

NAPHTALI HERZ WESSELY'S
DIVREI SHALOM V'EMET:
ANALYSIS OF A MANIFESTO FOR
EDUCATIONAL REFORM

JOHN A. FRANKEN

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York

March 3, 2003
Dr. Leonard Kravitz and Dr. Martin A. Cohen

ABSTRACT

The Enlightenment exerted a profound influence on the social, cultural, and intellectual life in the German and Austrian lands, and the Jewish community was not unaffected. Ultimately Enlightenment values took a specific Jewish shape in the form of the Haskalah movement. Among the leading proponents of that movement was Naphtali Herz Wessely, whose *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* ("Words of Peace and Truth") in 1782 ignited a firestorm of controversy concerning the direction of Jewish life, particularly with regard to Jewish education. The message of *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*, together with the strident reactions by more conservative forces to it, exemplifies the political and intellectual forces then in existence the central European Jewish community of that era. On one side, *maskilim* such as Wessely sought at once to preserve and enhance Jewish life by introducing secular learning and new modes of pedagogy. On the other, traditionalists also interested in preserving Jewish life, deemed such changes a mortal threat—not just to Judaism but, implicitly, to rabbinic and communal authority. The resulting collision—and the competing values driving it—have lasting consequences even in the present time.

Pursuant to the thesis instructions, this thesis is divided as follows:

Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	Historical Context: Enlightenment and Haskalah
Chapter 3	Naphtali Herz Wessely and <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i>
Chapter 4	Responses to <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i>
Chapter 5	Epilogue and Conclusion
Appendix	Original Translation of <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i> , First Pamphlet

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2	Historical Context: Enlightenment and Haskalah.....	6
Chapter 3	Naphtali Herz Wessely and <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i>	19
Chapter 4	Responses to <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i>	26
Chapter 5	Epilogue and Conclusion.....	30
Appendix	Original Translation of <i>Divrei Shalom v'Emet</i> , First Pamphlet.....	36
Bibliography.....		77

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In a recent article entitled "Who Is an Educated Jew?" Paula Hyman responds that there has been no consensus on the issue for more than two-hundred years.¹ What had been a "shared commitment to a curriculum, and therefore to a vision of Jewish knowledge, was irretrievably disrupted with the social and political changes that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century."² The desire of the European states to reshape the socioeconomic and culture configuration of their Jewish populations, and the emergence of Jewish intellectuals and businessmen who welcomed that desire, led to a breakdown in the erstwhile consensus about Jewish learning, at least within Ashkenazi communities in Europe.³ "For a growing number of Jews," says Hyman, "the *talmid hokhm* was no longer the model of the educated Jew."⁴

The purpose of this thesis is to survey some of the developments that reflect the breakdown in consensus about what Jews ought to learn and, by extension, how Jews ought to engage the broader society. It will initially explore the intellectual trends known as the Enlightenment and the Haskalah. It will then focus on one of the most important early *maskilim*, Naphtali Herz Wessely, and his manifesto for Jewish educational reform, *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* ("Words of Peace and Truth"). Since the latter publication served as a lightning rod for the controversy between the reformers

¹ *Sh'ma*, February 2002, p. 1.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

and the traditionalists, it is hoped that a complete translation and analysis of the work, and of the subsequent events it generated, will foster a better understanding of the deep division which engulfed Central European Jewry in the late eighteenth century and which has continued to this day.

⁴ *Id.*

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *DIVREI SHALOM V'EMET*: ENLIGHTENMENT AND HASKALAH

A. The Enlightenment

To properly understand the forces that constituted the Haskalah in Germany, a word must first be said about the Enlightenment (German: *Aufklärung*) which preceded it. The movement of enlightenment started in the seventeenth century and developed and spread throughout the eighteenth.⁵ It did not consist of a certain theory, but more properly could be described as a set of shared premises that had practical consequences for all spheres of life—from moral behavior to agriculture.⁶ Whereas in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, western Europe was dominated by two almost unchallenged sources of authority—scripture and the classics⁷--what dominated it in the enlightenment era was a new confidence in the power of human reason.⁸

It was the empiricist and political philosopher John Locke who articulated some of the values of the Enlightenment. In Locke's view, all knowledge depended upon simple ideas taken in by the senses, thereby discrediting the notion that divine mysteries can only be grasped by faith or intuition.⁹ Locke's theory of knowledge therefore begins with reason, not revelation, and his religion is entirely reason-based.

⁵ Sabine Roehr, *A Primer on the German Enlightenment*, p. 3.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, p. 16.

⁸ Roehr, p. 4.

⁹ Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, p. 14.

Therefore the intellectual and spiritual worlds are both founded on human reason, common to all humanity.¹⁰

Religious toleration and was also thought essential to enlightened society.¹¹ Even during the Reformation in the sixteenth century, Erasmus of Rotterdam had argued for toleration among Christians.¹² Neither could Erasmus dismiss the possibility of being a friendly with a Jew so long as he did not blaspheme Jesus Christ in the Christian's presence.¹³ The groundbreaking universalism of Erasmus was later carried forward by Hugo Grotius and his German disciple, Baron Samuel Pufendorf.¹⁴ The latter put forth his idea of equality in a section entitled "That all Men are to be accounted by Nature equal; or who is a man as well as he" in his work *Of the Law and Nature of Nations*.¹⁵ Enlighteners thus believed that, through education, humanity could overcome prejudices, superstitions and dogmas maintained by secular and religious authorities.¹⁶ Religion, free of such corrupting influences, would be based on rational morality.¹⁷ Indeed, argued the British philosopher John Toland, "true religion must necessarily be reasonable and intelligible."¹⁸

As in other countries, in German lands the enlightenment movement was carried forward by the educated strata of society.¹⁹ However, more than elsewhere, the movement's proponents tended to be closer to the state, as they often worked as public servants, officers, professors, schoolteachers, judges, or clergymen. As

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Roehr, p. 4.

¹² Meyer, p. 14.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Roehr, p. 4.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Meyer, p. 15.

German lands moved toward absolutism and centralized bureaucracy, the necessity of loyalty to the state by those who served it created a certain kind of enlightenment: one that believed in the benevolent ruler and in reform from above.²⁰

For most of the eighteenth century, at least in Germany, enlightenment and absolutism went hand in hand.²¹ It therefore stands to reason that when Frederick II (Frederick the Great) became king of Prussia in 1740, his tolerance of enlightenment values heralded a period of relative free thought and writing and rendered his capital Berlin the center of intellectual life.²² While Frederick's own interest lay more in power politics—specifically of expanding and unifying the Prussian state under his central authority—he nevertheless became the great German “cultural emancipator.”²³ Goethe, even as he acknowledged Frederick's dislike of German as a literary form, nevertheless claimed that “the first true and higher content entered into German poetry through Frederick the Great.”²⁴

One product of the so-called Age of Frederick was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing's 1749 play *The Jews* was meant to demonstrate that even among the people long reviled as enemies of Christ, a virtuous individual could be found.²⁵ Similar to the New Testament story of the Good Samaritan, the play depicts a traveler who saves the life of a baron attacked by robbers who the baron mistakes for Jews. During the play, the virtuous character of the traveler becomes more apparent, to the point where the baron offers his daughter's hand in marriage to him. The traveler's

¹⁹ Roehr, p. 6.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*, p. 88.

²² *Id.*, p. 13.

²³ H.W. Koch, *A History of Prussia*, p. 139.

²⁴ *Id.*, p. 138.

²⁵ Meyer, p. 17.

Jewish status renders acceptance impossible, but the baron's gratitude is undimmed.

"O how worthy of esteem the Jews would be if they were all like you!" he exclaims.²⁶

In Catholic Austria, too, enlightenment values were taking hold under the Emperor Joseph II, who succeeded his mother, Maria Theresa, in 1780. Grounded in reason, many of Joseph's reforms were also designed to expand the power of the state. To do so, he set out to centralize the institutions of the Hapsburg monarchy on the Prussian model and to ensure German-language predominance in the multinational empire.²⁷ Joseph II also sought to increase state authority at the expense of the power of the Catholic Church which exerted influence over most inhabitants through its doctrines of papal infallibility.²⁸

Unlike in Protestant Germany, however, where the university-educated clergy spread enlightenment ideas and educated their followers in moral and practical matters, the largely Jesuit-educated clergy in Austria opposed Joseph II's enlightened measures.²⁹ Similarly, many in the lower classes of Austrian society were appalled when Joseph II, through his reforms, attacked superstition, belief in miracles, witchcraft, saints, the power of relics and the devil.³⁰ In Austria, then, unlike in Prussia, where enlightenment manifested itself through an intelligentsia, in Austria it was decreed exclusively by an absolute monarch.³¹

However, in both dominions, the rulers demonstrated a commitment to improving education as a means of strengthening the state. In Frederick's West

²⁶ *Id.* (citing Scene 22 of *The Jews*). See also, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, trans. William Jacks (Glasgow, 1894).

²⁷ Koch, p. 137.

²⁸ Roehr, p. 23.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.*

Prussia, for example, 750 schools were built between 1772 and 1775.³² In Austria, Joseph II in 1782 issued his celebrated *Toleranzpatent* (edict of tolerance) for Vienna and Lower Austria (and subsequently for other provinces of the empire).³³ One of a series of patents granted to major non-Catholic denominations, the *Toleranzpatent* guaranteed existing rights and obligations and set forth additional ones.³⁴ Regarding Jews, for example, it confirmed existing restrictions against augmenting their numbers. However, it also encouraged them to engage in establish schools, attend universities, engage in business, establish factories, and learn trades.³⁵ It reflected Joseph II's enlightenment values of erecting a strong state, tolerance for other religious denominations, and of making all citizens useful to the economy and the state through the abolition of economic restrictions and the enhancement of education. The *Toleranzpatent* was noteworthy as well in that it decreed on the subjects of the emperor the study of German.

Besides endeavoring to broaden the range of individuals receiving some formal education, the Enlightenment reflected a tendency toward serious educational reform. Such a tendency reflected both changing goals of education and a new understanding of how to effectuate them. Regarding the former, new thinking held that education should aim not at turning out "gentlemen" or social ornaments, but useful citizens who could contribute to the state.³⁶ Education, then, had three objects:

³¹ *Id.*

³² Koch, p. 136.

³³ "Toleranzpatent," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, XV, p. 1209.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 189.

(1) to train the minds of the young; (2) to inculcate them with knowledge; and (3) to make good Christians of them.³⁷

Then too, new ideas prevailed concerning the subjects taught and teaching methodology. Critics of the old school were criticizing the education they received and which they still saw being given to their sons.³⁸ They alleged that a youngster leaving school knew nothing or next to nothing.³⁹ He might mumble some words of Latin or Greek and then go on to an academy to learn riding, fencing, dancing and music. But he could not subtract correctly or explain more than basic geometry.⁴⁰ What was needed instead was a system of progressive education with attention given to practical, relevant, productive subjects. Rather than Latin and Greek, it would be better to learn one's own vernacular. So, too, ought one to learn history, geography, mathematics, and the natural sciences.⁴¹ Moreover, education ought to instill the values of good citizenship and loyalty to the state.⁴² And such education ought to be presented in a rational, methodical, progressive way from the simple to the more complex.

If the agendas of emperors like Joseph II and Frederick the Great meant to harness education to serve the interests of the state, thinkers such as Immanuel Kant saw it primarily benefiting the individual. Though a loyal subject of Frederick, Kant nevertheless conceived enlightenment as the individual's ability to transcend his own limitations, to engage in "free and public examination," by means of reason, of such

³⁷ *Id.*, p. 190. As applied to Jews, this would mean making moral individuals out of them, akin to the traveler in Lessing's play.

³⁸ *Id.*, p. 192.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*, p. 194.

⁴² *Id.*, p. 197.

matters as religion and legislation.⁴³ To Kant, then, enlightenment meant self-enlightenment of the individual, which the government could encourage by strengthening education and removing restrictions on the exercise of reason.⁴⁴

B. Berlin Jewry and the Berlin Haskalah: The Turning Point to Jewish Modernity

In the 1740's and early 1750's Berlin Jewry was still overwhelmingly traditional.⁴⁵ However, the effects of the Enlightenment and the cosmopolitanization of the city—it had grown to 100,000 by 1747⁴⁶--had already begun to influence the Jewish populace. In 1738, for example, one Jeremias Cohen appeared in the synagogue clean-shaven and wearing a wig, as a result of which the community attempted to punish him by limiting his right to communal honors.⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1747, Abraham Hirschel (Posner) was reported for having violated government rules by shaving off his beard.⁴⁸ Even young Moses Mendelssohn, who arrived from Dessau in 1743 at age 14, departed from his intention of studying Talmud with the rabbi of Berlin.⁴⁹ In subsequent years, he learned literary German and several other languages and taught himself literary criticism and philosophy.⁵⁰

If the community at first succeeded in curbing such aberrations, by the 1760's it had become more of a struggle. As a result of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), a small group of Jewish families became extremely rich and rose to positions of

⁴³ Roehr, p. 36.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ *Id.*, p. 19.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*, p. 22.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

dominance in Berlin Jewish life.⁵¹ Unlike earlier groups of wealthy Jews, they soon set upon trying to live a life that would imitate the luxury and culture of their gentile counterparts.⁵² They built mansions, collected art, and by the 1770's, were avid theatergoers, attracting other Jewish families in tow.⁵³ By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, men seemed to be dressing like Christians and were increasingly going about clean-shaven.⁵⁴ Though Jews may still have been keeping religious law, the abandonment by many of the traditional dress, lifestyle and, increasingly, the Yiddish language, portended a trend toward assimilation. Consequently, certain members of the community began to consider how to maintain Judaism while at the same time embracing the forces that were altering the lives and consciousness of many of its adherents.

Their efforts, which coalesced in the form of the Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, attempted to redefine Judaism and rearrange relationships with non-Jews for precisely this purpose.⁵⁵ Its proponents sought to respond to dramatic changes in outlook toward Jews by non-Jews that began in the 17th century. These changes, marked by a spirit of rationalism and universalism, signified a new willingness to open gates to Jewish integration in European society.⁵⁶ That the Haskalah constituted an attempt to develop new relations between Jews and non-Jews and to provide a new definition of Judaism meant that it did not offer an ideology of

⁵¹ *Id.*, p. 4.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Id.*, pp. 32, 48.

⁵⁴ *Id.*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Lecture, Immanuel Etke, Nov. 20, 2001.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

assimilation, but rather a new ideology in which to continue the Jewish existence in a more integrated fashion within European society.⁵⁷

The Haskalah, then, was "one form of modernization available to Jews."⁵⁸ Its major feature was dualistic: the attempt to "maintain a balance between the inner and the outer, between the 'Torah of God' and the 'knowledge of man'; between the cultural patterns, religion, and customs of the Jewish heritage and European culture and its civic ethos."⁵⁹ Accordingly, advocates of Haskalah found it necessary to critique Jewish institutions, thought and behavior in order to effect a transformation of their society to one of humanism and tolerance, independent and critical thinking, new social, economic and cultural ideals, and the normalization of Jewish existence.⁶⁰ And of all Jewish institutions, it was the educational system on which the early *maskilim* tended to set their sights for reform.

1. The "Old" System of Jewish Education

To understand the perspective of the early *maskilim* toward Jewish education, let us consider the educational system in they had been reared. Until the Haskalah period, because it was a religious duty to educate one's child and the community pressured its members to fulfill this obligation, almost everyone in Jewish society had a traditional education.⁶¹ In the first years, one learned Bible, first in the vernacular and then with Rashi's commentary.⁶² Because these texts had a didactic quality to them, they played an influential role in how Jewish children came to understand their

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Shmuel Feiner, "Towards a Historical Definition of the Haskalah" in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*. Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin, eds., p. 218.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*, pp. 218-19.

⁶¹ Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, p. 162. It seems that by "everyone," Katz means at least every Jewish male.

place in the world. Ideas such as the chosen people, exile, and redemption all entered the Jewish student's consciousness during this formative phase.⁶³

At the same time, the educational system was characterized by the lack of a systematic, comprehensive curriculum.⁶⁴ Teaching the Pentateuch, for example, kept pace with the weekly Torah portion with the result that teachers would move on to the next portion even if they had not completed the previous one.⁶⁵ As a result, it is likely that students gained only a superficial exposure to the Torah. Moreover, because of time constraints, it is probable that entire sections of law and narrative were often skipped (e.g., the Tower of Babel story in favor of the Flood story).

Other matters seemed to be dictated by the calendar as well. Laws of the holidays were studied only as the specific holidays approached.⁶⁶ Other practical laws were taught as time permitted and as the need to know them arose.⁶⁷ For example, the blessings for reading the Torah and putting on *tefillin* were taught just before a boy reached the age of Bar Mitzvah. All of this, taken together, meant that Jewish education was inefficient to the extent that its structure allowed for both the repetition and neglect of material which the community deemed important. The result was that "[e]ven those who absorb what the *heder* had to offer were left with only fragmentary knowledge."⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as Jacob Katz observes, anyone who

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*, p. 163.

attended a *heder* would have absorbed the rudiments of the tradition and could help to preserve it.⁶⁹

Although the *heder* provided the foundational education for Jewish boys, it was widely viewed as a steppingstone to *yeshiva*.⁷⁰ There one could aspire to the “ultimate educational goal” of becoming a *talmid hakham* with extensive knowledge of the Talmud and halakhic codes.⁷¹ Since the study of Talmud was a primary value for the entire community, the student who achieved the status of *talmid hakham* was assured of a position of leadership in the Jewish community.⁷²

In this pre-*Haskalah* period, then, secular subjects simply had no place in the community curriculum. Yet there were two notable exceptions in which some quarters of the community did engage in secular learning. The first group comprised children whose families arranged private instruction in general subjects (e.g., mathematics, writing) for the purpose of business. The second group comprised elite scholars who engaged in the study of sciences.⁷³ The conventional rationales for doing so were (1) that knowledge of sciences is crucial for understanding some halakhic issues, and (2) that engaging in such study is a legitimate amusement for serious Torah scholars.⁷⁴ Thus, virtually all Berlin Jews who acquired Western educations before the 1770's did so either autodidactically or through private tutoring.⁷⁵ The only exceptions were a handful of medical students.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*, pp. 163-64.

⁷³ Lecture, Immanuel Etkes, Dec. 2001.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ Lowenstein, p. 52.

⁷⁶ *Id.*

2. The "New" System of Jewish Education

Though the early Haskalah represented the start of the transformation of Jewish scholarship, it constituted more of an intellectual than a social phenomenon. Its adherents explored how to seek truth in the world of thought, how to strengthen faith, and how to uphold the standing of the Jewish community in the face of outsiders.⁷⁷ However, by the 1770's, the Haskalah developed into a "comprehensive program of social and cultural transformation."⁷⁸ Moses Mendelssohn's celebrated translation of the Pentateuch into German was not merely a scholarly undertaking, but an attempt to "draw Jews into European culture."⁷⁹

Moreover, Mendelssohn and David Friedländer's *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder* (*Book of Instruction for Jewish Children*) signified the first attempt to educate Jewish children on the German model. For the first time in European Jewish culture, there was published a book for a modern, non-religious Jewish school.⁸⁰ The *Lesebuch* "aimed to prove that one can find in the Jewish heritage the same elements that exist in the German."⁸¹ Thus it drew parallels between the two and legitimized their interaction.⁸² Most notably, the *Lesebuch* contained the central components of German readers at the time. It was divided into the following eight divisions:

- (1) Guide to the German alphabet, the vowels, Latin alphabet, reading exercise, Hebrew alphabet, Shema Yisrael in German translation with Hebrew letters;
- (2) Maimonides thirteen principles of Judaism followed by the Ten Commandments;

⁷⁷ Feiner, p. 187.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ *Id.*

⁸⁰ Zohar Shavit, "David Friedländer and Moses Mendelssohn Publish the *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder*" in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096-1996*, p. 68.

⁸¹ *Id.*, p. 69.

⁸² *Id.*

- (3) Fables by Berechiah Ben Natronai HaNakdan;
- (4) Two moral tales from the Talmud;
- (5) Four contemporary German lyric poems;
- (6) Prayer exercise and preparatory prayer from Judah Halevi's poetry;
- (7) Epigrams and proverbs from the Talmud followed by a poem;
- (8) Moral tales and sayings.⁸³

Significantly, the *Shema* prayer appeared only once, and in German translation. As well, the Hebrew alphabet appeared only after the seventh paragraph, and only once in the entire reader.⁸⁴

The *Lesebuch*'s German-style format and goal of cultural fusion and harmony render it most significant despite the fact that it did not attract much notice in its day. Four years later, however, the publication of Naphtali Herz Wessely's *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* would have a far greater impact in a Jewish world that was beginning to grasp the meaning of Haskalah and its effect on Jewish life.

⁸³ *Id.*, pp. 69-70.

⁸⁴ *Id.*, p. 70.

CHAPTER 3

NAPHTALI HERZ WESSELY AND *DIVREI SHALOM V'EMET*

A. Wessely the Man

Apart from Moses Mendelssohn, no *maskil* would exert as much influence on Haskalah thought as Naphtali Herz Wessely, also known as Hartwig Wessely. Wessely had been born in 1725 in Hamburg and spent his childhood in Copenhagen where his father was a purveyor to the king of Denmark.⁸⁵ He received a traditional religious education the yeshiva of Jonathan Eybeschütz, who influenced him greatly, and was tutored for a brief time by Solomon Hanau, who awakened in him an interest in grammar and the relationship between biblical exegesis and rabbinic interpretation.⁸⁶ Wessely also read literature and scientific works in a number of languages, including German, French, Danish and Dutch.⁸⁷

Living in Amsterdam in the 1760's, Wessely was not writing "explicitly enlightenment works."⁸⁸ His first published work, a two-volume book entitled *Gan Na'ul* (Amsterdam, 1765-1756), explored the synonymous relationship between Hebrew verbs and nouns.⁸⁹ His interest in this subject was "part of a lifelong campaign to revive the study and literary use of Hebrew, especially biblical Hebrew,

⁸⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica, vol. XVI, p. 461.

⁸⁶ *Id.* See also, David Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought*, pp. 99-100.

⁸⁷ *Id.* See also, Sorkin, p. 54.

⁸⁸ Lowenstein, p. 37.

⁸⁹ Breuer, p. 30.

by demonstrating its subtlety, richness, and capacity for sublime poetics."⁹⁰ Yet *Gan Na'ul* also contained significant secondary aims, namely, to reaffirm the veracity of rabbinic and midrashic exegesis, and specifically to defend the integrity and soundness of the oral law.⁹¹ As well, Wessely meant to defend rabbinic Judaism against those from outside it who criticized it as unsophisticated or inauthentic.⁹²

Wessely's devotion to Hebrew would continue after his 1774 move to Berlin as well. In an ode to Mendelssohn, Wessely lamented the decline of the study of Hebrew and Scripture, emphasizing the differences between the "profane" languages which contained imprecision and error, and Hebrew, which was God-given and holy, and therefore free of error, pure, intellectually rigorous.⁹³ In a foreshadowing of his seminal work, *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*, Wessely went on to complain about the quality of contemporary education, accusing teachers of filling young minds with *drashot* (rabbinic interpretations) without first providing them with a firm grasp of Hebrew and Bible.⁹⁴ In Wessely's words, "The rabbi did not know that all the *drashot*⁹⁵ of our Sages were founded upon the holy mountains of the *peshat*.⁹⁶ And whoever is ignorant of the *peshat* of the verse cannot understand the depth of the *derashah* based upon it."⁹⁷

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.*, pp. 31-32.

⁹³ *Id.*, p. 33 (citation omitted).

⁹⁴ *Id.* (citation omitted).

⁹⁵ Explications of the biblical text, sometimes to a fantastic extent.

⁹⁶ Plain meaning of the biblical text.

⁹⁷ Breuer, p. 30 (citation omitted).

In this light, it is little wonder that some consider Wessely the most conservative of the *maskilim* in his attitude toward Jewish orthodoxy.⁹⁸ Indeed, even as he went on to argue for wholesale reform of the Jewish educational system, Wessely remained an observant Jew, devoted to traditional doctrines of Jewish thought. He himself worried about the consequences of unchecked reason on religious faith. The proper education, he wrote, is to plant in his students "the seeds of holiness, the fear of God, the purity of faith and the dignity of Torah."⁹⁹ In *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*, however, he would add a critical substantive dimension: human knowledge.

B. *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*: Wessely's Call for Educational Reform

Though by the late 1770's Wessely had already criticized the state of Jewish education, it was ultimately an external political development that inspired him to write what would become the manifesto for Jewish educational reform of his age. The *Toleranzpatent* of the Austrian Emperor Joseph II, after all, had finally given concrete expression to the Enlightenment values of equality and tolerance of religious minorities, including Jews. Now, for perhaps the first time in their history, Jews in Austria would be permitted to lease land and to farm it, and to engage freely in commerce and the trades.¹⁰⁰ Wessely seized on this development to preach to the Jewish people, and specifically his fellow *maskilim*, the urgency of embracing the Emperor's magnanimous gesture.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., Moshe Pelli, Naphtali Herz Wessely's Attitude toward the Jewish Religion as a Mirror of a Generation in Transition," p. 1.

⁹⁹ *Id.*, p. 16 (citing "Mahelel Re'a," *Netivot Hashalom* [Paths of Peace], (Vilna, 1849), p. LIX.

¹⁰⁰ See, *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*, chapter 5.

Espousing an ideology and program based on the belief that a new Europe was dawning, and along with it the vision of the Jew who was also a man and a citizen,¹⁰¹ *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* exhorts the Jewish community to embrace the educational and occupational opportunities presented by the *Toleranzpatent*. Yet it does so not with an appeal to abandon the ways of the past, but to reclaim them. Authentic Israelite tradition actually valued the kind of learning and productive occupations that the Joseph II was encouraging; only the exclusion of the Jews from them caused such activities to be forgotten and even scorned. By opening the door to them, Jews would be returning to their roots and a more balanced Jewish life.

To convince the Jewish community of the validity of this proposition, Wessely presented a scheme in which there are two distinct realms of knowledge: human knowledge and divine knowledge. According to Wessely, human knowledge preceded divine knowledge in that that humankind organized itself in all aspects of human knowledge—law and government, agriculture, engineering, architecture, craftsmanship—twenty-six generations before the Israelites received Torah. Human knowledge therefore is anterior to divine knowledge. Wessely defines human knowledge as etiquette, ethics, good traits of character, civility, and maintaining refined and clear language. This implicates acceptable norms of social behavior. In addition, human knowledge includes knowledge of history geography, law, politics, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, biology geology, meteorology, botany, medicine, chemistry, physics, language, administration, agronomy, architecture, engineering, and navigation.

¹⁰¹ Feiner, p. 187.

Human knowledge is arrived at through the faculty of reason. Divine knowledge, on the other hand, comprises lofty matters beyond the judgment of any man whose specific laws and instructions were imparted by God to Moses through prophecy. These two realms of knowledge are bound up together and synergistic. Human knowledge, for example, can prepare the soul for religious teaching by inculcating the necessary social consciousness, such as that which occurred before the revelation at Sinai. As well, human knowledge can serve the acquisition of divine knowledge through, for example, proper attention to the study of the Hebrew language.

To Wessely the benefits of human knowledge are manifest. The person with human knowledge is useful to society and has something positive to contribute. Moreover, states whose leaders possess such knowledge and which engage in activities such as arts, sciences, crafts, and trade tend to enjoy peace, international bonds and tranquility – all as a result of their common bonds and shared knowledge. By contrast, postulates Wessely, the person with divine knowledge but no human knowledge has nothing positive to contribute and is burdensome to other people. Intellectually he will think illogically and will err in human relations. Indeed, quoting *Midrash Rabbah*, Wessely argues that next to the wise person who knows the laws and instructions of God but who is devoid of civility, “a carcass is better than he.”

Divrei Shalom v'Emet thus presents a new educational agenda for the Jewish community in the field of human knowledge. Jews would now need to learn civility, good manners, and proper social behavior so that they can engage non-Jews

appropriately and in a way that will reflect well on the Jewish people.¹⁰² Moreover, Jews need to learn to speak pure, clear, and accurate German such that they will have the ability to access German books in pursuit of knowledge and to communicate with Germans properly and in a manner that will not invite hostility. Furthermore, the community will need to learn the arts and sciences such as history, geography, mathematics, and geometry. Wessely also gives high priority to improved knowledge of Hebrew in order to strengthen one's grasp of divine knowledge through interpretation. Such is the nature of Wessely's proposed reforms in the area of educational content.

Yet Wessely did not stop there, for he proposed equally radical changes in the form and method of Jewish education. This is apparent in his very first sentence where, quoting King Solomon, he writes, "Educate the youngster according to his way."¹⁰³ From this statement Wessely later proposed the innovation that students be differentiated in their learning according to subject matter and level of achievement. In the first level of Judaic studies, all students would study the Written Torah and its didactic values. However, only after mastering this subject would students be promoted to study Mishnah and *baraitot*. Students not promoted to the second level would instead learn a trade toward which their hearts are inclined. Similarly, only an elite group of intellectually capable students would pass from the second level to the third level of Talmud study. Thus, "everyone will be successful according to his

¹⁰² The emphasis Wessely places on civility betrays his extreme sensitivity to the way Jews are viewed by non-Jews. He seems convinced that if Jews learn to think, speak, and behave in a refined fashion consistent with the norms of the broader society, then their standing will rise and baseless anti-Semitism will decline, much as it did between the traveler and the Jewish protagonist in Lessing's 1749 play *The Jews*.

¹⁰³ Proverbs 22:6.

abilities and according to his achievements."¹⁰⁴ For a world in which Jewish boys heretofore had been lumped together by age and economic status rather than by achievement, Wessely's proposal was nothing short of radical. It also reflected the enlightened thinking of the day that education be methodical, progressive and, when necessary, differentiated.

As well, Wessely advocates the introduction of textbooks in lieu of primary sources such as the bible to teach children such subjects as Jewish thought, morality, etiquette, civility, and civic duty. Equally radical was his suggestion that Jewish students use existing textbooks—already being utilized by non-Jews!—in areas where faith was not implicated. Meanwhile, he proposed Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch for teaching both Hebrew and High German. He also advocates his own book, *Gan Na'ul*, to assist students in understanding the Scriptures and their literary beauty.

The last subject of major reform proposed by Wessely concerned the training and selection of Jewish educators. Wessely complains that the existing teachers, often imported from Polish areas, speak improper German, as a result of which their pupils imitate the same improper speech. As well, the teachers have insufficient levels of human knowledge. Yet Wessely hopes to remedy this problem by introducing the above-mentioned textbooks, notably Mendelssohn's translation, to cure students' linguistic deficiencies and to awaken their spirits such that they will learn well and become the first generation of qualified teachers. In particular, he foresees those having passed to the level of Talmud study as being the future leaders in the land.

¹⁰⁴ *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*, chapter 8.

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES TO *DIVREI SHALOM V'EMET*

Divrei Shalom v'Emet provoked a fierce reaction from many communal rabbis and leaders who read it as an attack on the long-established educational and religious system.¹⁰⁵ That Wessely himself was a learned Jew; that he called for change in so public a manner; and that he criticized scholars who only concerned themselves with the Torah of God without attention to human knowledge or occupations was taken as an affront by many in the traditional world.¹⁰⁶ No doubt they also feared for their authority over the community and for the continuation of traditional Jewish life. Between reading German textbooks and reading heretical philosophy, in their view, lay but one small step.

One response, from Rabbi David Tevele of Lissa, spoke of Wessely as a "sycophant, an evil man, a man poor in understanding, a most mediocre of men." To Tevele, the meaning of Joseph II's *Toleranzpatent* merely commanded the Jewish community to teach its children to speak and write the German language so that they would know the language of the land. This he viewed as a legitimate demand requiring one or two hours of instruction per day. Tevele therefore accused Wessely of reading into the *Toleranzpatent* a requirement of a wholesale educational reform by the introduction of secular subjects and, moreover, of allowing for the possibility that not every student will learn Talmud. Tevele insisted that, even under the

¹⁰⁵ Edward Breuer, "Naphtali Herz Wessely and the Cultural Dislocations of an Eighteenth Century Maskil," in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*. Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin, eds., p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ *Id.*

Toleranzpatent, the foundations of education continued to be Torah, ethics, Mishnah, and Talmud. The study of the sciences was merely an adornment.

And so Tevele accused Wessely of raising his hand "against those individuals who have consecrated their lives to the service of God," not to mention blasphemy.¹⁰⁷ He added, further, that Wessely has "shorn his beard and therefore all who have beards and sidecurls are deemed by him to lack 'human knowledge' and to deviate from all the ways of humanity."¹⁰⁸ Tevele must have trembled with fear at the prospect of a new educational system like Wessely's being implemented. Whether such a system led to the diminution of Torah learning, the diminution of rabbinic authority, the diminution of faith as a result of individuals' ability to access outside knowledge, or the diminution of traditional *melamdim* from Poland teaching in Germany—all of these consequences he must have seen as a mortal danger.

A similar response came forth from the important halakhic authority from Prague, Ezekiel ben Judah Landau. Although Landau was prepared to support learning the vernacular language, grammar, and etiquette as consistent with Torah, he warned that one should be very careful in doing so, lest he mix with different people or be attracted to philosophy on faith and develop doubts in the process. One who fears God, then, should hold both the Torah of God and the knowledge of man in esteem. But the Torah of God must come first; the knowledge of man is valuable only insofar as it is necessary for business. Moreover, said Landau, to the extent that the government seeks to eliminate religion from the curriculum, it must be resisted.

¹⁰⁷ "A Sermon Contra Wessely" in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ *Id.*

Landau was clearly in a bind. The clear mandate of the *Toleranzpatent*, as Landau himself acknowledged, was the “knowledge of proper manners and the grammar of the languages of the world’s peoples.”¹⁰⁹ Landau therefore could not openly challenge the will of the Emperor. At the same time, Landau deeply feared the possibility that access German-language books would cause people to read philosophy: “But give heed, be very careful that you fear the Lord. Because as you acquire the language of the country, you will also wish to read books of the type that do not serve the purpose of learning the language, but deal rather with investigations into matters of religion. And this, God forbid, may awaken in your hearts an aversion to the faith . . . we have inherited from our holy fathers.”¹¹⁰ So Landau could do nothing but to accept the introduction of German-language study, even as he feared that it would function as a means of sowing seeds of independent thought and, concomitantly, rebellion against traditional interpretations and the power structures that promoted them. The primacy given to the Written Law over the Oral Law in Wessely’s curriculum constituted but one aspect of this challenge to traditional authority.

In writing *Divrei Shalom v’Emet*, Wessely had unwitting made himself a lightning rod for both the *maskilim* and their opponents. In response to vehement opposition of figures like Tevele, Landau, and a group in Vilna that reportedly burned Wessely’s pamphlet, Wessely went on to write three follow-up pamphlets to *Divrei Shalom v’Emet* in which he defended his piety, sincerity, and general program, and particularly retreated from his remark that a carcass is superior to the pious scholar

¹⁰⁹ Mordecai Breuer and Michael Graetz, *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, vol. 1, p. 360 (quoting Ezekiel Landau).

who lacks human knowledge.¹¹¹ But now the genie had been released from the bottle. The more radical *maskil* David Friedländer engaged a German writer to compose a retaliatory pamphlet attacking Tevele.¹¹² Further, a group of seven *maskilim*, including Mendelssohn, wrote Tevele a warning to retreat, threatening to write the King of Poland if he failed to do so.¹¹³ Meanwhile, the traditional side broadened its attack when Pinchas Halevy Horowitz, a celebrated Talmudist, attacked the entire group of *maskilim* for ignorance and impudence, during which he called Mendelssohn's *Book of the Paths of Peace* full of nonsense.¹¹⁴ Ezekiel Landau picked up on the attack as well, urging the traditional method of study and exhorting his followers not to devote undue amounts of time to the study of secular subjects.¹¹⁵ Three years later, Landau objected to Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch as encouraging students to spend time studying German rather than Torah. Both sides, it seemed, were locked in a struggle to control the course of Jewish education and, by extension, Jewish society.

¹¹⁰ *Id.*, pp. 360-61.

¹¹¹ Sorkin, *The Berlin Haskalah in German Religious Thought*, p. 110.

¹¹² *Id.*, p. 110.

¹¹³ See, Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment in the Eighteenth-Century*, ch. 4 ("Threats and Fears in the Wessely Affair") (Hebrew).

¹¹⁴ Sorkin, p. 110

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the debate over *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* may well correspond to that between modern liberal Jews, on the one hand, and Orthodox (or at least ultra-Orthodox) Jews today. Only two generations after its authorship, the traditionalist objections to Wessely's program were enshrined in the new orthodoxy of Moses Sofer in Pressburg. Known for his maxim "*Hadash asur min haTorah*," Sofer declared "total war with no concessions in the battle against modernity."¹¹⁶ Consequently, he and his followers vigorously opposed the new type of school founded by the *maskilim* in particular and the doctrine of Moses Mendelssohn in general, although Sofer did not oppose secular studies where they were undertaken for the advancement of Jewish tradition or for the sake of livelihood.¹¹⁷ Thus, in his ethical will, Sofer decreed it forbidden to read Mendelssohn's books, including (and perhaps especially) Mendelssohn's translation of the Pentateuch into German with a modern scientific commentary.¹¹⁸ In addition, Sofer admonished the traditionalists to separate themselves from "secularizing Jews."¹¹⁹ There is little doubt that Sofer considered Wessely's educational program anathema as well.

For his part – and indeed, within only a few years of authoring *Divrei Shalom v'Emet* – Wessely turned out to be sorely disappointed by a growing trend toward

¹¹⁶ "Moses Sofer," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. XV, p. 77-78.

¹¹⁷ *Id.*, p. 78.

¹¹⁸ Ethical Will of Moses Sofer; Lecture, Emanuel Etkes, January 30, 2002.

¹¹⁹ *Id.*

secularization.¹²⁰ While many Jewish communities had indeed established a general studies curriculum in compliance with the Hapsburg decrees, he lamented that this came at the expense of Torah.¹²¹ Wessely's vision of Jewish education, he claimed, was that Jewish children:

should learn pure German through the perspicacity of the Torah; 'how good is a thing rightly timed',¹²² such as the publication of a German translation, impeccably written and explaining scriptural verses according to their *peshat* and following the traditions of our forefathers. Since not all German words make it into this translation, they can learn the rest of the language from the history books and travelogues of gentile scholars, which they may read for a half hour a day; one comes and illuminates the other, for through the clarity of the translation they will understand the glory and majesty¹²³ of Scripture's refined expressions, and through the study of Torah they will also learn pure German.¹²⁴

Now, however, Wessely lamented that the schools "waste many hours teaching young people to write German and mathematics and the like, while the Torah is taught as it had been earlier, with stilted and confused language."¹²⁵ Moreover, he lamented that it had been decreed that students may not study from Mendelssohn's translation until age 13, at which time he supposed that the student would no longer be interested.¹²⁶ Wessely's desire to introduce a curriculum and pedagogy in which Jewish subjects would be taught in a more organized and accessible way thus went unfulfilled. Rather, those subjects went largely unrevised while the introduction of new secular subjects could only have pushed them further to the margins.

¹²⁰ Edward Breuer, "Naphtali Herz Wessely and the Cultural Dislocations of an Eighteenth Century Maskil," in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*. Shmuel Feiner and David Sorkin, eds., p. 39.

¹²¹ *Id.*

¹²² Proverbs 15:23.

¹²³ Psalm 96:6.

¹²⁴ Breuer, pp. 39-40.

¹²⁵ *Id.*, p. 40.

¹²⁶ *Id.*

It should be noted that although Wessely was personally disappointed by the apparent displacement of Torah by secular studies as opposed to a "golden mean" between them, what he witnessed portended a trend which would last well into late modernity; namely, the desire of a large segment of Jewish society to use education to prepare their children to participate in the life of the larger society. At the same time, Wessely's findings were by no means end of the story of Jewish educational reform during the Berlin *Haskalah*.

Indeed, Wessely's negative findings were practically contemporaneous with the first volume of the journal *Ha-Ma'asef* (1784) which, along with the German-language periodical *Sulamith* (1806-48), brought forth a wealth of contributions on education.¹²⁷ The 1786 edition of *Ha-Ma'asef*, for example, introduced an important new curriculum and pedagogy by a disciple of Wessely from Italy, Elijah Morpurgo. Morpurgo's program reflected the balance between religious and secular studies; an organized, systematic, and progressive method for teaching the subject matter; and sensitivity to the psychological needs of the students. In Morpurgo's model, children would learn to read and write not just in Hebrew, but in the language of their native country as well.¹²⁸ From the third through the sixth year, he suggested, reading should be taught initially by female teachers since "women have a gentle heart and understand how to instruct the child patiently and in keeping with his nature."¹²⁹ Children from ages six to nine would then be instructed in language and grammar,

¹²⁷ Michael Graetz, "The Jewish Enlightenment," in *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*. Michael A. Meyer, ed., pp. 364, 373.

¹²⁸ *Id.*, p. 364.

¹²⁹ *Id.*

Bible, ethics, and Jewish law – two hours in the morning and two in the afternoon.¹³⁰

At the age of nine they would be introduced to Mendelssohn's *Bi'ur* commentary, and would also learn the laws of rest on the sabbath and festivals based on the codification by Maimonides. Between the ages of nine and thirteen, Morpurgo recommended that pupils work through all the books of the Bible as well as the principles of normative Judaism contained in the *Shulkhan Arukh*. The Talmud would not be studied until after age thirteen and then only by the most gifted pupils from wealthy families. In addition, Morpurgo proposed the creation of a special civics textbook to inculcate the "duties of the individual toward the king, the townsman to his city, the human being to his neighbor, and the Jew toward his fellow Jew."¹³¹

Pedagogically, too, Morpurgo offered practical suggestions for education reform. Among these were motivating pupils by competition and posting the results of exams, as well as utilizing games and practical outdoor instruction in nature.¹³² Each day, following the afternoon prayer, teachers and pupils would walk together outside of town to strengthen and invigorate the body and soul. Furthermore, between the age of nine and thirteen, two hours daily would also be set aside for practical training in crafts. He also recommended the wearing of uniforms in order to minimize the social differences between students.¹³³

Throughout this period, concrete pedagogical initiatives continued to be taken. Between 1778 and 1816, ten modernized Jewish schools were established in the

¹³⁰ *Id.*

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² *Id.*, p. 365.

¹³³ *Id.*

German cultural area.¹³⁴ However, it is unclear to what extent each such school's curriculum was devoted to Jewish subjects as opposed to preparing its predominantly poor student population for a vocation. In the Religious and Vocational School in Seesen, for example, priority was given to general education, ethical behavior, and vocational training, especially in the crafts and agriculture.¹³⁵ By contrast, the Dessau Free School, in the curriculum of its first four grades, devoted half of the total hours (twenty) to Jewish subjects – Bible, biblical history, Hebrew, religion, Talmud, and Judeo-German. The remainder was comprised of German, French, arithmetic, penmanship, history, geography, and natural science.¹³⁶

Although education had become the preferred domain for the activity of the *maskilim*,¹³⁷ it must ultimately be said that the contribution of the Berlin *Haskalah* was more qualitative than quantitative. Within the conservative Jewish society in the German lands of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, modern Jewish schools enrolled a relatively small proportion of the Jewish student population. Yet, as Michael Graetz observes, they constituted the “experimental terrain where it proved possible to translated conceptions of a Jewish enlightenment into practice.”¹³⁸ For the first time in modern history, secular education was integrated with general studies in accordance with an organized curriculum. Moreover, a number of the graduates of these schools would go on to participate in nascent religious reform and in the modern scholarly study of Judaism.¹³⁹ With that in mind, the Berlin *Haskalah*

¹³⁴ *Id.*, p. 367.

¹³⁵ *Id.*, p. 369.

¹³⁶ *Id.*, p. 372.

¹³⁷ *Id.*, p. 373.

¹³⁸ *Id.*, p. 374.

¹³⁹ *Id.*

exerted a decided impact on the development of liberal Judaism, Jewish education, and modern Jewish scholarship.

And if the Berlin Haskalah had such an important effect on the liberal Jewish world, so too did it have one on the emerging orthodox one. Two generations after Wessely, none other than Samson Raphael Hirsch would "wax eloquent in praise of Schiller and outline an educational curriculum that went beyond Wessely's openness to German culture."¹⁴⁰ In a real sense, then, Hirsch's stance provides evidence of German Jewish traditionalists' inability to withstand the Haskalah forces embodied by *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*. The powers that resisted Wessely's program two generations earlier—at least in the German lands--ultimately came to support its aims. However, such would not be the case with the anti-modern forces of Moses Sofer and his descendents who would continue to this day to view the introduction of human knowledge and pedagogical reforms as assimilationist and threatening to rabbinical authority, faith, and to Torah itself.

¹⁴⁰ Yale Companion to Jewish Writing, Thought and Culture, p. 87.

APPENDIX

“Divrei Shalom v’Emet”

Words of Peace and Truth

To the Community of Israel,
Those Living in the Lands of the Government

Of

The Great Emperor,
The Lover of Humanity, Delighting in Creation,

His Majesty Joseph II

By

Naphtali Herz Wessely

Translated by John A. Franken

CHAPTER 1

Said the wisest of all men:¹⁴¹ "Educate the youngster according to his way because if you do so, even when he grows old, he will not depart from it."¹⁴² This statement contains two elements: The first, "Educate the youngster," that he will be educated in his youth, that is, with a heart free of thoughts of the vanities of their world and from the perversions of foreign ideas. For when his heart is like new and smooth paper, it will be easiest to write words of truth on it. And they will be well-inscribed. The second element—"according to his way" means according to his ability and his potential. For the disposition of men and their spiritual faculties are different. What is easy for one to receive and retain will be hard for the second whereas other matters will come easy for the second. And that will be hard for the first because he will retain more (Chapter 8). And if one educates the youngster during his youth, and the education is according to his way, he will not depart from it in old age.

Now, to educate the youth of Israel in the proper way, education ought to be divided into two sections. The first of these elements is the teaching of human knowledge,¹⁴³ which things render a person worthy of being called "human." For one who lacks this almost does not deserve the appellation "human," as will be explained. And the second element is to teach divine knowledge,¹⁴⁴ which is the laws and instruction of God, lofty matters beyond the judgment of any man, and they were

¹⁴¹ King Solomon

¹⁴² Proverbs 22:6. That is to say that the child is most impressionable, and therefore most educable, when he is young.

¹⁴³ "Torat Ha'Adam."

imparted to Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him, by God through prophecy. And if they had not come to us in this divine way it would be a secret as well from even the wisest among us, for their matter cannot be discerned from fixed laws under the sun.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the seed of Israel alone is obligated to observe them.

These divine laws are explained in the Torah of Moses our Teacher from the mouth of God through the light of prophecy. And he, peace be upon them, transmitted them to Joshua and the elders of his generation. And thus it was repeated by mouth¹⁴⁶ from generation to generation until the exile of Israel for the second time by Roman kings, at which time they were dispersed in the four directions¹⁴⁷ of the heavens.

Troubles increased and hearts diminished, and the Sages of those generations were concerned that Israel would eventually forget the Torah. And so they rose up committed to writing the received tradition and interpretations of Torah; words which had they gone unwritten, would have been impossible for subsequent Sages to arrive at by means of reason and discernment. However, human knowledge--which is things human reason deduces and upon which most wise men after deliberation agree--these were not committed to writing since any person of intellect can understand them on his own or learn them from the wise men of his generation.

Generally human knowledge means etiquette, the ways of ethics, and good traits of character, civility, and maintaining refined and clear language. These and similar matters are implanted inherently in man's faculty of reason. The one with

¹⁴⁴ "Torat Elohim."

¹⁴⁵ I.e., observable reality. In other words, divine law is not "natural law," which the Enlightenment viewed as available to humanity through the faculty of experience and reason.

¹⁴⁶ I.e., in the form of the Oral Law.

such understanding¹⁴⁸ will understand much from the expressions¹⁴⁹ of the divine Torah and from the ways of God that are written therein, as we shall indicate below; and, in addition, knowledge of history and land and water formations,¹⁵⁰ and the laws and politics of kings and countries and the like. And this also includes human knowledge such as the wisdom of numbers (arithmetic), wisdom of measurements (geometry), and wisdom of heavenly motion (astronomy), and similar things.

That which is inscribed in human knowledge as axioms— their essence is reason which generates reliable inferences in every field of wisdom. And this knowledge includes also the natural sciences, which include knowledge of existing things according to the classifications: animals and plants, minerals and elements; signs of air and clouds and their effects¹⁵¹; wisdom of the science of identifying plants (botany); the science of astronomy; the science of healing¹⁵²; the science of chemistry, etc. And all of this is in man's power to learn them through the senses and mind without the need for divine revelation to achieve them. Nor do you need a reference book to prevent the loss of such knowledge.

Human knowledge clearly preceded the laws of God. Hence it is fitting that in his youth man should crown himself with the fear of God, civility, and knowledge – all of which define man as human. So he should prepare his mind (heart) to study the laws and teaching of God and, as well, to observe His commandments which are exalted above human judgment. For this is the Torah of the Jewish man and this is what our Sages of blessed memory transmitted. Twenty-six generations of human

¹⁴⁷ Lit. "winds".

¹⁴⁸ I.e., human knowledge.

¹⁴⁹ I.e., refined language.

¹⁵⁰ Geography.

knowledge passed from Adam to Moses and they engaged only in the "Torah of Man." They possessed only the Seven Commandments and their details.¹⁵³ As well, it is the opinion of most scholars that these realms of human knowledge include etiquette, thought, and science. For these fall under the rubric of human affairs because human knowledge benefits the whole society and teaches us to appreciate everything under the sun.¹⁵⁴ And they cause man to succeed in all his deeds¹⁵⁵ and they promote man to help his neighbor in both thought and in deed.

Therefore, one who is ignorant or neglectful of human knowledge despite having knowledge of the Torah of God and observing such laws--for two reasons he has nothing positive to contribute.¹⁵⁶ First, his fellowship is burdensome to other people. Both in his coming and his going, he will err in the ways of human relations. His words on worldly matters will not be logical and all his actions and things under the sun will be worse than useless because they shall be of no help to or use to humankind.

Second, despite the fact that the God's statutes and instructions are much exalted above human knowledge, they are connected and bound up in it. Where human knowledge ends, divine knowledge begins and reveals things which no human can achieve on his own. Therefore, one ignorant of the divine laws but possessing human knowledge, despite the fact that the Torah scholars will not benefit from his light, the rest of humanity from all peoples will benefit from it. But one ignorant of

¹⁵¹ Meteorology.

¹⁵² Medicine.

¹⁵³ I.e., the Noahide laws.

¹⁵⁴ I.e., nature.

¹⁵⁵ That is, they are essential for human progress.

human knowledge, despite knowing the laws of God, gladdens neither the scholars of his own people nor the rest of humanity. For this reason, the Sages said (Midrash Rabba, Leviticus, chapter 1), every wise person (who knows the laws and instruction of God), but who is devoid of civility, is as good as a carcass.¹⁵⁷ For example, on the matter of a beast rendered a carcass¹⁵⁸ by piercing on the way to slaughter, or which was slaughtered contrary to law, there is nothing loathsome in itself and therefore it is only we who are forbidden by the laws of God to eat it. However, the rest of humanity may enjoy its meat, as it is said: "Do not eat the whole carcass so that the resident alien within your gates may benefit and it or sell it to a non-Jew. And one ignorant of manners and civility will bring neither pleasure to the wise among Israel nor to the wise among the nations, for he who dishonors His Torah is loathsome to all creation.

CHAPTER 2

From the beginning human knowledge occupied the heart of great men and because of it the polity existed and the kingdoms were established. The inhabitants of each kingdom were divided into many groups. One became the ministers and judges of the land. Another group became the defenders of the country. Another group established schools to teach people knowledge and wisdom. There also was a group of artisans. There were also farmers, vine-dressers and field hands (Jer. 52:16). And

¹⁵⁶ This statement and the supporting statements which follow constitute the most controversial aspect of Wessely's essay, as evidenced by the extremely hostile reaction of conservatives such as Rabbi Yehezkel Landau of Prague and Rabbi David Tevele of Lyssa.

¹⁵⁷ A carcass, in this sense, being not kosher and therefore unfit for human consumption.

each and every division established their own traditions concerning how to deal with people in their own divisions. Thus they agreed on a common law to govern kingdoms and established peace between them. As well, one country could receive assistance from another country in wisdom, war, in all kinds of crafts, purchase and sale, and all kinds of trade that they divided among themselves. Through that interaction the different parts of the world became connected to one another and they wanted peace for the others because they knew that what is good for others is also good for them; and if they have bad times, it will also be bad for them. So in this way each individual can be of great help or little help to the commonweal.

Therefore, human knowledge became the firm foundation in the heart of thousands of leaders of Israel, the kings and prophets, holy and divine captains to whom-- even though the spirit of God rested upon them, and especially on Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him, who received the law and instructions through prophecy—human knowledge was not transmitted to them. Rather, sublime knowledge was transmitted through them, for matters of civility were already prepared by the Creator when He created the human soul, in which He planted knowledge, intelligence by which to understand its issues and to comprehend many details of the reality before them, and to draw out of their knowledge good manners by which the religious assembly exists in every country everywhere. Before the divine matter¹⁵⁸ was revealed to the people of God,¹⁶⁰ they were already competent in every aspect of civility, both in manners and in leadership as well as in natural and acquired wisdom. Moreover, after the divine light fell upon the Israelites, they did

¹⁵⁸ That is, unfit for consumption by Jews.

¹⁵⁹ The Hebrew bible.

not divert from them because they needed them all the time. Whether they spoke to individuals or to the whole community, they would express themselves with grace and wisdom—and also in the issues they had with other peoples and with their kings and ministers, such that it was impossible that someone could lead a large people in peace¹⁶¹ without being versed in the utmost civility and wisdom mentioned above.

Thus this idea drove Israel in coming to the land and establishing its government according to the Torah and settling its tribes in the cities and countryside, where human knowledge was needed very much as well, to set aside places for justice and to fix everything for the necessary order of specialization according to the laws of God, and to set aside places for the scholars to teach the public and to put an eye on their education according to the will of God. And they needed skilled artisans in a landed state and builders to build castles and people schooled in the science of war and in repairing its weapons, and historians and agronomists, and experts in government and geography, whose craftsmanship, customs, strength, and daily attention to children radiate in the world, by having written of generations of books. Proof of this is offered in the acts of King David, the *Rishonim*¹⁶² and the *Acharonim*¹⁶³ which are “recorded in the history of Samuel the Seer, in the history of Nathan the Prophet, and in the history of Gad the Visionary, together with all the mighty deeds of his kingship and the events that befell him and Israel and all the kingdoms of the earth.” (1 Chronicles 29:29-30.) For these and similar things need

¹⁶⁰ The Israelites.

¹⁶¹ That is, with their consent.

¹⁶² Medieval sages prior to the *Shulkhan Arukh* in the sixteenth century.

¹⁶³ Sages after the composition of the *Shulkhan Arukh* in the sixteenth century,

to be the work of government from generation to generation, and our knowledge of God's laws and Instruction obligate us to exalt all these.

And knowledge of the ways of God we should simulate on our way, which knowledge includes knowledge of the wisdom of the soul,¹⁶⁴ that is, the perfection of purpose of latter-day man. And everywhere there are two appropriate bodies of instruction, for both the Torah and human knowledge are works of God. The divine Torah is the jewel and glory of human knowledge. Just as a little such knowledge brings to knowledge among all peoples and ultimately advances them in human knowledge—for just as childhood and maturity progresses to old age, night to day, winter to summer—so too does human knowledge prepare the soul that has completed studies of the sublime. In this way you will now find that the existing dominions, the national groups which today exist in peace—the cause for this is the human knowledge which they possess. Their leaders are versed in one and the same language and in the arts and sciences, and in all crafts and trades. Each one engages in a science or trade toward which his soul is inclined. By this the entire collective exists and the politics are changing emphasis from the many to the few.¹⁶⁵ And notice that the more civility there is in the state, the more respect there is for the state and the stronger it becomes in wisdom, wealth and respect. Conversely, when there is little civility in a state, that state will fall from its exalted position. Everybody knows this. There is no need to adduce evidence to prove this.

¹⁶⁴ Morality and ethics.

¹⁶⁵ That is, from the collective to the individual.

CHAPTER 3

There is one people in the land that has not properly engaged in human knowledge. In their youth and at home most have ceased learning natural and acquired manners. That people is the children of Israel, dispersed here in the lands of Europe, inhabiting the majority of its kingdoms. For we have cut off such studies. Among the Jewish inhabitants of Germany and Poland, there are men of reason and great discernment. As well, there are men of faith in awe of God. However, all their preoccupations and learning from their youth have been in divine law and teachings, whereas they have neither heard of nor studied human knowledge or patterns of Hebrew grammar. They thwart the elegance of speech, proper syntax, and accurate expression whose wells flow with wisdom and ethics. And most of those ignorant of proper speech are also ignorant of how to read and write the language, of geography, and of the flow of history. Similarly, it befell them to believe that natural and acquired manners are not things worth knowing or understanding because nothing was conveyed to them about this at the inception — not by their forefathers and not by their rabbis, for they also were unaware. Even the mainstays of the faith did not learn them until it was absorbed by the youth.

Thus they did not hear in school about proper behavior and morals and ethics. And only a few successful students in the divine Torah, when they grew up and saw what they were lacking, really bothered to remedy the deficiencies they saw in their

teachers and focused on these things based on the books and word of mouth of little people here and there, but in disorganized and inefficient fashion. But just like their knowledge is like wearing light clothing on a frosty day, in fact, though, clear knowledge of such matters is found only among individuals whose hearts lift and whose spirits impel them to heed such wisdom and to incline their hearts toward understanding. They have learned the vernacular languages and gained wisdom from books, and have become an overflowing spring without either the assistance of a teacher or by the commandments of their forefathers and Sages. Rather, it is from the love of truth that such superior individuals come to be. However, unlike them, the majority fails to learn this lesson and is also deficient in human knowledge, from the ways of speech and manners, from wisdom and trades. For those people are like tools devoid of any use. This disadvantage comes to burden us from generation to generation and lasts to this day. No one demands nor requests that we be enlightened out of the intellectual darkness that has befallen us.

Should we not wonder how it came to this? How is it that the people whose first generation wisely and intelligently heard God and which was designated "a light until the nations" switched its emphasis away from that of other peoples and did not engage in glorious learning, but rather trusted only in sublime laws, divine paths and metaphysical ways such that we are engaged in the laws of God and His Torah to which almost all our community is inclined? Among them are many reasonable and discerning men who inspire awe at the breadth of knowledge and clarity of reason in their fields and in every other matter to which they pay attention. They will bring

fruit to everyone and use their intellects to generate new knowledge through the wisdom and knowledge that constitutes human knowledge.

But know that we bear no guilt for this situation. We will not direct our anger or complaints against ourselves, for the other peoples who have hosted us for over one-thousand years are to blame for our misfortune. They were terrible to us in their royal decrees and advice. Some of those who ruled us treated us like dust and issued decrees forbidding the study of human knowledge. They rebelled against human knowledge, for they kept our souls in the dust and suppressed our spirits. From then on, the hearts of our community grew dark and their hold on human knowledge was weakened to the point that it came to be seen as burdensome. And this because it is seen as belonging to the lower, material sphere of man.

Thus Jews came to despise all those worldly things under the sun, created by God, from which goodness had been dispossessed. In their bitterness they put aside and abandoned the laws and sciences concerning the administration of world affairs, knowledge of astronomy such as the orbits of the stars, knowledge of agriculture, of navigation and constructing cities and fortifications, of common law and royal governance. For they said: "What do we have to do with all of this? The local inhabitants are our enemies who will not listen to our advice nor consider our strength. We have no fields or vineyards in the land. Therefore let us abandon the study of human knowledge and engage in commerce and trade in order to sustain ourselves and support our children, for only this have they left to us. And even this they have left us but a small measure and a great reduction. Our Father in heaven shall be our support and will only engage in those matters which bring us eternal life,

namely, the laws and Teaching of God which we were commanded to obey and which God and our ancestors entered into in a covenant."

The select few among them ceased teaching human knowledge because they knew that even sweet wisdom embitters the embittered soul. Were they to teach the obligation of loving all beings, which is the crown of etiquette, the Jewish people would pay no heed, for they live among populations which conspire to do evil against them and who level slanderous and cruel plots against them and repay love with hate. Were they to teach language so that they could properly express themselves in order to gain favor in the eyes of the common folk and the leadership, they would not listen. For the non-Jews mock the logic of their words and heap insults upon them. If they were to teach them the arts and sciences, the pupils would despise them because they receive no benefit from them. They cannot work in a field or vineyard or in building towers, cities, or fortifications, or engage in any practical work.

And once such skills and knowledge were lost to our community, we have been unable to recover them even in kingdoms ruled by benevolent kings who lifted the iron yoke off our necks, because by then we had already become far removed from such matters. We did not possess books in the Hebrew language. Nor were we trained to speak and read the vernacular for, in periods of great trouble, as we said, we became estranged from them and their languages. Therefore we did not learn to read their books or, concomitantly, to speak their languages fluently. And when out of desperation we ventured from people to people and kingdom to kingdom, we learned a bit of this people's language and a bit of that people's language and our own speech became a jumble.

It is therefore amazing how despite all these terrible things, we have remained a people, withstanding the flow of mighty waters, and nevertheless have remained leaders of humanity. This was effectuated by our divine Torah, for despite our ignorance, the Torah sustained us and taught us the nature of the true human heart from generation to generation, preventing us from developing the trait of cruelty and evil behavior, far be them from us! From then until now we have not been in a degenerate association or in a wicked band that plots evil against fellow human beings, for in every generation we were loyal to the kings who ruled over us as well as to the inhabitants of their lands, and we sought from God an era of peace for the kingdom and the land. If we found ourselves in a state of degradation, we would find comfort in our purity by saying: "These are prejudices in the heart of the peoples and their lords, in keeping with the customs of their ancestors." And we hoped that God would turn their hearts toward us for the good and cause them to look upon us with compassion.

These things recurred from generation to generation and, indeed, are entrenched to this day despite the rule of benevolent kings. In our generation as well, the kings of Europe are wise, philanthropic, and benevolent. They treat us with kindness and compassion, may God remember them for goodness. However, in every place many brutally primitive and cruel laws were promulgated over us with the intention of cutting us off from humanity. They prevented us from doing things such as when one man helps his brother. As stated above (chapters 1, 2), this phenomenon has yet to leave us, as it is deeply embedded in the hearts of the peoples and their

leaders and has grown old with them for most of their lives. It is therefore difficult to overcome or to employ reason to disagree with them or to mint these coins anew.¹⁶⁶

This is so even if one demonstrates these laws to be reckless, for tradition will overwhelm reason. Therefore the gentile will not have compassion on the souls of the unfortunate righteous persons whose fault was only having been born children of Israel and clinging to their basic faith. Just as all faithful persons in the world hold onto their faith that they sucked from their mothers' breasts, so we too believe in one God who is the Father to all of us--to our fellow humans who dwell in Europe, to our fellow humans inhabiting Asia and Africa. Our Torah teaches love of all creatures and ways of life and peace, which is the foundation and cornerstone of the religions of Europe and the Arabs. Still, we were treated poorly and we despaired, imagining oppression for the rest of our exile.

CHAPTER 4

However, it was not as man had envisioned, for to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. Ever since the Creator, praised by He, established heaven and earth, He established in His great wisdom the seasons of the world, times of good and times of evil. For He determines the generations from the beginning and sees them through to the end. Over generations, formerly hidden knowledge in the sciences, humanities, and crafts was revealed by wise men, such as the discovery of America, of printing, gunpowder, spectacles, and so forth.

¹⁶⁶ That is, stamp them out.

Similarly, from the beginning, He determined every generation and its leaders, installing kings on their thrones to be His instruments, by which to effectuate His laws and designs. For behold, the prophet Isaiah lived some 300 years before the destruction of Babylon,¹⁶⁷ prophesized and identified its conqueror by name, as it is said: "Thus said the Lord to his anointed one Cyrus." (Isaiah 45:1). So too did the man of God, Jeroboam, say 200 years ahead of time, "A son shall be born to the House of David, Josiah by name." (I Kings 13:2.) King Solomon numbered the periods when good and evil swept up all the inhabitants of the earth and remarked, "There is a time to love and a time to hate." (Ecclesiastes 3:9.)

Therefore, perhaps now an era is coming to rid hatred from the human heart, a baseless hatred founded upon somebody else's fight, whose source is in different modes of faith and prayer. O generation, you have seen that God is good, for He has installed a great man and a savior of humanity, His Majesty the great Emperor, Joseph II. Apart from his wisdom, counsel, and military strength, word of new imperial decrees that have issued herald even greater acts of heroism. These words of peace and truth¹⁶⁸ to all of his subjects have been refined in the crucible of reason and are founded on love of mankind. Furthermore, in his many good deeds he has not forgotten a poor and long-forgotten people, the children of Israel. He has commanded us to do many good and comforting things, like a father to his son, a teacher to his students, and a governor to his people. He has removed the restrictive shackles of their livelihood by permitting them to work in all kinds of agricultural work, crafts and commerce. In his attentiveness, he has also observed that few of

¹⁶⁷ C. 536 B.C.E.

¹⁶⁸ Heb. "*divrei shalom v'emet*," the title of Wessely's letter.

them speak the German language accurately—on which point we have already commented (chapter 3)—as a result of which they cannot understand books, neither in history and world affairs nor in etiquette, sciences and the arts. Nor do they know how to speak clearly with the local inhabitants and their officials. In benevolent fashion, he has decreed the establishment of schools in which to teach reading and writing of the German language, where the books of rational ethics based on words of the Torah will instruct the youth in civility.

However, mathematics, geometry, astronomy, history and geography will be taught to the pupils by way of existing books for the children of the realm, for these disciplines do not concern matters of faith and man's knowledge of them is identical. All this is done to strengthen the house of Israel and mend the breaches torn open by earlier rulers, as we mentioned above (chapter 3), such that the pupils will become industrious people, assisting their kingdoms in deed, work, and wisdom.

Happy is the king who has it so, for God has chosen him to do righteousness and good. An object of God's delight is he who acts to save others in his world. It is said that many men have behaved virtuously, but you¹⁶⁹ have risen above them all. This is true of valor: the man whose spirit moves him to disseminate thought and opinion; who has overcome prejudices which have been accepted for many a generation and is rooted in the hearts of the masses. He whose good sense rules over them and brought righteousness and justice as the afternoon brings light, softening hearts and brokering peace and love among them--about him Solomon in his good wisdom said: "Better to be forbearing than mighty, to have self-control than to conquer a city." (Proverbs 16:32.) May the Eternal God be with this great king,

decide in his favor and defend him against all evil. May the precedent of his wisdom that he is fashioning be as a lovely paradigm to all earthly kings, that peace will spread throughout the world. May his name be magnified that all nations will celebrate it. And may his reward be kept in heaven for all time.

CHAPTER 5

And you, our brethren, the children of Israel living under this great sovereign, what shall you offer your ruler in return for the extensive beneficence which he extends to you? What can you give him other than praying to our God on his behalf for his well-being for as long as you live and to do his bidding as he has enjoined you? For he has asked only what is good for you. He has permitted you to lease land and to become laborers over it and to engage in all kinds of commerce and in every craft. Should the Lord bless all the works of your hands and you do business with the distinguished local inhabitants and dignitaries, it would be appropriate for you to remove all the ways of the downtrodden,¹⁷⁰ which you have practiced in your affliction, including your diction and speech that from now on you will speak with accuracy, grace and intelligence. You are not to prevent your children from learning the language of the local inhabitants and from speaking it properly. Similarly, you should familiarize them with the study of etiquette, the sciences, and the arts because they will be among those who frequent noble households. Why, then, when they

¹⁶⁹ Joseph II

¹⁷⁰ I.e., abandon behaviors which developed from persecution and marginalization, such as speaking a distinct language or dialect.

speaking with them about historical events or geographical phenomena, or matters among the sciences and arts, should they resemble those who slumber in foolish drunkenness?¹⁷¹ Moreover, such knowledge is necessary for God's laws and teachings to which our community adheres and which it studies. Until now, because they were inattentive to their language and did not know how to speak properly like the Sages of the native lands, they suffered such shortcomings in the holy tongue as well. They ceased to study grammar and rhetoric and thus lost the ability to discern the true meanings of Torah and prophecy and did not pay proper attention to them. And they did not reap the great benefit which the Torah bequeaths to those who engage in its proper study. Aside from bringing us eternal happiness, it also prepares us for success in worldly affairs, granting a person knowledge and wisdom in all his actions and enabling him to gain divine and human favor.

And so taking note of this, a wise man of our generation, a noted scholar and eloquent speaker, the honorable rabbi and teacher, Moses of Dessau,¹⁷² may God keep him, translated our divine Torah into pure and proper German, just as we would have expected of a master famous for great rhetorical prowess. He has provided a great service through this work as well shall discuss later on (chapter 7).

Similarly, the study of etiquette, the sciences and the arts, aside from bringing respect to those who master them, and aside from enabling them to be useful in strengthening the country and its inhabitants, is necessary for the pillars of faith and the roots of fear and love of God and for magnifying in the heart of man the glory of God and his sacred word. Therefore, those who attend the house of study should also

¹⁷¹ Ignoramuses.

¹⁷² Moses Mendelssohn.

study the annals of the generations and the events of the past until they know how things developed from the beginning--who originally occupied the various countries and how kingdoms were founded, and the names of the nations which seized countries, one from another, until today, and their customs, practices, and laws. For such knowledge helps us understand the Torah, which describes to us the habitation of the earth from the earliest descendants of Noah, and the names of the countries bearing the names of their earliest settlers and the families -- and the stories of Nimrod and Assyria and the story of the wars of the four kings and the names of the districts they conquered, and other such stories in the Torah and additional stories in the books of the prophets. For someone unfamiliar with ancient history, all these things appear like an incomprehensible dream which his mind cannot fathom.

These things facilitate love and fear of God, for when someone has learned the ways of these primeval nations and how they quickly turned away from God's universal law, he will understand why God did not choose them and why from among them all, God chose only our father Abraham, peace be upon him, and made a covenant with him and with his descendants after him. And they will understand the Torah and the commandments which He gave them to set them apart from the abomination of other peoples. Then they will see that all the stories of the Torah are most reliable and instructive. This will set straight students' minds and accustom them to exercise discernment in every matter and not engage in vain fantasies, and no longer give credence to the insipid chatter of women and those who tell them strange and fantastic stories.

From history a person will gain wisdom as well by reading in it the deeds of people of all the nations that preceded him--their leaders, their thoughts and strategies. When he understands the consequences, he will see what effect wise counsel had and how, as a result, entire nations flourished and how great men of renown arose among them. Conversely, he will see the effects of bad counsel, due to which great and exalted nations declined, and how men renowned for their power and reputation became corrupt. Knowledge such as this raises the level of humans above the thoughts of foolish masses who slumber while awake.

Similarly, a knowledge of the measurements of the world—knowing the length and breadth of character of the world—the borders of the various countries and how they abut each other and the area that each occupies on earth, and the place of the seas and great rivers and the like, known as geography—resembles the knowledge of the annals of the generation¹⁷³ which is also necessary for Torah itself, which mentions the countries conquered by the descendants of Noah and the travels of Abraham our father, peace be upon him, and the borders of the land of Israel, and the travels of Israel in the wilderness and the seas and rivers mentioned in the Torah and, even more, in the books of the prophecies, knowledge which in the eyes of a fool is strange and fantastic, whereas the knowledgeable person understands that these are true according to observable reality. And knowledge of the peoples inhabiting the many countries of the earth and their deeds, traits and beliefs, will provide him access to the great¹⁷⁴ such that he will consult it in all of his affairs.

¹⁷³ That is, history.

¹⁷⁴ Proverbs 18:16.

It goes without saying that the natural sciences include studies of the various kinds of minerals, plants and animals, and the elements, and also the study of numbers, measurement, astronomy, and so on, which are connected to the Written Law, such as laws concerning mixing diverse seeds and establishing the holiday times, and the indications of an animal that is to be eaten and that which would conceal it from the human eye. Of those who ignore such matters, it is said: "But they never give a thought to the plan of the Lord, and take no note of what He is designing."¹⁷⁵ Scripture says: "Then you will understand the fear of the Lord."¹⁷⁶ For through these studies as well, a person appreciates God's majesty and great power, and increases his reverence for God in his heart and fears Him. It is unnecessary to expand upon this proposition, upon which earlier authors, may their righteous memories be blessed, have already elaborated, and concerning which knowledge, His Majesty the Emperor has decreed. His words cause happiness of heart, for God loves truth, and it is worthy for us to engage in such a fair and sweet activity.

CHAPTER 6

Furthermore, our community needs to compose new books concerning beliefs and opinions with which to teach our youth in the study hall. And also regarding this His Majesty the Emperor has cast his wise gaze by commanding that books of rational ethics be composed, for such philosophy employs reason to teach pupils

¹⁷⁵ Isaiah 5:12.

¹⁷⁶ Proverbs 2:5.

wisdom and ethics. And when we pay attention to this matter, we shall say without a doubt that the lights of the books of ethical authors will make dim the powerful light that shines through the cracks of our Torah.¹⁷⁷ The light of our Torah is of no use to beginners and to pupils. In order to draw out the good moral thoughts from their original source—from the depths of its poetry—this is the work of Sages. This requires intelligence and extreme discernment, which is not the work of amateurs. Therefore, to begin, a book of the statements of belief needs to be composed, in which everyone in Israel needs to believe. And it needs to be written in a clear and pure language so that the author will suit his words according to the intellectual level of the youngster. Thus all will learn from their youth the tenets of faith and their detail, and to reinforce each and every detail by means of scripture which is explicated in Torah, which the author shall explain, to show them the correctness of the matter and its belief. Moreover, when they grow up and stop studying Mishnah and Talmud, they will not abandon this knowledge,¹⁷⁸ which is necessary for life in both worlds.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, books of rational ethics need to be written for use at school, including books on manners and civility, which are in the realm of human mores and only marginally related to the divine laws. Others should deal with the human spirit and its capabilities such as wisdom and ignorance, faith and stubbornness, joy and sadness, love and hate, generosity and miserliness, and many other matters such as these. And since almost all of the moral dicta of this kind are related to the divine

¹⁷⁷ This is a very bold statement, as it suggests that human knowledge, especially philosophy, outshines divine knowledge.

¹⁷⁸ That is, their religious tenets.

¹⁷⁹ Jewish and secular.

commandments—for example, “You shall not covet,” “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge.”¹⁸⁰ “You shall not have your brother in your heart,”¹⁸¹ and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”¹⁸²--and also the words of the prophets such as “Stubbornness of heart is an abomination to the Lord,” “Pride is an abomination to the Lord,” and many things like this—the authors need to arrange their writings in relation to the sublime Torah and to explicate them with good reason and appropriate order so that the words will enter and captivate the hearts of those who hear them in order to instill in them the instinct of righteousness so that ultimately they will become wise and do good before the Lord and man.

As Solomon began his book on rational ethics (Prov. 1:3)¹⁸³ for the ethical teachings of our Torah, when the enlightened person contemplates and understands them well, all of them are righteousness, law and truth. They are pleasant and comprehensible to every person and, God forbid, that they should be in opposition to the reason of the Sages and scholars of the nations, or that any concern should cling to one of them.¹⁸⁴ To say that according to this assumption, any kind of obstacle might be encountered. This shall not be so in the Torah of the Lord. And also it shall not be so in the words of our Sages, the authors of the Mishnah and Talmud, which they correctly understood.

A significant demonstration can be cited from the matter of usury where the Torah said: “You may deduct the interest from loans to foreigners; do not deduct

¹⁸⁰ Leviticus 19:18.

¹⁸¹ Leviticus 19:17,

¹⁸² Leviticus 19:18.

¹⁸³ “For acquiring the discipline of righteousness, justice, and equity.”

¹⁸⁴ That is, everything in the Torah should be accepted by the wise among the nations.

interest from loans to your countrymen."¹⁸⁵ For the intention is that it is permitted to take interest from the local inhabitants according to their custom, for example, four or five percent. But when one takes more than the local law permits, he does evil. But from a fellow Jew even one percent is forbidden. It is a royal prohibition like all the laws of the Torah, which are beyond the understanding of man. See that when a generation numbers the good paths in which it engages them¹⁸⁶ it will never waver. If it counts among it that one has never loaned money at interest (Psalm 15:15), then they say in Talmud (Makot 24a) that this means even interest from a non-Jew, meaning that one lends to the non-Jew for a small charge. This is the path of the hidden ethics and it applies in everyday life.

So the author needs to separate these things according to their subject matter and arrange them in a pleasant way in order to make learning easy for the pupils who engage in it. He shall explain from the beginning man's obligation to his God, such as love and fear, walking in His ways, purity of thought, and the like, and also man's obligation to his king, counselors, and judges; and finally, his duty to his fellow man. All of this falls into the area of rational and sound ethics from words of the Torah, stories of prophecy, and the words of our Sages, of blessed memory.

These exercise books and what comes out of them should be suitable for teaching easy, accurate, and clear language composition in the holy tongue. Afterward, a German language master will translate their compositions into proper German. Yet despite this translation, the teacher will explicate the words to his students and make the students comfortable using both languages. They will learn the

¹⁸⁵ Deuteronomy 23:21.

¹⁸⁶ That is, the precepts of Torah.

Hebrew language and the German language. In any case, the textbook needs to be in the Hebrew language so our youngsters can learn better and with greater precision, understanding the roots of the language, proper syntax, synonyms with nuanced meanings on account of the laws and Torah of God. For if the pupils succeed and advance a level by learning also Mishnah and Talmud, they will be able to derive truth from the Torah's phraseology. Understanding language roots will be good for them for their entire lives. As well, for those who do not progress to study the Mishnah and Talmud and who will grow up to be artisans and businessman, it will be sufficient for them to study what they learned in their youths in order to understand simple meanings of the prayers they pray and to read books of ethics and the like. In addition, by knowing how to read and understand the German language, they will know how to engage in books of history, travel and business that the other peoples have written,¹⁸⁷ for such distinguished books teach humanity precious things about human knowledge and behavior, and its relationship to all creation.

CHAPTER 7

And how good is a word rightly timed!¹⁸⁸ For there now is being published the fine translation of God's Torah that the sage and honored scholar, rabbi, and teacher, Moses,¹⁸⁹ may God keep him, has rendered into the German language. As we have noted (chapter 5), much good for the House of Israel comes from this, for

¹⁸⁷ I.e., secular knowledge.

¹⁸⁸ Proverbs 15:23.

¹⁸⁹ Mendelssohn.

when teachers instruct their students in the Pentateuch according to this very precise German translation, they will condition the youth from their youth to speak in the vernacular and to understand the intended meaning of the text. For even now, if teachers stammer and cannot speak decent German, it will be impossible to translate the Hebrew material for their pupils such that the youths understand its meaning. Translating literally from an unknown language to a known one requires that both teacher and student are familiar with the language they speak¹⁹⁰ and speak it properly and uniformly. Therefore the teacher must translate the Hebrew text well into the language that is "sealed" in his students' heart.

Such is not the case when both master and student are linguistically deficient. The master does not possess the words to translate the matter for his students. And when a few words are corruptly translated into German, the students become conditioned to using them in other situations and therefore have labored for naught--corrupting pleasant words which are utterances of God, refined sevenfold.

Since most of the teachers are not proficient in Hebrew grammar, and even less proficient in linguistic eloquence, children hear these errors and mimic them and are not able to let go of them. However, by this translation¹⁹¹ all will learn in the same way. And they will be able to speak clearly and learn correct Hebrew grammar by way of elucidation from this translation. The fact is that teachers have not mastered both languages. When they translated Hebrew words, which they did not properly understand—with the help of empty and fractured German words and expressions--the Holy Scriptures and their pleasant songs were devoid of taste and

¹⁹⁰ The target language—German.

¹⁹¹ Of Mendelssohn.

meaning, unembellished and unadorned. They became for the pupils a yoke and a burden.

Many of the youngsters who were not successful in their studies, so when they grew up and left school to make a living in the land, sometimes wayward Jews would come and introduce to them books by frivolous and rebellious authors written in grandiloquent language, surprising them with their linguistic clarity and the beauty of their organization. They were seduced by their words. They made an inference from accuracy in speech about the correctness of what was being said, just as fools conclude that what they understand and find pleasant is true. Because they have never heard such fine and elegant speech from their teachers of Torah, they have decided that there is no glory in the Hebrew language and no sweetness or exaltedness in the sayings of Torah. And so they throw off the yoke to wander off aimlessly.

However, by means of this translation, which translates the bible properly, free of errors in German, the youngster will hear the divine Torah in pure and proper language and its words will enter his heart. And he will pay them¹⁹² closer attention and better understand languages' purity, brevity, pleasantness, good taste, and rhetoric. And the quality of language in popular literature will no longer lead him astray because he will understand the superiority of divine language over it and see how divine language sustains deep meanings with few words and that it does has none of the deficiencies of the popular language. Some of them will succeed in understanding the meanings of roots and that each one is based on a true

¹⁹² The words.

representation of reality, as we have begun to explain in our book, *Gan Na 'ul*,¹⁹³ and the other books we have written on this topic, and also in our commentary on Leviticus, which we have written to accompany the Mendelssohn translation. The will increase his desire to delve deeply into the divine Torah and thus he will become wise.

Look, my brethren, and see that this deficiency of the Jews – that they speak improperly – applies almost only to our Jewish brothers dwelling in German-speaking Christendom. Our Jewish brethren from Spain and Portugal speak proper Spanish at home and at work. The Jews of Italy speak proper Italian. The Jews of Britain speak proper English. Those who inhabit the Kingdom of France speak French properly. Those who live in the east speak proper Turkish and Arabic with their countrymen. Even our brethren in the Polish lands speak proper Polish with their countrymen, although because they originally migrated from the German lands, they have still retained the German language, albeit in fractured and jumbled form.¹⁹⁴ But it causes them no embarrassment, for the people of their country¹⁹⁵ do not speak that language.¹⁹⁶

We alone, living in the German lands, have no excuse to justify our ineloquence because we do live among those who speak that language.¹⁹⁷ They have skilled writers, elegant stylists and poets. But we have not taken the trouble to learn from them and to raise our children in this path. Instead, we have become accustomed to having our children taught by teachers from Poland who speak and

¹⁹³ Literally, "*A Locked Garden*," the term comes from Song of Songs 4:12.

¹⁹⁴ By this, Wessely believes that Yiddish is not a bona fide language, but a corrupt German dialect.

¹⁹⁵ The Polish lands.

¹⁹⁶ Yiddish.

arid and desolate German. Our Sages would not have been pleased by this, for they said, "Only one familiar with all the languages should sit in the Sanhedrin, lest he need to rely on a translator." King Hezekiah's men, all righteous and upright, said to Ravsheka¹⁹⁸ "Speak Aramaic to us for we understand it."¹⁹⁹ If the great men of Jerusalem who spoke fluent Hebrew also learned Aramaic, which was the language of the Assyrians, why should we—in whose hands remain only the little bit found in the twenty-four books of the bible, and who are dispersed among the rulers of the German-speaking lands—appear to be like chirping and moaning pigeons?²⁰⁰ The holy tongue is a matter unto itself and the German tongue is a matter unto itself, the former being for holy matters of faith and Torah, the latter being for worldly matters--business transactions, local traditions, and civility, arts, and sciences.

It is worth noting that sometimes popular Christian Sages and giants in matters of faith and thought speak with us. When he desires a Jewish scholar to interpret a verse or saying for him, or translate a word idiomatically, behold, the scholar's corrupt speech obscures his wisdom. "And through speech, the God of Jacob told of His glory to the nations."²⁰¹ For all human beings are obligated to teach each other about that which they have seen of God's glory and greatness, and make them aware of the truth. Being that most regimes in the world, praised be God, are today equally aware of the Lord, they all know that God is exalted beyond the perception of creations. There is no end to his power and glory. He examines every heart and everything is revealed to Him and foreseen by Him. He rewards those who

¹⁹⁷ German.

¹⁹⁸ General of the besieging army.

¹⁹⁹ II Kings 18:26.

²⁰⁰ See, Isaiah 9:18.

fear Him and punishes those who forsake justice. He watches them at all time and hears their prayers and conducts his world with righteousness. His holy ways are mercy and compassion, slowness to anger and fullness of steadfast love. Many of the principles based on the Torah of our teacher Moses, peace be upon him are undisputed by all religious people of faith, according to whom the principles all derive from the divine Torah. Everybody can speak with each other without needing to venture where the controversy between them begins, for there they have been divided and each one has its own tradition and practice which do not concern other human beings. Moreover, it is unbecoming for man to hate people of another faith or to instigate a quarrel on account of it, as it is more appropriate to speak about this in the realm of books of ethics and matters that are to be written, as we will note (in chapter 8). Linguistic knowledge is absent, thereby separating man from his brother such that when one speaks, the other does not understand.²⁰² For this reason, the pious and wise leaders of Israel have written many Arabic-language books on matters of science and ethics, such as *Duties of the Heart* by our master Bakhya the Elder, may his memory be for a blessing, and the *Commentary to the Mishnah* and the *Guide for the Perplexed* by Maimonides, may his memory be for a blessing, and a number of distinguished books which our Jewish brethren composed in the Spanish language. Now what is the difference between these languages and the German language? All are of equal stature.

When the youth learn God's Torah by way of this fine translation, under the tutelage of teachers polished in the German tongue, they will already be learning

²⁰¹ Citation omitted.

²⁰² Psalm 19:4.

more accurate German at school and will learn the rest of the language and its grammar. Furthermore, when they grow up and speak about matters of Torah with non-Jewish authorities, the verse that such authorities would like translated will come out of the Jewish mouths in speech pure and fine, as a result of having learned it from their schoolmasters, for the vernacular language will have become well-known to them in their youths.

Therefore youth will learn proper speech through this translation and from their youths will be careful to avoid rhetorical traps. They will come to appreciate the power of rhetoric and how it affects the listener's soul to the point that the speaker's greatness of spirit will become known through his spoken word. For one word leaves the mouth of three people, each of them a sign. And the one which is direct and considered will penetrate the heart of the listener and motivate him to seek the same thing. From this model they shall be the glory of wonderful poems rising over remaining types of rhetoric, for the poem is pleasing in every aspect for its scale and sweetness, largely by touching the soul, awakening the somnolent quality in it. But everything we shall say about this is strange to those people in our community without elegance and purity of language and who do not notice that numerous written books teaching knowledge and fear of God are written in poetic style, such as the books of Psalms, Job, Song of Songs, most of the prophecies of Isaiah the son of Amotz, many prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and almost all of the Minor Prophets. In the divine Pentateuch as well, there are such wonderful poems as the Song of the Sea²⁰³ and the prophecies of Balaam, the Song of the Well,²⁰⁴ and the

²⁰³ Exodus 15.

²⁰⁴ Numbers 21:17-18.

poem *Ha'Azinu*.²⁰⁵ How exalted are these poems! How very pure²⁰⁶ the refined soul will perceive the divinity in them.

Nevertheless, most of our community neither sees nor perceives this while among the nations which have continued from antiquity—because they have been inspired to devote themselves to elegance of language, spiritual wisdom and other types of wisdom—because they were inspired to do all of that, they raised and fostered great poets. For they understand that poetic skill is a marvelous quality in human creativity. So why have we not seen in recent generations in the German and Polish lands a Jew becoming a distinguished poet? Is there any people whose ancestors and teachers have instructed them in the paths of poetry like ours in the house of Israel? As we have said, most of the books of the prophets follow this path. One cannot say that proper speech is useless if God's prophets and our kings and officials have chosen it, and some of the great gentile poets of our generation have testified that the splendor and majesty in the sacred poems of the bible are without equal, even among the highly renowned poems of antiquity such as those of Homer, Pindar, and Horace. Why then have we forsaken them²⁰⁷ and not followed in their paths?

All has befallen us because we spent our youth under the hand of inarticulate teachers who taught us to employ coarse and vulgar language. And the genteel speech like the wise and the great among the gentiles, that we did not learn—neither grammar nor elegance of style. They did not make us cognizant of the magnificence and exaltedness of the human spirit and the munificent gift of speech with which God

²⁰⁵ "Give Ear."

²⁰⁶ Hebrew unclear.

has endowed us—stamping the words that come out of our mouths with the quality of our spirit. For speech is the emissary of thought and the agent of perception. It cannot properly form its mission save by words purged of all corruption. So pleasant language—these are things which a person must learn from persons competent in that language. Furthermore, even if he has a great spirit, his perceptions will remain hidden in his soul and the divine fire will die down, for through the breath of his mouth he will not fan the fires in others' hearts and they, in turn, will not benefit from his light and will not be warmed by his embers.

Yet there is hope. Henceforth our children will begin to learn proper Hebrew and study in school the Pentateuchal translation according to this [Mendelssohnian] translation, in which the Torah's poems are translated into poems in German as well. Teachers will make clear to their students that a poet must be attentive in order for his poem to be pleasant in the listener's ear, and to awaken the listener's soul with his words, images, and metaphors. Thus he will awaken his students' spirits from their slumber. Many of them will themselves feel the benefit of the poet's work and will learn his ways. And some of them will reach the culmination of the process by themselves becoming poets and eloquent men.

CHAPTER 8

And here we have only spoken about a few facts of this matter. Concerning other issues like them that we have not yet touched upon, His Majesty the Emperor in

²⁰⁷ The biblical poems.

his wisdom has seen to, and the royal edict which has issued from him includes all of great import that has been briefly said. He has decreed that Jews establish schools to teach Jewish children proper German. May the heart of every wise person rejoice when he hears this decree, and may he understand the great goodness that comes from it to the children yet unborn. And to you, my brethren, esteemed ones, hurry to draw near to this good work, to establish schools and to fix and improve all that is needed in this matter. Through them there is hope to achieve this precious goal for the success of our children, as we have stated above. For every matter founded in its inception on justice and wisdom—it is easy afterward to magnify and broaden and become the salvation of generations to come.

But all beginnings are hard, all the more with the matter at hand, which would generate new things in our community—things to which our fathers and forefathers have not been accustomed for many generations. Indeed, men of renown like yourselves, let your hearts not fail, let your hands not weaken, for there is great reward for your efforts. For what you are doing—is it not to renew proper customs that were in our midst in ancient times? And did we not forget them only because of the enmity of our persecutors, as we have mentioned (chapter 3)? Now pay attention to put everything in order and properly supervise and oversee the initiation of this great matter. The main thing is to choose discerning and God-fearing teachers and instructors who know well the Hebrew language and its grammar, and also the German language and its grammar, so that the children from a very young age will get used to reading and comprehending both languages fluently. And to study Torah, as we have already said, there is no more correct and proper way than to use the

Pentateuch translated by our teacher, Rabbi Moses, as mentioned above, because his translation is in very clear language and it clarifies according to the simple meaning of the biblical text. The foundations of the translation are according to those commentaries accepted to us.

And if perhaps at present you will not find in your regions people fluent in both languages, you need to search for them among the entire Jewish people and bring them from afar because in just three years their living waters will be dispersed to the whole community. Many among you will possess the language of study and be of help to your brethren because many of your youth will take heart and themselves turn to teaching that which they have learned from the teachers who have come to you. Many will come and knowledge will increase. So too will it happen concerning etiquette, the sciences, and the arts. When some of the best of our children devote themselves to study all this in the schools of the wise of the land²⁰⁸—this one succeeding in this and that one succeeding in another--at the end of a few years, they themselves will be teachers and instructors of gatherings of Jewish children.

Thus may it be that books will be created on the subjects of faith, knowledge, and ethics, such that they transform the consciousness of the society in every community of Israel regarding what is good and what is not. (Regarding the difficult subject of prioritizing according to the youth's inclination and talent, may your youth follow paths of our Torah and may he be pleasing in the eyes of the minister and not be the cause of any discomfort, and may he be writing in precise and measured German.) Is there not a man of knowledge in their societies, for Israel is not a widower? Are there not individuals in every generation who know how to deal with

things justly? May they compose books such as these! But for now it is enough to study Torah according to the format set forth above, and to learn both languages properly such that, in time, there will be many disseminators of wisdom and good informers, and there will be wonderful trainers in all these disciplines.

Therefore you must pay attention to separate youths into groups and levels. A child should not be promoted from the classroom in which he is studying for a reading knowledge of languages²⁰⁹ and their grammar, to the room in which they study Torah, faith, and a bit of ethics, until the instructors check him and judge if he has completed²¹⁰ the first curriculum.²¹¹ Nor should the youth advance from the room in which he learns the Written Torah and its didactic values to the room in which he will learn Mishnah and *baraitor*²¹² until they judge him as having finished that curriculum. If they adjudge him unsuitable to study Mishnah and Talmud, it is better for him if he does not invest his time idly in the matter. Instead, he will learn one of the trades toward which his heart is inclined. And he will continue with Torah study and ethics in order that he will learn to revere God and to be a good citizen and to help his brethren²¹³ through his deeds and his work. So too, is it fitting to act in the same way as those few who advance from the Mishnah class to the class where they study the depths of the Talmud. In this manner, everyone will be successful according to his abilities and according to his achievements.

²⁰⁸ That is, non-Jewish academies.

²⁰⁹ This would mean German and Hebrew.

²¹⁰ I.e., mastered.

²¹¹ That is, until he has mastered this curriculum.

²¹² Extra-Mishnaic laws from the tannaitic period, c. 2nd century C.E.

²¹³ I.e., his fellow Jews.

Those few who succeed in Talmud as well after having already civility and general knowledge – they will be the leaders in the land.²¹⁴ They will engage in Torah for its own sake and also engage in the way of truth²¹⁵ to which they have been accustomed from their youth. In the breadth of their knowledge they will completely understand the teachings of Talmud because they will be good analytical thinkers. They will find favor in the eyes of God and man, and they will raise up our status among the nations. And their Jewish brethren, as a result of the elite – every one of them from his achievement and from his work will be elevated with them to be a help to their community and for the betterment of the Crown and Kingdom. For we were not all created to be masters of Talmud and to engage in the depths of the laws and to instruct in them. For God has differentiated between people and has endowed each man with certain abilities from his inception and everyone is complete according to its matter and time.²¹⁶ I have written in the book, *Gan Na'ul*, (1:4, A-C) and, moreover, our Sages taught, “One-hundred people go into a study hall but only two emerge as masters of Talmud and five as masters of bible.” All this is really true. And if this is true, why should we engage people in works that their creation did not prepare them for? If we did force them, we would be pushing them away from the work for which their nature renders them suitable. And further, there are several things and matters that people like them need to oversee. “Indeed, I know that you will watch over all the understanding that is in your hearts.” However, this screed, which is coming out for the first time, is not only a token of love and affection for

²¹⁴ This is a radical and visionary proposal that ultimately came to be realized in all but the ultra-Orthodox segment of world Jewry – the professionalization of Jewish leadership through educational differentiation and the establishment of special training programs, which ultimately became rabbinical seminaries.

those few of the masses who do not understand the main issue at hand²¹⁷ and who cannot judge between what is truly good and what is truly bad, but also to teach and instruct them about the purpose of those acts which the wise Emperor has decreed upon them. And to inform them that it is for their good – for them and for their children forever, both for their temporary and for their eternal success. But I have not written this for the wise among you²¹⁸ who understand from their own knowledge more than I can make them aware.

Now, my brethren, gentlemen, the leaders of this generation and its officers, if you will dedicate yourselves to correcting the situation,²¹⁹ according to the command of the beneficent ruler, His Majesty, then future children from generation to generation will bless your name and your good memory. And they will say, “Blessed are our ancestors who God inspired to do these things for our benefit.” On all of you may the honor and glory of His Majesty the Emperor be magnified. He is the one who commands this and makes good and fine decrees for all the inhabitants of his land and he has not forgotten our community as well. And he has also commanded them in order to augment the common good and welfare. And anyone who grows up in wisdom among our youth, from generation to generation, to do noble work for the good of the general community, by him may his Majesty Joseph II be called the wise ruler by the natives in the land, the common folk. And may all recognize him as a

²¹⁵ Human knowledge.

²¹⁶ That is, his natural qualities and potential for growth.

²¹⁷ The decree of Emperor Joseph II.

²¹⁸ The intelligentsia. Yet this statement is belied by that fact that Wessely's pamphlet and sophisticated Hebrew was not widely accessible, but rather was limited to, and therefore directed at, the elites of Jewish society—first and foremost Wessely's fellow *maskilim*.

²¹⁹ That is, the current state of Jewish communal education.

man whose energy is for doing good and declare it to the Creator on high every day
that he sustains us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Altmann, Alexander. *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

Breuer, Mordecai and Michael Graetz. "Jewish Enlightenment and Education," in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, I, Tradition and Enlightenment 1600-1780*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Encyclopedia Judaica, X, XV, XVI. Jerusalem: Keter, 1996.

Feiner, Shmuel. *The Jewish Enlightenment in the Eighteenth-Century*. Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2002.

Feiner, Shmuel, and David Sorkin, eds. *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*. London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001.

Gilman, Sander L. and Jack Pipes, eds. *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing in German Culture 1096-1996*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Graetz, Heinrich. *History of the Jews*, V. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967.

Graetz, Michael, "The Jewish Enlightenment," in Michael A. Meyer (ed.), *German-Jewish History in Modern Times, I, Tradition and Enlightenment 1600-1780*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Hampson, Norman. *The Enlightenment*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

Hazard, Paul. *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: World Publishing, 1969.

Hyman, Paula. "Who Is an Educated Jew?" *Sh'ma*. Feb. 2002.

Katz, Jacob. *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Katz, Jacob. *Tradition and Crisis*. New York: Schocken Books, 1993.

Koch, H.W. *A History of Prussia*. New York: Longman, 1978.

Mendes-Flohr, Paul and Jehuda Reinharz, eds. *The Jew in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Meyer, Michael A. *The Origins of the Modern Jew*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967.

Pelli, Moshe. "Naphtali Herz Wessely's Attitude toward the Jewish Religion as a Mirror of a Generation in Transition." (Unpublished paper.) Jerusalem: National Library of Israel, 1973.

Roehr, Sabine. *A Primer on the German Enlightenment*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1995.

Shavit, Zohar. "David Friedländer and Moses Mendelssohn Publish the *Lesebuch für jüdische Kinder* in *Yale Companion to Jewish Writing and Thought in German Culture 1096-1996*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Sorkin, David. *The Berlin Haskalah and German Religious Thought*. Portland, Oregon: Valentine Mitchell, 2000.

Sorkin, David. *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780-1840*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Wessely (Wessely), Naphtali Herz. *Divrei Shalom v'Emet*. Berlin, 1782.