

LEON MODENA
HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK

Submitted as part require-
ment towards Rabbinical de-
gree ---

by

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To my
Father and Mother

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Table of Contents.

Introduction	1 - 3
Biographical Sketch	3 - 18
Activities of Leon Modena	19 - 29
Attitude to Christianity and Christians .	30 - 37
Attitude to the Qabbala	38 - 43
Attitude to Talmud and Tradition	44 - 79
Conclusion	80 -

LEON MODENA

Introduction

I

To understand the life and work of Leon Modena we must first try and catch a glimpse of the background of his environment, and the spirit of the age in which he lived. Centuries of uninterrupted persecution and oppression had a degrading effect upon the cultural life of the Northern Jew. Shut up in the Ghetto walls, unable to have intercourse with the outside world, and denied every privilege due a human being, it was but natural that the intellectual horizon of the Jew be small and narrow.

The Jews in Italy did not, indeed, either in learning or in their social and political position, sink to the depth of their co-religionists in some other parts of Europe. On the contrary, they took an active interest and an actual part in the cultural life of the country. ¹ The Renaissance, born in Italy, was a movement in which the Jews had a hand. "In the time of the Renaissance we find that the Jews had a part in this movement which broke the power of the Church in Italy, and loosened the minds of men and raised them to loftier heights of ² dignity.

1. Marx, A. H.U.C. Year ~~Bk.~~ 1924 - p.605

2. Karpeles, G. A Sketch of Jewish History. Phil., 1897 - *Annual*
Pp. 75-76

The period of the Reformation was promoted by the Renaissance. The outstanding characteristic of this period is that it was essentially a movement which stressed the critical examination of traditional views. The horizon of men was being changed and enlarged by new inventions and discoveries which opened before them a vista of unnumbered possibilities. The discovery of America, the work of Copernicus, the establishment of printing presses, all served to help men acquire a broader outlook upon life and upon the universe in which they lived.

While this movement had not a very deep influence on the Jews, it did not pass entirely unnoticed by them.³ The great mass of Jewry cleaving to its Rabbinic - Talmudic Judaism was little influenced in its principles and outward form of living by the spirit of the sixteenth century. This spirit brought to the Jew only more poignant suffering and hatred. But despite the persecution, the Jews could not help imbibing a modicum⁴ of this new influence, which was potent within their ranks.

The seventeenth century made more firm the chains of the Jews, and we find that a few vigorously protested against the yoke. The great body of Talmudic law weighed them down, and the Kabbala of Luria, Vital, and others had them in firm grasp. "However", says Graetz, "in this thick unsightly crust overspreading the Kabbala, some rifts and chinks appeared, which indicated disintegration. Here and there were found unprejudiced men ,

3. Deutsch, G. The Hist. of the Jews. N.Y. 1921 - p.93
 4. Geiger. Leon da Modena - Breslau 1856 - p. 5

who felt and expressed doubts as to the truth of Judaism in its later Rabbinical and Kabbalistic form. Many went further and included Talmudical interpretations." ⁵ Some spoke with open audacity of the outrage, but these were pursued bitterly and silenced; while others kept their bitterness to themselves, only revealing themselves when they believed themselves unobserved. These are noteworthy men! In such Jewish men, who, in their own circles, protested either openly or secretly against the ignorance and intolerance which was superimposed upon them, the criticism of the Judaism of their day and the rejection of its demands assumed an entirely new form. Among these men Leon ⁶ Modena stands foremost!

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Biographical Sketch

A.

As a rule, the Jewish historian suffers from a paucity of biographic data. He is forced to rummage about and gather material from all corners and ends in order to form a mosaic picture of the life and works of his author. This, however, is not true of Leon Modena. He has through his writings, especially in their prefaces and other additions, given us much more detail about his activity than the majority of Jewish authors of former times. ⁷ His autobiography -- "הקדמה" -- which he prepared for the use and benefit of the posterity who might pos-

5. Graetz: Vol. V p.55
 6. Geiger: Leon da Modena - Breslau 1856 -- p. 6
 7. Blau, L. Jahresbericht der Landes -- Rabbinerschule in Budapest für das Schuljahr 1904 -1905 -- p.57

sibly be interested in his life's course, is a biographical memorial, which saves the investigator the trouble of collating the individual data.

Geiger says of Leon Modena, "A remarkable man this Rabbi Judah Aryeh, or Leon da Modena: A man with two exteriors, who throughout his life, never revealed what was inmost in his heart; who did not dare trust to anyone a manuscript bearing his name. A man who performed his manifold duties as a Rabbi, and then turned upon the Talmudic system and its founders with wrath. He spurned the centuries - old, firmly founded truths, but believed in alchemy, astrology, and necromancy!! A turbulent and harried life that commands our admiration and sympathy, and yet repulses us."

The family, Modena, migrated from France to Italy. They established a temporary home at Viterbo, and from which, according to the custom of the time, they took their name. The seal of the family was a leopard standing on his hind legs holding a ¹⁰ ^{לולב} in his paws.

Leon's grandfather, R. Mordecai ben Isaac ben Moses was a very distinguished physician who was given the title of "Knight of the Golden Fleece" by Charles V. He lived in Bologna where

8. In his ^{יהודה} ^{ה"י} ^{ה'הוד}, Modena says: p.9 --

נה לי יותכ מעשנים וארבע שנה בכוהי בקרבי הפצתי להעלות בכתב כל מקמי הזמן אשר עברו עלי מעודי עד אחרית הימים אשר לא אמות כי אחיה: כי חשבתי יהיה יקר בעיני בני יוצאי ירכי וזרעם אחריהם ולתמיד הקלו"ן בנים:

settled after war in the name from that city by the first family name

9. Geiger: Leon da Modena, Breslau 1856 -p.6

he attained a reputation not only because of his medical skill but also because of his scholarly attainments. He tried to write a book like the *Sefer Joseph Caro*. He died in the year 1530, being poisoned by the physician who treated him after he had been kicked by an ass. He left his wife Gentila and four sons, the oldest of which, Isaac, was ten years old, and the father of Leon Modena.

In the second half of the 16th century a series of persecutions began. In 1553 the Talmud was burned by the order of Pope Julius III. In 1569 Pius V banished the Jews from his domains, excepting Rome and Ancona. Over 800 Jews were compelled to leave the city of Bologna.¹¹ It was in the wake of this expulsion that the parents of Leon fled to Ferrara, and from there they were forced to flee in 1571, because of the earthquake,¹² to Venice on the 23rd of April (28th of Nisan) 1571. He was circumcised by Menachem Azarja Fano, the cele-

10. ואמך לי כי מאז צאת קדמונינו מצפת שכנו ימים כבים בויטיבו ואח"כ באו לטולדינה ויאחזו בה ויפלו ויכבו ומהיותם ראשונים בחזקת חנות ההלואה ובעושי לקחו כינויים מהעיר ההיא :
(ס"ק-ח"י יהודה)

lit. from Modena

11. J.E. Vol. III, p. 298

12. ויהי כעש גדול וחזק בעיר פיראכה לא היה כמותו בכל הארצות, ככל הכתוב בספר מאור עינים לחכם מהאדומים הנז' וינוסו לנפשם "ו" ובני ביתו אל עיר וניצ' אה.

(The mentioned above was written by Azarja de Rossi 1511-1578) *פ. 14 ח"י יהודה*

brated scholar and Cabbalist. We have a letter of Modena written to Fano in which he recommends to his attention one ^{כ"ח ט"ו} 13 who had come to Italy as a collector for the poor of Palestine. He tells Fano that this man is upright and righteous, sacrificing in order to help the poor Jews of the Holy Land. *making sacrifices*

When Leon was eight months old his parents returned to Ferrara and from there the family moved to Colonia. Here, he had as his friend and companion, Gerson Coen, who later became the head of the Yeshiba in Polonia. Gerson Coen saved his life one day when Leon fell into the מקוה where they went to play. *Polonia* 14 In his autobiography יהודה he tells of the incident.

Leon received a liberal education, and in addition to the usual Jewish training, he was taught singing, music, dancing and Latin. We find that in 1578 Isaac settled in Montagna, *na* which is near Venice, and here with the exception of two years,

13. Blau, L. Jahresbericht der Landes -- Rabbinerschule in Budapest fur das Schuljahr 1904 - 1905. (NR 6) p. 5

14. ויהי היום ואני הייתי לומד משניות פרק מי שמתו עם כמהכ"ר גכטון כהן עתה הוא נאש ישיבה בפולוניה ואז היה ולכ כטוני, והטלמד הלך לו ונלך שנינו אל המקוה לשחוק בדכך הנעלים ואפול לתוך המקוה והוא היה טלג עכ כל גדותין: ויבכח הנעל ויקכא וישמעו אנשי הבית וירוצו עם א"א ואמי ויבקטוני כה וכה וטשלך עצמה באים משכתת אחת ותוציאני וישאונני החדקה על המטה מוטל כמת מיכאה וכחד: (15-16, חיי יהודה)

little town of ^{na} Motagna. He longed to go out into the world, so that his imprisoned spirit might find nourishment. He sought a remedy in corresponding with people of the outside world, or in visits to larger cities like Ferrara, Ancona, and Venice. In a letter addressed to his half-brother Abraham Parenzo he explains his desires and longings.

Up to the age of 13 he knew no hardships and had no financial difficulties, for his father provided him with money. His course of studies, we have shown above, was that of a child of richer parents of that time; for he studied not only Hebrew, but also Italian, arithmetic, singing, dancing, and music. But soon he says, "the stars in their courses began to war against us 'with a strong hand and outstretched arm.'" ¹⁹ His father was imprisoned because of a plot schemed against him by Cardinal Alvise d'Este who accused him of not paying 1500 scudo, which he owed him. This left Isaac penniless and his family had to suffer. Leon then had to do something, and in the summer of 1589, in order not to be entirely idle, he began to instruct several children. He pursued this occupation, which was thoroughly distasteful to him, until July 1612. ²⁰

Beginning with the year 1588, as soon as he was seventeen years old, his mother urged him to choose a wife from her family. "In spite of this", he relates, "I made a plea for a dream, without incantation, in which I could see the woman who was des-

His teaching started well
1589
Mean-while
(7/1/21)

18. Blau, L. -- NR. 20 p. 20 - 21
 19. ^{ה'ק"ל} ^{ה'ק"ל} -- p. 16
 20. Blau, L. -- p. 60 -- also ^{ה'ק"ל} ^{ה'ק"ל} p. 20 - 21

tined to be my wife. I dreamed that an old man took hold of my hand, led me to a wall, upon which were certain drawings. He drew aside the curtain, and I saw Esther, the daughter of my aunt, ¹ even say how she was dressed. But as I was still gazing, *saw* the picture disappeared and a new image appeared in its place, of which I could not get a glimpse quickly enough. In the morning I told the dream to my parents, but they were the only ones *delete* ²¹ who disbelieved it." He became engaged to Esther, the daughter of his mother's sister and the wedding was to take place in 1590. Esther was a beautiful and intelligent girl and very clever. When the day set for the wedding approached, Leon traveled with his family towards Venice, since they, at the time, lived in the outskirts. The bride was unaccountably ill; she felt death approaching, and so called to Leon whom she embraced and kissed. She said to him: "I know that this is immodest. God knows that never, during the period of our betrothal, did we even touch each other with our fingers; but now, however, this eternal separation gives me the privilege, since I will not have the fortune of becoming your wife. It is decreed thus above; May God do His will." ²² On that day (the 21st of Nissan) she died.

After the death of Esther his relatives urged him to marry Rachel, the sister of Esther. He wrote to his father Isaac asking him for advice. His father answered in a broad and liberal spirit, and left it to his own judgment. He said: "I will be

21. יתן לה -- p. 21
 22. יתן לה -- p. 22

taken away from you today or tomorrow; you, however, will remain with your family, which you will get with her. Therefore, you must choose according to your own discretion." ²³ In order to mitigate the anguish of the family he married Rachel in the summer (5th of Tammuz) of 1590. An interesting thing is that he changed her name from Rachel to Diana, because his mother's name was Rachel. ✓ On the Sabbath, in the Italian Synagogue (בב"ה) Leon Modena received the title of רב, at the suggestion of the assembled Rabbis of the city. ²⁴ Much trouble and anguish soon came to Leon. There was a great deal of sickness in the family, and considerable anguish, because of the plot against Isaac by the Cardinal. On the 9th of September 1591, Leon's wife gave birth to a son. The superstitions of the age held Isaac in firm grasp and he warned Leon not to name the boy Mordecai, because his son who was given the same name had died. Leon did not hearken to his father's request and named his first born מרדכי after his illustrious grandfather. The child grew up to be a promising youth, but died at the age of 26.

source? see p. 12

On the 6th of December 1592 his father died. ²⁵ Leon loved

23. יעשה כצונך כי לך משפט הבחירה, אני היום או מחכ לוקח מאתך ואתה ובניך תהיה עמה לכן בני תבין את אשר לפניך ועשה כיד הי' הטובה עליך: (ח"י יקודה פ. 22)

24. ח"י יקודה, p. 23

25. Both Geiger & Blau give the date as 1591, but in the text edited by A. Cahana p. 24 -- he gives the date as 1592

But December 1591 is correct, the Hebrew year which began in September was already 1592

Montagnana

his father dearly and his death was a great blow to him. His father asked that he be buried in Ferrara. Leon, however, could not take him there, because of the bad roads. Isaac was, therefore, buried in Mantua.²⁶ While his father lived, Leon had had many discussions with him about the soul and its disposition in the world to come. In this, Leon again shows his belief in dreams. "A month after his death, he appeared to me", says Leon, "in a dream, and said to me: 'now I know what the soul is; only after death does this become clear', to which I answered, "Well then, tell me how it goes with your soul in the other world?" 'I eat and drink very well there', he answered. "How is this possible, I said, since our sages say, that there is no eating and drinking in the other world?" 'now, you foolish child, who thinks himself wise', he replied, 'look at the end of the sentence: The righteous sit and partake of the glory of the Shechina, as it is said: They behold God and eat and drink.'²⁷

Such dream-visions, to which he attached authority, appear often in his reminiscences. With respect to his uncle Abtalion, who was very renowned, and who died in 1611, he declared that he had incanted the prophet Elijah and that he had actually appeared

26. On his tombstone Leon placed as follows:

קצין ושכ — צדיק וישן — נודע כס
 מלא ביה — שמש דורו, נשקצ אורו
 בקן יצחק איש מודין א: (24. מ. ח. י' יהודה)

27. פ"ד פ"ה י"ח, p. 24 - 25

28
 to him. Leon tells also that no long after the death of his mother, and shortly before the birth of his daughter, she appeared to him in a dream and said that soon he will be with her: he asked, perturbed: when? And she replied: Toward the last days of the approaching Passover. Solomon Sferno interpreted the dream as meaning that a daughter would be born to him, which he should name after his mother. A daughter was born to him, but he could not call her Rachel, since his wife's name was Rachel, but he called her Diana, which name his mother had assumed at the time of her marriage. Well known is the vision which appeared to him in which he was told that he would live four years and seven months longer. The next morning he put the vision into verse:

ה שֶׁצִי לִי יֵג ט ב ת	29 עַל מִשְׁכְּבֵי שִׁי הָהָ
מִוֹדִיעַ לִי ק צ י	חֲלָאֲתִי עִם נִבְיָא
וִינְחִימִים עוֹד שְׁבַע הָ	עוֹד שְׁנַיִם אַרְבַּע הָ
אֲגִיעַ אֶל כַּבֵּץ	תִּמְצוֹץ אֵל אֵב שִׁפְעַ

This prediction fortunately did not come true, and he lived on for twenty-seven years. Later he never once referred to his dream. This, however, did not shake his faith in dream-visions. The verse, "Dearer than wisdom and honor is a little foolishness", can truly be applied to Leon. Not only did he have great faith in dream-visions, but he had a still firmer faith

28. Geiger -- p. 8
 29. Libowitz -- p. 13

One interesting fact here, is the reasons he gives for calling his youngest son Zebulun. He had wondered why that name was not used more often. Was not Zebulun one of the twelve tribes of Israel? His name, too, then must be established in the ק ה ל ש א ג . Another reason which he gives, is that this son was born in Venice, the city by the sea, and it is said of Zebulun that $\text{ל ב ו ל ו ן ל ח ו ן ב י ם ש ך ן}$. Also because he was born under the rulership of Duke Marino Erimoni, called among the Gentiles מ א ר א י ם (Mare--a sea).³² His oldest son Mordecai inherited some of the genius of the father, who placed his hope in him. Consequently in 1612, he took the place of his father as children's tutor. The letter of his father to him shows him still in his childish innocence; and his brother Isaac, whose occupation by day was that of tailor, and by night, study, is shown as a refractory youth, the later vagabond.³³

His son Mordecai soon became interested in alchemy. Leon himself had been attracted by alchemy. To be sure, in his youthful writings he exclaimed against the occupation of the alchemists, saying that they misused their days; that while blowing up the coals, they therewith blew out their own souls, spent their money for it and gained nothing; they purposed to make gold out of copper, but they declined from possession of gold to that of silver, and from this to that of copper, and at last beheld ----- merely shame!³⁴ No more mild is the phrass used

32. ק ה ל ש א ג , p. 28
 33. Blau, L. -- NR 84 -- p. 82
 34. Geiger, A. -- p. 9 - 10

in his autobiography, as he looks back upon the many useless expenditures he had used in alchemic research in 1603, using the term *שכב*.

Geiger says of Leon: "He had, with an iron spirit, broken so many supports and thrown them away, supports for the fatigued feet of the traveler upon life's journey; his analytical reason sought an outlet, but he looked with dismay upon the skepticism of his contemporaries, and to this point his innermost convictions would never allow him to reach. He had to look for other props, which he could expose to the full view of searching reason, and in the absence of a thorough nature-knowledge, as was true of the period, astrology and alchemy appealed to him, which have always enticed restless, disquieted souls with their witchery of secret craft."³⁵

It was in 1615 that Mordecai began to busy himself in the study of alchemy with the priest Joseph Grillo. Mordecai soon became proficient in the art. He set up a laboratory in a house in the Ghetto Vecchio and began experimenting. Leon recounts how he saw his son turn nine parts of lead and one part of silver into silver; and also tells how he earned over 1000 ducats in a year carrying on these experiments.³⁶ Mordecai, however, soon became very ill because of the arsenic and salt which he constantly had to breathe. For two years he suffered from his illness.

These would have been a profit of about 1000 Ducats

In the meantime, in the year 1616, Rabbi Solomon Shmaya Sforno, whom we have mentioned above, died. Leon preached the

35. Geiger, A. ---- p. 9 - 10
36. *יהודה חיי* --- p. 34

who caused the hearts of all to melt at their grief and wretchedness.⁴¹ Zebulun was buried at the side of his brother Mordecai. Two sons had Leon buried, one, twenty-six years old and the other twenty-one. The troubles of this man surely were great!

His son Isaac too, did not give him that joy and consolation which he needed. He became a vagabond and wandered through the Levante and other countries of the east. In his autobiography he relates how Isaac in 1620 returned to Venice practically naked and without any money. He had been wandering about for ten years. Leon was forced to pay fifty ducats to the captain of the ship in order to secure his release. He hoped that if he would take him back to his house then perhaps Isaac would help him and walk in the right path. His trust was misplaced, however, and Isaac returned to his evil companions and evil ways. "Until", says Leon, "I urged him in Iyar 1621 to return to the Levante, and I also gave him twenty ducats to send him on his way."⁴² Thus does Leon lament: "For I had three sons, all from twenty years and upward. One died, one was killed, and one is in exile. And two daughters have I. One is a widow, and one is unhappily married. I have been satiated with bitterness, poverty, and every trouble from the day of my birth until now. Surely, I cannot see consolation in this world."⁴³

Leon, because of his great sorrow and unhappiness, tried to get away from the world and its realities. And the thing which appealed to him and which seemed to satisfy that longing was card-

41. ה'ת"ן י"ח p. 40 - 41

42. Ibid p. 38

43. Libowitz -- pp. 11, 12 -- (taken from the הקדמה לסיקני יהודה)

aided by Leon (11.34)

playing. He gambled and lost huge sums of money, which he badly needed for the support of his family. He was, however, a truthful man and never denied his short-comings and his mistakes. He constantly bemoaned the fact that the השמים נסיון ensnared, causing him to go back to the gaming table, when he had fully determined never to return to it again. He relates how in 1601 R. Joseph Fardo conceived the idea of writing a commentary on the Torah. This was to be in the form of a compilation of all the commentaries that had already been written. When he began he had twenty-seven compositions before him and from these he gathered the simplest; those which he thought would serve the needs of the layman. "And in truth, if I had finished it, it would have been a fine work." ⁴⁴ He completed only בגדל, פנין, ופשיטתו because he did not stop gambling, and Joseph Fardo, seeing that he made no progress, took the commission out of his hands. He says that from Ab 1634 to Adar 1635 he was able to gather more money than he ever had. However, between Ab and El-lul he lost 200 ducats and in Hesvan, Kislev, and Shvat 1635, ^{44a} he lost about 400 more. This would add to his sorrow and grief, and his life was a constant struggle and worry.

44. ה'ת"ל -- p. 29
 44a. ה'ת"ל -- p. 52

The whole of this page should have been cancelled with p. 25.

Activities of Leon Modena

B.

In order to support his family he undertook all sorts of work. He counts twenty-six occupations, all of which brought him some income. He served chiefly as corrector and proof reader, since he was greatly interested in everything connected with literature and printing. All the work which he did, he loved, except that of instructing the youth. This he hated all his life, as we have already pointed out above. In the year 1595 he writes to Azarja Fano as follows: ⁴⁵ "It is known to your excellency, how much I would like to print your work; for all the days of my life I have taken pains to print many books without end. No one carries this wish so much at heart, as I. I hope also to print my own works for I have begun many and as soon as I come to rest, I will end them". He took care of everything, printing and proof reading, the entire plant and censorship.

One of the first accomplishments of Leon in this field was the printing of the ^KCabbalistic Siddur of Menachem Azarja Fano. The cost and sale of this siddur was taken care of by Fano ⁴⁶ himself who was a rich man. He was greatly interested in the new printing of the Talmud which was planned at this time, and concerning which, he wrote a message to the congregations. We do not know exactly what part he had in the publication of the

Life

1523 to the Prince of Mantua, and in 1532 to Duke Adr. Grite.

50

In his autobiography Leon gives us a list of his works which are numerous and varied. He prefaces them by saying: "For this to me is a great consolation; that my name will not be wiped out from Israel and from the world during all the days (that the world exists) in spite of death, and in spite of these bad times".

51

Let us return for a while to the external events of his life. we have already mentioned the misfortunes which befel him because of his sons and his sons-in-law. If his married life were happier, he probably would have had some consolation. Unfortunately, however, his wife became very melancholy, and at last fell into complete insanity. Time after time does he lament his unhappy state.

1 year copy here Blau p. 76

In his autobiography he relates how his son Isaac, after he had returned from the east, married. Soon, however, he again fell into his old ways. For eighteen months he did not come near his father and Leon did not come to him because he was ashamed of his actions and evil ways. "May God be praised though He has not shown me the happiness of children. Of the three (sons) that I had, only sorrow and sighing (did I have). Were it not for the students that I had, and brought up to be *בני חינוך* and teachers in Israel, that they are called my sons, they will be my consolation."

52

50. Blau, L. --- p. 66

51. *הקדמה*, p. 42
(The entire list of his works will appear at the end.)

52. *הקדמה*, p. 53

Although, in his autobiography we find that Leon speaks of his wife with a certain tenderness and sympathy, yet we know that his married life was an unhappy one. The outpourings against the feminine sex found in many of his works are the distempers of a cramped soul. "His pertinent remarks to Talmudic selections are perhaps not put quite in the wrong place, for from some authorities of the Talmud like statements are perhaps also pressed from cramped breasts." ⁵³ In one of his letters ⁵⁴ which is a statement against bigamy, he says: "All women who do not bow down before men -- and there are very few of them who are obedient -- are a millstone around the neck of the man, and especially, if there are several of them and most particularly in these times, when the daily bread is so hard to procure". As was said above, there was, however, a strain of tenderness in the places where he mentions his wife. In a letter to his oldest son Mordecai in 1607 ⁵⁵ he mentions tenderly, his wife who, he says, is depressed over the sickness of Esther his sister. Also in a letter to Abraham Cammeo ⁵⁶ he mentions her with a great deal of sympathetic understanding.

53. Blau, L. -- p. 76
 54. Blau, L. NR 71 p. 69

והן כל הנשים אשר לא כרעו לבעל ומועטות הנה הציתניות
 כחיים בצוארו של אדם כ"ש כי תרבינה וכי תפלוצנה
 ובדורות האלו שקשים מצונותיו של אדם:

55. Blau, L. NR. 84 -- p. 82
 56. Ibid NR. 85 -- p. 83

אשתי אב"ת זה שלשה ימים על ענט דוי הקדחת כב ואין
 מכככל לה, והיא יושבת עגונה ובלי תשמיש הראויה, כי
 אין אצלה לא שכנה ולא קרובה, ואתה צא וחשוב איך לבי
 בל עמי, אך עיני אל ה' לשלוח לה כפואה מקודש -

His constant poverty, which was the result largely of his inability to withstand the temptations of the gaming table, formed the chief reason for his eternal complaining and his permanent ill humor. This he immortalized in the words "the desolate" which he always put before his signature. Leon Modena was a busy man, constantly writing and planning books. Many of his books had a good sale and he derived much money from them. But yet he lacked a secure existence. We find that in 1604 he had much trouble because of his card playing.⁵⁷ His class of pupils also dwindled and he was left without means to support his family. He therefore accepted the position of tutor to the sons and grandsons of a rich Ferrara Jew by the name of Joseph Zalmon. He left Venice alone and at the end of a month he sent for his wife and children. They all came except Zebulun, who remained in Venice.⁵⁸ He tells us that he was warmly welcomed by the community, and soon he also became the preacher of the community. He preached in the Synagogue each Sabbath, and also organized a *חבורה* of young men whom he taught. He complains of too much work! In spite of the honor which he received and the money he made, he was not happy, because he constantly longed to go back to Venice, the city he loved. In 1605 his brother-in-law Moses Simcha died. He was a young man, only 33 years of age, and Leon found an excuse to leave

57. *ה'ת"ס* -- p. 30
58. *Ibid*

Florence

Ferrara and go back to Venice, so that he could care for the family which Moses Simcha left. We find him teaching again in Venice; then he went to Firenze as preacher and teacher. In 1609 we find him in Florence as teacher and preacher, but there he stayed only one year. There is to be found no single writing dated from Florence.⁵⁹

In 1610 he returned to Venice where he remained and worked till the end of his life. His chief occupation was the position of teacher, but he also preached and often succeeded in literary undertaking. So, he earned 500 ducats from the edition of the Bible which came out in four volumes in 1617 and 1619. He was at the same time a rabbi, but from this he drew no fixed wage. One of his former pupils, Gerson Belgrado, gave him at one time four pickled tongues and at another time three more. In his letter to Gerson he touchingly remarks that other students had forgotten him.⁶⁰

During these years we know that means of subsistence were not wanting to Leon. In fact there were times when his income

59. Blau, L. p. 77
60. Blau, L. NR. 181 -- 168

היטבת חסדך עמי מחסד לאברהם עם סלאכי עליון
כי הוא האכילם שלש לשונות ואתה שחת לי אכבעה
מהם. היו לי חן מלבד הגשוחה בעצמה בראותי
כי נכרתני אצלך ואולי לא השלכת אחי גוך כאשר
עשו לי כמה וכמה אחיים אשר חן וכבוד נתתי להם
ועל לשונותיך לשונותיהם צדקך:

The city of Venice was notorious for its card playing, although it was quite prevalent in Italy. Blau brings facts to prove that card playing was perhaps founded in Venice, and that first playing card factories were established there, and that in 1506 a play exhibition was released. Lotto also originated in Venice.⁶⁵ This passion for card playing was not only widespread among the nobility and the upper classes, but it was also general among the working classes. The casinos and the private salons did a rushing business, being the rendezvous of these workers.

Blau quotes Molmenti concerning the characteristics of the Venetian people of the 18th century. This fits, he says, the 17th century also, in which Leon lived.⁶⁶ "While the people gave themselves over to boisterous merrymaking, the nobles and citizens passed their nights in card playing, and in the various kinds of playing they lost the 'Zecghines' gathered by their fathers. The play houses, the Casinos, the cafe s were the favorite gathering places of the men and women. The poorer ones contended with the wealthier ones and after they had lost their last ducat they played away their watches, their rings, etc. -- all their jewels which they had with them." It should not be surprising therefore, that Leon should have become a slave to card playing. Especially when we remember that his youth was spent in the company of his two step-brothers, who were passion-

65. Blau, L. -- p. 79

66. ibidem: from Molmanti, La vie privee a Venice.
(Venice 1882) -- p. 347 ff.

ate gamblers. The milieu in which he lived as a youth was conducive to bring about a passion and lust for gambling which was hard to eradicate. Of course, it is hard to understand how a youth, who would write a book against gambling, could have succumbed. ⁶⁷ but he did; this should not be condoned, but we must understand the matter, for Leon was merely a child of his age, and he succumbed, as did many others, to a generally spread custom, which in addition, was awakened in him in his childhood through the evil examples of his brothers. We cannot, says Blau, ⁶⁸ accept the statement of Libowitz that Leon was a martyr to his people, and lost great sums to the nobles in order to bring about in them a better opinion of his coreligionists. He merely did what most people in his environment accepted as the natural thing.

A very interesting thing which is brought to our attention by Blau ⁶⁹ in this connection is of a controversy which raged in Amsterdam during the life of Leon Modena. It seems that one year, on ^{תורה} שמחת תורה the young people of the city put on wo-

67. Leon wrote ^{כ"ג} ^{מ"ג} when only 13 years old. This book was often published in many cities. Leon mentions that it was published in Venice and in Prague.

68. Blau, L. -- p. 80 - 81 The statement of Libowitz is found in his book -- ^{כ"ג} ^{מ"ג} ^{תורה} ^{שמחת} ^{תורה}

New York, 1901 -- Second edition -- p. 15 ff

^ל ^ו ^ח ^כ ^מ ^ו ^ה ^ש ^כ ^ל ^ו ^כ ^י ^ה ^צ ^ח ^ו ^ק ^ה ^ב ^י ^א ^ל ^פ ^ע ^מ ^י ^ם

^ק ^נ ^ק ^ט ^ו ^ב ^ל ^ב ^י ^ת ^י ^ש ^ר ^א ^ל ^א ^ז ^כ ^ת ^ב ^ו ^ע ^ל ^ס ^ר ^ה ^י ^ש ^ר ^פ ^ע ^ו ^ל ^ת ^ו ^ה ^נ ^כ ^ב ^ד ^ה ^ז ^א ^ת :

69. Blau, L. pp. 81, 82

men's clothing. There was an outcry against this, and a controversy raged as to whether or not the young men implicated, did the right thing. Leon Modena, with others of his colleagues, condoned the act, and for this a certain anonymous person villified him in a pamphlet in which he said that Leon knew well how to play cards, but not how to write. Leon regarded Isaac Uziel⁷⁰ the chief Rabbi of Amsterdam as the writer of this pamphlet, and he answered him with a great deal of humor. "I, I am the least and poorest among all, for whose opinion there should be no regard, for I have a greater understanding for playing than for writing. I wish it might have been so, but unfortunately, it was the reverse, for in playing I lost in the fifties, while with the pen I earned in the hundreds..... I have, indeed, sin-

70. Isaac Uziel was Rabbi in Amsterdam from 1610 to 1622.

71! ואני אני הפחות והדל שבכולן אומך כי אין לחוש לדברי כי חכמתי רבה לצחוק מלכתוב מי יתן והיה כן אלא צר לי כי הדברים בהיפך היו כי בצחוק הפסדתי לחמישים ובמכתב חכמתי אני אף יותר כי היכוחתי למאות
 אמ כי נספכתי ואשגה הרבה כל יגיעי לא ימצאו לי עון אשר חטא בכרך אלהי ישכאל מיום היותי על האדמה כי עם זה אשר חזרתי על כל הטקרא ולא מצאתי בשם"ה לאוין, לאו "דלא תצחק" אבל מצאתי לאוין אחרים

ned much, yet my only sin is that I went through the Bible, and among the 365 prohibitions, did not find the prohibition "do not play"; on the other hand, I find others -----".⁷¹

Gamblers usually are credulous. "Playing is indeed the direct descendant of casting lots, through which, according to the ancient view, the deities made manifest their will to the people!" It has already been pointed out how Leon, in spite of his great scholarship and strength of mind, was yet taken in and misled by the various superstitions of his age. Yet this was in accord with the general view of the times, and it shows Leon to be merely a child of his age. We have seen how firm his faith was in astrology, in dream-visions, and in alchemy.

Leon Modena continued his auto-biography until the end of his life, so full of stress and grief. He died on the 27th of Adar (March) 1648.

Attitude to Christianity and Christians.

II

What attitude did Leon Modena have toward Christians and Christianity? He must have been well known among Christians who admired him for his scholarship and his ability as a preacher. In his autobiography he mentions that on many occasions Christians came to hear him preach and praised him highly for his eloquence.¹ We know too that he was very friendly with non-Jews, especially monks.² Leon's predecessors in Italy were in the habit of writing elegies on the death of famous Christian men and women, and he followed in their footsteps. Judah Muscato, who wrote a commentary to the *Muzari* called "Kol Judah", wrote an elegy on the death of the Princess Margareta of Savoy who died in 1574. She was also mourned by Azarja de Rossi in his "Meor Enajim." And so we find Leon writing an elegy in 1590 on the deceased pope.³

The Catholic clergy of that time loved the Hebrew language and studied it intensely. Leon being on friendly terms with them had many disputes with them and on some occasions even acted as their teacher. From his earliest youth he had disputed with Christian divines and had naturally acquired great skill therein. "Concerning the monks whom you have named, who told you that

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1. היה' "ח, -- p. 25, 39, and 47. etc.
 2. Blau, L. -- p. 69
 3. In a letter which he wrote to Solomon Sforzo in 1590 he mentions this.

he had disputed with me, I do not remember him. But it is possible, for they are more than locu^sts, those with whom I had converse. It would be good if you would practice yourself, in order to know what you should answer the assailants, for the name of God becomes hallowed through that." ⁴ The desire of the clergy for disputes caused the rise of a rich anti-semitic literature in the Italy of the 17th century. Leon wrote a eulogistic poem for the work of Fra Pietro Bel-Occhio. This work dealt with absolution by confession.

There were at this time two very prominent Christian Hebraists who were very friendly with Leon. The elder was "Marco Marini Bresciano Cononico Regolare della Congregazioni di S. Salvatore." This man wrote a Hebrew grammar in 1580 and a Hebrew Lexicon in 1593. Pope Gregory XIII made him the censor of rabbinic works, and he was the man who expurgated the Basel edition (1578 to 1581) of the Talmud. He died suddenly in Brescia in 1594. His chief work is a Hebrew-Latin dictionary called תבנת נח Arca Noe. This is a tremendous work of 1658 pages, which took him many years to write. Blau says: "The large work must have already been far advanced in 1581, for the dedication to Prince Giacomo Boncompagno is dated in Rome in that year. As it seems, the author, during the printing of the Talmud in Basel, where he,

4. Blau, L. NR. 200

הגאון אשר נקבת בשם אשר אמר שנתוכח עמי, אין
 זכרוני מעלהו אך אפשר הוא כי רבו מאנביה אשר
 עמדתי עמהם בשוכה על ככה. והנה מה טוב
 אם תחונך עצמך לדעת מה שגשיב כי נמצא
 שם שמיים מתקדש:

as already mentioned, published a Hebrew grammar in 1580, he also worked on the dictionary. That the printing was not completed until twelve years later is surely due to the necessarily high cost of printing, for the defraying of which, the author needed patrons." One of his teachers was Samuel Archevolti, who was also Leon's teacher. It was in this manner that Leon must have made the acquaintance of this man.. This large Thesaurus made a great impression on Leon and excited great wonderment in Jewish circles. For we are astonished to see that it was cited as authority in a Rabbinic judgment. ⁶ Joshua Benveniste, Judge in Constantinople, used the word אִשָּׁה as feminine in a document and he was attacked. He was forced to make a public statement in which he defended his act. He said that more than twenty years ago he had found in a very excellent dictionary written by a Christian scholar, the fact that the word אִשָּׁה is used twice as feminine in the Bible. He is unable to procure the book at present but will look into it at his first opportunity and will then refute his opponents. It is questionable, says Blau, whether he really knew whose work he was citing as authority.

The second prominent Hebraist that we should consider is Jean de Plantavit de la Pause, known also under the name of Plantavitius, who was Leon's pupil. ⁷ He made his acquaintance in Florence in 1609 where they conversed about the Hebrew language.

5. Blau, L. p. 71

6. Ibid p. 72

7. Steinschneider disagrees with Blau, and says that Plantavitius

Plantavitius was born in 1578, became Bishop of Lodeve in 1625, resigned in 1648, and died in 1651. Leon and this man were very friendly and Plantavit at one time sent two divines to greet Leon and inquire concerning his welfare. His chief work was his Thesaurus of synonyms in the Hebrew language. His work consists of three volumes, the first of which is called פֶּלֶאָסִימֵי; the second "Florilegium Biblicum", Lodovae 1645; and the third, Florilegium Rabbinicum, Lodovae 1645. Leon was greatly impressed with this work and he greeted him with a eulogistic poem.

In the last volume of his work, the author of the Thesaurus says: "Judah Leon da Modena, a great authority among the living Italian Rabbis, was my teacher in Rabbinic literature in Florence in 1609, and later through two years in Venice. Particularly him do I thank for my 'Florilegium Rabbinicum'". It can easily be seen, therefore, that this man was a great admirer of Leon, who marvelled at his mastery of Hebrew, which he could use with such marvelous beauty and fine technique. His ability to write poetry which was a combination of two languages and could be read at the same time, he could considered marvelous, and he cites one such poem of Leon.

It was the universal custom of the time for rich patrons to bestow rich gifts upon those who dedicated their works to them.

was not a disciple of Modena. Z. f. H.B. IX, 188 (1905) ~~g. 2. R. I, 371 - 375 (1910)~~. This reference I found in the notes of Dr. Deutsch on Modena.

- 8. Blau, L. -- NR. 179 p. 165
- 9. Blau, L. p. 75

The article in J.R. is by Rhine

Leon tells us in his autobiography that he was once rewarded by a Christian. Leon had to do this because writing meant for him, not only a means of expressing his ideas and thoughts, but it was also his chief means of gaining a livelihood.

Of course, we know that Leon loved and depended on Jews and Judaism. He had many disputes with the Christians, and expressed himself as opposed to their mind-befuddling interpretations. But the Christianity with which he came into contact was Catholic, and it had not permitted itself to be influenced by the spirit of the 16th century. So Leon had no new ground to work on -- he could only follow in the footsteps of his predecessors. And besides, he had to be careful, and could not express himself openly and freely. And so it was not until the last year of his life, that he could make up his mind to write such a work which he entitled

אגרות אבות. This book he meant as a protection for Judaism, and a weapon against Christianity. He never finished this work -- perhaps because he did not care to.

It is evident that from the titles of the five parts of the book nothing new is brought to light. The questions raised had already been amply treated by earlier apologetes.

In certain places he speaks briefly about the origin and development of Christianity: ¹⁰ "I have often tried to discover (he says) just what were the events concerning Jesus; what was the intention of his acts and speeches; and especially what his purpose was in calling himself the son of God. On the strength

10. Geiger, A. --- p. 51

of Jewish and Christian sources I have come to a conclusion of which I am as sure as if I had lived at that time and had been his best friend. Among the Jews at that time were various sects, which united in their belief in the mosaic law, but differed in the interpretation thereof. Jesus believed with the Pharisee group. But his quarrel with them arose when he declared that certain of their interpretations were unauthentic new ones. When the Pharisees saw that a young man of the people was differing with them on some points, they feared that he would become the leader of a new sect, and so they vigorously arose against him. But he also won followers, who agreed with him. To proclaim himself as divine was far from his aim. He was not a fool, and he realized fully his human qualities. It never occurred to him that posterity would in any way deify him. No; his aim was to give himself prestige, that he might be a significant figure in his opposition to the Pharisaic interpretations. That is why he called himself the son of God. He had to seem higher than the prophets and other holy men, if he was to be a victor. -----
It was only later that there developed the entire Christian dogma, which was far removed from Jesus and his purpose."

Here, then, we find in hidden phrases the same words that, a century later, were plainly and openly announced. "It is indeed a pity", says Geiger,¹¹ "that Lessing who lived a century later and arrived at the same view, knew nothing of Leon --- that, when he resurrected other fragments, he did not pull out Modena

11. Geiger, A. --- p. 52

from the darkness." But Leon wrote rabbinical writings, -- and what do most of those, who busy themselves with rabbinic writings, know of the world?

Although Leon was familiar with the writings of the liberal, philosophical, mediaeval Rabbis and was thoroughly conversant with their thoughts and ideas, yet they made little impression upon him. He seems to have derived little or no inspiration from their works. But a deep and lasting impression was made upon him by one Abner of Burgos, who, in the 14th century, became a Christian and assumed the name of Alfonso von Balladolid. Leon had in his possession the chief work of this man, and he added at the beginning a short preface for the reader. ^{12.} "In 1611 I saw this book, torn, in the hands of Joel Afron, who offered to sell it. At first glance I saw that its contents were religio-polemic, and I immediately decided to buy it at any price. As I read in it, I discovered that the author was that Abner, later called Alfonso, whom Jachia¹¹ has designated as a scholar of Nachmanides, and whom he has characterized as a man of great genius and high position. Indeed, only such a man could speak from real insight. I have my whole life had much converse and disputation with Christian scholars, and I am certain that I have left unread no polemic^{pl} work by the Christians against the Jews, or vice versa. But among all these I have found, no one who so well, and with such fine insight, understands the use of the words of the Bible and the meanings of the Rabbis for his own purpose, as this author; one can see that

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Studen

12. Geiger, A. -- p. 24

11 You should have had a note on Jachia
i.e. the author of Sefer haChofetz

he is a philosophic thinker and a thorough Talmudist. Until now (he wrote this in 1634) I have been unable to write a refutation of this book -- and for that reason I have considered burning it before my death, lest it fall into the hands of one unskilled in this matter, and he be misled by it. But I changed my mind, for I thought: perhaps God will grant me a longer life in which to refute it, or perhaps another scholar will do this." He never wrote a refutation of this book, because, says Geiger, tho' its Christian contents may not have pleased him, certainly the anti-talmudic part seems to have satisfied him. He possessed the book thirty-seven years and surely if he had wanted to he could have refuted it. As a matter of fact, in 1643, when he finally undertook to write a defense of Judaism against Christianity, he omitted all mention of this book, probably because it contained portions with which he agreed. Similarly, he probably said that he wanted to burn it only as an apology to later readers, for having had it in his possession at all.

13. Geiger, A. -- p. 25

K

Attitude to the Cabbala.

III

To attain the region of the higher spiritual life, in order to control, at will, the other world, was the ambition of the Cabbalists, and that to attain this wonder through the ordinary meaning of words could and must be accomplished seemed, accordingly, natural. The means of attaining this height was not only through the exaltation of the spirit and the ennoblement of the soul, but also through mundane performances. To achieve this end, a whole system was built up which had a firm grasp upon its devotees. Doubt was considered not only error, but sin and unbelief. This spurning of knowledge and rational thought, gave freest tether to the silliest notions and the most stupid thoughts. The $\text{אֵלֹהִים הַיְחִידִים}$ came to be regarded as the highest form of truth and knowledge, as the most ancient secret revelation.

Leon Modena was one of the few men of his time who had the courage to break away from Cabbala, and to reject it as worthless. Of course, his writings with reference to this matter, were not given out for publication by himself. It is only within the last 100 years that they have been published. But Leon did not deny his views on the Cabbala, even during his lifetime. His views were broadcasted, and at one time created quite a stir.

1. Geiger, A. -- p. 11

You might to have written for Joseph Chamiz -39-
used the text here a doctor (see 21/10 VII 261A)

His beliefs and views with reference to the Cabbala were expressed in two books; the first called שו"ת אור חיים and the second שו"ת אור חיים . In 1635 a young son of one of his pupils, David Finzi of Egypt, died. He wrote to Leon for some expression concerning the soul. Leon, therefore, wrote שו"ת אור חיים which deals with the reception of the wandering soul (ש"ס א). He says: "When another one asked me about this point, I gave an ambiguous answer, as though I agreed with the majority of the scholars; thus the world follows irrationally after custom; and whoever turns from the beaten path, whoever has seized the root of the matter, has the ill fortune of being regarded either as a fool or an unbeliever. But you, my beloved pupil, are like a son and I therefore need not deceive you." He then goes on to show that there is no basis in Judaism for such a belief. It has also been repudiated in the past by famous scholars and Rabbis. He also states that the attempt to prove connection between Cabbala and ancient writings is utterly without foundation; and that there is not the least proof or support that this belief has theologic-philosophic grounds.

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Hand

The most important work on this subject is the שו"ת אור חיים which he wrote in 1639 when sixty-eight years old. He did this for Joseph Chamiz, a pupil of his, who was an ardent devotee of the Cabbala and with whom he had various controversies. Here are the arguments which Leon gives against Cabbala which, he says, is based on the "Wissenschaft der Ueberlieferung". He says that

2. Geiger, A. -- p. 12
3. ibid

ש"ס א

Wisdom
 the "Knowledge of Tradition" is impossible and paradoxical. This, he says, is neither knowledge nor tradition, because knowledge rests upon its own grounds, its self-discovered truths. On the other hand, tradition rests upon the acquiescence of authorities and is independent of the validity of its content. Therefore, the "Knowledge of Tradition" cannot be bound together, for they are paradoxical and mutually exclusive. And Cabbala is not knowledge because all its postulates are arbitrary, mere playtoys in the hands of its believers who use it to arrive at the most outlandish and anomalous results. And then, too, it is not tradition! None of the antiquity knew of its existence; in fact when it first began to manifest itself it was condemned bitterly by the most sagacious scholars.

Then, too, a tradition must have at least the unanimous approval of its votaries. Whereas, we know, that the leaders of Cabbala have constantly quarreled and have accused each other of ignorance and rascality. The intelligent person, he says, will not accept the statement of Cabbalists, that a certain predestination of the soul is necessary before one can reach the heights of Cabbala.

Leon also shows a critical sense here, when he tells us that they are liars, who say that Abraham wrote the *Gezira*, Nechuniah ben ha-Kana the *Bahir*, and Simon ben Jochai the *Zohar*. These writings because of their content and conclusion, point unmistakably to their recency. They all forged writings never having been known in antiquity.

The words of Leon, as given by Geiger from the □ 7 13 ' 2 X

express better than anything, his real attitude.⁴ "The objection is raised that its fruits are sufficient evidences of its soundness; its adherents are believers, pious in appearance and deed, in much higher degree than the votaries of philosophy and even more than the Talmudists. So then let these good results bear witness to the sacredness of the source from which they sprung: it is a well known fact, replies Leon, that the most ardent believers in all religions are the most ignorant; the common people, women,⁵ to whom everything appears the same; the essential and the unessential; they raise difficulties for themselves, which are entirely unknown to the scholars. They are afraid of hell-fire and long after a taste of paradise, as they have heard it spoken of, and this gives them courage for their renunciations. Often have I envied those Jews who can attain eternal life so easily, while for the truth-seeker there are so many perplexing doubts. The latter achieves truth through earnest reflection, but what great courage he must need to side-step so many errors that are extant. The others, however, are entitled "believers", who despise reason, condemn logic as being foolish, are very considerate of the duties toward God, and fast constantly; for the banal phrases of the Zohar: "Woe to the sinners"; "Abundant is the portion of the pious," are readily understood by them... And to the heights of this belief, that fools and women have attained, do the believers in Cabbala reach; however, I can find no merits in this system. On the other hand I have observed other fruits of this be-

4. Geiger, A. -- p. 13 - 14

5. This is another example of his contempt for women in general, and their mentality in particular.

lief which must be pointed out as sickness. The majority of the devotees of the Cabbala, namely, are possessed by an unbearable pride. Naturally: They believe themselves nigh to God; believe that they are versed in His mysteries, by the combination of the most marvelous names. He, however, who possesses the cardinal virtue of humility and reticence, thereby puts himself far from piety. When one reads the works of the Cabbalistic Master-minds -- of Gabbai, of Shem Tob, of Cordovero, one discovers on every page this most unbearable haughtiness, as they consider themselves above the truly wise of Israel. I will but mention what they tell of Isaac Luria, who had said that he could not, in eighty years, convey what his soul had learned when it had spent the noon hours in the heavenly regions, where angels and arch-angels led him wheresoever he would go; detestable conceit, which Moses himself would not dare: far be it from me to repeat what I have heard on all hands: That is, that the Cabbalists had selected the Mishnaist Simon ben Jochai as their head and rock, because he had with equal conceit boasted of himself. He had said among other things: "I can free the whole world from punishment"! But I will not be a carper; but surely these mistakes are in the writings, and in such violent opposition to the scholars that they cannot be concealed."

The sad results, says Leon, that have followed in the wake of the above mentioned Science are evident. It has spread the most corporeal conceptions of God, and justly is the accusation made that its reverence for the ten Sefiroth in God must inevitably

Ascher (lived long before Modena)

lead to the destruction of His unity, which is at the very foundation of Judaism. It is for that reason, of course, that many Christians, like Prince Pico de Mirandola and Reuchlin, were greatly interested in the Cabbala, because they found in its mystic inferences a similarity to Christianity.

There is no doubt that there were many men who preceded Leon in the denunciation of Cabbala. But none was as outspoken as Leon Modena, who did not even hesitate to criticize the Talmud on this score. Yet he treated the Talmud, says Geiger, with the highest regard. Frankly did he examine every rational belief, and when Ascher ben Jechiel made the following remark, he was arraigned by Leon. "Glad I am that I know nothing of profane knowledge; and I thank God for saving me from it; for philosophic speculation leads people from the fear of God and His teachings." A fighter for rational truth was Leon Modena and a man unafraid and courageous in his beliefs. We shall see this in our final chapter, where we shall discuss his attitude to the Talmud and traditional Judaism.

6. Geiger, A. -- p. 15
7. Ibidem

Attitude to Talmud and Tradition.

IV

We come now to the most important part of Leon's activity, and the one which made him on the one hand a subject of derision and on the other hand, one of adoration and praise. The early leaders of Reform made Leon Modena their standard bearer, for they found in his writings, especially in the סוֹפֵר, agreement with their own views and beliefs. Even Graetz ¹ calls Leon the first reformer. Dr. Deutsch seems to disagree with this statement when he says: "Isaac Samuel Reggio is not entirely free from the suspicion that he has written the severe attacks on Rabbinical Judaism which are commonly attributed to Leon Modena." ² He points out in another place ³ that the two volumes, although published by Geiger and Reggio, are forgeries: "It would require a book to prove this statement. However, it may suffice that the language is modern; that the ideas are those of the Braunschweig Conference; that the books and their existence were unknown until published."

However, it seems, that Dr. Deutsch is wrong. In the reading of his אֲתֵּיבָהּ, his letters, the סוֹפֵר and אֲתֵּיבָהּ it can be seen that there is a great similarity in style and even in thought. There are can be no doubt that Leon Modena

1. Graetz - Vol. V p. 73
 2. Deutsch, G. "Theory of Oral Traditions" p. 39
 3. Epochs of Jewish History - p. 24

did bring these works into their present form. We shall see later whether his attacks on the Talmud and Jewish tradition were original with him and whether his refutation in the *נ'א אאא* is a sincere one.

Before we discuss the definite works in which Leon discusses his attitude to the Talmud and tradition, let us first see what attitude he displayed in some of his earlier works. One work in particular, upon which he labored greatly and which gives us an insight into his thought is his *נ'א אאא* which appeared in 1634, and which was the result of ten years of labor. *The נ'א אאא*

is an appendix to a work of Jacob Ghabib in which all the Haggadic passages are collated with his own commentary. He also wrote a table of contents for "En Jacob" nine years earlier. These two works he wrote primarily for his preaching and as Geiger says:⁴ "was vitally motivated by his passion for homiletic and adumbrative meanings in surprising places, which he, as a preacher, utilized with great agility." But as we look through these works we find another motive predominant. He seems to collect the passages, which had been omitted by Ghabib, with a peculiar prejudice. He seems to select passages which are themselves ridiculous, or in which the Talmudists do not appear in a favorable light. There seems to be an ulterior motive in his presentation of these Halachas, which throw so unfavorable a light upon the Talmud and the Rabbis. He says:⁵ "Should it seem to you that

4. Geiger, A. --- p. 17

5. Geiger, A. --- p. 18

many of these passages do not fit in here, and futhermore, do not at all belong in the field of Halacha ----- you will, therefore, learn a lesson and you will draw some benefit from it."

A few of his thrusts against Talmudic law will suffice to illustrate that in these earlier works he already shot his arrows and prepared the way for his later works. For instance, when he speaks of the necessity of devotion during prayer while commenting on the statement in Berachot 29b⁶ which says that prayers should not be too long in general, and short paragraphs sufficing at times, he says:⁷ "Whoever finds himself on a dangerous road is allowed to say a short prayer; thus it is that today, when all of Israel is living in constant danger, surely a short prayer (and prudently he adds thereto: after the order of prayers of the great synod) will suffice, and not so much prattle and vain poetry." And again referring to a statement in Shaboth 1b, in which the differences between the Babylonians and Palestinians are discussed, he re-⁸marks: "From this we can see that all the Rabbinical ordinances with respect to customs, occupational procedure, morals, are conditioned by time and place! We find more of this in the Gemara. This observation would be very valuable, if the scholars of the time would grant it its proper attention!" Many other observations are made by him which are indirect attacks against the Talmudic system. He cites passages showing that the Samaritans are more observing than the Jews. He attacks the whole value of Rabbinic

6. Berachot 29b
7. Geiger, A. -- p. 19
8. Ibid.

ordinances, and says that the passages in scriptures: "You shall not disregard the words, which they shall tell thee", and, "Ask your father and he shall tell thee," refer merely to the uprooting of doubt and not to the making of new statutes. He says:⁹ "The divine doctrine is complete, but in order to maintain its completeness, nothing must be added, nor must anything be subtracted; therefore, no prophet should add anything new to it. And how much more does this apply to an ordinary person; not to alter this divine work according to his whim."

Passages of a different character are also cited by him. These passages are collated merely with the idea and purpose of showing the irrationality and the foolishness of some of the sayings of the Rabbis. Passages like the one found in Rosh ha-Shana¹⁰ 23b where it says that the sun never shows itself on the dark side of the moon, because she might become melancholy; never on the dark side of a rainbow, so that the sun-worshippers might not say that the sun throws arrows from itself. In the same way, out of sympathy with the avowed plan of the avowed plan of the work, he makes use of the passage cited by Chabib¹¹ concerning a town which could not be punished for its lack of faith, because there was in it one פסל. He also quotes the passage where it tells of Judah Hanasi sending a פסל to a Persian prince in exchange for a precious jewel. He tells the prince that it is quite priceless, for it will guard the entire household. Modena closes with

9. Geiger, A. --- p. 20

10. Rosh ha-Shana 23b

11. פסל

these words: ¹² "See, what preservation power lies in the הַסִּיּוּן!
 It can rescue a town which fully deserves to be destroyed, because
 of its idol worship, and the place is forgiven because of it." He
 gives many other examples and his remarks, concerning them are
 ironical and bitter. He did not in the least agree with the Rab-
 bis who said that a philosophical outlook was necessary and the
 chief thing. " For him, a healthy human understanding was the
 most important, and the minutial of ceremonialism particularly
 irritated him." ¹³

We do not know exactly when this view became part of him.
 His autobiography, הַיְיָדוּת "ת" is silent on this point. It deals
 only with his personal life; his sufferings and torments and is
 very silent as to his mental development along this line. Of
 course, the spirit of the age in which he lived had a great deal
 to do with his attitude toward traditional knowledge. It was
 this same spirit which nurtured men like Joseph del Medigo, Uriel
 D'Acosta, and Baruch Spinoza. There was no lack of opponents to
 the Talmud, as we learn from Aboab's "Nomologia" written in 1625.
 The main purpose of his writing the book, he says: ¹⁴ "is to re-
 fute the opinion of certain of his fellow countrymen, who laid
 down and stubbornly defended the proposition that one should place
 no credence in the explanations received from the wise men of
 Israel, but that the holy scriptures are readily understandable
 by everyone, and should be literally obeyed."

12. Geiger, A. p. 21
 13. Geiger, A. p. 22
 14. Geiger, A. p. 23

The three writings of Leon which we shall discuss here are:

— תוספתא , תפלת , תפלת , תפלת , תפלת

The work תפלת is a refutation of the first. "Shield and Thorax" is the first we shall discuss. This work consists of two parts, of which the first contains the objections to tradition, and the second the refutations. In this work Modena posits eleven theses which Geiger has translated for us with reasons:¹⁵

1. The laying of t'fillin is not a Biblical injunction, but a purely human one. The passages quoted to substantiate the validity of the custom cannot be rightly construed to mean anything of the kind. Certainly, if they had that connotation, they would not omit all the important details. Through this interpretation arise also differences among the Jews themselves, since the Karaites do not obey this law ----- To make an addition to the teachings of God, and then to say that God has commanded it, especially since the non-Jews mock it, is not admissible.
2. The additions at the circumcision, as well as the uncovering of the member and the sucking out of the blood are not commanded by the Biblical text, and are, therefore, not practiced by the Mohammedans and Karaites; furthermore, they invoke a feeling of shame. And to preserve a chair for the prophet Elijah at this celebration, is something which can arouse only scorn.
- 3.. The additional days of the festivals are a contravention to the Bible. They are an unnecessary change; they disturb the premeditated holy number seven, and they cause untruths to be mentioned in the prayers.

15. Geiger, A. -- pp. 25, 26

4. The prescription for the Biblical death by fire is not through the agency of melted lead (poured down the throat of the accused), as the Talmud prescribes.
5. The possessor of a known vicious ox deserves the death penalty (as the Bible has it).
6. The command "an eye for an eye" is to be taken literally.
7. The assumption of an oral teaching to supplement the written destroys the latter. There is not the slightest justification for such distortion. To make the Talmud equal to the Bible is abominable.
8. Certain sentiments and judgments are found among the Jews, which are not seemly to Israelites, because they are foolish and against custom and decency.
9. Vows, the contents of which are against neither the Bible or good custom, are non-releasable, and the mischief which accompanies absolution from them must be hindered.
10. The many restrictive writings are detrimental. They add to the duties of man, and detract from his sense of duty.
11. The prayers contain improper portions --e.g. certain legends.

Now it is a mooted question as to whether or not these eleven theses were Leon's own. In the *השאלות והתשובות* he begins by saying that these questions were those of an erring fool, who lived in Hamburg and who sent these "questions" to Venice. Certain men of the Sefardic Congregation asked him to answer these questions.¹⁶

16. On the first page of *השאלות והתשובות* preceding the eleven

Now Geiger things that the man from Hamburg is merely a fictitious person. "There can not remain any doubt for a moment", says he, ¹⁷ "that the questions not less than the answers, come from Leon himself, and that his actual purpose was to raise the questions..... Evidently, formulation was given to these questions only by the one who intended that they should be followed up by refutations, and the formulator of the theses, who then later, becomes the questioner, is indeed one and the same person with the refuter. Why is this Hamburg heretic's name mentioned as little as the names of the Sephardic nobles who asked that the questions be answered? The witty and eloquent author forces his reader, by sheer persuasion, not to believe in the existence of the man from Hamburg and to hold Leon himself as the heretic." Geiger goes on to say: ¹⁸ "It is indeed peculiar that this set of questions, which originated in Hamburg,

"questions" he has the following:

מגן וצנה בעד חז"ל מאיש שוגה ומפתי חכם בעיניו
 איש כסיס שמו, היה דבר אז באמבולגרן ושלח פה
 שאלותיו אלה - - - - - ובקשו ממני נכבדים מן
 הספרדים להשיב אותו דבר כאשכ עם לבני,
 ולשואל שלא כהוגן כך השיבותי כשזכה:-

And then when he is ready to begin his refutation he says:

אלו הן התשובות ששלחתי אל האפיקורוס
 הנזכר על כל שאלותיו אשר באו לעיל כאויות
 להעלות על דעת כל מאמין:

17. Geiger A. -- p. 27 f.

were sent to Venice; there^{it} aroused the Sephardim -- ^{was} were answered and sent back to Hamburg --- that these questions were not only not known at the time, and not printed, but that they even were altogether hidden, and were not discovered at all until recently. All this assures us that Leon himself was responsible for these theses, and that he attributed them to another man, who lived in a far-off country, and whose name was not given; of course, he could not give the name of the Sephardim who lived right in his city, for his contemporaries, would quickly have discovered the untruthfulness of his assertions." He goes on to say that because of Leon's boiling unrest he needed an outlet. Not daring to express himself openly he chose this circuitous route of assigning the authorship of the questions to someone else, and outwardly refuting that which his inner self had been forced to express.

But as we look at all the facts and at the later evidence we must agree with Blau that the man from Hamburg is not a fictitious person. Because in the first place, if the questions in the 7351⁷³⁵ were the chief concern and the important thing, and the answers were merely subsidiary, would it not be peculiar that three times as much space is spent on the answers, which are less important and subsidiary to the questions? But there is greater proof, facts that speak for themselves. Blau has included in his collection the letter which was sent to the Rarnasim of the

Hamburg Congregations in which he speaks of this heretic.¹⁹ A man from your congregation was misled by evil spirits, they say, to come out against the oral law. Whether he be a Sadducee, Boethusian, or a Karaite, we do not know; enough it is, that he is entirely a heretic and an Epicurean, in that he dares to speak against the words of our wise ones. "We know his affair, for he has sent here a number of written objections and refutations of the words of our wise men, just as they occurred to him -- without reason or proof, to which convincing answers were given, for truth sprouts forth from the ground."²⁰ If he accepts these right and good answers, then it is all right; if not, he should be placed under ban, and this ban should be pronounced in the Hamburg Synagogue in the name of the Venetians.

19. Blau, L. NR 156 -- p. 146

שמענו וימס לבבנו כי קמה כוח באיש
 מק הלתכם כוח כעה מבעתו לדבר תועה
 נגד תוכה שבע"פ ודברי חכמים, צדוקי ביתוס
 או קראי מה זה דעתו לא ידענו, די
 בכך כי מין ואפיקורוס גמור הוא בהעינו
 אצחן נגד דברי נבואתינו ז"ל אשר הבית
 נכון עליהם בית ישראל בכל תפוצותיהם
 וכו' -

20. ואת דבני שמענו אשר שלח פה בכתב כמה תפישות
 והשגות נגדם ככל העולה על כוחו מבלי יסוד וראיה
 אשר עליהם הושבו תשובות באמנות כי אמת
 בארץ תצטח:

It is easy to see that the senders of this letter must have been Venetian Sfardim to the Sfardim of Hamburg. Blau says: ²¹
 "They do not say: We have sent the refutation to Hamburg, but "refutations have been sent." It stands without doubt that Leon, who wrote the letter, also composed the refutations, for which reason he adds modestly: "truth sprouts forth from the ground".

We also have the ban pronounced by the Venetians against this mocker of Rabbinic tradition on the 23rd of Ab 1618. This is found in the gathering of Responsa called $\square' \text{שני ארבע}$. Blau shows that the wording of this ban is similar to phrases in פארו ד' יס' and it seems to refer to this concrete case of the Hamburg heretic. ²² This is the fact of the matter as Blau puts it; that Leon Modena composed "Shield and Thorax" in 1616 and also published it in Italian. That altho' he was a freethinking man and in his writings made many critical observations on individual utterances in the Talmud, yet we do know from the new evidence that the questions in the פארו ד' יס' are not his, but those of the man from Hamburg; and also that his refutation of them and his defence are sincerely meant. Whether it be strong or weak is another question. He has, as he says at the beginning of סו ס' read many writings about philosophy and religion and exchanged ²⁴ ideas with many men of various degrees of knowledge. The attacks may, therefore, have come to him more fluently than the repulsion of them. This can easily be seen from the סו ס'

21. Blau, L. p. 88
 22. Ibid

24. "Kol Sachal" - I.S. Reggio Goritiae
 1852 -- p. 6

and *ה'נח נחש* where his attacks consist of sixty pages and his repulsion merely four pages: Yet we know that the *ה'נח נחש* is a sincere refutation.²⁵

Leo was far from being the originator of the attacks on the Talmud. Many men who came before him and who were his contemporaries wrote works defending the Talmud or attacking it. We have already spoken of Aboab earlier. We know too, that the opposition to the oral law was very prevalent among the Spanish Jews, the Sfardim, for it was a heritage of olden times, of the days of the Karaites.²⁶ This later strengthened the Christian polemic. Not without reason does Leon say that the "Kol Sachal" was written by a Spaniard.

Azarja de Rossi in his "Meor Enajim" criticised the Talmud. We know that Leon studied this work very carefully and made marginal showing that we cannot draw too far reaching conclusion from his occasional utterances against individual Talmudic passages, nor place him in the front ranks of those who fought the Talmud; but we must say that he meant his defense of tradition seriously, even tho' he collated the attacks and poured them into his own form. We can agree with Graetz that Leon Modena was sincere at each moment. He was a paradox, a contradiction. Although he was the author of the *שו"ת* he was at the same time sincere when he wrote the *ה'נח נחש*. Even though he collected data against the Talmud and the Rabbis, and hurled invectives against tradition,

*Contradiction
sincerity
with
above*

25. Blau, L. --- p. 85
26. Blau, L. ---- p. 92

yet his defense of the Rabbis, both in the "Shield and Thorax" and in the *ה'תל"א חלל*, is both sincere and true. He was not a secret fighter of the Talmud, as Geiger makes him, but a man who saw the faults of the Talmud and brought them to light. Yet he was, despite his free outlook, an adherent to the Rabbinic tradition, and he meant the defense of it seriously.

Let us ~~know~~ see just what the *שו"ת* contains, the method it uses, and then how he defends the Rabbis in the *ה'תל"א חלל*. The *שו"ת* is treated in two divisions; the first treats of the general phase, the second of individual instances. We will now attempt to give an outline of the book according to its chapters:
27

1. The universe could not go on without a purpose; therefore there must be a God. In other words, he proves the existence of God through the order existing in the universe.
2. The world is not eternal, because if it was, God would not be omnipotent and would depend on the world and on His creatures who have free will. He therefore, postulates the creatio-ex-nihilo theory of the universe. He goes on to say that we do not know what existed before creation. In the same way we do not know what our soul was or what it will be.
3. The world, he says, is homocentric. Man is the purpose of the world. Only Man's movements are unfortellable, because of his free will. Man is the plaything

27. Reggio's *ה'תל"א חלל*, Goritiac 1852, edition is followed here.

עמוי האלה
האלהים הקדוש

of God. He quotes Plato here:

4. There is an individual providence of man, because of a created world by God whose pleasure is man. He goes on to enumerate some objections and answers them.
 - a. Isn't it beneath the dignity of God to see all the details of the world? This, he says, is not so, because this is the very purpose of creation.
 - b. How can God see all the details of so many creatures at once? In the same way as thirty-two pieces of chess can be followed by the finite mind, so the infinite mind can follow these.
 - c. How can God know the doings of man's heart and his thoughts? Since God created them he created them in such a way, as He should be able to know.
 - d. How can God know the future? Even astrologers can foretell and predict the future; how much the more God, who is the creator of the stars. Furthermore, the time element does not exist for God; therefore he does not have to know the future.
5. Having posited the idea that man is created for the pleasure of God, it will follow that some deeds of man will satisfy Him and others will not. Using human analogy it will be seen that those deeds satisfying God will be rewarded and vice versa. If this were not so, it would be useless for man to try and do the good. This would make man equal to animals, since power of choice is to make

changes and receive reward for the changes.

6. If there are despicable and acceptable deeds in the eyes of God, then He must have given a law by which man should live. That Law is the Torah. His proofs that the Torah is divine are as follows:

- a. The Torah is so perfect and all-inclusive that human mind could not have written it.
- b. All the civilized nations of the earth recognize it as divine.

7. In this chapter he discusses the problem of immortality. He says that apparently we would disbelieve in immortality for we have had no clear proof that ^{the} soul exists, since no one has come back after death. Again it is for him who posits immortality to prove it, for upon him is the burden of proof. The Torah, too, does not mention it at all. It mentions only terrestrial and physical rewards, like rain, children, etc. Yet, says Leon Modena, he believes in immortality. He then tells his reasons for having this faith in immortality.

- a. Nature, he says, which never does anything for nothing has implanted the desire in man to live for ever. This is impossible in the body.
- b. The Soul is independent of the body for as man grows older the body becomes weaker and the soul (intellect) becomes stronger.
- c. Having assumed that man is so superior to the animal;

being able to move mountains and rivers and understand planets, created for the special pleasure of God, it is impossible that he should be entirely destroyed. And then man, if there is no immortality, is certainly worse off than the animal, because man realized the pain, and not *only* feels it as does the animal.

d. And then reward and punishment is not perfectly possible on this earth. There must, therefore, be an after life where the rewards and punishments of man are made perfectly possible. He then raises two objections against the doctrine of immortality and tries to answer them. Why, says Leon, did not Moses mention immortality in the Bible? Because he desired to increase reward for faith, and also, the people in the days of Moses, were not yet ready to understand the full significance of this concept. Then, says he, how can the soul exist without the body and the vessels (five senses)? We believe that angels exist, he answers. And then God, who created everything, would find a way to make it exist.

8. Why do the righteous suffer, asks Leon Modena? The problem of *למה צדיקים סובלים* is answerable by immortality. Very properly does God not punish in this world immediately, for then, element of choice would be eliminated. God therefore, created the body and the soul to be in constant conflict. The vicissitudes of the body, he says, are controlled by the *הגוף*, and no matter what a person may do,

his physical fate is inescapable. It all depends on his
שׁוֹב. The soul, however, is given full liberty, there-
fore it is fitting for us to choose the good in order to
get the reward. Moses did not find it necessary to speak
of this, realizing that his followers will understand the
question very clearly.

9. It is impossible for us to know how God metes out reward
and punishment. In the same way that a king met^es out re-
wards and punishments, so does God.

10. This chapter is a summary and conclusion. He says that
having proved these various fundamentals he is much bet-
ter off than he who denies them. For if they are false
and there is no immortality, then he has lost nothing but
a few passing pleasures, which might have brought pain in
their wake. He uses the same argument for the Torah. The
unfortunate part, he says, is that after Joshua, the Torah
has not been interpreted correctly and that he will suffer
both ways if he exposes that. But he must do it if he is
a truthful man.



Part II

1. The first part establishes the fact that man's duty is to
choose the way of life. This way is the יְשׁוּבָה אֲרִיבָה as testified
by most of the inhabitants of the earth. Our task now, Leon says, ²
is to see whether the teachers of the Gemara have understood the
practical מִשְׁכּוּל of the Torah correctly or not. Whereas, the Mo-

hammadans obey the Koran implicitly without adding or subtracting from it, the Torah of Moses despite its strict prohibition of change, has yet been changed by our Rabbis, by the Karaites, the fools, who understood the Torah like children. Also the Christians who discarded all the practical laws because of their inconvenience; by our Rabbis at times like the Karaites. For example, in the matter of $\text{לִפְנֵי$ where verse $\text{קָשַׁרְתָּ אֶת יָדְךָ$ is taken literally, "to bind them on your hand". And at times like the Christians: For example $\text{לְלַיְלָה$ of which they discarded the $\text{לְלַיְלָה$ and the wearing of them at night. Our Rabbis have failed to realize that He who gave the $\text{תּוֹרָה$ had too much understanding to enter into such nonsensical details. And if you will ask, is not our present code, the result of unbroken tradition; and secondly, that the Torah itself permits of interpretation, I will answer, says Modena, "that I shall try to prove the early death of tradition, and shall also discuss the second question".

2. After the death of the generation of Joshua, the Torah was forgotten by the masses of the Jews. Their leaders so interpreted it as to permit of idolatry etc. (it need not surprise us, for have not the Christians permitted image worship? Do they not believe in the Trinity; have they not declared Sunday the day of rest, despite the following verses:

$\text{לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל}$
 $\text{וְלֹא תִצְּבֵט וְלֹא תִשָּׂא אֲנָפִים}$
 $\text{יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד}$
 $\text{לִכְבוֹד אֵת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת}$

And even the leaders themselves forgot the Torah as is seen from

28

II Kings, 24. Most certainly was it forgotten during the 70 years in babilon. We must then assume that apart from a few fundamentals, such as circumcision and ^{me} sence Sabbath laws, the Torah of Moses was forgotten from the day of the death of Joshua, until Ezra came and brought it to the people. Everything again seems entirely new, as though, since the time of Moses, it had all vanished from the earth. We may truthfully say then, that the Torah as we have it today, we really received from Ezra and not from Moses. Now, Ezra surely did not change the law of Moses, but he interpreted it anew and clearly for the people. And surely, since he and his followers had so hard a time to convince the people of the validity of this, to them a new law, he could hardly have had time to instruct them in the minute details of the oral law. Ezra undoubtedly was too busy bringing the Jews back to the Torah to think up such ordinances as eating garlic on fridays, which is reckoned by the Kabbis as one of his ten תיקנות. If you are at all intelligent, you will realize that this so-called tradition is not Mosaic.

3. After the death of Ezra, the חסידים interpreted the Torah as they pleased for one hundred and twenty years. This went on until Antigonos of Socho, when the different sects began their fights against the different interpretations of past century. This, in truth, was the cause of the rise of the

28. He refers to the finding of the book of the covenant by יהושע during the rign of Josiah. This is found in the twenty-second chapter of the Jewish rublication Society bible, altho' Leon Modena has it that it is in chapter 24.

probably manuscript

of the sects and not the statement of Antigonos: ⁽²⁹⁾

אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את ה' על מנת לקבל פנים אלא ה' כעבדים המשמשין את ה' על מנת לקבל פנים.

This was interpreted as a denial of reward, and it is impossible to say that Antigonos denied reward, whereas he admitted punishment when he said: ⁽³⁰⁾ ו'הי' מוכח שמים עליכם. Further, if the Sadducees denied a future world they did not deny reward and punishment. But we must conclude that their objection was to the Rabbinic interpretations after the time of Ezra. [Sadducees later Karaites; and a very good argument against the Rabbanites is --- (though I am not a Karaite) that where they say that tradition is necessary to interpret certain vague commandments, there the Karaites agree, but where the Torah is explicit, e.g. אל תבטל גדי ^{אב} וה' לטטפת נין. -- e.g. אל תבטל גדי or where it uses figurative language, -- e.g. ע'ני it is there that the Karaites refuse to accept Rabbinic interpretation.]

Again, if chain of tradition were really unbroken, is it possible that a group of people would suddenly rise and refuse to lay T'filin and perform the other traditional ceremonies? But we must say that the rabbis were at fault in adding, subtracting, and changing the law, thus causing the rise of various sects. And even Christianity arose as a protest against misinterpretation. For example, the washing of the hands, which the rabbis put a

29. Pirke Aboth I , 3
30. Ibid

great deal of stress on. It is noteworthy that where too much emphasis is laid on a matter, its permanence is questioned. Further, the heads of the Pharisees, Shammai and Hillel had a great deal of disagreement, and if ^{the} chain of tradition was unbroken, that would be impossible.

Our conclusion then is, that at the second exile the Jews had no Mosaic tradition; because from Joshua to the first exile the Torah was altogether forgotten, and in the second period, the diversity of sects made tradition impossible. That it is only after the exile that they began leading a new life, as witness the various disagreements in the Gemara. For, were there a tradition, how come the disagreements? Even as late as the period of Rabbenu Tam there was a question as to a detail about T'filin. Had not Rashi and Tam seen T'filin formerly that they should argue about it?

Our first thesis, therefore, is proved, namely, the lack of a Mosaic tradition. Our next task is to discuss the second matter, that of permission which the Torah gives to each generation to interpret it.

4. When the Rabbis wanted to create a new law, and they did not find even a hint in the Torah for that, they were helped by such phrases as: "When a thing is hidden from you, ask the priests of your day." But this is a falsified interpretation, since it is given to contemporary teachers to decide only in actually doubtful cases. For example, in money matters, where the Torah could not enter into all the details of the trial. But where the Torah

is perfectly clear as to the rule, it clearly prohibited changes, additions, or subtractions:

לא תוסיף עליו ולא תגרע ממנו
 לא תוסיפו על הדבר אשר אנוכי מצוה אתכם
 ולא תגרעו ממנו לשמוך את מצות ה' אל תיכח
 אשר אנוכי מצוה אתכם :

Even in making a the Rabbis have dared nullify a Toraic law for the sake of protecting their own regulations; for example, Shofar on the Sabbath of Rosh Hashana. The carrying of a thing in is only a Rabbinic prohibition; and the fear lest one carry the Shofar in the prohibited , the Rabbis have forbidden the blowing of the Shofar on the Sabbath, which is a Mosaic institution. Note further their arrogance in interpreting

the verse: אפי' יאמרו לך על שמוך שמוך ועל שמוך שמוך
 to mean -- :

The Torah says just the opposite, that a prophet cannot create any new laws, and such stories as Elijah on Mt. Carmel (where he violated the D. code) are explained by the Rabbis as . I have heard from a great man, says Leon, that when a man meddles with the law of God he only spoils it. That is the reason why it was originally prohibited to put in writing the oral decisions of the Rabbis, for these were only temporary. It follows that the Rabbis of the Mishna, the Amoraim, the Gaonim and those who came after, had no right to do what they have done. And even though their intention was good, they have but confused, as I am about to point out.

5. After the destruction of the Nation the rabbis found it nec-

essary to adjust the religion to the new condition of the changed life. But instead of lightening the yoke so that in a strange land the Jews should have an easier life and be less hated by their neighbors, the Rabbis have added prohibitive regulations in order to destroy Israel's money and to embitter their lives, and make them hated by their environment. For that was the only way in which the Rabbis could now show any superiority over the masses. And for this reason, too, did they prohibit the putting down in writing of their laws, so that Israel should ever be dependent on them.

Indeed, during the second temple the Pharisees were merely a sect who accepted certain extra prohibitions on themselves; and it was only in the course of time, under the growing supremacy of the Pharisees, that the Pharisaic regulations came to be considered as the *שבעל פה* i.e. Sinaitic.

And when Judah Hanasi saw the great many customs that grew up among the people he organized them all into the systematic Mishna, for the sake of the evident convenience. No sooner had this been done, then the Rabbis realized that with a book of Law their supremacy ended. They therefore, decided that:

אין להורות הלכה מתוך המסנה

because of the lack of clearness. And from their attempts to make the Mishna clear grew the Talmud in Babylon, a veritable Bable ^{30a} so that even ^{אמר} them themselves admitted:

במה שקיים הושיבני זה תלמוד בבלי:

"He placed me in darkness", this is the Talmud Babil.

And after these came the Gaonim and the Tosafist. Maimon-

30.a This is indeed a clever pun.

Rabbis.

6. Leon Modena continues: I do not say that no one should have written a book after Moses. We need books expounding Mosaic laws and exhorting people to perform them. But I do say that these books should not be made the equal of the Mosaic Law. And the Rabbis think that there is no harm done in that; and in this they are wrong, for:

- a. -- It is against the Torah.
- b. -- The common man in transgressing one of the customs that grew up, would fear that he has violated the Mosaic Law. The more laws there are, the more sinners.

וכפי מכבית המצות ירבו החוטאים

Had the Law of Moses been left alone and it would have remained pure and simple, all would obey it as a means to the knowledge of God, especially in the Exile. In the latter days (in the days of the Messiah) the peoples who are looking for a religion would accept Judaism if it did not have all these accretions and these interpretations, and we would then be one people. But the small-minded Rabbis did not understand this, and they acted as enemies toward this, -- a prolonging of the exile. I am writing this book after long deliveration, so that he who desires could follow the Law of Moses, and have a guide in the exile. I omit laws depending upon Palestine, because when the Messiah will come he will explain all these himself. My original plan was to discuss the positive and negative commandments separately, but I

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Messianic Times would have already come since all nations would have accepted the simple Mosaic Law

Jacob L. Michael

became confused in them. I also discarded the plan of following the סדר of the Pentateuch and have chosen the order of Jehiel in the דברי diverging only now and then to suit my purposes. I do this only in the search for truth and not out of conceit and pride, or free-lance.

After Leon has finished his discussion of tradition and Talmud, he handles individual groups of prefaces (after the direction given him by Joseph Karo in the Schulchan Aruch) briefly, and indicates how those things which alone would be very useful and understandable have been cluttered up with much else, and tells how they should have been handled. We will give merely a few to show his mode of argument and his reasons for believing that although certain things are treated with the right kind of felling, yet because of hairsplitting definitions are robbed of their strength and life.

Custom of rising, dressing, and toilet.

It is true that modesty is a good thing; but it isn't appropriate to discuss at length all the various excretions, etc., even the least of the gentile ethicists refrained from expatiating upon these matters.

Washing of hands.

This is very fine, says Leon, but why make it such a serious matter, when Rabbis say: "He who holds cheap the washing of the hands is rooted out from the world." And why a special benediction, when there is not even found a hint in the Torah for it, and why so many particularly detailed laws?

ת'ס'ס

This is a clear and true ת'ס'ס. In this they have been very lenient for this is their wont to be lenient when one has to be meticulous, and to be meticulous when one has to be lenient. It is a duty for every Jew everywhere, always in every cloak and every covering, since the reason for ת'ס'ס is remembering of the commandments and one's duty to remember them is always -- at night as well as in the day. And the Rabbis said that at night one is ת'ס'ס. Also what difference does it make how many corners a piece of clothing has, or how many fringes the ת'ס'ס should contain, or how long or short they should be? Further, the Torah enjoins a blue fringe, so as to remind us of heaven, and not as the Rabbis would have us discard the blue, because we have not the ת'ס'ס. Here is an instance where they diminished the law, thus proving that they diminished the original law, so as to be able to add their own laws. They went even so far as to say that ת'ס'ס on the outer cloak is requisite only during prayer, for shame of the gentile. Whereas, it should be the other way round. (cf. the Hanuka lights). Furthermore, the wording of the benediction is set by them to be ת'ס'ס namely as the Ishmaelites clothe themselves. Why not say ת'ס'ס or ת'ס'ס depending upon the way a piece of clothing is put on. But they have dealt with the laws in their own sweet way.

Phylacteries

Phylacteries are an invention of the Pharisees during the time of the second temple. This is hinted in Josephus and the

Gospels. ³¹ It is not traditional! We do not find it mentioned at all in the Bible, for, if so, why do they call them T'filin and not תפילין as in the case of מצות? Further, how do the Karaites dare suddenly to break with a Mosaic custom? The language תפילין is not indicative of leather straps and leather boxes. Further, the contents thereof is to be disputed, as will be seen later. מצות is already declared to be the reminder of all the commandments; what necessity is there for another reminder? We must say, therefore, that the Bible refers merely to an ethical exhortation such as: קטנתם על לוח לב
 The Pharisees, in greater piety, therefore, invented these phylacteries which apparently were originally worn only in time of prayer, (thence the name תפילין). Gradually this was extended for the entire day and the people who love all this nonsense, gladly accepted these new additions. And then, it is that the Rabbis forced the wearing of phylacteries in order that it be considered Sinaitic. So thus we find such expression as: קטנתם על לוח לב, not to say of the strangeness of God wearing phylacteries.

בכורת השחכ

The בכורת השחכ, says Leon, is not obligatory, except as prayer which will be discussed presently. The Rabbis have exaggerated unnecessarily the importance of the בכורת השחכ.

31. This shows that Leon Modena must have been familiar with the New Testament.

Prayer and the שלושה קראות.

Even though the Torah makes no specific command as to prayer, yet our reason commands that this is the only way in which man can express his gratitude to God, ask Him for his needs, and think about Him. The reason why the Torah does not mention prayer is because in those days sacrifice was the means of communion with God. We may agree, therefore, with the interpretations of the Rabbis on Scriptural verses such as:

וְשָׁלוֹם לְשֵׁן יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְשָׁלוֹם לְשֵׁן יִשְׂרָאֵל

as referring to prayer. David, Solomon, Daniel, all prayed, as well as the Patriarchs. It is, therefore, incumbent on all, man or woman, to pray three times a day. Prayer should include confession of faith, petition for needs, confession of sinfulness. But the Rabbis, instead of this, made the prayers to consist of those Biblical portions in which these three elements are commanded. Thus, for example, the Shema, barring the first verse, has nothing in it of real prayer. It is merely a recitation of certain commands. (Our author suggest the following פסוקים):

וְיָרָא וְיִשְׂתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה
וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

The Rabbis have done the same thing with T'filin and ש"ש. What there should be contained in the phylacteries really is such a thing as the ten commandments.

The דבר is discussed next. What necessity is there for the benedictions ש"ש and ש"ש would not

force of quotation in its end
שד"ח סדרת אבות

שד"ח סדרת אבות be sufficient? The middle benedictions are various and disorderly. Also the emphasis which the Rabbis place on the fact that every ברכה conclude with 'הוה' אג', and "woe to him who changes the custom of the Rabbis which they have established in mighty waters." There are also more prayers than a business man could find time for. And there are all sorts of unnecessary discussions concerning the place where one should pray, etc.,

The commandment for keeping the Sabbath is important, but it is cluttered up with all sorts of useless quibbling. The commandment to honor parents is a natural one, which needs no further explanation. The additions are only ridiculous. Other matters are so handled that they controvert propriety and good usage. e.g., certain discussions concerning the marriage relationships, etc..

Certain things which no longer have any value are retained, much else is offered as entirely new additional material. And so, outside of ralestine, there can be no more question of the forbidding of the fruit of the tree for the first three or four years, etc.. There is no longer any justification for such ordinances. Yet, they still hold their place in the code.

These are, then, Leon Modena's criticisms of the Rabbis. But let us go to the פתח ארבעה עשר and we will see how he defends the Rabbis.

From the pen of this man (the writer of *Sefer HaIkkarim*) we know that he was a great scholar, but when he was born, he grew up to be one of the *Sarshonim*. In the first chapter of the second division he criticizes the Rabbis for taking extremes, either for understanding the Torah as the Karaites with extreme literalness, or explaining it, on the other hand, by distant figures like the Christians. What he wants is that the Torah be taken in a middle way, avoiding extremes; as the Mohammedans take their Koran. But the truth is that he failed to draw the line between the holy and the secular. For, he should have realized that Mohammed expresses all his ethical and religious laws very explicitly without leaving room for later scholars to expatiate on them.

As for the Christians, their Saviour gave them no new law or ethic; it is only that those who came after him, seeking to justify their laxness, began to use metaphor and allegory. But our Torah which is full of God's names, every letter of which lends itself to interpretation, how would it be possible indeed, not to interpret it? I will not go into the matter further to indicate the mistakes of the Karaites, for the *Sefer HaIkkarim* of the Kuzari in chapter III, 33 has already proved the necessity for tradition, e.g., new moon, the work prohibited on Sabbath, the meaning of *וְיָצְאָה אֲרָבָה* ?

And what does this man think Moses did during the forty days and forty nights that he was on the mountain without food or drink? Was it not that God gave him all the minutiae of the law there? Now the reason why God left many of the details for oral interpre-

tation was that he wanted to reward those who learned. But when this destroyer (author of $\text{סֵפֶר הַבְּרִייתִים}$) realized this, he claimed that the tradition lasted only through Joshua and that thereafter, the Rabbis of each generation invented their own laws. This he sets forth in the second of his chapters and I intend answering him in my second chapter.

After he realized that he could not deny the fact that God gave an oral tradition to Moses, he states that, however, immediately after the death of the generation of Joshua all was forgotten. As proof he brings the story of הַיְיָבֵן who found the "book of the covenant," and Ezra where it is said that the Jews celebrated מִצְוֵי עֵזְרָא for the first time since they left Egypt. But this is impossible because there was an unbroken line of prophecy until years after the death of Ezra. Thus, Joshua, Phineas, Eli, Samuel, Abiyah, Elijah, Elisha, Jehoyoda the priest, Zechariah, his son, Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Nahum, Habakuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and other people of the great synagogue, Simon the Just, Antigonos, the $\text{אֲבִי הַבְּרִייתִים}$ to Rabbi Jochanan b. Zakkai, Rabban Gamaliel, his descendants till Judah Hanasi, who collected the Mishna, which is the source of the Gemara, which the author looks upon with so much disdain. And we must assume that every prophet was taught by his predecessor, since the Torah cannot be understood without the oral tradition. No proof can be deduced from the fact that the mass was not observant. As for "the book of the law," which הַיְיָבֵן found, the Rabbis have already interpreted it in a Midrash which is very near the מִשְׁנָה , that the astonishment created

my at

there was due to the fact that they found it rolled after the
 verse: "God will lead you and your king into exile." And this
 explains why the king said to repent, because the wrath of God
 is wrought up against him. But in no way would this imply that
 they knew nothing of the Torah, or its interpretation. Likewise,
 in the days of Ezra, he exhorted the people to do the command-
 ments, not because they knew nothing about them, for if that
 is the case, why didn't he mention all the commandments? As it
 is, he spoke only about חנוכה since it was the period of the year
 for it. And we are not to interpret the story to mean that the
 חנוכה was not kept in the days of the first Temple; simply,
 that it was not held with such gusto (cf. Josiah and the paschal
 Lamb). The author also throws darts even at the Torah . . .
 as when he says concerning Ezra: "Even though I am sure that
 he did not change one letter of the book of the law, we have to
 admit that we received it from Ezra and not from Moses, for he
 had the power to give it to Israel in his own sweet way." He
 also shot an arrow when he said: "Therefore, it is
 not to wonder that he denies the regulations which are said by
 the Rabbis to have been ordained by Ezra, and mocks the regula-
 tion of eating garlic on Fridays et cetera."

There is no doubt that this defense against the . . . is
 very weak and inadequate. It is, of course, merely a fragment
 and was never completed by Leon. He must have planned a worthy
 defense, but somehow he never finished it. Reggio, Geiger, and
 Blau all agree that Leon Modena wrote the The fact

that in two spots he undertakes a refutation of *סוֹפֵר*, which he interrupts in the middle, and which in twenty-four years, he does not complete, is proof for rather than against his authorship. There is no doubt that it is a fragment and we cannot say that the author has intentionally not completed it. For, indeed, neither did he conclude his Hebrew book on style, which he had begun twenty years back. He was just such a man, who as he once wrote to Menachem Azarjah Fano ³², that he carried many works about in his head, but because of lack of leisure he is unable to complete them. He says:

אשר אדם יתנוני הזמן בעצט השב כוחי יתיינותי
 אכסית אשכחתי חילי

MR 98 - Blau, L. p. 97

We cannot but come to the conclusion that Leon was an adherent to tradition and believed in it and defended it seriously and sincerely, even though he collated the attacks against the Kabbis. But he was a man of many moods. He was sincere at each moment, a true paradox, a contradiction. Though he attacked the Kabbis and Cabbala in many places, yet he has the following in a statement he made about Aristotle ³² "May the soul of Aristo rest in Eden in the garden of life, by virtue of his noble and acceptable utterances. By my life I love him with a perfect love, for he was a father in Wisdom. Many an exalted sentiment did Aristo utter in agreement with those of our Kabbis; and by reason of the influence of his clear understanding, did he determine righteous rules and sayings. Our Kabbis have indeed remarked: A sage is even greater than a prophet. As for this man, he was the pick of philosophers, inasmuch, as he ad-

duces a proof for every argument. And what though he be a Greek: he labored to establish God's unity in the government of the world; and the Science of pur philosophy is intimately bound up with that of Cabbala." *may mean our Tradition!*

The most bitter attack upon Leon Modena is made by Graetz, who stamps him as a betrayer of Judaism. He says that Modena was ashamed to be a Jew and tried to ridicule Judaism. He bases his statements upon a little work on customs which Modena wrote. He says that Modena has in this work uncovered the nakedness of the Jew, and held open for ridicule the customs of the Jews. ³³ Unconsciously, he says, has Leon allied himself with the mockers of that Judaism, which he himself had taught as a Rabbi.

In the preface to the book on Customs, which was translated in French and later into English, Modena says: "During my writing I have, in truth, forgotten that I am a Jew, and I have regarded myself as a simple and impartial observer. However, I do not deny that I have taken pains to avoid scorn, because of the many ceremonies; but neither did I have the intention, either to apologize for them, or to make them more attractive, because I only wanted to impart -- not to convince."

The only sin committed by Leon seems to be that he has written a literary masterpiece describing Jewish customs and ceremonies. Judaism has never been a secret religion. He was

32. H. Gollancz: Translations from Hebrew and Aramaic - p. 7
Taken from "Ari Noham" --

33. Graetz H. Vol. V -- p. 71

not ashamed of it and so he desired that Christians understand them better. The customs of the Jews were known to Christians, for he says in his introduction that there are enough Christian scholars who have written and are able to write concerning his theme. Blau tells us of a letter he wrote in 1640 to Nethanel Trabotto.³⁴ "After the completion (of the printing of my work Gabuth Jehudah) I will open my ear, and listen to what you will say to me concerning the "Rite" which was printed in the Italian language. For I had the intention of showing to the peoples the basis of the laws, the commandments, and the customs of the children of Israel, in order that they might no longer mock at us, which result, thank God, I have hitherto succeeded in attaining, and (the writing) will be of use to the sons of our people in this manner." There is no basis for the contention of Graetz.

34. Blau, L. -- p. 95

Conclusion.

A great character was Leon Modena! His life was a very sad one. His children caused him great distress and worry. Poverty was ever at his threshold. It is not to be wondered that he says in all earnestness, that man's function on earth is only to amuse God, just as earthly kings have monkeys to entertain them.

We must wonder at his manifold activity and accomplishments, the number of his works. The range of topics he discussed is marvelous. Not only that, but he was a prominent rabbi, a great preacher, who attracted great numbers to his sermons, including Christian nobles and divines. He was a teacher, translator, corrector. He worked on exegesis, lexicography, ethics, liturgy. He wrote pastoral dramas and poems of different kinds. So he died really unknown and misunderstood. His name should be treasured as a good Rabbi and good Jew.

----- Finis -----

