is important to remember that the main vehicle of Synagogue music were the Hazzanim, who by virtue of their duties developed individual styles and specialties within the sacred Ashkenazi spectrum. Hazzanim, usually great singers, used to travel and to adopt various musical elements from all over the Europe into their compositions. The Eastern Hazzanim during those times of the beginning of the nineteenth century could be generally divided into two groups: hazzanim with a nice vocal ability, and great self performance and composers, and secondly, hazzanim with poor vocal abilities, but great and prolific composers and choir-directors. The hazzanim of the first group tented to create their own schools, where they taught not just their repertoire but mainly their own style and technique. For example, one of these hazzanim was Joseph Altshul, called "Yoshe Slonimer" (1840-1906). He was born in Wilna and served later in his life as a hazzan in Lithuania, Slonim and eventually in Horodna. He possessed a great basso-voice; he was a highly educated musician and a prolific composer.

From the second group of hazzanim the best example could be Nissi Belzer, who had a poor voice, but was a great choir director and talented and prolific composer. Despite his vocal abilities he became a hazzan in several important Jewish cities such as for example, Kishinev and Berdichev. None of these hazzanim, however, was interested in Jewish folk tunes. They considered it to be less noble to search or to adopt Jewish folk melodies into their repertoire

The response to the article published by Ginsburg and Marek was overwhelming. Music began to arrive from all over Russia. Though not professional musicians the two historians handed over the musical responsibility to their friend Joel Engel. Joel Engel in 1905 after several years of organizing the newly incoming material published his *First Album of Ten Jewish Folk songs*. During the year 1900 a significant illustrated lecture was given by Ginsburg at the Moscow Polytechnic Museum. This public concert-lecture was sponsored by the music division of the "Imperial Society for Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography". Several Jewish folk songs arranged by Engel were performed at this concert. This event proved to be a great success.

The significance of this concert could be hardly overestimated. It was a great achievement on several aspects. First, it proved to the entire Russian population that Jewish folk song does exist. Secondly, it gave strength and new force for the other Jewish composers to come forward with their own discoveries and compositions. In April of 1901 the same type of lecture was given in the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In some of his later articles Engel said: "It is true that we have such songs which have come down to the folk masses from unknown sources of olden, long forgotten times; or they may have been written recently, almost before our very eyes. But these have become widely accepted among the folk masses because of their folk character".¹

As all Russia was facing the new times of modernization and nationalism Jewish musicians played an important part in the development of the musical life and education of their country Russia. It was through the courage and organizational labor of the two Rubenstein brothers, Anton and Nicholas, that Russian musical life began to be

¹ Engel, Joel. "An Answer to Sholom Aleichem," *Der Yid*, Cracow 1901, no. 40, p. 42. This source is cited by Weissner, Albert. *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music*. Bloch Publishing Company, INC., New York, 1954.

professionalized during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was Anton Rubenstein's idea to give musicians status of a "free artist", and by doing so to provide the musicians with a respectable position in the social echelons of Russian society. In 1859 Anton Rubenstein founded the Russian Music Society, whose activity was institutionalized in St. Petersburg in 1862 with the founding of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where even a few foreign musicians were appointed as its first professors.

Vladimir Stasov, who was shortly to become the ideological leader of the "Russian Five", was opposed to the idea of the Western type musical institution, assuming that it would underestimate the nationalistic dimensions of Russian music. However, the success of the St. Petersburg conservatory led soon after its establishment, in 1866, to the foundation of a second conservatory in Moscow, under the direction of Nicholas Rubenstein, and where Petr Iliyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893), who had just graduated from the St. Petersburg conservatory, was one of the first professors. By the year 1871 Rimsky-Korsakov as well accepted the position as a professor at St. Petersburg conservatory. The Russian Musical Society shortly after expanded its educational programs and new music schools were established in Kiev (18613), Saratov (1865), Kharkov (1871), Tbilisi (1871) and Odessa (1886).

5. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIETY

The year 1901 could be considered as the time when the idea of having an institutional organization that included Jewish Russian composers, who are trying to research and to establish the Jewish folk music within Russia, began to brew. When Joel Engel arrived in St. Petersburg in April of 1901, he was surprised to find an audience that was eager and

excited for his lecture about Jewish folk music within Russia. Joel Engel was happy to meet one of the protégé's of Rimsky-Korsakov and Balakirev, a student at the St.Petersburg Conservatory, Ephraim Skliar (1871-1943?). Skliar during that time was seriously engaged, with the support of his teachers, in composing musical arrangements based on Jewish folk tunes. Born in Timkevittchi, a small town in White Russia, to a father, who was a Hebrew scholar and a part time chazzan, Ephraim Skliar from the time when he was a little boy was engaged in listening, performing and even composing Jewish music. Needless to say due to such a background he was on the intimate terms with the Jewish Russian folk musical tradition.

It was not easy for Skliar to get the permit to leave the Pale but with the help of Balakirev, who believed in the young talent, Skliar arrived in St.Petersburg. During his later musical education in the St. Petersburg conservatory Skliar was strongly supported by Mili Balakirev, who was one of the most important Russian intellectuals during that time and surely the father of "The Russian Five" (Mili Balakirev 1837-1918, Cesar Cui 1835-1918, Alexander Borodin 1833-187, Modest Mussorgsky 1839-1881, and Nickolai Rimsky-Korsakov 1844-1908), and by Rimsky-Korsakov, the head of the Conservatory.

Never forgetting his Jewish background Skliar was the instigator and the creator of the club, "Kinor Zion", (Lyre of Zion). The members of this club were the students from the Conservatory who were looking to compose and to perform Jewish music. It was also during that time that Skliar wrote for one of his analysis classes taught by Rimsky-Korsakov the Yiddish song "Farn Obshayd" (text by L. Jaffe). After becoming familiar with this new composition the Russian composer responded to Skliar by saying: "Write another thirty such things and you will found a new school..."

Rimsky-Korsakov, a strong believer in the ideas of nationalism and especially in the use of music as one of the vehicles to express the national ideas of a certain population, Russian or Jewish, was very eager to urge his Jewish students to come up with their own style of composition. He used to approach his Jewish students by saying: "Why do you imitate European and Russian composers? The Jews possess tremendous folk treasures. I myself have heard your religious songs, and they have made a deep impression upon me. Think about it. Yes, Jewish music awaits her Jewish Glinka".² Supported by such strong words of Rimsky-Korsakov, Skliar among others continued his work, but the idea of having a bigger organization of Jewish musicians started to materialize.

Despite all the excitement and support in the courts of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Jews were still treated as an outside population, as Jews. More and more Jewish intellectuals were now arriving in St. Petersburg and Moscow from everywhere in Russia, but the Pale of Settlement was still there. Jews were still not free to move and settle where they wished to go.

In 1906 a new student, Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959), who was born in a small town Vale, near Odessa, was accepted at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. It was after his arrival that the idea of the organization of Jewish professional musicians was advanced, and between Saminsky, Rosowsky, who was also a student at the conservatory at that time and Skliar, who stayed in St. Petersburg as a choir director of the St. Petersburg Synagogue, the pianist Leo Nesviski-Abileah, and the singer Tomars the core of the new organization was created. Shortly thereafter a number of additional Jewish scholars and

² This quote of Salomone Rosowsky is documented by Albert Weisser, *The Modern Renaissance of Jewish Music*, p. 44, after their conversation on January 2, 1950.

musicians, such as Michael Gniessen, Pesach Lvov, Alexander M. Zhitomirski, all students of Rimsky-Korsakov, and Susman Kisselgoff, Moshe Shalit and L. Streicher, joined the group.

The time came, and in 1908 the group of Jewish Russian musicians and scholars decided to apply to the Governor of St.Petersburg, General Drachevsky, for the legalization of the Society. Rosowsky, Nesviski-Abileah and Tomars were to represent the organization in the process. They proposed for the group to be called the "The Society for Jewish Music". Needless to say that the governor, a Russian General was extremely surprised to find out that Jewish music even existed. Rosowky, who had graduated from Kiev law school prior to his arrival in St.Petersburg, was the one who negotiated the battle. He explained to the governor about Jewish folk music, bringing to his attention many Jewish composers such as Rubenstein, Halevy and Goldmark, who were well established and internationally known. Rosowsky also supported his presentation by referring to some great Russian composers such as Glinka and "The Russian Five", who were using some Jewish folk elements in their compositions. To all of that General Drachevsky replied,"Yes, indeed, I recall now having heard a Jewish melody once in Odessa at a Jewish wedding. But that was a folksong. I think your Society should rather call itself the Society for Jewish Folk Music". There were no further argument and the Society was established on November 30, 1908. The Society had its own constitution, which included the aims and the goals of the organization. For example, "It is the aim of the Society...to work in the field of research and development of Jewish Folk Music (sacred and secular) by collecting folksongs, harmonizing them and by promoting and supporting Jewish composers and workers in the filed of Jewish music. In order to

achieve these aims the Society has (a) to help print musical compositions and papers on research of Jewish Music; (b) to organize musical meetings, concerts, operatic performances, lectures, etc.; (c) to organize a choir and orchestra of its own; (d) to establish a library of Jewish music; (e) to issue a periodical dedicated to Jewish music; and (f) to establish contests and give prizes for musical compositions of a Jewish character. The work of the Society is to be spread all over Russia.

Several committees were created within the Society. There was the Musical and Arts Committee, which included Saminsky, Rosowsky, and Joseph Achron, who joined the Society in 1911. This committee was to examine new compositions, to arrange and to promote performances, and to look into new publications. The Administrative Committee was placed under the direction of Israel Okun, who was the engineer and music fan serious, whose administrative work was so valuable and important that Rosowsky called him the "soul" of the entire organization. This committee was to provide a financial support and security to the Society. This was to be accomplished by gathering funds from different resources such as the Baron Ginsbourg family, one of the most significant patrons and supporters of Jewish music and musicians; also the Bund, from subscriptions to the publications, and lectures and concerts, organized by the Society.

The success of the Society was overwhelming. Many non-musicians, but somehow involved in the activities of the Society joined the organization. They included, for example, Shlomo Ansky, Rappaport, who was a playwright and ethnographer, Mordecai Riversman, the poet and litterateur, Mendel Elkin, an active Jewish culture enthusiast and the pass curator of YIVO, and Isaiah Knorosovski, who was a music critic.

It is important to remember that the Society with its core was inspired and influenced by two men, perhaps the most important and powerful intellectuals of Russia of that time, the musical critic and publicist, Vladimir Stasov (1824-1906), and the composer and the head of the St. Petersburg Conservatory Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). Both of them were highly involved and associated with "The Russian Five". This fact gave a significant political shadow to the creation of the Society. Supported by Russian important and powerful figures such as Stasov and Rimsky-Korsakov, Jewish composers were now able to create and to perform publicly a new kind of Jewish art music.

6. THE SOCIETY, ITS PRIME AND ITS ENDING

During the years of its prime, approximately around the years 1909-1914, the Society was actively promoting Jewish music and creating Jewish art music. It organized many concerts and lectures throughout Russia. One of several important achievements and successes of the Society was a promising start of a series of publications. The first was the arrangement for a four-part choir of the folksong, *Di Gilderne Pave, The Golden Goose*, done by Skliar. This musical composition was performed in 1909 in the small hall of the St. Petersburg Conservatory.

The Society also began to organize small instrumental and vocal ensembles, which performed with the composers of the Society. These groups toured all over the various Jewish communities within and out of Pale, in Russia, and also abroad. In almost two years these small ensembles performed approximately one hundred fifty concerts. Some of these concerts were followed by an event sponsored by a local Zionist

organization. Therefore these concerts had more than an artistic purpose; they served certain needs of the entire Jewish nationalist movement.

One of the artistic goals of the Society was to investigate the connection between Jewish folk music and art music. Considering that the organization included several talented composers, each with his own ideas about art music in general and, especially, about Jewish art music, this complicated task proved an ambitious idea. The new Jewish intelligentsia, with its nationalistic and modern ideas, became an essential element in the creation of Jewish art music. Due to the historical and social changes, earlier described, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that these Jewish professionals, historians, musicians, musicologists and other scholars, arose in Russia and were ready to pursue their Jewish nationalistic ideas, Jewish art music being one of them. The members of this intelligentsia created the Society.

United under the same ideas and goals, each of these composers had his own opinions about the Jewish folk resources to be used in creating Jewish art music. A few of them considered synagogue music to be the main source, while others turned to secular folk elements, but all of these musical and artistic ideas were strongly supported by the individual political views of the various composers.

The creation and functions of the Society cannot be detached from the political conditions in Russia during the beginning of the twentieth century. Besides the political and social unstable environment of tsarist Russia, the Jewish community had its own political disagreements between the secular and religious Jews, and within the secular circles, between the Bund, and the Zionists, and the Jews who were leaving Russia to immigrate to other countries.

The revolution of 1905 encouraged many Jewish activists to pursue their nationalistic ideas. The declaration of the Tsar of the October 17 1905 for the first time suggested a possible validation for the battle of equal rights among all Russian nations and minorities. These political developments led to the establishment of various Jewish organizations during the first decade of the twentieth century, the Society notable among them.

In 1908 the Jewish Historical Ethnographic Society led by Dubnow as its vice-chair, received political recognition. During the years of 1911-1914, under the leadership of Shlomo Ansky, the pseudonym of Shloyme Zabvl Rappoport (1863-1920), a writer and ethnomusicologist, and a member of the Society for Jewish Folk Music, this organization traveled on several occasions through the areas of Volhynia and Podolia in order to gather Jewish ethnographic resources. Another Society, the Jewish Literary Society, was established in 1908 in St. Petersburg. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century several smaller societies had started to function. For example, the Society for the Dissemination of Reading and Writing among the Jews in Riga was founded in Riga in 1908.

Among all of these organizations the Society for Jewish Folk Music was by far the most prolific. Its success became so extraordinary that according to the Society's report of 1912 the number of the members of the organization had reached three hundred and eighty nine, among whom two hundred and forty nine were in St. Petersburg. The same report claimed that by 1912 the Society's publications included thirty three compositions by different authors, and a collection of Jewish folk songs. By 1912 five major concerts had been organized with internationally renowned artists such as the

violinists, Jascha Heifetz and Ephraim Zimbalist, the cellist Joseph Press, and the famous basso Feodor Chaliapin, as their participants.

Several smaller branches of the Society were founded in Kharkov in 1913 and in Odessa in 1914. However none of them had a long term existence. The only other branch, which did survive, was founded in Moscow in 1913, under the leadership of Joel Engel. At least during the first years of the existence of the Moscow branch the two branches coexisted amicably. The two branches engaged in frequent interaction and artistic exchange. As members of the Society Saminsky, Rosowsky and Engel used to travel together and lecture, without a specific identification to which branch, St. Petersburg or Moscow, each composer belonged. However, certain differences and disagreements regarding artistic opinions, mainly concerned with the creation and the development of Jewish art music, and with the variety of the folk musical resources, caused the split of the two societies. An interesting myth about the different temperaments of the two schools, the Moscow and the St. Petersburg Conservatories, which in both cases served as a core for the branches, was in the air and came to be the source for many jokes within the Society. The St. Petersburg school was considered to be "intellectual" and "pedantic", where as the Moscow was – "over-emotional" and "hysterical". The pianist David Shor served as the first president of the Moscow branch, where the musical director was Joel Engel.

During the years of 1908 through 1912 the main attempt of the Society's composers consisted in the collection, and the harmonic arrangement of the folk songs. It was acceptable to use the folk material as a starting point and then it was up to each individual composer to develop it into art music. During the accomplishment of this test

many composers had different opinions about the interpretation of the same folk melody. Some of them used to quote the entire folk motive, where others just borrowed a couple of measures. While searching for these answers many composers disagreed and had their own artistic ideas. Rosowsky used to say to describe this controversy: "The folk song of a people is like a wide and deep sea. One may find pearls there, but one must be able to separate them from debris".

Most of the published works composed by the members of the Society were arrangements of the folk songs. The original source of the folk material in many of them is unknown. Perhaps the most significant publication of the Society was the collection of the folk songs, assembled by Susman Kisselgof (1876-1943?) after his famous expedition to the areas of the Pale, sponsored by Baron Ginsburg. This album, *Song collection for the Jewish School and Family*, was published in St. Petersburg in 1911. This work consists of the five different sections: Skarbove Folksongs, compositions religious in nature, which were credited to the Hassidim from the areas of the Pale, Skarbove area being of them later became Poland, was the first collection. The second one was called the Secular Folksongs, the songs that were published earlier by the society in addition to some new compositions. The next section was Songs Without Words, comprising six Hassidic nigunim. The fourth one was the Art Songs, which consisted of works by Jewish and non-Jewish composers, all, however, set to Yiddish or Hebrew texts. The last section discusses the art of Biblical cantillation and its tonal interpretation. Most of the folksongs from this album are arranged by Alexander Zhitomirski (1881-1937) and Pesach Lvov (1881-1913) for three-part choir.

Only a few legitimate art songs, not based on any folk tunes, were written and published by the composers of the Society. One of them and perhaps the most famous one is *In Kheyder* (sic), which was composed by Moses Milner in 1914. Other publications of the examples of the Jewish art music included few violin compositions by Joseph Acheron, the Trio by Solomon Godowsky and several works by Lazar Kaminski.

In 1915 the Zionist Russian weekly magazine, *Rassvet (Dawn)*, published an interesting article written by Saminsky. Without mentioning any personal names or details, this article discusses in a harsh tone some of the major disagreements within the Society. There was no need for further explanations: it was clear that in his article Saminsky was trying to criticize the ideas represented by Joel Engel.

As Rimsky-Korsakov represents the musical ideas within the Russian nationalistic movement, so Joel Engel is considered to be the instigator and the "founder" of the Jewish nationalistic artistic element within Russia. Influenced by the *haskalah* movement, Engel became an important musical critic for the newspaper, *Russkiye vedomosti*, in Moscow, highly appreciated and respected not just among the Jewish intelligentsia, but among the non-Jews as well, especially he was supported by Stasov. His awakening as a Zionist Jew happened during his conservatory years in Moscow. He became part of one of the most important Zionist groups in Moscow, Zacharyevka, which was named after professor Zacharyev, who used to rent his house to the young Jewish students. It was through this Zionist group that Joel Engel, engaged by Pesach Marek, began to show his interest and passion toward Jewish folk songs, which were an essential part of the Jewish identity of the members of Zacharyevka.

Engel used to say: "Jewish melodies have appealed to me, I have written them down and worked upon them not because I was a Jew, but for the very opposite reason, that is to say, because I wasn't enough of a Jew." By saying so Engel was trying to convey the message that just because he was working with the Jewish folk material he was not connected deeply enough to his Jewish roots and identity. With the awakening of the Zionist movement in Russia Engel became increasingly involved in the new Jewish national movement and through his artistic talents played a significant role in many Zionist actions.

According to Stasov, art was entrenched in the people who belong to a certain nation and not in the individual. That is why it was incumbent upon the artists to convey their national identity. Due to this fact, only by being completely united with Jewish identity could Engel as a composer create genuine artistic treasures. For Engel these thoughts and views of Stasov was a spiritual awakening. By joining a Zionist group, by being an active member of the Society, by traveling on several occasions to the areas of the Pale, Engel immersed and surrounded himself with the Jewish nationhood.

Stasov was a big supporter of Engel's project.

"Your project on Jewish folk songs continues to delight me-a very important work; I have always felt that it has been long overdue to introduce some Jewish seed money into the history and coffers of modern (Christian) European music; a good half and perhaps more of all Gregorian, Ambrosian and other Christian melodies have Jewish roots. For the very reason that folk and liturgical songs and melodies of all people in the world-ancient and modern, pagan and Christian-are in their roots of similar constitution, essence, character and form, I think that a solid study of Jewish national melodies may become one of the first foundation stones in the studies of contemporary, new European music...and for this reason I was and remain very happy that you plan to study and publish those Semitic folk songs that are available to you"

(Stasov to Engel, February 11, 1904)

Engel did not share Stasov's opinion that Jewish music had some Christian roots, however he considered Jewish music to be that the modern contemporary Russian Jewry convey in their music. He responded to Stasov:

"About Jewish songs. I collect secular and not liturgical melodies. Many of the religious ones (often very ancient and probably common to all Jews in the world) have been published, although many more were not. As far as the melodies of Jewish folk songs are concerned, it seems nobody has yet tried to publish them. At this point I do not set broad goals such as comparing Jewish themes with other (folk music) and do not dare to draw any general conclusions because I do not feel I am qualified to do that. For now my goal is to acquaint out musicians and singers with material that is evidently very worthy of their acquaintance. At the same time I plan to publish some melodies (by fall), and if they are well received. They will influence people positively (of course, intellectual Jews first of all) who live surrounded by Jewish folk songs but never pay any attention to them and never write them down".

(Engel to Stasov, February 23, 1904)

The artistic disagreements concerning the creation of Jewish art music were always a "hot topic" among the member of the Society, especially between Engel and Saminsky. Saminsky questioned the authenticity of the Yiddish folk songs, where Engel had no doubt that they could be considered folk songs if they were created by the community. Saminsky considered music to be a national source only when its purification from all other sources has been completed. What this meant in practical terms is that almost none of the folk songs or Hassidic melodies could be considered to be a pure source for Jewish national music, due to the simple fact, that they are mostly influenced by their surrounding cultures. Engel conveyed this idea by arguing that all of the folk songs had been influenced by foreign cultures, but because it became the music of every day life among the Jewish communities, these songs could be considered as national Jewish resources.

While discussing this debate between Engel and Saminsky it is ineluctable that both composers had different political views as well, which supported their musical

dispute. Saminsky, with his love to the national "purity", and his disregard of Yiddish culture, encouraged the revival of Hebrew language and Hebrew culture. However Engel passionately supported the Yiddish language and Yiddish art. This definition of national folk material left no choice to Saminsky but to be very cautious in his choice of the folk sources and sometimes to turn toward Jewish religious music, even though it was influenced by other foreign elements, for example, Arabic music. In this disagreement between the composers the Jewish music became a kind of a symbol for the Russian Jewry: Folk music was for the masses of the ghetto, where as the sacred music served the higher noble characters of the Bible.

Neither of these composers were active members of the socialist or Zionist parties. Engel, who was not a Zionist, but was influenced by the Zionist movement, eventually moved to Palestine, where as Saminsky, who was strongly supported by Zionists while in Russia and especially after his arrival in the United States in 1917, never took an active part in Zionist affairs.

The Society continued to be active until 1918 and, due to the historical and political changes in Russia, the First World War and the Russian Communist revolution of 1917, the Society for Jewish Folk Music ended its functioning in 1918. Many of the active members of the Society left Russia due to the disagreement with the new Communist régime, and only Milner, Gniessin, Streicher and Krein remained in Russia.

The Society for Jewish Folk Music was the first organization of Jewish composers, which in modern times shared the idea of establishing a Jewish national art.

7. THE CONCLUSION, SAMINSKY, ENGEL AND KREIN

Perhaps one of the most prolific composers among the members of the Society For Jewish Folk Music was Lazare Saminsky. From the time of his dispute with Joel Engel and until his arrival in the United States, where he devoted his work to the synagogues of America and, especially, Temple Emanuel of New York City, Lazare Saminsky played a significant role in the development of a national Jewish music first in Russia, and, during his later years, here in America.

Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959) was born in a small town, Vale-Gotzulovo, near Odessa. He was always interested in music and took piano lessons as a child. He began his professional study in the Moscow Conservatory in 1905, but within one year he transferred to the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he remained to study under the supervision of Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov. In 1908 he was one of the first members of the Society. Saminsky graduated from the Conservatory in 1910 and remained involved in Jewish music. For several years after his graduation Saminsky worked as an assistant editor for the St. Petersburg newspaper, *Russkaya Molva* (The Russian Talk), and actively participated in many trips to the areas of the Pale, hoping to gather as many Jewish folk resources as possible. Finding it difficult to adapt to a new regime in Russia with the events of 1917, Saminsky left Russia, first for Turkey, then for Palestine, where he stayed briefly and finally through Paris to the United States.

Here in United States Saminsky became an active proponent in behalf of Jewish musicians in the United States. Already by the year 1923, shortly after his arrival in United States, through his numerous secular and sacred works Saminsky, was able to establish himself as a well known composer, and, as a charismatic and energetic

character, was able to organize the League of Composers. In 1924 Saminsky was selected to become a musical director of Temple Emanu-El, in New York City. Already in 1927 Saminsky was able to organize a first public performance of Temple Emanu-El choir at Town Hall of New York City. This concert included compositions by Moses Milner, Michael Gniessin and Saminsky's own works.

During the later years it became one of Saminsky's mission to promote and to perform different compositions written by Jewish composers, including works by the members of the Society, Ernest Bloch (181-1959), Darius Milhaud (1892-1974), and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco (1895-1968). Saminsky also played a significant role in the foundation and later activities of different Jewish musical organizations in United States such as, *Mailamm* (1931-1939), and the Jewish Music Forum (1939-1962).

Besides being a composer Saminsky used to give variety of lectures and wrote on different musical topics. His book *Music of the Ghetto and Bible*, which discusses a variety of questions, one of them being Saminsky's dispute with Engel, was published in 1934.

A prolific composer, Saminsky composed a wide variety of works. He wrote three *Hebrew Song Cycles*, two choral pieces *Holy, Holy, Holy* and *Out of the Deep*. Numerous songs on sacred as well as secular subjects, an opera-ballet entitled *The vision of Ariel* (1916), and many other vocal and instrumental compositions are among Saminsky's works.

Joel Engel was conceivably one of the most influential and vital figures among the members of the Society. Joel Engel was born in Berdyansk, a town in Crimea, outside the Pale in 1868. The son of a successful businessman, Engel was fortunate to attend the

graduate school and later was accepted into the Law school in Kharkov and in Kiev.

Drawn to music as a child Engel took piano lessons, and in 1893, after receiving his law degree, was accepted in the Moscow Conservatory. Already during those years Engel composed an opera "Esther", where he tried to incorporate some Jewish folk melodies, which he remembered from his childhood. In the year 1897, upon his graduation from the Conservatory, Engel became a music critic for the one of the most influential Moscow newspapers *Russkiye Vedomosti*. He remained working as a musical critic until Russian revolution, when this newspaper was closed by the new regime. As a music critic Engel was at the very roots of the establishment of the Society and remained active in it until the end of the Society.

In 1922, unable to adjust to the new political life in Russia, Engel decided to leave Russia permanently and settle in Berlin. In Berlin he established a publishing house called *Yuwal*, where he was a main editor. He also organized a series of concerts and lectures, which were successfully received all over Germany. However, Engel was not able to make Germany his new home and in 1924 he moved to Palestine.

Engel became very active in the musical life of Palestine. He wrote articles on different subjects. He composed, he taught, as Saminsky was doing in America, in Palestine Engel was trying to promote Jewish national music. However, Engel's best works were his musical arrangements of Jewish folk tunes. The list of these compositions is endless. There are children songs; there are a few instrumental works such as *Adagio Misterioso*, which is based on a Habad melody, numerous piano pieces and a wide variety of vocal works, among them solo compositions, a number of duets and some choral pieces.

Engel died on February 11, 1927. As Saminsky brought with him to the United States his love and commitment to the Jewish music, in the same manner Engel carried his passion and strong devotion to serve Jewish music throughout his life.

Michael Gniessin had a very different life journey from Saminsky and Engel. He was born to a Rabbi in the town named Rostov na Donu, Rostov-on-the-Don, in 1883. As a child he sang in the synagogue choir of one of the most successful cantors from that time, Cantor Eliezer Gerovitch. At 1899 Gniessin joined his three older sisters, who were studying music in Moscow, at the Moscow Conservatory. In order to study with Rimsky-Korsakov, Gniessin transferred to the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1901. In 1911 he accepted the position of the music teacher at the State Music School back in his hometown, Rostov-on-the-Don.

During his years in St. Petersburg Gniessin was one of the most active members of the Society. Along with others members of the Society he helped to organize lectures and concerts. He composed and arranged a number of Jewish folk tunes, which he remembered from his younger years. He visited Palestine twice, in 1914, and in 1921, where, during his last visit he even considered remaining in Palestine and briefly taught in Tel Aviv University

In 1922, with his three older sisters the Gniessin family established a private musical academy in Moscow, which later in 1944 became public and was renamed as the Gniessin Music Institute. Here Gniessin, while along with his work at the Moscow Conservatory and St. Petersburg Conservatory, remained teaching till his death in 1957.

Gniessin's works include a wide collection of vocal compositions, few instrumental works, such as for example, the Suite for orchestra *Jewish Orchestra at the Ball of the Town-Bailiff*, and incidental music to Gogol's play *Revisor* (1926).

Unlike Saminsky and Engel, Gniessin chose a very different life journey. By 1957 he became one of the most important and influential Soviet musicians and teachers in Soviet Union. Not as prolific a composer as Saminsky or Engel, Gniessin devoted almost ten of his last years to being a teacher and an educator. One can only imagine the difficulties that he had to go through to be able to adapt to a new political regime and life style in Soviet Union. But by choosing to remain in Russia and by continuing to compose music based on Jewish folk melodies, Michael Gniessin distributed his own passion and devotion to Jewish national art.

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