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An American Rabbi:  
A Translation of Four Essays from  
Max Raisin's  
Dapim MiPinkaso shel Rabi

by

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DEDICATED  
TO  
REX DAVID PERLMETER  
whose love has  
strengthened and inspired me

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## DIGEST

Rabbi Max Raisin (1881-1957) was an Eastern European Hebraist who became an American Reform rabbi. He was a prolific writer in English and in Modern Hebrew. Primarily a historian, his works focused on the history of Modern Judaism, the Reform movement, and Hebrew literature.

Raisin came to the United States from Poland in 1893 and was ordained by Hebrew Union College ten years later. Following brief ministries at several congregations across the country, he served Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Paterson, New Jersey from 1921-1953.

Raisin was a faithful defender of Isaac Mayer Wise and of Reform Judaism to his fellow Eastern European Jews. He also emerged as an "in-house critic," interested in promulgating changes in classical Reform from his Zionist-Hebraist perspective.

This thesis contains an English translation of four chapters of Raisin's 1941 Hebrew autobiographical work, Dapim MiPinkaso shel Rabi, Leaves from a Rabbi's Notebook (Dapim). An introductory chapter analyzes his thought on three areas relevant to Reform ideology: Zionism, the Jews as "chosen people," and the centrality of the synagogue. It examines as well the roots of Raisin's dissension within the Reform movement. Together this translation and analysis aim to provide an initial understanding of Rabbi Max Raisin's contribution to the American Reform rabbinate.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I.

Mordecai Ze'ev (Max) Raisin was born in Nieswizh, Poland on July 15, 1881. His father, Aaron, was a maskil, an enlightened man, who taught Hebrew in wealthy Jewish homes. Jewish practice in the Raisin home was strictly observant, but the spirit was liberal. Max was one of five children; he had three sisters, and a brother, Jacob--the sibling with whom he had the closest relationship. Max and Jacob would eventually follow similar paths to the American Reform rabbinate.

In his autobiographical narrative, "My Fifty Years As a Rabbi," Raisin describes his native city and his youth with a great deal of pride and affection. He speaks of his mother's influence on his home life, his experiences in cheder, and the centrality of the synagogue to his upbringing.

But it was to our father that Jack and I owed perhaps our true attachment and devotion to Judaism. We were influenced by his example as an enlightened man who never stopped reading and studying and who remained steadily reverential towards Jewish values. We were much impressed by his knowledge of languages, including Russian, his love for Hebrew, and his deep interest in all things Jewish.<sup>1</sup>

Raisin was also deeply indebted to his father for his decision to emigrate to America. Max was twelve years old when he arrived in America. He and his family dwelled in a

tenement on New York's Lower East Side and they largely carried on their European way of life. Still, Aaron's liberalism allowed him to make concessions to the New World.

His attitude had not a little to do with Jack's and my own decision in favor of preparing for the Reform rabbinate as soon as we found ourselves ripe for it.<sup>2</sup>

Both Max and Jacob decided to attend the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Max was drawn to the seminary primarily for two reasons. First, he saw Cincinnati as an environment where his own personal Americanization process could occur at a more rapid rate. Second, the College's program of study (not to speak of the fact that it was free) appealed to him. Max Raisin began his course of study in 1898, a year following his brother.

When he began his work at Hebrew Union College, Max had already begun to establish himself as a Hebraist. His first Hebrew work to be published, a eulogy, appeared in the weekly, Ha-Ivri. His interest in Hebrew language and culture was to continue throughout his career and was to become his primary written means of expression in the rabbinate.

Raisin's years at the College were enjoyable and fulfilling. He was ordained in 1903. Following positions in Stockton, California, in Philadelphia, in Meridian, Mississippi, and in Brooklyn he settled in Paterson, New Jersey where he served Congregation B'nai Jeshurun for twenty-five years. Raisin was named Rabbi emeritus in 1946. Despite his withdrawal from the active rabbinate, he continued to write, to travel, and to pursue his Hebraic avocation. He died in

Florence, Alabama on March 8, 1957.

## II.

Max Raisin was an Eastern European Hebraist who became an American Reform rabbi. His life and works were the products of this synthesis between his European background and his commitment to American liberalism. The two essential elements which shaped Raisin's rabbinate were his devotion to Hebrew language and literature and his advocacy of Zionism:

The twain, Hebrew culture and Jewish nationalism, served as the two signposts of my career as a Reform rabbi. I did not have to attempt to reconcile the two for they both grew out of my European Jewish heritage.<sup>3</sup>

Raisin was an amalgamation of past and present influences, ideas, and values. It is this synthesis, even while still retaining each separate facet of his identity, that makes Raisin so fascinating a figure. He was an American rabbi, deeply rooted in his European antecedents.

In understanding Raisin it is imperative to keep his background in mind. Then one can more fully comprehend and analyze his contribution to the American Reform rabbinate. Raisin was a faithful defender of Isaac Mayer Wise and of Reform Judaism. He also emerged as an "in-house critic" interested in promulgating changes from within based upon his Zionist-Hebraist perspective. This introduction to Raisin's thought will examine three issues upon which he focused during his rabbinical career: Zionism, the Jews as "chosen people," and the synagogue as the center of Jewish



life.

One of Raisin's primary criticisms of Reform dealt with its official stance on Zionism. He was a cultural Zionist who was influenced by his father and by contemporary Zionist thinkers, principally Achad Ha'Am. For Raisin, Jewish nationalism represented an integration of his personal ideals. He did not see the incompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism. In fact he saw Zionism as part and parcel of Reform ideology.

Raisin recognized in Zionism a fulfillment of the prophetic ideal which Reform professed. He saw in it both an opportunity for growth and for a flourishing of Jewish culture. He envisioned both Reform Judaism and Zionism as movements of liberation which complemented one another.

When taken together, Reform and Zionism instead of forming an antithesis rather fused into a synthesis. There is, to begin with, the emancipatory element in each of them. Both Zionism and Reform are movements of liberation.<sup>4</sup>

In his encounters with anti-Zionists at Hebrew Union College and in the rabbinate, Raisin did not allow differences to prevent him from pursuing his own goals. He displayed great tolerance for those with opposing viewpoints, a gift which he respected in Isaac Mayer Wise and which he strove to emulate.

Raisin's concept of chosenness, the divine election of Israel, is another intriguing dimension of his thought. He devotes a chapter, "Atah Bachartanu," You Chose Us, in Dapim to this problem. He attempts to rationalize the concept of chosenness within the parameters of Contemporary Judaism,

and concludes that Jews have allowed their "chosenness" to manifest itself in chauvinism, when in reality they are no better than any other nation. According to Raisin this has been a historical source of anti-Semitism and of persecution.

It is this chauvinism which disturbed our spirit and damaged our souls in past days when Israel was still young, and it has been an inheritance for us to this day. . . . Many things caused the hatred which the European nations feel toward the Jews. . . . But I believe that the greatest cause rests in the ideology of "Atah Bachartanu," that the Jew belittles the non-Jew in his heart and looks upon him as an outsider.<sup>5</sup>

Raisin proposed a way that the notion of chosenness could provide a positive outcome for modern Jewry. He implored his fellow Jews to accept in their "election" the challenge to aspire to the ethical good. He provided an analogy: Israel to the other nations is like a Shaliach Tzibur, a prayer leader to his congregation. Judaism, though not spiritually or structurally stronger than other nations, could be their moral guide.

Raisin was a "limited" universalist. He argued against Judaism as a particularist religion, yet described its universality in terms of its "aims at the highest and broadest possible conception of the God-idea,"<sup>6</sup> and its "being the only true faith, than which there can be none higher or nobler."<sup>7</sup> He admitted that Judaism may be separate in observance and ritual, but that its precepts and purposes were universal, and as such could serve as standards for the other nations.

Another key emphasis of Raisin's rabbinate was insistence on synagogue attendance and participation. Undoubtedly

this was a result of the strong role that the synagogue played in his own development.

The greatest thrill I and others derived from the religious life of the town was, however, supplied by the synagogue and its services. The Shule served many purposes, often offering an outlet for the social problems of the day.<sup>8</sup>

On numerous occasions he referred to the "synagogue problem."

The synagogue is not the center of Jewish life; it ought to be, and that is but another indication of the tragedy which is ours. . . . The synagog is only a part of Jewish life and we want to make it an important part. It should be the sounding board of the noblest Jewish ideals.<sup>9</sup>

At various points of his career Raisin blames the "synagogue problem" on both the laity and the leadership. In two of his essays in Dapim, "Reform Judaism" and "In the Winter of Life," he attributes the decline of synagogue involvement to the youth who are not following in their parents' footsteps.

Their fathers and their mothers still saw it as an obligation to come to the temple once a week, or at least once a month. Their children today feel no such moral obligation.<sup>10</sup>

He explains that this indifference on the part of the youth stems from their lack of sufficient religious education, as well as their diminishing link with tradition.

As a member of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in the 1930s and 40s, Raisin contributed to many discussions on this topic. Here he blamed the rabbinate for not providing a unified leadership:

If we question how we can strengthen the synagog, I believe the answer is that the synagog is weak because the rabbinate is weak. The rabbi

does not exercise the influence he should have; he does not enjoy the authority he should have. There is no solidarity among the rabbis and therefore they often work against one another's interest and do not influence the laity to stand behind the rabbinate . . . We must educate our laity to support the synagogue and give the rabbinate the moral authority that is its due and then there will be no synagogue problem.

Raisin suggested that the rabbinate itself take the responsibility for organizing its authority, and thus for solving the problem.

Another reason he gave for the decline of the synagogue was a falling away from tradition. Raisin accused Reform of being a religion of convenience, a religion of negation, a religion of non-practice. Reform Judaism, according to Raisin, had become "too simple." It focused on faith, on belief in God, but not on ritual, not on text study, not on Hebrew prayer.

When we speak about there being no chaos in the matter of the Minhagim, the truth is we have no Minhagim left to have chaos about . . . There are no Minhagim left in the home that we observe, and that is the crux of the whole matter. We have become de-Judaized in our homes and it is getting worse. Twenty-five years ago, when I came to Paterson we had a small congregation but we used to have a full house of worship. Men and women would come on Friday night. Today we have a congregation which is about twice as large and the House of God is almost empty on Friday nights.<sup>11</sup>

Raisin devoted many lines of his essays to describing the failures of Reform Judaism. He often appeared extremely pessimistic as he bemoaned Judaism's fate. Yet, he offered concrete suggestions for improvement, and never gave up hope for the good that Reform could accomplish.

## III.

Raisin's background gave him a very keen sense of tradition. This, mingled with his Americanization and his strong attraction to aesthetics, formed his Reform identity.

It is quite likely that this influence of my native city in both directions, of extreme Orthodoxy and of religious liberalism, has a decided bearing on my becoming what I am: a Reformer, yet not a radical iconoclast; a liberal interpreter of Jewish teachings and rites, yet one who looks very sympathetically on Jewish tradition and traditions.<sup>12</sup>

This identity became more fully developed through his experiences at the Hebrew Union College and within Reform congregations, and through discussions with his colleagues in the rabbinate.

Raisin's Reform identity included a critical attack on certain aspects of the movement. This stemmed not only from his Eastern European roots. It also concerned his overall attitude toward Judaism. He categorized himself as an "American rabbi" and preferred not to be labeled as a Reform Jew. He sympathized with Reform, but Judaism in a broader sense was more important to him.

I should much prefer to be known as just simply a Jew. Since, however, my mode of living and worship is what is commonly ascribed to the Reform Jew, let me make it plain that under all circumstances, my Judaism comes first, my Reform platform next.<sup>13</sup>

Raisin, therefore felt no compulsion to defend the Reform movement's every action. His loyalty stood not with the movement itself, but with its ideals, and that is why even when they differed from his colleagues' or from an institutional stance, his own ideals took precedence. Above

all he defended Judaism. If a Reform perspective clashed with his understanding of a Jewish ideal, he berated the Reform perspective. Raisin defended those individuals whose values were compatible with his own and those ideologies which best served his interests.

Raisin can be characterized as a "quiet rebel." He was more of an analyst and interpreter than a true insurgent. He did not hesitate to express counter opinions or to respond negatively, yet he often couched his criticisms in positive terms, and did not lash out unreasonably. He saw it as his mission to defend that which he believed.

Another reason for Raisin's dissension stemmed from his basic realism. He spoke very concretely and out of personal experience. He wanted to correct that which he perceived as failing within Reform; he did not suggest changes out of a vacuum. Raisin had a commitment to his congregants, to his community, and to his personal integrity.

Max Raisin should not be remembered as a critic only. He admired very deeply the leading proponents of Reform Judaism. Despite its flaws he saw Reform as an extremely positive development in Jewish history--one that he defended faithfully.

Raisin focused his energies on improving the state of Reform Judaism and on pursuing his goals in the rabbinate. Still, his life contained various other elements which contributed to a well-rounded profile. An integral part of his identity was that of Hebraist. Throughout his rabbinical career he wrote numerous books, articles, and essays, pri-

marily in Hebrew. This allowed him to express actively his regard for the Hebrew language and the significance which it held for him. He wrote not only about the Reform movement, but also about the history of modern Judaism, and Hebrew literature.

Raisin possessed a wry sense of humor which manifested itself in his writing. He sprinkled anecdotes throughout his Hebrew autobiographical works, and peppered his essays with word plays. In his "In the Winter of Life" in Dapim, for example, he discussed the problem posed by the need to destroy old, discarded books donated to the congregation and attracting rodents in the storage area. The donors' sensitivities added to the dilemma. Raisin and the Board of Trustees finally decided to burn the books. According to Raisin, they had thus solved the "burning question" of the books!<sup>15</sup>

Another such example came from Raisin's student days. He was a diligent student whom the faculty respected for his Hebrew knowledge. The other pupils, at times jealous of his language ability, also looked to him for academic help. Once a classmate asked him to supply the meaning of a Hebrew abbreviation. He told the student that it meant Tashmish HaMitah (sexual relations) when it truth it meant T'chiat HaMetim (resurrection of the dead). Raisin related in "Yoreh Yoreh, Yadin Yadin" that he and the professor shared a laugh over this "error."<sup>16</sup>

Above his devotion to the rabbinate and his Hebraic interests, Raisin considered his family the most valuable

part of his life, and the one that made his other endeavors worthwhile.

My greatest satisfaction is in the family I have raised, the children and grandchildren we have given to America who have added such joy to myself and my dear wife. This, too, is part--and a most important part--of my fifty years as a rabbi, for which I am truly grateful.<sup>17</sup>

Max Raisin was perhaps a bit ahead of his time. Some of the very things which he advocated changing or bringing to the Reform movement are there--and accepted without question--today. In Raisin's own words:

In the twilight of my days I find that pretty nearly all my hopes and prayers have been fulfilled: Zionism has found its fulfillment in the State of Israel, Hebrew is a living, spoken language, and Reform Judaism itself has greatly progressed and expanded and is today closer to the sources and traditions of our religious inspiration.<sup>18</sup>

The most visible of these changes is Zionism. Today Zionism has been incorporated into Reform ideology, and is recognized as an important plank in the Reform perspective. Reform Judaism currently embraces Raisin's vision of cultural Zionism based on Achad Ha'Am and on Judaism's prophetic ideal. Unfortunately his ideal picture of Reform in Israel has not yet been realized:

And right here permit me to indulge in a very fond hope, which some of you will perhaps regard as a chimera, but which I sincerely believe will actually come true, namely that it is Liberal Judaism which will be the predominant phase of Jewish religious life in the Jew's future home in Palestine.<sup>19</sup>

Raisin's emphasis on a return to tradition and on the



use of Hebrew text can be seen in today's Reform as well. It is important to note, though, that Reform Judaism's leaders are still fighting some of his battles, particularly that of synagogue participation.

Max Raisin was not a particularly influential member of the Reform rabbinate; he was not considered one of the "greats." But then, his primary interests from the point of view of his colleagues, were idiosyncratic. In those areas where he chose to direct his energies, he excelled. Raisin's life and writings offer insight into the rabbinate he created: a successful blend of his Eastern European background and his American ideals.

### Reform Judaism

The problem of Reform Judaism has interested me more in recent years than in years past, and not just because I am approaching old age, an age which is more fitting for backward glances and reflections of the past. I became interested in the fate of this Judaism precisely in view of the present situation, a situation of degeneration, of decline. I am connected by myriads of chords to this Judaism because of the education that I received in its schools and also, particularly, because in this Judaism I have seen and still see at this time a great deal of strength and ethical courage.

For me this was never a question of mere irreligiosity with no responsibility, rather on the contrary an expansive and daring step against accepted customs and beloved traditions of inherited belief very dear to the heart, because in these customs and traditions we saw the basis of weakness and of failure. Because we loved our Judaism and worried about its preservation and its renewal, we therefore decided later to remove some of the vain beliefs and incidental customs which had become rooted in it in the Middle Ages and which do not exist in a modern and enlightened age of freedom, equality and

brotherhood. Our aspiration was to give to our Judaism a new form which was more fitting with the aesthetic nature of our time and of the modern, good, and wondrous land into which we were carried on the wings of fortune, grace and goodness. Judaism was for us the dearest possession in life, and because of this we wanted to embellish and to adorn the exterior of this Judaism: wonderful temples, an attractive and enthralling worship ceremony, beautiful and artistic song, proper decorum at the hour of prayer, and improved schools for our youth. With the content, with the soul of Judaism we did not tamper, although one or two irresponsible extremists did go very far with their demands for reforms and interpretations. On the contrary, that to which we aspired particularly was to emphasize the true light that is within this Judaism, the wondrous concept of pure and noble divinity, and its ethical teaching which has no likeness among other beliefs. When we endeavored "to show the people and the princes her beauty,"<sup>1</sup> this could be attributed only to our great devotion to our belief in which we have taken pride, and whose banner we have always carried with a feeling of pride, of awe of the Glorious One.

In these days, the luck of Reform Judaism has turned, and instead of going forward to flourish and to grow, we see it narrowing and diminishing. Almost no new Reform congregations are being established anymore, and those that are fight for their existence. The wonderful temples still stand in their places in the most beautiful neighborhoods

of the city, and their worship ceremonies are as beautiful and enthralling as ever. The preachers of the Reform pulpits know how to speak to the hearts of their congregants in eloquent and flowery language, and with the power of their speech there are those who surpass even the preachers of past generations. Despite this, Reform Judaism has lost the alluring strength it once had. The causes of this interest me and my colleagues in the rabbinate very much, and we seek its solution which is not at all easy.

I know one thing; the source of the failure of Reform Judaism in our time is not in its faulty or misguided ideology--as the harsh critics from the Orthodox camp declare. Of course this Judaism makes many mistakes, but not as the critics believe. In their opinion the masses refrained from going to the Reform temple because this temple does not satisfy sufficiently their spiritual needs, and they do not find that which they seek there. They seek God, they seek Jewish content for their lives and an ethical basis for their existence--and none of this can be found at the temple and because of this they have stopped attending it. But this criticism does not take into consideration the fact that the masses about whom they speak who do not go to the temple, do not go to the Orthodox synagogue either. In general, the Reform temple never depends on the masses. I must add furthermore, that concerning its financial support, the Reform temple, despite the deficient number of attendees and supporters is still in a better situation at this time than the Orthodox syna-

gogue notwithstanding all those who attend and worship there.

One must seek the reason for this failure elsewhere. In my opinion, the source of the weakness of Reform like that of Orthodoxy is in one thing; the youth of today. This youth does not have a heart which goes after religion and they do not possess the conduct of their fathers, especially if these fathers also are not distinguished by the awe of God and do not show to their children an example of preserving commandments. Also, these children do not receive sufficient religious education to make them love Judaism. It has been told to me that this matter is also true with the Christians today, that they also complain about the absence of boys and girls in their houses of prayer. However the truth of the matter is that the situation is much worse with us, because to be a suitable Jew a man must have a sufficient measure of Jewish education, which the great majority of our children do not get in America. The Christians may be satisfied with their small amount of religious education. Their God does not envelop Himself in darkness as does ours, and it is possible for them to see their God as spirit because they can also see him as flesh. This explains the importance they find in Jesus, the man that is God at one and the same time. Jesus is reality, a concrete expression of the belief in God. They have no need to penetrate into the question of the existence of God, for the pictured Jesus is always before them, and "seeing is believing," as the

English proverb says. Our God is hidden from the eye of all, He is revealed only to the Chosen ones, and has no desire for everyone to look for Him and trace His roots. "Man shall not see me and live"<sup>2</sup>--it is very hard to plant belief in such a God in the hearts of children who receive very little religious education. For if Judaism is a faith, is it not particularly "Torah," meaning logic and thought, a matter which reaches not only to the heart, but especially to the brain, to the intellect?

In explaining the indifference to belief in our camp today, it is possible to add this also: faith is based on mystery, while the age in which we live is not suited to the investigation of mystery, that which is hidden from view. The masses as a whole are not interested in questions of faith; the matter in general is far from their hearts and they see it only as a matter for "loafers," seers and dreamers. When one seeks God and inquires after Him, one discovers Him and approaches Him. The man of faith sees his God when he dreams and when he wakes, he sees Him in his experience and in the world which surrounds him. God is close to him, and if he is not actually "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," surely he is "spirit of his spirit." But in order to arrive at such a level of belief, first of all the desire to study this ethereal subject is necessary, a sense of curiosity into the question of what is above and below, and this is lacking in our youth, Reform as well as Orthodox, because they are too into reality. They neither feel the mysteries of

life, nor have any desire to become interested in them.

I believe that regarding Reform it is not a question of preservation, of the constancy of life, rather of growth and flourishing, and of having an influence over wide social classes of people. I do not truthfully fear for the preservation of Judaism in general nor for that of Reform Judaism. I am sure that Judaism will not pass from the world as long as people who call themselves Jews are found in the world, and there will always be these. They will be Jews whether they want to or not because the Hitlers of all ages will force them to retain their Judaism. From not clinging to it for its own sake they will learn to appreciate it for its own sake. But I am becoming afraid that Reform Judaism's time as that great spiritual and ethical power that it was supposed to be and boasted of being has passed and may not return again. This Judaism lasted sixty to seventy years, from the sixties of the past century until the World War. During these years German Judaism ruled the roost of American Judaism, and they had influence as well as wealth and glory--and also the will to create and to build, to improve, to glorify and to exalt Judaism. Then they were the majority and also the most strong and the most brave. The new immigrants from Eastern European states whose numbers increased during the time were still occupied with the fight for survival, and their influence in Jewish life was extremely limited. Reformers thus had a large and wide field of work and unlimited opportunities to lay the basis of their Reform ideo-

logies, and many of course succeeded, but not to the extent that they had believed and which their prophets and leaders of those days had predicted for them. The truth was that they did not seek to capture these congregations for Reform, and they made no propaganda for this among the Orthodox. These Jews were lazy and aristocratic by nature, and it was not in their character to "go down" to the people, perhaps because they believed that the mass of the people itself would "go up" to them in order to bask in their warm light and delight in their company. And in this they made a fundamental error. The people did not yearn after them, and the temple, with all of its importance as a religious institution speaking in the name of Liberal Judaism, remained limited primarily to the narrow world of German Jews, their sons and their grandsons, already born to them in America.

On this matter Orthodoxy had much better luck. It was not incumbent upon it to "make souls" because it already had people. Had it only had the wisdom to hold fast to them, to bring them near to its service, and to make them into better workers for its benefit, its lot today would be far better than it is. The leaders of Orthodoxy over the last fifty years, from the time of the great immigration to America from Eastern Europe, did not think enough about the future, and they did not consider properly the opportunities that lay before them. Those who already had adapted themselves to the spirit of America at that time, half a century ago, dreamed about an Orthodox Judaism



attuned to the spirit of the land and designed for natives. They therefore founded institutions for the sake of this end, such as the theological school in New York.<sup>3</sup> They neglected the Orthodoxy of their day, of the immigrants, and did not worry about it. This Orthodoxy groped its way like a blind man, and its ethical condition today testifies to the many failures that have occurred. For in our days the faith of those who call themselves Orthodox has become increasingly unstable, and it is almost reduced to a figure of speech for outsiders. Among them too synagogues stand empty and silent, and not only during the week, even on Sabbaths and holidays. Were it not for the Yahrzeits and the mourners saying the Kaddish they would not have enough worshippers for a minyan. But the Orthodox have several other causes for which they labor, and over which they fight among themselves. These causes provide them with the vigor necessary to continue their work in the community. One of these is the matter of Kashrut. I know people who call themselves Orthodox and find it possible to live without prayer and without Shabbat, without Jewish education for their children, and even without any belief in God, but not without Kosher meat. And every time that the matter of Kashrut is placed on the agenda the Orthodox rabbis will fight against one another because here there is a question of sustenance. The masses will always be found mounting the ramparts on one side or another of this "holy war"--such is the compelling force through which Orthodoxy will be preserved and will continue

to go its way in life.

The Reform do not have such problems and questions and wars. Everything with them is so simple--too simple. To them Judaism is faith, that is faith in God. The temple particularly is entrusted with the task of strengthening and encouraging this belief in God. Together with belief goes also the fear, fear of God and His punishment, for Judaism is also, and especially, a remembrance of sin--sins of people created from matter who always desire riches and wealth and delights of the flesh on account of what they are ready to use, people with all of the means at their disposal. It is consequently necessary to be on guard and to warn, and to continue to warn the people, reminding them that "sins between man and his fellow" are much worse than "sins between man and God." Questions such as that of Kashrut have already been removed from the Reform agenda, because in their eyes Judaism is above such minor matters as eating meat and milk, everything that belongs to the kitchen and to the stomach.

Even the worship in the Reform temple is too simple. Here too the Orthodox who continue to use the Hebrew prayers that are in the old prayerbook have the advantage. Hebrew prayers contain a certain secrecy whose compelling strength increases especially with those who do not know Hebrew. Such people, and they are the large majority of today's Orthodox, find special flavor and favor in that which is secret and hidden in the Holy words which are before them. This is the case also with the Catholics whose

prayers are in Latin. On account of this the Roman church is stronger than the Protestant church.

What completely eats away both at the Orthodox and the Reform is the terrible ignorance which rules in our camp. Lack of knowledge of God caused Judaism's situation of decline in general, and if this matter is felt by Reform particularly, surely it is because Reform has boasted from the beginning to be based more on intelligence, discernment, and knowledge. Our sages have already taught: "The ignorant one cannot be pious."<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes I think that what undermined Reform was its good luck in material ways. Precisely because Reform Judaism always included so many wealthy and generous people who gave to the needs of the congregation, precisely because this Judaism did not have to fight for its soul or for its existence, indifference and deterioration came to it. There is much truth in the thought that belief and religious enthusiasm come only from the midst of poverty and oppression, from oppression and want. The wealthy surely does not have much for which to hope and pray. Only the poor and the sufferer are in a state to feel and discern the full measure of sorrow which comes at the time of desolation, and only he can recognize the agitation and the shaking of the spirit, the excitement of the soul which come from the midst of worthy and pure prayer. Be careful with the poor for from them will issue forth not only Torah, but also the holy splendor of pure belief, of devotion and adherence to God.

Reform Judaism is quiet about its guardians and does not spread out and does not shout in its streets--and this is a bad sign for it. There were times in which zealots were found in this Judaism, zealots for Reform, who had the courage of heart and the strength of spirit to assault their enemies and to ward off their revilers. Two generations ago in America there were fighters for the sake of God in the Reform camp as in the Orthodox camp. Einhorn<sup>5</sup> fought with Leeser,<sup>6</sup> Hirsch<sup>7</sup> with Kohut,<sup>8</sup> Wise<sup>9</sup> and Kohler<sup>10</sup> with Sabato Morais<sup>11</sup> and Benjamin Szold.<sup>12</sup> Even in the Reform camp itself there was infighting as Kohler and Hirsch conspired to battle Isaac Mayer Wise, for according to them his reforms were not radical enough.

Who will give us back those good days of ferment, of zealousness, and of battling, of assault and of stubborn defense, verbal and written? Today we have peace and quiet, there are no enemies or destruction of one another. But such peace and quiet are also the rules in the graveyard. . . .

### In the Winter of Life

More than thirty years have passed since I graduated from rabbinical school with the crown of "Rabbi" on my head. With all of the trials, the tests, and the adventures which have passed over me, my successes and my failures, there are times when I still stand in amazement and ask, "cvi bono?" How, why, and for what purpose?

I have given countless sermons from my pulpit during these years, sermons many of which were, truthfully, good and beautiful as much from the artistic side as from the side of their content. I invested a lot of time, toil, and energy into these sermons. With them I tried to awaken the person that is in the Jew and the Jew that is in the person, and in them I have cried out bitterly against the ugliness and the desecration that is in life, and about the need to rise up and to shake oneself from the decadence, and about ethical service, and about living life without shame and degradation.

I was like an idol smasher and an ethical redeemer both in my eyes and in the eyes of the members of my congregation. In the first years of my rabbinate a great number of people came to hear my discourses. Sometimes, the lovely women and after them, the men, came up to me to express their rapture with my talent as an orator and preacher, about the pure and direct style of my words, and about the poetic

metaphor that I employed.

At first all such words of praise were like intoxicants to me and I began to believe that truly great talents were hidden within me, and that I had been designated by providence to be among the most prominent and active speakers of my generation. But slowly the intoxication faded and I began to see that such words of praise were nothing but flattery and hypocrisy. Now when I think about this the redness of shame rises in my cheeks.

For even if those good people were truly impressed by my words, this was then, only a fleeting impression, an impression of the moment. They saw only the external polish, the rhetoric, and the metaphor: the content did not act upon them and did not arouse emotion in them or even any thought. And the proof of this: They remained as they were; there was no recognizable change in their behavior or in their manner of thinking. The disgrace and the ugliness that was in their lives remained in force.

And not only this. Today, after more than thirty years, the passage of a complete generation, I find that the ethical situation of the members of my congregation is not only no better, but worse. The officers of my temple today are the children and grandchildren of the officers of thirty years ago, and those of today lack even the same measure of spiritual liveliness that was felt by their fathers. Their fathers and their mothers still saw it as an obligation to come to temple once a week, or at least once a month. Their children today feel no such moral

obligation. On Sabbaths and even on holidays their places in temple are vacant. They come once or twice a year, on Yom Kippur and on the anniversaries of the deaths of their fathers. Even then they do not come out of love for it, but rather unwillingly, as if possessed of a devil, because still planted in their hearts are the foolish beliefs in the punishments that await transgressors who do not go to worship services even on Yom Kippur and on the dire necessity to say Kaddish in order to cause the spirit of their dead fathers to be at rest.

It is possible that the fault lies within me. Perhaps I did not shepherd properly the flock that was delivered into my possession. More than thirty years of care for them and for their children, of education and guidance, of speeches and sermons, of gatherings and discussions, of reciprocal visits, they in my home, and myself and my wife in their homes, more than thirty years of spiritual and moral care, and after all, how thin and small is the sum of my life's work!

But I know that this situation is the same in all of the congregations and all of the temples, and every time that I meet with my brothers of the profession, with the rabbis, I hear their complaints and their frustrations. All of us share the same distress, and even partial comfort is not found for our great anguish. This situation is very serious, and it bodes ill not only for the present generation but also for the future.

I see a bad sign in that even the compliments have

stopped, the flattery and the words of praise, that with all of the hypocrisy that was mixed in with them, still were pleasing to the ear. They do not hear the sermons and therefore do not praise them.

The House of Jacob of our days has been shattered into fragments in everything that touches on faith. They do not search for God and they do not pray to Him. A layer of thick dust covers over the prayer book and over the thick Tanach, the family Bible that remains from the inheritance of former generations. There is no desire and no request for these books. I still remember the first days of my rabbinate when I saw these books in the homes of the members of my congregation and their places were places of honor on the table or in the bookcase in the beautiful drawing room with the expensive furniture. Now the places of all of these books is in the attic; they are hidden from view as if they would be embarrassing in front of guests.

It is a tragedy to me every time that death steals inside the house of one of my officers, and robs from there an elderly father or an elderly mother. This means that yet another Jewish soul has been laid to rest and that an empty place remains not only in the home but also in the temple. The sons and the daughters may still come to say Kaddish during the year of their mourning, but after that they will forget the departed and the temple.

This and more. After the death of the father or the mother, a shower of old and worn out books that were precious to the departed during their lives, and for which there



is no need after their deaths, begins to rain on the temple. These books mostly include prayerbooks, machzors, and Bibles. There is no longer room for them in the house, and the mourners think, and not incorrectly, that their proper place is in the temple. They do not consider the fact that those who come to temple do not anymore use the old prayerbook that is all in Hebrew, and that in general one does not use worn out books whose pages are damaged, and which don't even have a binding. These fools even believe that they are doing Tzedakah, and more than this, that they are honoring the temple with such gifts. They are ardent to burn the "chametz" from the house, but because of sentimentality they also want this "chametz" to find its refuge in the temple. They are not refused because they support the establishment with their money--they are members, and one should not cause insult to them about a matter which touches their souls.

We consider this situation almost a catastrophe. The storeroom of the temple is already overflowing with books of this kind, shemus<sup>1</sup> that have no use, and fall prey to the teeth of mice which on their account have now multiplied. The trustees became interested in this serious situation at their last meeting. They still have not reached a conclusive decision, but I believe that finally they will decide to burn all of these books, which then will also stop the plague of the mice. The question is only how to put this judgement into action without causing insult to the members who gave the prayerbooks and the machzors in the

spirit of giving and were proud of their donation. Great caution was urged, and they told me that they had two ways of solving this "burning question." The first way is to get permission from every one of the donors, but this way is full of obstacles and pitfalls, because it is clear that many of the donors will refuse. The second way is to burn the books in secrecy without anyone knowing, except of course, the rabbi, the cantor, the shamos, the janitor who guards the doorway of the building, and who is a gentile, and the board of trustees and the directors.

At any rate, the books finally will be burned, among them many on whose empty pages are still recognizable traces of the tears of mothers who requested mercy for the souls of their sickly babes, or for their sons who entered the World War and endangered their lives in battle. On the campfire all of these essays that in ages past had such great significance in the lives of numerous men and women will be cast away. It is a decree of fate.

In Germany despicable anti-Semites like Goebels<sup>2</sup> and Streicher<sup>3</sup> burn Jewish books: and in America, at the temple yet, prayerbooks and machzors are burned, and the burning is done by Jews themselves that are the guardians of the citadel, the trustees. They do not fear God, but they fear and are afraid of--the mice. . .

The first and foremost worry that a rabbi has among all the vast brooding worries that are always in his heart is that perhaps the congregation will stop coming to listen to the service and sermon. In generations past, and with

the Orthodox, the rabbis did not fear this matter. They knew that their congregation would come because the fear of God was before it. Those who were lax in fulfilling their religious obligation knew that they had sinned against God and that He would forgive their transgressions. Those rabbis were not executors of the souls of the members of their congregations, nor did they make any effort to lead them in their ethical obligations and religious commandments. Such is not the case in our day and with the Reform. The rabbi is the leader, the guide, and the shepherd, and he is also the last executor to the spiritual and ethical situations of the sons and daughters of the temple. He always worries about their souls that perhaps, heaven forbid, will err and will stray from the straight and faithful path, and upon them, upon the rabbis, the blame will fall.

Among the rabbis there are some whose worries about the souls of their congregants stem from self-centeredness or narcissism. So long as they continue coming to the temple, it is a sign that the rabbi is still strong in his speech and that the magic is still on his tongue to tug at hearts with his sermons. If they come less often it is only because the rabbi has lost favor and honor in the eyes of the congregation or because old age has come upon him--and old age is an affliction for which there is no pardon in America. Everyone refuses to submit to old age in this country, most of all the rabbi, the preacher, who has the fear of old age always before him. As a result of this many rabbis hide their true age from people, so as not to

be destroyed by them. They are precise in coloring black the hair on their head or their moustache, and they always shave their beards, all in order to be seen as younger than they really are.

There are those among them who really want to raise the ethical standards of the members of their congregations. Their highly developed sense of responsibility compels them to strive by all means to bring the men and women to the temple because they believe that the temple is the last shield against assimilation and annihilation. So long as they still continue to come to the temple and still want to participate in worship services with the community it is a sign that the liveliness of Judaism still bubbles within them. Those who have no more desire to pray as Jews no longer feel themselves to be Jewish.

The temple and its worship and its sermons--their meanings are a positive reaction to Judaism, to the question "to be or not to be" as a Jew. Beyond the threshold of the temple always waits the end, nirvana. If there is no more interest in prayer and in preaching, if the ear is not given the opportunity to assimilate a Jewish thought, to hear a Hebrew word, or to take in a lesson from Jewish history or a Jewish ethical message, if all of the interests of the sons and daughters of the temple are only for the end of rejoicing upon rejoicing, bridge party upon bridge party, dancing upon movies, and theatre upon opera--then it is almost that from such people there is no hope for Judaism. They of course will be known to the world as

Jews, but not because they want to be. They will be Jews only because they are not Christians, and all of the value they hold for Judaism will be only that they too will be hated and pursued. This will be the principal and perhaps the single cause of their remaining in the Jewish fold, though they are like impoverished limbs. Responsible rabbis are very frightened because of this situation, and they trouble themselves to bring the transgressors to prayer and to the sermon in the hope that by their power they will succeed in saving these smoking embers before the burning coal of faith that is in their heart flickers out completely.

The question continues to wait for an answer: What have I attained during these thirty plus years of my rabbinate? For myself and my household I have of course improved this art of preacher and teacher and community leader. I have educated my children in the best schools, at Cornell and Harvard, I have married my daughters to respectable men, and my wife and I have traveled often to Clifton Springs and to Carlsbad and to other known "springs of salvation." (mineral springs) But all of this does not satisfy the spirit when a feeling of responsibility overcomes one and one sees failure in the mission that is presented to one in life. I already stand not far from the threshold of old age, at a time when people begin to take account of themselves and sum up what they accomplished and acquired during their lives. My lot was to be one of the forces of our spiritual lives in this great and noble land, a land of boundless opportunities for we Jews in terms of our spiritual

existence. I stood at my guardpost and fulfilled my functions with all of the energy and talent which I could muster. Nevertheless the accounting does not appear good; the end result of my spiritual acquisitions among my brothers is terribly defective and sad. With whom lies the guilt? With me, with my brothers who work with such great devotion, or with other causes?

As I approach the end of my days, I continue to see the great decline that we Jews have made in spirit and in ethics. This is particularly marked in our relation to the belief that we inherited from our fathers. We have become a people of non-believers, we whose "Ani Ma'amin" has been heard with such pride and strength and enthusiasm for generations without number in the face of our adversaries and our enemies, in the torture chambers of the Inquisition and from amidst the burning pyres of the Auto de Fe. And the reason for this? Sometimes I think that the root of the evil is in the great frustration that we have suffered during the many centuries of our history. The God whom we have worshipped and whose name we have exalted--removed His shadow from upon us. The "Guardian of Israel"--did not watch over us. The many enemies which we acquired because of our devotion to God, these enemies surround us from every side, aspiring for our blood and conspiring to destroy us. "Where is your God"<sup>4</sup>, O Israel? they cry out to us in contempt and in mockery, and we have no answer to this, but are tired from the continuous war which lies before us and flee from the battle. The elderly among us still grasp onto

their faith with the remainder of their strength, and for them the temple is the last stronghold of compassion and hope. But the young rebel against this ideology of a God who doesn't shield those who worship Him and cleave to Him. To them the prayers that we proclaim every time in the temple at worship services only jar the ear. "Ahavah Rabah Ahavtanu, Adonai Eloheynu, Chemlah G'dolah V'tera Chamalta Aleynu," "Deep is your love for us, O Lord our God, and great is your compassion."<sup>5</sup> Truly? They ask: Where is the love that God shows us? It is not in the heaps of our corpses who fell in every period, before each adversary and enemy; not in the wars which we had to fight in every generation for the sake of our lowly existence against Egypt and Assyria and Persia and Greece and Rome, against Spain and Poland and Russia and Rumania and Germany, against the Haidamacks, and against the Black Hundreds, against Petlura and Hitler and Mussolini . . .

If the young knew Hebrew and if they read Haim Nahman Bialik, then they would know that they are not alone in their feeling of revolt against this "world order" of a God who gives the land into the hand of evil and leaves it to the young to subdue the innocent and the weak. This proud Hebrew poet gave voice to his prophetic wrath in these wonderful lines:

Forgive, ye shame of the earth, yours is a  
 pauper-Lord--  
 Poor was He during your life, and poorer  
 still of late.  
 When to my door you come to ask for your  
 reward,  
 I'll open wide: see, I am fallen from my  
 high estate.

I grieve for you, my children, my heart is  
 sad for you.  
 Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I  
 nor you  
 Know why you died or wherefore, for whom,  
 nor by what laws;  
 Your deaths are without reason; your lives  
 are without cause.<sup>6</sup>

And in this spirit, also these morose lines:

If there is justice, let it appear at once!  
 If it appears  
 only when I am nothing under the sun--  
 let its throne be thrown down and shattered!<sup>7</sup>

But no! These Jews of our time do not rebel against God, for the meaning of rebellion is belief in a God who lives and rules and leads this universe, and only against such a God is it possible to rebel. But the people of whom I am speaking do not know such a God. Their God is dead and His place in their hearts is empty.

The elderly who believe in God are dropping from the stage one by one, and their children after them have stripped the belief from their hearts. They no longer anticipate salvation from God. They know that if there is still any hope at all that they will remain alive, and not as lowly and despoiled slaves but rather as free men, then the salvation lies within themselves, in the strength of their spirit, in the power of their hands, and in the might of their arms. For now their tendency is to seize from life all that they can get. They rush to forget the past, and yesterday does not mean anything to them. They live in the present. "Eat and drink for tomorrow we will die."

This situation does not prevail only in Reform; it is even more common with the Orthodox whose youth refrain from



coming to the synagogue even once a year because the old customs are not according to their spirit and their taste. This youth, when it does go to synagogue, prefers the Reform temple to the Orthodox synagogue. But for we Reform there is not much comfort in this. In a time of general distress such as today, we Reform say: If only we were Orthodox! If only the desire were strong enough with us to hold fast to the ancients and to believe in all that our fathers believed! And at the same time there are not few among the Orthodox whose broken hearts burst forth with the cry: If only our sons were Reform! If only the desire to go to temple would come upon them, for they do not go to any synagogue, and God's name is never heard on their lips. They have become like non-Jews--not like Christians who believe fervently, and not like pagans who at least worship the stars and the constellations, but like non-Jews who do not even worship idols because they don't believe anything at all.

### You Have Chosen Us

The idea of the election of Israel, despite all of the many different explanations and justifications which we give to it, is in my eyes our greatest historical mistake. I sometimes lower my eyes from shame when I think about this. It is precisely because we are a cultural people which gave so much to mankind's benefit that this is a mistake. This loud proclamation of our importance does nothing to increase our glory. What is good and fitting for semi-barbarous people and lower classes who seek to cover over their ethical nakedness with a claim of this sort, is not befitting the glory of Israel.

I don't know if we were every truly a "chosen people" which had greater vigor and spiritual advantage over other nations. The ancient Greeks were also graced with great spiritual skills which enabled them to bequeath to mankind a great and rich culture. The Egyptians in their day were also members of an extraordinary culture that is still to this day one of the wonders of the ancient world, which we are not today, with all of our intelligence, capable even of understanding. All of the great nations had the option to glory in their greatness and to proclaim themselves "a treasured nation" as the Jews called themselves. For this we truly were in our own eyes. We looked down at the others from up on high. The nations with which we came in contact

were for us an abomination, "a nation resembling an ass,"<sup>1</sup> despicable creatures; if one defeated them in war, none of their people were to be left alive. It is this chauvinism which disturbed our spirit and damaged our souls in past days when Israel was still young, and it has been an inheritance for us to this day. Some of our great spokesmen at different times spoke to this problem. When Moses demanded or commanded, "Do not loathe the Edomite and do not loathe the Egyptian,"<sup>2</sup> it is a sign that indeed they did loathe the Edomite and the Egyptian until the great lawgiver saw the urgent need to forbid the matter. And when Isaiah spoke about Egypt and about Assyria and about Israel as all peoples that were deserving of a blessing from God: "Blessed by My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My very own Israel,"<sup>3</sup> the explanation of the prophet is clear: All of these peoples are equal in their standing before God, and one has no advantage over the next--Israel over the stranger--as the members of his generation believed.

This ideology, that the people Israel is a chosen and ennobled people, undoubtedly served us well in the dark centuries of the Middle Ages in which we were pursued and killed all of the time. It is this belief in our historical importance, in our nobility, which sustained our spirits and gave us the ethical strength to rise up and to overcome the trouble and the suffering, the contempt and the hatred that came upon us incessantly. When our backs submitted to blows under the strife of our pursuers, with all of this spirits did not fail--For within our souls we knew that we, the

victims, were not only the righteous, but also the noble dignitaries in opposition to our oppressors who were scum of the earth. But at the same time we failed to see that that sense of nobility that kept us alive and in which we took pride was in no small way the source of our oppression. This idea of chosenness is based at its root on early man's tribal sense, the feeling that I and that which is mine are better than everyone else. We are the righteous and they are the evil, we are the wise and they are the ignorant, we are the cultural ones and they are uncivilized. And to the extent that a nation or a tribe praised itself for its importance, to that extent the others hated it and embittered its life when they became strong enough.

Many things caused the hatred which the European nations feel toward the Jews and in which they continue to indulge: differences in race, differences in faith, the opposition between Judaism and Christianity and so forth. But I believe that the greatest cause rests in the ideology of "Atah Bachartanu,"<sup>4</sup> that the Jew belittles the non-Jew in his heart and looks upon him as an outsider. Hitler and his Nazis also glory in a "You have Chosen Us" of their own and they also extol the German race and the "light" within it. But Hitler and the Germans are a nation large in number and their strength is great in war; even though everyone hates them, everyone is afraid of them. The Jews are a small and weak nation, no one fears them and everyone pursues them.

Sometimes I think: the Jewish people is the most unfortunate people in the world for its spiritual advantages

no less than for its faults,--unfortunate in its greatness as in its declines. It is unfortunate also in that it strives toward height and in that sometimes it falls from "the highest heights to the lowest depths."

It is not important for our objectives here that this nation is today like a rich man who lost his wealth. It is significant that nothing prevented its decline and that everything that it did during its long and proud history was a cause added to its fall. The anti-Semitism that it has suffered all of the days of its life began almost from its inception. The hatred toward Israel which began together with Abraham our father is a hatred which I am afraid, will stop only with the last Jew who remains in the world. We have always been hated and we have always been persecuted, whether or not for adequate reason, whether the Jew is guilty or not.

Because the Jew loved freedom and extolled the story of the exodus from Egypt--perhaps the loftiest event in the history of human independence and of course no less lofty than that of the French rebellion in the modern age--they became the object of half of all the tyrants who sought domination over others. The Jew inscribed the story of his liberation from Egypt as an eternal remembrance in his Bible, and for this the dictators and tyrants, who always saw in the Jew a stumbling block to their quest for unlimited rule, could not pardon them. The Jew was likewise dangerous for them in that he aspired not only to liberate the body from political slavery, but also to liberate the soul. The

Jew always aspires to peek out from behind the curtain of existence. Since his view of the world brought him a belief in One God, hidden from view because He is spirit and not flesh, they cast him off and forsake and argue against Him. They--the great majority of mankind--have no great flights of imagination into the sublimities of the spirit: They believe only in what they can see and touch. The ideals of love and of grace, of pardon, forgiveness, and humility were also given to the world by the Jew, and because the great majority of mankind hates people and doesn't know what forgiveness and humility are, they thus hate the Jew who always dares to be unconventional and to go against the current--to be what the others are not--a little more human, a little closer to the merciful and forgiving God in whose name the Jew speaks.

The Jew is made unfortunate both by what he does himself and by what others do to him. He began as a nation that inhabited its land and ruled itself, and he slipped from the land and was despoiled of its nationality and became a scattered and divided people whose children went begging to all of the rest of the nations. This is what the others did to him. But he also did everything in his ability to damage himself. The division of minds and lack of unity that prevailed among us penetrated deeply below the foundations of our lives. As a nation that is divided and split we have far too many orators and leaders, group inclinations and cultural streams and politicians who continue to weaken still more our national organism. We permit ourselves such

luxuries that would give stronger and more established nations pause. We tend to look to the heavens when we should look more to the earth beneath our feet to make it safer for us. Without end we have lived such as to make ourselves guardians of all the vineyards in the world except for our own.

There is no doubt in my mind that much of the guilt lies with our feeling of chosenness, the feeling bequeathed to us as an inheritance from previous generations that it was incumbent upon us to do "great and hidden" things in the world and to be concerned with the well being of all humankind. We recognize the intellectual talents which nature granted us and we believe that all we have to do is try and we will succeed. Here we have the root of the problem for which Christianity arose in the world, that is to say that we raised it up ourselves. Jesus the Jew was a faithful son of Israel who believed in the people of Israel's Divine election, and he also believed in his own strength as a Jew, to be a redeemer and a savior for his brothers and for all mankind. With this belief he lived and he also died, and he succeeded truly in reaching the highest rung of praise and fame--he attained immortality in every sense of the word. But he also became the greatest obstacle in our lives, and there never arose another man that so endangered our existence, as did this Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.

Nevertheless, despite that I see a stumbling block and an obstacle in this belief in the election of Israel, and the ultimate reason for the pursuit which we suffered

and are still suffering, it is worthwhile for us to deeply investigate this matter in order to understand its full meaning. One cannot cancel this matter out of hand only because we don't believe or want it, or even scorn it in our hearts. It is clear to us that our forefathers had their thoughts and motives for everything that they did or planned to do, and the idea of chosenness took a very honored place in their world view. Rabbi Judah HaLevi even saw in this belief the most important principle in Judaism; though, understand that his was an extreme view. But from this we see how much the leaders of our nation thought of this idea, such that they came to see in it the central focus of our existence in the world. Let us look then at the essence of this matter to see what we can learn from it and how much it can help us in the struggle for existence which we must always fight, and at this time more so than at any other time of our history.

This idea with all the mistakes and the obstacles wrapped up in it, and despite the numerous misfortunes which came to us because of it, also brought much benefit to our fathers in that they used it as armor against the attacks of the outside world. This was especially true in ancient times when the Jews were a people dwelling on its land under its own rule and fighting many wars with nations that surrounded it. This war of the Jew for his national survival never ceased--that and a slogan like chosenness was necessary to inspire the imagination and to forge the will in order that they could stand before their enemies.



This was truer during the long dispersion and the threatening pursuit that came in its wake, for had it not been for this belief in the first born and in the election of our people as the God of the World's favorite son, who knows whether we might not already have been annihilated?

The first and foremost thing that we learn is, of course, that this concept of the election of Israel is totally dependent upon belief in God. This belief is the foundation upon which all of this structure is built. The God "who chose us from all of the nations and gave us His Torah"<sup>5</sup>-- to non-believers this concept says nothing, nor does it say anything to the leaders of our new nationalism. If we want our own Jewish state it is not because we feel that we are better than others, but rather on the contrary, because we know that we are not worse than others and that we have the ability to rule ourselves no less than others. In the new nationality then, there is not room for chauvinism. Only the believing Jew is still able to hold on to the old idea of the special importance of the Hebrew people and to be zealous on behalf of this idea.

But there is another positive side to this matter of chosenness, a side which touches only slightly on the theology of this question, which says that God chose Israel and placed him higher than the rest of the nations. This side says that the desire and the aspiration to be "the chosen people" came to our fathers from the belief in Israel's election. This is probably the central focus of the whole concept of chosenness.

On account of this yearning for this noble level of "chosen people" our fathers succeeded to a considerable degree to reach the character of nobility, at least in their spiritual lives. We know that as a matter of fact Israel did not become a more noble nation than other nations. It was not better than the others either structurally or spiritually. There were both good and bad among us, righteous and holy, as well as evil and villainous. Tyranny, the evil dominion of man over his fellows, manifested itself with us in every generation, and we always had to battle against it, as our history bears witness. But the difference between us and the other nations was in that we at least aspired to the ethical good. We were not in truth "a kingdom of priests and a holy people,"<sup>6</sup> but because we saw ourselves that way we strove as far as possible to reach such a level. This striving influenced at the very least the continuity of our national thinking. From this came the wondrous development of the Jewish ethical teaching, and the creation of the great ethical literature which arose among us, and which has nothing comparable to it among other nations. From this also emerged that sense of responsibility that we have toward ourselves and toward the world which surrounds us.

It seems to me that the best explanation which I have found for the question of the election of Israel is provided for us by a man of our day who, although he is a believing Jew and serves as a rabbi and preacher in Paris, is not a Jew by birth. He was born a Catholic and for several years

was even among the students in a seminary in France in which he prepared himself for the Catholic priesthood. The name of this man is Aime Palliere<sup>7</sup> and he converted after many experiences that he underwent at the Seminary and after a great struggle that he had with himself. Palliere wrote his interesting history in his book, The Unknown Sanctuary<sup>8</sup> in which he tells of the great spiritual ferment that he felt within himself for several years before his conversion, and in which he also deals with this question of chosenness. I find his words interesting precisely because they come from a man who came to us from the outside. Such people who look at us from the midst of a non-Jewish perspective are likely to understand our spirit and our problems more than Jews from birth. I bring here some of his words on the matter.

Palliere emphasized in his address the idea that it is not in God's nature to treat people and nations in a manner that discriminates between them for good or evil. We are all God's children. Palliere brings forward the words of Rabbi Meir in Sanhedrin 38: "The dust of the first man was gathered from all parts of the earth" to teach us that all of us, as descendants of the first man, are equal before God, that all of us were created from the same dust. But at the same time changes also arose which distinguished between peoples, as we find with children who are born from the same parents but who are not the same in their natures and characteristics, or even in the character of their faces and builds. The different nations were each

graced with a distinguishing gift of their own, among them the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Persians, each of which contributed according to its strength to the total sum of human culture. Israel is the one people among all of the nations which demonstrated special genius in the profession of faith, as is proved by Abraham and the rest of the Patriarchs, by Moses and all of the rest of the Prophets, and the great rabbis. Israel wrote the Bible, and it not only discovered for itself the idea of the unity of the Creator, but also bestowed this knowledge on all of mankind. The Christian and the Moslem world alike owe thanks to the Jews for their spiritual development.

What then would be the relationship between the world and Israel? The relationship is like that of a congregation to its prayer leader. In this lower world, God's footstool, all of mankind is in the role of the congregation, and Israel is the prayer leader who stands before the altar. He acts as priest before them, striving for their benefit before God. The priest, the prayer leader is not better than the rest of the worshippers, except to the extent that his holy work influences him to improve his deeds and his actions. After he speaks of God and of truth, of the upright and the righteous, of mercy and forgiveness--it is impossible for him, the leader, not to suit his conduct to the message which he speaks in the name of God. He must be an example to others. If God chose Israel, surely Israel in essence, also chose itself to be the prayer leader and it did so with the full measure of responsibility connected with it. And

if at times it complains of oppression and persecutions surely this is because the prayer leader was negligent in his work and did not fulfil his leadership faithfully, or did not live the model life befitting the spiritual leader of a congregation.

Aime Palliere, the Catholic of yesterday and the Jew by choice of today did not demand from the Jews that they take pride in fulfilling such an important function in the world. On the contrary modesty is an important attribute for the prayer leader; he must always "walk humbly." But he does demand that the Jews recognize the importance of their task and conduct themselves accordingly. The fact that Judaism involves persecution of those who believe in it does not prevent Palliere from cleaving on to Jews and their fate. This tremendous deed by this noble spirit is what justified his demand that the Jews be truthfully and wholeheartedly a chosen people in practice and in theory.

If it were under our control to change the act of creation and to make the Jew into a new being, different in essence from what he is, then I would request from the Creator of the world that He make the Jew into whatever He will, only without his being a "chosen people." We would be like all of the nations with their weaknesses and their strengths, but we would be like one of them, not higher and not lower than they are. Our fate would then change decidedly too. We would not be heroes of the spirit passing before the camp of mankind with a crown of glory hovering over our heads, and we would not be a doormat to all of the rabble and the

wrongdoers. We would not be immortal--as if this were the greatest joy of a people, to continue to be without end or limit!--but in our limited lives would have a little more of the joy and the success of existence, and a little less of the worry over our Jewish fate which burdens us so.

But such a thing is not in our control; it is our tragedy that chosenness became part of our being as a people, an inheritance from our fathers which we cannot cast off and cannot escape. The world which surrounds us demands this of us, pursues us when we do that which fate cast upon us, and pursues us when we refuse. There is no exit or refuge.

The conclusion is simple. We will be as we are, and we will continue to live according to what our natures require of us. The road that is before us is not one of arrogance--to be the most praiseworthy among the nations--which we are not, and is not one of apology and justification of our Judaism. If in this manner we can continue to contribute to the ethical wealth of mankind as our fathers did, let that be our reward for our pain of being Jewish. We will continue to be Jews according to the best example that we know. There is no other way.

### "Yoreh Yoreh, Yadin Yadin"

In the autumn of 1898 I arrived in Cincinnati from New York in order to enter rabbinical school and the university in the same city. This was the first time in my life that I left my father's house for a long time, and I was then seventeen years old. It was also the first time that I found myself in a surrounding that was all "Reform" Judaism. In New York I already had a chance, of course, to peek behind the curtain of Reform, in the temples that I visited at the time of worship services. In them I heard the speeches and the interpretations of the "rabbis" and I saw all of the worship and the ceremony, filled with the splendor of holiness, from the prayerbooks and the beautiful customs, the sounds of the organ, and the music of the choir. My first encounter with Reform enchanted me and had no little influence on my decision to consecrate myself to holy studies and to rabbinical work. No little influence was also exercised by my desire to wander far from New York in order to "Americanize" more quickly. In New York I was still one of the crowd in the ghetto, the ghetto that I despised for its strange customs and laws, in which I spent many years. My soul aspired to expand beyond the big and noisy city with its crowded and pressed houses and with its filthy yards always filled with masses of people. I blessed

then the opportunity that was given to me to leave the bustling city and to go to a faraway city. I aspired for a "pure" American environment. But the primary push toward this step was the admiration that I began to feel for Reform, that is to say: for the beautiful exterior which impressed me. I have to admit that I knew only a little about the content of Reform Judaism, and the thought to examine it did not arise in my young heart.

When I analyze now my feelings then, at the time of the conception of the world for me and for my future, I find that the life's work which I have chosen did not interest me at all in those days from an idealistic standpoint. I did not choose the rabbinate specifically because I found in it satisfaction of the soul or because I recognized in myself special strengths and talents to be a spokesman for my brothers, a leader, a speaker, or preacher. Truly, I did not know then anything about the nature of this holy work, and what the congregation demands of the rabbi. In general I knew only that the rabbi is a preacher, and that this was the principle function of rabbinical school--to prepare preachers of Israel, preachers who knew how to affect the hearts of the members of their congregation articulately, and through their knowledge of literature and science. I did not know then what I learned to know afterward: that aside from all of these things, the externalities, there were many things more necessary, internal things which inhabited the hidden places of the soul, for example, belief in God, and a burning desire to bring others to such a belief.



That the rabbinate is more than a profession, a means of sustenance became known to me and to those like me only after we had already finished our curriculum, and we had been given a certificate which announces the fact that we are permitted to teach and to preach and to spread Torah among the masses, according to the accepted formula: "Yoreh Yoreh, Yadin Yadin."

Belief in God for its own sake apparently brought us to school to study Torah. It of course was found within us as well. We were not atheists or non-believers, but rather every matter of faith was misty to us. Even if this matter had been clear to us, I doubt whether we would have understood it sufficiently strongly to permit us to ponder it and to consecrate our time to it. Many of us came to Cincinnati not because of the seminary, but because of the university, not for the acquisition of Hebrew and Judaic knowledge, but for the possession of secular learning. The seminary was the pretext for which the university was the principle, by whose means we sought to break open to our souls windows to the great world of culture. But one depended on the other, and the study at the university which did not cost us anything, was made possible for us because we were students in the seminary. Many of us also received monthly support on this account, and it allowed us to continue our studies without worrying about tomorrow.

There were then, thirty years ago in several cities in America, good people among the "Yahudim," meaning the Jews from Germany, who were concerned that the burning coal

of Judaism not be extinguished in the New World. They were the people who built the large and beautiful temples and all of the rest of the institutions of which Jews in America boast, and properly so, as well as the hospitals and the residence homes for the aged, and the orphanages and more. They also built the Hebrew Union College, which is the official name of the rabbinical school in Cincinnati. These people were also concerned to find students for this seminary. For this they established a special fund into which they deposited large sums of money, according to the generosity of America before the depression, a fund at the head of which stood a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, and a secretary--as was customary and necessary. They did not lack anything but the "boys," that is the youths for whose sake they labored and endeavored so. But they also were found after intensive search. They were found from among the daily immigrants to the Jewish quarters of large cities, the Jews that fled to America from Russia, Poland, and Galicia. These boys agreed in their great kindness to receive the monetary support that the "Yahudim" extended to them on the condition that they, the boys, would agree and commit themselves to be "rabbis" in Israel after several years of study and preparation. This is the story of the rabbinate or more correctly the "rabbi-hood" of America. More than the calves (the students) wanted to suck, did the cow (seminary fund) want to nurse. I do not say this in order to show the failure of the matter, rather only to tell things as they really were. I believe that the Orthodox rabbinate

in other countries was built in a manner similar to that used in America for the sake of amassing candidates for the Reform rabbinate. When Jews lived under other conditions and material means did not suffice for them, the yeshivah students were dependent on a lower level of support. They had "eating days" and "eating Sabbaths,"<sup>1</sup> slept on the hard yeshivah benches or lay on the ground, and upheld the Torah out of poverty. In America where the standard of living was higher, they also related to the seminary students in a nicer manner. They gave them enough support for all of their needs, support that not only did not lower their spirits, but which also nurtured and encouraged a feeling of freedom and of independent perspective in their souls. This was support in an honorable manner, according to American custom.

My brother, several years older than myself, had already been in Cincinnati for about a year, and to some extent prepared the ground for me in my new surroundings; I adapted myself to it quickly. I knew of course that all of the students, almost without exception were of this type of grant recipient. Almost all lived a leisurely life, because in addition to the monetary support they received each month from generosity, they also brought in various sums via lessons in private homes, or by teaching in religious schools, the Sunday Schools of Reform temples. We all lived in beautiful, spacious furnished rooms, wore beautiful clothes, and ate to satisfaction. We did not know need or worry. We learned--if we studied, for there were several among us who were negligent in their studies--peacefully and broadmindedly.

We did not know what were lives of sorrow, of toil, of troubles in order to arrive at our goals. Of course precisely this characteristic of our lives, of our security, was the weak side of our program. The Torah is not preserved from the midst of wealth and not from security, and great people do not issue from an environment in which there is no place for war, for struggle and for turmoil. The seminary educated desirable, even excellent preachers, speakers, and leaders, scholars and scribes whose tribute is in the work in which they are engaged and "rabbis" who know how to wear their rabbinic uniforms in a courteous and noble way. But "greats" in Torah and wisdom and even in preaching--the pinnacle of our professional calling--did not come forth from us.

And yet, this vision on its own--that Jews relate so very seriously to the education of rabbis, and concern themselves so much, and with such great energy for their sustenance, and for all of the students in the school's needs, had with it much which gladdens the heart.

The generosity of the "Yahudim" that sustained the seminary and its students in such an honorable manner certainly exonerated Israel from any taint of disgrace. How far all of this was from the dreadful conditions in which students of the yeshivot in various European countries then lived, conditions which lowered the honor of Israel among the nations and to itself, and about which Judah Leib Gordon already expressed a bitter groan in his well known verses:

Gaze on the pathways of Mir, Eisysok  
Volozhin

And see impoverished lads swiftly walking  
 Marking off each step the length of the  
     route.  
 Where are they going? To sleep on the  
     earth?  
 To live a life of misery, bearing each  
     destruction?  
 This is the law when a man dies in a tent.<sup>2</sup>

The "Yahudim"! This word flows freely from the lips of Jews born in Russia and Poland every time that they speak about the German Jews in America. It is, and was then, a name of disrespect. They wanted to display the contempt that they felt toward these brothers who were strange to them in the way of life and in their outlook on the world. The accepted meaning of this word is ignorance of Jewish matters and the teaching of Israel, apathy toward what touches Jewish interests, and to assimilation. In truth I do not know a greater injustice for a large and respectable portion of our Jewish brethren than this name of opprobrium. Precisely this word marks the vital feeling of the Jew who came to America from Germany. With this one word these Jews surely wanted to testify to brethren immigrating after them from Eastern Europe once they were already based in their positions, and masters of capital and property, even as the exiles who came were poor, and lacking in everything and in need of help. We are "Yahudim" called the Germans to the Russians, as if to say "we are your brothers and we will offer you help with all of our ability"--as they truly did. It is very possible that among these "Yahudim" were found here and there those who looked with contempt on the "schnorrers and the Polacks." Perhaps the feeling of hate that the others felt toward their supporters and their

benefactors came from this. This psychology is easy to understand. But woe to us, with all of this, to disregard the multitude of good which came to the Russian immigrants at the time of the "Yahudim," for not only did they help them financially. They gave them work in their factories, they taught them the ways of American commerce; indeed they were to them more like guides in respect to organization and association for the sake of mutual help, and they had influence upon them even in their spiritual and religious lives.

Through this influence the immigrants from Russia and Poland in America reached a definite level of aesthetics in matters of communal concern, and in the congregations, the synagogues, and in the schools which they established. I am sure that were it not for German Jewish hospitals like Mount Sinai in New York, the Russian immigrants would not also have had such respectable hospitals as Beth Israel in the same city. This is the rule in all of the rest of American cities and communities. If there were not a rabbinical school such as Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, the Theological Seminary or the Yeshivah College in New York would not have been established. These "Yahudim" were certainly good teachers for the Jews from Russia and Poland, whether intentionally or not, in everything that touched on the improvement of external life. Even the synagogues of the most orthodox Jews came under the influence of the Temples in matters of order, cleanliness, and discipline. The Jews from Russia and Poland had the right to love or not to love their German brethren, but it was impossible for them to stop receiving the benefit

which their brethren had to offer in terms of influence, since in the final analysis they had a joint communal life; all of them together were responsible for the honor of Judaism in its broadest meaning.

It is necessary to emphasize that these "Yahudim" loved their Judaism and were proud of it, and this love was proven in the very reform that they brought into Judaism. Because they were devoted to their faith and wished with all of their hearts for its preservation, they gave it a more beautiful and more aesthetic form from their point of view. Because they sought to save Judaism from the teeth of the annihilation which loomed, to their mind because of the new conditions of life in the Modern Age, they allowed themselves also to cut back the plants that appeared to them to be superfluous. Whether they were justified or not--this is not the question here. There are those who say that the Reform temple of today is in a state of decline, and there is much truth in this. But they forget one small thing; that the Orthodox are in a worse state in this generation of those who forget God. At the time of which I am speaking Reform was at the height of its flowering. From among the Jews that commanded the portals of the temples came forth all of the greats of Jewish philanthropy of that day, as well as the politicians and the diplomats who held high offices in government and in the courts. They were appointed to these offices especially because of their positive devotion to Judaism. With loving hearts and giving hands these people cared for their temples, for it was the beginning

and the essence of their existence as Jews. These people established the Hebrew Union College from their desire to raise a fortress of strength for American Judaism, and which from its inception they wanted with all of their hearts and their souls.

However it is not my function here to write a defense brief on behalf of Reform or the Reformers. Nevertheless, I will say that in the days to come when Reform will already be a thing of the distant past, it will be possible for a historian to write about this religious movement from a non-prejudiced point of view and to place on it a more correct judgement. Such a judgement, I believe, will be to the merit and not to the demerit of Reform. The very fact that great Jewish leaders like Marshall,<sup>3</sup> Straus,<sup>4</sup> Wise,<sup>5</sup> and more issue forth from among the Reform, and that followers of Reform were always found among the sons of the Orthodox and devout--this fact will certainly help to bring forth this meritorious judgement.

The task which is before me in my memoirs is only to leave in print some mark from the period of my studies, which I believe will also shed a little light on the period in which the years that I spent in Cincinnati began. This was, without a doubt, a period of brightness, a golden age, in the history of Israel in America, and also in all countries, not only on account of the great hopes that were born or awakened anew in the heart of the Jewish masses. The last decade of the 19th century was without any doubt one of the most decisive decades in the lives of Jews of all



times and of all countries. This was an age of changing values and changing of the guard that came as a result of the pursuits and the pogroms in Russia, and of the immigration to America that reached a high peak. The gates of America were then open wide for all to enter and tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants from all countries each year found for themselves a refuge in this great and wealthy land. Almost over night a Jewish community of millions of people was formed here, while previous to this the number of Jews in this country was very small. The nationalistic idea of Israel found its hope in the same years in which Herzl's "Jewish State" appeared and the Zionist congresses began to sound in a loud voice the Jewish aspirations for self-liberation and for national life in the land of Israel. These two stood, one against the other, America the great and the wealthy, and the land of Israel, the small and the poor. A man had to be a radical idealist not to see in America, in contrast to Israel, the decisive and conclusive solution of the "Jewish question." Many Jews certainly solved this question themselves: They went to America and not to Israel. These masses did what they did without considering the ideological side of the matter. They went to America according to the decree of blind fate. America promised them bread to break their hunger, and shelter, and rest from robbers during the day and murderers at night. But there were also prophets that looked at this through their own special mirror. America the free, the land of limitless opportunity, of which the righteous and the upright

and the equal sing--is the utopia which the great men of all times and generations foresaw and prophesied. This is the future country for all of mankind, and it is also the future country of the Jews, of all Jews.

This effervescence which was then being felt in the lives of the Jews in all lands, also left its mark on the students in the seminary, even though it is understood that their lives were encompassed by a high wall of aristocratic segregation which came to them on account of their situation, since they were to be the future heads and spokesmen of wealthy congregations whose members stand above such burning questions. For most of the students the feeling was a sense of the "career" in all of its power, the burning ambition to overcome every obstacle and stumbling block and to succeed in life. With this sixth sense they knew that such success is possible to find in the hands of the strong men who seal the fate of the temple, and find for it the sums necessary for its existence. It was necessary then to stand on the side of these people for in their hands was also the rabbi's fate. It was necessary, in any event, to be cautious not to arouse any opposition on the part of these strong men by dealing with questions to which their hearts did not turn. There were not a few supporters of the Zionist movement among these students, but they buried their sympathy for this movement in the secret places of their souls . . . for they knew that the directors of the seminary and also many of the professors were opposed to it. Only a few students had the strength of spirit to do public propaganda for Zionism

inside the school as well as outside of it. But one must admit that with all of the students, almost with exception, the perception of the importance of that period was felt then, though they could not grasp the whole matter in its entirety. They saw the new life which was continuing to form in America, and the changing face of the Jewish community in America on account of the large Jewish migration. They recognized that they would also have to fulfill an important function in this life when their time came to go out to battle as commanders of the camp, but it would be impossible for them to know clearly what the nature of this task would be. A strong echo of this perception was heard frequently in the sermons which these students delivered on Shabbat in the College synagogue.

The first impression that the College made upon me was that of a school of which half was a yeshivah and half a seminary. The studies were holy studies and they also were studies which were very close to my spirit and dear to my heart: the Holy Scriptures, Tractate "Chulin," Jewish History, Sefer IkKarim, Guide for the Perplexed, Emunot V'Deot, Midrash, and Agaddah. The goal was certainly holy, preparation for the rabbinate, meaning service to the Jewish community in the most sanctified interests that it had. After a short time I found that the seminary had swallowed the yeshivah, leaving not a trace of it in its midst.

The program was broad of course, but truthfully, there was within it not a little deceit. The students learned very little of what was taught them or was supposed to be

taught them. They had to go to the university in the morning hours. Only the few afternoon hours remained for their rabbinic studies when these immigrants were already tired and their hearts were not inclined to Jewish studies. A result of this situation was that the majority of the students were influenced only in a very small degree by all of the program, for to be honest, they only tasted a small part of it. Jewish scholars did not issue forth from the walls of this school and they could not come forth. If among the ones who finished there were found one or two who knew Hebrew or Talmud or had any knowledge of Medieval Philosophy, or the creations of the poets, this was a matter of chance alone, because these students who were European natives brought their knowledge with them when they came, and the strength of their memories remained with them, for they did not forget their learning during the years which they spent in the seminary. The heads of the institution certainly were sorry about this, but there was nothing they could do about it, and during the course of time they were reconciled to the situation. In the end the seminary's principal mission was to develop preachers in Israel, and good preachers could issue forth from it even in this situation, meaning preachers who knew how to speak beautifully in pure and eloquent language--even if the content was sometimes defective in terms of its Jewish character. Truthfully, the College succeeded in educating good speakers and preachers. But we should remember that this matter was actually not a concern of the College, but rather of the general education that these

students received at the university and in the high school which preceded it. For the most part these students did not go to Midrash or to Agaddah or to Jewish tradition for material for their sermons, but rather to Shakespeare and to Milton, to Spencer and to Huxley. The Tanach was of course the basis for their sermons, especially the portion of the week upon which they depended, but they did not expand on it with Hebrew literature, and what they couldn't find in the Agaddah, which was foreign to them, they found in Greek mythology. They were very precise in their use of the English language, which became a ritual for them, and they were proud of it. The students competed against one another to be intelligible with poly-syllabic words, unusual words, or words which sounded beautiful. Many of them also tried their hands at poetry, and in the sermons which they had to prepare they frequently brought in the best verses of Byron, Tennyson, and Longfellow. Yehudah HaLevi and Ibn Ezra or Ibn Gabirol were strange names to them, and Judah Leib Gordon they knew only through hearsay alone.

On the social side I found these American youths for the most part good and sympathetic friends. Many of them were able to discuss beautifully matters close to students' hearts, they knew poetry, music, and dance, and they were veteran students of gymnastics, baseball, and football. For many of them I found that the seminary was a kind of "penance for their sins," a "Via Dolorosa" that they were forced to walk in order to arrive at a strong economic position for life. Hebrew studies interested them very little, and I do

not remember even one who had any additional inclination to delve into the literature of Israel and Israel's great culture. On the other hand, I found with them many valuable human characteristics--maintaining an interest in the lot of others and participating in their grief. I believe that this character trait was the driving force which stirred them to become rabbis, meaning pastors who minister to the people of their generation, and their beliefs, and want with all of their heart to be an ethical helper for them. If not for this, there would be no cause for their "rabbinate" since they were scarcely attracted to its cultural basis.

Among these students I and several others like me were the "learned Jews" upon whom they looked with fear and honor for our Hebrew knowledge which they lacked. Perhaps they mocked us in the hidden places of their hearts, and there were also those who pitied us because we had not been as fortunate as they, to have been born in the holiness of America, and our articulation in English was not as distinctive as theirs. They believed that this would be an obstacle for us when our turn arrived to leave school and to seek a position. They did not doubt their professional success for even a second, and there was a great deal of truth in their thinking. Yet, several of the "foreigners" among the students would also succeed. Today they are counted among the most famous rabbis who stand at the head of the large congregations. It is true that the relation to us, the natives of Russia and Poland, was sometimes as toward second class students, both from the side of the professors

and that of the students. At the same time they felt that we were above them in our Hebrew knowledge and they were jealous of us. There were those who also turned to us for help when they found themselves in trouble at the time of a lesson, which caused several humorous episodes.

I remember: we were sitting in a class and reading the portion of the week with the commentary of Rashi. The teacher was an old man and a little quarrelsome, he became excited and angry easily, though he had served in this capacity for many years, and already knew the spirit of the students and their weaknesses. We, the few "Jews" who were in the room, he treated kindly. He knew that it was possible for him to depend on us. The others, the "goyim," and they were the great majority, sat and struggled with the reading. The reading was especially hard for them in Rashi script and with the many abbreviations there. The boy who sat next to me was the reader, and he failed with almost every word. The teacher looked upon him with agitation and contempt, trying to help him from the professor's chair with half of the words which he whispered to him. The unfortunate boy struggling with the stormy waves, grasped the anchor of rescue which the teacher threw to him, failed again, and the deep waters almost passed over his head. A little more and he would arrive at the abbreviation, נ"ן, which were to him real hieroglyphics. From under the bench without the eyes of the instructor noticing, he pulled on my sleeve, meaning, "Help me, brother, what is the meaning of these two cursed letters?" And I, the good and the

merciful, felt like helping him and whispered to him the solution for the letters. The boy read in a happy and sure voice, like a warrior who brings the crown of victory from the battle: "Tashmish Ha Mitah" (sexual relations), when in truth this was the abbreviation for "T'chiat Ha Metim" (resurrection of the dead). The teacher looked at him and smiled, and I also answered him with a smile of shame and embarrassment. The rest of the students didn't laugh, because they didn't even understand the humorous side of the matter.

It appears to me that the weak side of Reform is not its ideology, which is a matter transmitted to the heart, but rather the limitation of the Hebrew knowledge of so many who stand at its head. What this means is a basic lack of knowledge about the soul and the spirit of Judaism. Judaism never tolerated ignorance because it knew that ignorance would bring with it misunderstanding and distortion in matters of faith. An ignoramus cannot be righteous. Ultimately, knowledge of Hebrew is necessary not only to criticise Judaism, but also to be devoted to it. The contempt which the leaders of Reform and its institutions demonstrated for Hebrew studies through the program which they determined for the seminary--at least for the first thirty years after the establishment of the institution--is what brought misfortune on the entire Reform movement. One can forgive an opponent a great deal, even his denial of God, but not ignorance. Here we had a vision of people who were being educated to be ethical leaders for congregations in Israel, and whose



knowledge of Hebrew was so weak that they found difficulty even in reading some of the few prayers in Hebrew that remained in the temple's prayerbook. These rabbis sometimes bore pure and noble personalities which they devoted with all of their hearts and souls to the affairs of their congregations, and as I have said there were among them preachers not without talent. There is no doubt that the great majority of them stood on great cultural heights and could play honored and glorified roles in community life--were it not for this defect in their Jewish knowledge.

Truth demands that I add that the captains of Reform's ship dealt with this stumbling block, even at the time of which I am speaking, and through the years they have succeeded in bringing a broader Hebrew program into the curriculum of the College. The most important reform that they brought into this institution was, without a doubt, that they made it independent of the university--that is to say: they cancelled the arrangement by which a student used to be compelled to go to the university in the morning hours so that the Jewish studies became of secondary importance. Instead of this they decided to accept as students in the school only boys who had already completed their studies at the university and had their degrees in hand. In this manner these students were given the opportunity to consecrate themselves to rabbinic studies without interruption during all of the years that they remained at the College. The College of today is without a doubt a more important educational institution than it was during the years covered by these

memoirs.

I find it necessary to add one more thing. Even the rabbis who left the College at the time of which I am speaking--and I mean, of course, only the native Americans of the kind mentioned--even with them were found not a few who themselves understood this great lack in their education, and by their own efforts overcame it after they had already completed their requirements and gone forth from the institution. The great majority of them probably remained in their ignorance, but there were also many among them who continued to study on their own, and succeeded in possessing for themselves a broad knowledge in our literature, if via some secondary route. Some of them went to Germany to continue their studies in the Hochschule or in other schools, and there were those who even went to yeshivas and colleges in Russia and Poland and Israel, and returned from there with their knowledge enriched. Others, who did not go out of the country, but chose to preach in large and wealthy congregations, were also compelled to acquire knowledge in Judaism and its wisdom because of "noblesse oblige" and from performing good deeds for wrong motives, they eventually care to perform them for right ones. Some of the most famous rabbis in America at this time, whose influence is more recognized in our community lives, and among them also the leading speakers for Zionism, are counted among the students of the time of which I speak here, or close to that time. Then, in the years of their studies in Cincinnati, these were proud boys, dressing themselves up in their moustaches and

their suits and endeavoring to make an impression of their nobility, which was limited almost entirely to a wonderful but empty exterior. The kids of then are the goats of today, and I believe that they are truly good and faithful Jews.

Other matters which touch on my Reform, I believe also accord with the spirits of several of my friends who were in school with me at the same time.

At the time I entered the seminary, even during all of the years that I spent time in this institution of Jewish studies, I did not have the sense that I was a "Reformer," meaning a revolutionary in the matters of religion. The transfer from Orthodox to Reform did not bring any tear in my soul, or shattering of my spirit, nor even any agitation of my religious conscience. This is not because I lacked a religious quality. I remember only that I lacked the realization that an important problem was before me. Philosophy, more correct: religious philosophy, did not interest me in the days of my youth, and few were the days in which I occupied myself in thinking about what and why we Jews believe, or even are Jews in general. I accepted my Judaism as a fact inseparable from my being. In the days of my childhood the hard discipline of Orthodoxy made an impression on me, and I did not like it, though I did not consciously rebel against it. I stopped being an observant Jew in the thirteenth year of my life, and perhaps previous to that. The old school with the old angry-faced teacher and his strap that I remembered from the days of my childhood were a symbol of Orthodoxy to me, as were also the poor and delapidated

synagogues in my hometown. I was aesthetic in spirit, and the external ugliness in everything acted upon me negatively. If my knowledge of Judaism had been greater then, it is possible that I would have looked before me and before the soul of this faith to recognize its hidden treasures even for the external ugliness that darkened it, and which pushed me away from the formal side of it.

Thus it occurred that I turned from Orthodoxy to Reform without any internal struggle. It had only the feeling of turning from a narrow and gloomy corridor to a wide and illuminated drawing room. The yoke of the commandments, the prohibitions, and the warnings which touched my daily life, no longer pressed against me. In contrast to this a new world of simple ideals opened before me, of the freedom of religious thought, of human brotherhood and of peace among the nations, and as a result of these about which Judaism preaches, an enchanting world opened which my heart went after. I realized that I had become a conscious Reformer only after I finished my required studies and went forth wrapped in the title "rabbi," and congregation after congregation called me to do them "the honor" of being their preacher and spiritual leader. Then my spiritual conscience was aroused, and I began to seek my paths in life and to find merit and justification for this Reform whose prophet I had already become. This matter came to me easily, to me the aesthete going after beauty, order and the depth in life. In general my Reform philosophy was thus: Religious reform is necessary for us just as political redemption is

necessary for us. Orthodoxy as it is practiced currently originated not in the wise spirit of ancient and prophetic Judaism, but rather in the Middle Ages, days of darkness and of flames, when Jews and the rest of humanity didn't know what internal freedom was and what external beauty and elegance were.

Further that complete political redemption will not come to us unless spiritual redemption proceeds it--an idea which came to me under Achad Ha-Am's influence. As we know, with the world's nations, religious reformation proceeded the political revolution that brought the principle of freedom and equality in its wake. The Jews were not different in this respect from the rest of humanity. I once also believed, along with the German reformers, that Orthodoxy was an obstacle in the way of our achieving complete civil emancipation in all lands, and that with Reform, that portrays Judaism to the world so beautifully and uprightly, equality and complete freedom would also come. I knew the Reform Jew to be no less of a believer than the Orthodox, though he was not so exacting in the mitzvot, and he surpassed his Orthodox brother in that he paved the way for a full emancipation for his brothers. During this time I also came to the belief that the full success of Zionism depended on the religious reform of Judaism. The Reform of today are, after all, students of the prophets of Israel of old, and the prophets were liberal and nationalistic Jews at one and the same time--an idea that I expressed in my speech at the Zionist Conference that was in Rochester twenty years ago.<sup>6</sup>

This soul searching is interesting in that I believe it casts light on the spiritual condition of several of my friends who like me also entered the "orchard" of Reform because they saw within it an important solution to the problem of Jews and Judaism among the nations.

It still remains for me to add here various descriptive sketches of the group of teachers at the College, the masters who gave to this institution its spirit and its soul and made it the "factory" of American Reform. These masters were, in their times, without exception, natives of Europe, from different countries including Russia and Poland. Only two of them were natives of Germany, but there was no doubt that German culture brought up and nursed the great majority of them, if not all of them. The professors who were born in Russia and Poland were Americans, that is to say, men who received their education in American universities, but they also grasped the German culture which they admired deeply. It was easy to feel that the spirit of Mendelssohn,<sup>7</sup> Geiger,<sup>8</sup> Holdheim, and others hovered over the institution that was founded by people who were educated in the German enlightenment, and who were supported and funded by German Jews.

First and foremost among these professors was of course Isaac Mayer Wise, founder of the College and the living spirit of American Reform for over fifty years. When I arrived in Cincinnati Wise was close to eighty and crippled because one of his legs was lame, but all of his senses were still alive, and he was still active in the work that was before

him as a rabbi and preacher at his temple, Bene Jeshurun, as an editor of English and German newspapers, and as director of the College, in which he also taught several hours a week. Besides this he was always busy as a father and patron for the Jewish community of his city which grew increasingly from day to day in all of its nuances and different faces, and as a famous leader upon whom were the eyes of the Jews of all America. Wise did not found Reform Judaism in America, as is believed in error, for in truth a reform movement was already found in the country in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in Charleston, South Carolina, a movement that began three decades before Wise arrived in the United States.<sup>9</sup> The credit of Wise is that he organized the movement, collected the lone sheaves into bundles in all of the various cities, and influenced the congregations then in the American diaspora to accept his opinion on religious reforms. Many opponents in many places rose against him, of course, especially in New York, Philadelphia, and in Albany where he began his work, and even in Cincinnati to which he came in 1854. But the man was exceptionally energetic and his spirit did not know defeat. His personality had a special magic, and his talents as a speaker and writer stood him in good stead as he overcame obstacle after obstacle from his path. As time went on his opponents turned into his admirers and helpers. Thus Wise succeeded in establishing the Union of American Congregations, and immediately after this, the Hebrew Union College (1875).

Despite his great age Wise did not miss even one day

of going to the College to teach the students and to direct the interests of the institution which were so close to his heart. He drew the boys close to him, and especially those in whom he saw a spark of talent whether in preaching or teaching or directing. He always tried to find positions for the students who completed their studies, and many of these that later became the heads of large congregations were given positions for life. The happiest day of the year for him was graduation day and distribution of certificates and prizes to those who graduated. This day was like a grand holiday for the Jewish community of Cincinnati. The ceremony took place at one of the city's temples, either that of Wise or that of Dr. Lilienthal,<sup>10</sup> and in the presence of many hundred of the leading Jews of the city and of other cities. Not only did the rabbis of Cincinnati and the teachers at the College participate in the program, but also rabbis and famous preachers from different places. Wise practiced the laying on of hands of each of the graduates, and when he extended him his certificate kissed him on the forehead. This kiss was known during that time as "the ordination kiss" and did not stop except with Wise's death.

Though Wise spoke very much about Reform and continued to do so until his last day, despite this it is impossible to say about him that he was zealous about the matter. In truth Wise was much more patient and composed about this matter than his students or colleagues who stood together with him in battle. He was not hostile to Orthodoxy, and the Orthodox rabbis in America treated him with respect.



Those of them who came to Cincinnati and knocked on his door always found his house and his pocket open to them. This attitude on his part did not change even for so dangerous a matter as Zionism. Wise opposed with all of his might the nationalist movement in Israel. When Herzl's "Judenstaat" appeared Wise attacked it with biting articles in his newspapers "the Israelite" and "Deborah" and in his sermons from the pulpit of his synagogue. His slogan was the familiar slogan of the "Protest-rabbiner,"<sup>11</sup> that Zionism was disloyal to the land in which Jews lived and were counted as citizens. Even though at precisely the same time there were found some professors at the College who were known Zionists, Dr. Wise did not shy away from them; his friendly treatment of them did not lessen on this account.

I remember that at a rabbinic convention that was in Cincinnati in 1899 in honor of his eightieth birthday, when Professor Caspar Levias<sup>12</sup> dared to proclaim Zionist ideas and some of those assembled protested against the heretical "desecration" in these "treacherous" words, it was Wise who acted as Levias's shield. Not only that, but he also gave him a free hand to print his words in the monthly journal that the students published, and after that, even in a special pamphlet.

This reminds me of the great difference between Isaac Mayer Wise and the second Reform leader that American Judaism had, and who took Wise's place in the presidency of the school. I mean Dr. Kaufman Kohler,<sup>13</sup> who with his deep knowledge of the science of Judaism and even with his talent

for preaching towered over Wise, while at the same time in the quality of his spirit he fell far below him. Kohler was bold in battle, but not in advice, and the concept of patience was foreign to him. Surely Kohler was a man of truth devoted to the opinions for whose sake he fought. But there was recognizable in him also a measure of zealousness such that he did not know how to give respect to his opponents, and he forgot that they were allowed to hold their opinions and to argue for them. When Kohler ascended to the presidency of the Cincinnati school in 1903, he began immediately to afflict the "non-Kosher" teachers, that is to say the nationalists. Dr. Max L. Margolis, the aforementioned Professor Caspar Levias, Professor Henry (Tzvi) Malter,<sup>14</sup> and Dr. Max Schloessinger.<sup>15</sup> He brought down his wrath upon Levias in particular because he saw him reading chapters from "Al Parashat Drachim" by Achad Ha'Am to his students. I doubt whether Kohler himself read Achad Ha'Am's essays or knew their content. But he knew this, that Achad Ha'Am was one of the great pillars in the building of the national movement, and this was enough for him to prohibit the book for the College! A few years passed and Kohler so afflicted these professors and treated them with such a feeling of hate, if not of real contempt, that their patience ran out and all of them together left their positions. Such a situation never could have occurred during Wise's days, who as I said was patient and merciful. He never conceded his opinions, but he knew the secret of patience in relating to others, even those with opposing opinions.

At the time when I received wisdom from Wise, he already was, as I said, an elderly man and crippled in one leg, but the light in his eyes did not dim and the tempo of his work did not flag at all. He used to sit at a long table in the large hall of the College as his students surrounded him on the left and on the right. Together with the lesson which he proclaimed (his field was: the essence of Judaism and introduction to Holy Scriptures) he also told beautiful popular stories spiced with jokes, and sometimes even stories from the Midrash. He was democratic to the full extent, and even treated the smallest of the students with the love of a father or a big brother. Sometimes he would light up his pipe at the time of the lesson. It is possible that his students did not learn much from him about the nature of Judaism, or about the characteristics of the Holy Scriptures; on the other hand they did learn the hidden secret of a personality full of grace and of magic. It was certainly the case that these students loved their teacher as sons love their good father. For Wise this love was the greatest reward for all of his life's labor for the good of Judaism and the benefit of the College. Wise did not pursue pleasures and material luxuries, though his congregational salary was large. (For his work at the College he did not receive a salary.) Contrary to the practice of his colleagues and many of his students who stood at the head of large rabbinic positions, he did not travel on tours of Europe, and he didn't go to health spas, to theatre, or to opera. He distributed a fair portion of his money to the poor. He found a greater

reward in the surroundings of his beloved students, and there he also met his end. A stroke seized him one Shabbat afternoon when he was sitting and speaking to his students, and from the sickbed which he got into he never came down again.

Wise's influence is felt in the religious lives of America's Jews even today. His students who served him went forth from his school to scatter the teachings of Reform in temples. Throughout the great land, and as a result of the work they did, they brought fame also to the honor of their teacher. Still, during Wise's life the number of Reform congregations grew increasingly in every city and town in America. New congregations were founded and beautiful temples were built, large and small, and a custom was fixed: to invite Dr. Wise with the erection of each new temple to be the main speaker at the dedication ceremony, a custom which continued almost until the final days of this famous leader. After his death Wise became almost a legendary figure. Many stories were written about him, about his history and his work, and in Cincinnati a Wise's worship service was fixed at the congregation. The grand temple which he served for decades is one of the most wonderful temples in America, though now it is already found in the "downtown" part of the city among stores and factories, and the congregation's members have moved to live far from it in the "uptown" part of the city in beautiful and new neighborhoods which were built in the last twenty-five years--despite this there is not a man who would consider selling the building or the

property on which it stands to build a new temple close to the homes of congregation's members. The temple's name also changed, and today it is called "Isaac Mayer Wise Temple." The College of course changed its location and today it is found very far from the old building, and it surrounds the University of Cincinnati which it rivals with the architectural beauty of its buildings which today are four in number: the classroom building itself, a dormitory in which the students live, a library for the institution's hundreds of thousands of books, and the gymnasium--that is to say, a Jewish university complete within itself. The school has thrown off its old form and even its old curriculum--today it is more intensive and more traditional. Not only the administration is new but also the faculty. Despite this, Isaac Mayer Wise's spirit still floats over this institution, and each and every year on the founder's birthday, the teachers and the students assemble inside the large hall and celebrate the day with a special ceremony, with speeches, with joy, and with prayer. Wise's place in American Jewish history is secure in perpetuity, so long as this Judaism continues in the Reform style. Even if the day will come when Judaism in another form--say more conservative--will establish itself in this country, this is because Isaac Mayer Wise was "a righteous man in his generation," and in his time he fulfilled the task of keeping the burning coals of Judaism from being extinguished--Judaism as he understood it and according to his special way.

Wise was loved by his students not only because of the

generosity of his spirit, his closeness to them, and his concern for their situations, but also and particularly because he treated Judaism and the rabbinate seriously. He saw theirs as the holy task of preserving Judaism and ensuring its perpetuity in the world. He influenced his students to love the rabbinate despite the difficulties which it entailed, and despite all of the troubles, burdens, and arguments of Jews--and even Reform Jews--who make heavy the yoke of rabbinic calling on those who serve it. He commented regularly on the many defects found in the character of Jews and explained that these defects came to them from without on account of the many oppressions and attacks during the many centuries of the dispersion. The Jews, he emphasized are still a great nation today and an important ethical base in the world despite all of the damages wrought upon them through the fault of the Christians. The most important factor making Jews great, he said endless times, was that they were a religious community. He believed with perfect faith that a Jew prospers according to the measure of his devotion to his faith, and fails according to the measure that he distances himself from it. As a student of German enlightenment reform in the first half of the nineteenth century, Wise could not see salvation for Jews in Jewish nationalism or in the flight from the European field for some "Asian imperative." The answer for the Jews would come, would have to come, in the lands in which they were located, even in the same countries in which they were treated as deviants. Humankind continues to get better, to improve--

he used to say in the spirit of optimism--and would not be satisfied with the moral conquests that had already taken place. He especially saw America as a land of promise for the Jews. In this spirit he taught the many students who followed in his footsteps, though after his death not few of them turned from the opinions which they inherited from their teacher, and began to look at the situation of Israel among the nations from within a totally different vantage point. But with all of this, there was no diminishing the heartfelt respect and love which they possessed for their teacher and counselor.

Second in command to Dr. Wise among the teachers of that time was Dr. Moses Mielziner,<sup>16</sup> professor of Talmud, who was a man of small stature with a wrinkled face and a long beard. Mielziner, like Wise, also began in the rabbinate in the country of his birth, Denmark. He became famous as the author of an important book in English, Introduction to the Talmud, and as one of the first to write on Talmudic literature he was counted in his time among the leading Jewish scholars in the country. For two years I heard the wisdom of the Talmud from him until the day of his death in 1903. I remember that he impressed himself on the hearts of his students more by the love and charm expressed in his face than by his work as a teacher. He loved the field in which he specialized, the Talmud and related topics, and there is no doubt that he was saddened when his labor to bring understanding of the Talmud into the hearts of his students failed to bear fruit, because these students lacked

even the most rudimentary knowledge in this subject. Mielziner taught us the laws of slaughtering in Tractate "Chulin," and it was customary for our teacher to go with us to the slaughterhouse so that we could see the methods of Jewish slaughter with our own eyes. He took the opportunity to explain to us the difference between this mode of slaughter and that customary among the Gentiles. In general Mielziner was a very humble man who liked and befriended everyone, especially his students. To us, those from Russia and Poland, he showed extra love because of our Hebrew knowledge, and he used to invite us to his home frequently to have a meal with the members of his household. He died after a long illness, and even after he took to his sickbed he still continued to teach his lessons to his students who came to his house and sat around his bedside with their Gemarat in their hands.

Dr. Eliezar (Gotthard) Deutsch<sup>17</sup> was probably the most dear of all of our teachers. He was a dignified man who made an impression when one saw him for the first time. He was very tall, solid, with broad shoulders, and his long and branched out beard gave him the aura of a patriarch. He was as one of the pious rabbis of Russia and Poland or Galicia it seemed to me. Because he spoke Yiddish well and with a Galician accent, he had an easy time mixing in with the Galician Jewish community and to be accepted as one of them when he went to New York. He used to love to travel the streets of the large ghetto and to visit the synagogues at the time of prayer without their knowing who he was. But truthfully he was very far from Orthodoxy, and his opinions



about Judaism were radical. For him, all of Judaism was a matter of historical development. It was possible to say of Reform that it drew him even less than Orthodoxy in which he saw at least an "ancestral inheritance" of principles, ancient customs, prayers, and ancient poetry. He was a professor of Jewish history, and he used to teach his lessons as the university professors did, each lesson on a particular chapter or a particular event in a given historical period. But Deutsch despite his academic education in magnificent universities was not suited to such a manner of instruction. He did not interpret and did not explain, rather he read from one small book that he used to carry in his pants pocket, with the dates of those events in the lives of the Jews of this country or that. This knowledge by itself was very dry. It gave us nothing and interested us not at all. Truly, we did not learn much about history from Professor Deutsch, and if we had not been motivated by ourselves to read the volumes of Graetz,<sup>18</sup> Jost,<sup>19</sup> and others, we would not have possessed even a minimum of knowledge about this important field.

Despite this Deutsch was the most popular teacher at the College, and even from the viewpoint of instruction. He had a loving personality and he endeared us to reading history books, though his lessons themselves gave us nothing. He did not "preach" wisdom, but expressed it through the special friendly conversations he had. We learned much more about the Jews and about Judaism from his wit and his jokes than from his formal lessons. He did not have any

system of teaching, and there were times when we saw him as a teacher of beginners when he proclaimed for us in a hoarse voice the dates which he read from the pages of his notebook. But it was pleasant for us to listen to him talk, telling about Judaism at the time of his birth and in Austria and Hungary that he knew so well, or engaging him in arguments about Zionism which he was against. We sometimes intentionally aroused him with our questions to speak about problems close to his heart, so that he would not teach us the lesson scheduled for the day. Once he began to speak about some subject, he did not stop. We were supposed to learn from him important details about Jewish history in Portugal and Spain or about the decrees of 1096 and so forth. We did truly hear from him interesting things about Chasidism and the "tzaddikim."<sup>20</sup> His words and his stories and even his jokes made an impression on us and helped us to endear ourselves to Judaism and more than this, to the Jewish people.

In truth Gotthard Deutsch was a strange plant in the ground of American Judaism, and particularly in the Jewish environment of Cincinnati. He was a great master of knowledge in various fields, but the knowledge was not organized well in his mind, and if he bit off more than he could chew, he did not bite off enough that was practical and useful. He was educated at Breslau and other famous centers in Europe and was slated to be a rabbi and preacher in Israel. It is very possible that if he had remained in the old world and in an atmosphere befitting his spirit he would have

become in time a magnificent preacher in Germany or Austria. But his fate carried him to America to be a professor at a rabbinical school, and he entered the teaching profession that truly did not become him. He hatched great advances in his mind in relation to his literary and scientific work, but because he attached such great importance to his own talent and caliber, he therefore failed almost every time he tried his hand at anything. He tried to be a scholar, story-teller, poet, historian, journalist, and he wrote many books none of which merited to be long lasting. His essays on the history of Israel or on Jewish questions were always interesting and read with pleasure, but his disorganization was recognizable in them. His attempt to blend facts and supposition and to bring together matters distant from one another almost always caused him to fail. A short time after I came to Cincinnati Deutsch sent out into the world of literature a book on the philosophy of Jewish history and on the history of Jewish philosophy. Included within this matter was much more than one subject or even two. For Deutsch it was a pretext for writing an essay that had within it many dates and many historical facts, all of it spiced with wit and anecdotes. This material that for others would certainly have been a book or a number of weighty books, came from him instead in the form of a meager pamphlet which had in it, as I recall, less than 100 pages.

With all of these faults Professor Deutsch was the most wonderful personality at the school, not only because of his patriarchal nature, but particularly because of his facial

expression, his eyes which always looked on his students with love, and the generosity of spirit that he showed to all. If Deutsch was not a great scientific expert, he was without a doubt a master of great and broad knowledge in all of the fields of Jewish wisdom. He had an awesome strength of memory for dates, important ones as well as non-important ones, of Jewish history of all lands, and he collected a detailed catalogue, written on special cards that numbered about seventy thousand, on every historical fact, and on every important personality in Israel of all times. His great weakness in this was that he loved to write about every matter and concern, which caused a lack of depth in the subjects which he treated. Despite this one can find great joy in reading his many articles in English, German, and also in Hebrew. Half of his scientific articles were in truth feuilletons peppered and spiced with the myrrh and cinnamon of Jewish humor. Deutsch had boundless knowledge about the essence of the Jewish soul from every row and layer. He came in contact with all of them, and he delved into all of them with his incisive and penetrating eyes, and he loved to write and to joke about all of them, not as a stranger but as one of the family. It seems to me that the Jewish masses, inhabitants of the ghetto's poor dwellings, were much closer to his spirit than the aristocrats, as it were, who lived in magnificent palaces. Deutsch, who was a Reform Jew in his views and his way of life, still found spiritual sustenance in the religious democracy he found only with the Orthodox. Every Shabbat and Jewish holiday

it was his custom to go to the latter's poor synagogue where he wrapped himself in a large tallit and loudly participated in the worship and in the community song.

One may summarize the talents and character of Deutsch's spirit by saying that he was an encyclopedist on account of his knowledge, but that he exchanged the great coins of science for the small change of the journalist. He loved the printed word and he had the great fortune to appear in print very often. He gave us only very little of the great abundance that was in the storehouse of his spirit. He died in 1921, and according to his wishes his body was not buried, rather it was cremated. This too shows the contrariness of his spirit, for in essence Deutsch was a conservative. The ancient customs were dear to him, and one of his most beloved topics in the friendly talks that he had with his students was pertaining to his father's and grandfather's graves in Moravia or Bohemia. Pictures of these graves were always found on his work table or on his office wall.

Among the other teachers who made an impression on the students in large measure, it is necessary to remember Ephraim Feldman<sup>21</sup> who was the Medieval Philosophy instructor. Though he was self-taught and did not receive a modern education either in public school or in institutions of Jewish studies alone, in a "cheder" or in the old style yeshiva, he was still an excellent pedagogue in his manner of explanation. With him we studied Guide for the Perplexed, Principles, and other such books. Though he was born and raised

in Russia and Poland and came to America in his teens, Feldman still succeeded in adjusting to the English language and was able to speak and to write it fluently. He wrote a number of essays on various matters, and were it not for the natural laziness which nestled him, certainly he would have made a name for himself among writers. Feldman was, without exception, a friend to the students, and in contrast to this, opposition to him rose from among some of the professors and the administrators who complained about his lack of "fear of God." To be honest, Feldman was not zealous in his honor of God, and it is also possible that his position on some religious principles contained not a little of the skepticism that could be interpreted as standing on the threshold of atheism, depending upon who interpreted it. Certainly he did not carry his position at the rabbinical school from any religious feelings. For him this position was only a source of sustenance and not more. But he also was not an "apostate"; he did not speak rebellion against God and did not try to influence his students to stray from the straight path. He remained faithful to the duties of his tradition all of his days, and he tried with all of his might in his lessons to his students to plant within their hearts a love of Jewish thought and Jewish literature. At any rate Feldman deserved his position for there was not another among the professors who knew as well as he did how to explain his teachings.

But his opponents saw only the toothpick between his teeth without feeling the moat between their eyes, for they

surely did not distinguish themselves in any great measure of religious piety. They constantly grumbled that he was an "atheist," and that his teaching rabbinical students who would some day go forth to bear the witnesses of Israel's religious spirit, would prove an obstacle for them. All of the time that Dr. Wise remained alive they didn't prevail against him, because Wise didn't find any fault in him and defended him. But after Wise's death Feldman's situation became more dangerous from day to day. Dr. Kohler, who took Wise's place, was a religious zealot by nature (yes, such zealots were even found among the Reformers), and it was not hard to nudge him from the neutral side and to set himself up as an adversary to the man suspected of atheism. It is also said that the fact that Feldman was a Russian Jew had some influence on Kohler. About two or three years after Kohler's appointment to the College presidency, the trustees cut off Feldman's fate. Then many of the rabbis who had been his students roused themselves and they gathered together to protest this action. They rained letters on the administration, spoke in praise of Feldman, emphasized his spiritual heights and his pedagogical talents, and finally the administration repented of their action and appointed Feldman anew to his position; they even decided to give him compensation for the injustice which had been done to him and to honor him with the degree of Doctor of Theology on his fiftieth birthday that fell close to the same time. But poor Feldman did not merit to see this honor in his lifetime. The day on which he was assigned to receive

the degree in a festive manner before many people, a massive heart attack seized him and he died suddenly. There is no doubt that his fears over his position and the sustenance of his household hastened his end.

There were others among the instructors, Caspar Levias, expert in Eastern languages and especially in grammar of Talmudic language; Dr. Henry Malter who came to Cincinnati straight from Berlin at a young age, and after remaining at the College several years, the earth of this city couldn't contain him, and he quite his job; Professor Simon Mannheimer, who taught Hebrew grammar and Holy Scriptures, and one in a while printed poetry about subjects which touched on events of the day and timely questions in the columns of Jewish newspapers (he used to write the poems in three languages at one time, in English, French, and German, and sometimes also in Hebrew); and Professor Moses Bottenweiser,<sup>22</sup> teacher of Tanach, who became famous through his essays on the Book of Job and Jeremiah the prophet. After I had already left the school Dr. M. L. Margolis and Professor Max Schloessinger joined the faculty, but they didn't keep their positions more than a few years. They became Zionist sympathizers and could not remain in the same company with Dr. Kohler, who was very strict about the pure sanctity of Reform ideology. Dr. J. L. Magnes<sup>23</sup> also taught at the College after I left it, and he too remained there only about one year. Only David Neumark<sup>24</sup> stayed with his position; he served as a professor for many years, until the day of his death.

About thirty or more years--a complete generation--have



already passed since the time of which I speak, and the impressions which I received then are still fixed and fresh in my soul. The College, with all of its faults at that time, gave to its students much benefit and usefulness to their work as leaders and guides for the Jewish community of America. It planted within us a belief in the future of our people in the new land, and it prepared our hearts to be devoted to the educational work of our brothers in this great land. There was not perfection in this institution, and it would be impossible to hope that there would be because of the conditions which then ruled in the Jewish world in America. Its greatest merit was that it was the first of the great educational institutions that arose for Judaism on this side of the ocean. It proved that in every place and time Israel is not a widow, devoid of teachers and leaders who recognized the community responsibility placed upon them. This was the shoot that sprouted in the sandbox of this strange land, that from it blossomed and grew a new branch of Judaism. That is an established fact, whether we acknowledge it or not, and which has maintained the Jewish world in America for more than two generations. And for this we are obliged to give it many thanks.

## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup>Max Raisin, "My Fifty Years as a Rabbi" (autobiographical essay, American Jewish Archives), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Max Raisin, "Zionism and Liberal Judaism," Jewish Exponent (July 3, 1914).

<sup>5</sup>Max Raisin, Dapim MiPinkaso shel Rabi (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Shulsinger Brothers, Publishers, 1941), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup>Max Raisin, "On Universal Judaism," American Hebrew LXXXVI, No. 15 (February 11, 1910):385.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Max Raisin, "My Fifty Years as a Rabbi" (autobiographical essay, American Jewish Archives), p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Max Raisin, CCAR Yearbook XLVI (1936):267-268.

<sup>10</sup>Max Raisin, Dapim Mi Pinkaso shel Rabi (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Shulsinger Brothers, Publishers, 1941), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>Max Raisin, CCAR Yearbook XLVII (1937):305-306.

<sup>12</sup>Max Raisin, CCAR Yearbook LVI (1946):300.

<sup>13</sup>Max Raisin, "My Fifty Years as a Rabbi" (autobiographical essay, American Jewish Archives), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>Max Raisin, "A Reply to Dr. [Samuel] Schulman's Views on Zionism," American Hebrew LXXXVI, No. 19 (March 11, 1910): 487.

<sup>15</sup>Max Raisin, Dapim Mi Pinkaso shel Rabi (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Shulsinger Brothers, Publishers, 1941), p. 22.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>17</sup>Max Raisin, "My Fifty Years as a Rabbi" (autobiographical essay, American Jewish Archives), p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Max Raisin, "Zionism and Liberal Judaism," Jewish Exponent (July 3, 1914).

## Notes

### Reform Judaism

<sup>1</sup>Esther 1:11.

<sup>2</sup>Exodus 23:20.

<sup>3</sup>Yeshiva University.

<sup>4</sup>Avot 2:6.

<sup>5</sup>David Einhorn (1809-1879), a Reform rabbi and theologian. A radical reformer, he had an ongoing debate with Isaac Mayer Wise. His prayerbook Olat Tamid served as the model for the Union Prayer Book.

<sup>6</sup>Isaac Leeser (1806-1868), a U.S. rabbi, writer and educator. Leeser was a traditionalist, but the first to incorporate English sermons into the worship service on a regular basis. He was the founder of the Occident, a monthly Jewish newspaper, and of the Jewish Publication Society.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Hirsch (1815-1889), a rabbi, Jewish philosopher, and pioneer of Reform in Germany and the U.S. He was the president of the first Conference of American Reform rabbis which convened in Philadelphia in 1869. He took a major role in formulating the Pittsburg Platform (1885).

<sup>8</sup>Alexander Kohut (1842-1894), a Hungarian born rabbi and scholar. He was involved in the struggle between traditionalists and Reform. Kohut had a major role in establishing the Jewish Theological Seminary.

<sup>9</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), Reform rabbi and primary organizer of the Reform movement in the United States. He founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and the Hebrew Union College (1875).

<sup>10</sup>Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), U.S. Reform rabbi and second president of Hebrew Union College (1903-1921). He was the son-in-law of David Einhorn. Kohler wrote the draft of the Pittsburg Platform (1885).

<sup>11</sup>Sabato Morais (1823-1897), U.S. rabbi and founder and first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He rallied for Conservatism when it began to drift toward Reform.

<sup>12</sup>Benjamin Szold (1829-1902), U.S. rabbi and scholar, father of Henrietta Szold. Szold was the rabbi of Congregation Oheb Shalom in Baltimore. He was a strong liberal and a humanist. He was also a Hebraist who advocated Zionism.

## NOTES

### In the Winter of Life

<sup>1</sup>Shemus are holy books buried in a genizah.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Josef Goebbels (1897-1945), a Nazi leader and propaganda minister. He became the controller of Germany's arts and communications. He was one of the instigators of the anti-Jewish boycott, Kristallnacht, and the Final Solution.

<sup>3</sup>Julius Streicher (1885-1946), primary anti-Semitic agitator of the Nazi party. He became famous and influential within the party because of his fanatical incitement against the Jews. Streicher was instrumental in swaying public opinion toward the Final Solution.

<sup>4</sup>Psalm 42:4, 11.

<sup>5</sup>Translation from Chaim Stern, ed., Gates of Prayer (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975).

<sup>6</sup>Abraham Burman, ed., Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry (New York: Abelard-Schulman, 1968), pp. 110-111: "The City of Slaughter," trans. A. M. Klein.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Mezey, ed., Poems from the Hebrew (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1973), p. 75: "On Slaughter," trans. Robert Mezey and Shula Starkman.

## NOTES

### You Have Chosen Us

<sup>1</sup>From Kli Yakar, Ephraim ben Solomon, on Genesis 22:5.

<sup>2</sup>Deuteronomy 23:8.

<sup>3</sup>Isaiah 19:25.

<sup>4</sup>"Atah Bachartanu" is a prayer in the T'fillah portion of the Festival liturgy which speaks of God having chosen Israel from all of the nations.

<sup>5</sup>From the blessing which precedes the reading of the Torah.

<sup>6</sup>Exodus 19:6.

<sup>7</sup>Aime Palliere was a French Catholic who converted to and became a leading spokesman of Judaism.

<sup>8</sup>Palliere's book Le Sanctuaire Inconnu, published in 1926, about his conversion to Judaism. It has since been translated into English, Hebrew, German, and Italian.

## NOTES

### Yoreh Yoreh, Yadin Yadin

<sup>1</sup>Refers to homes in which they were given meals on weekdays or on the Sabbath.

<sup>2</sup>Translation by Jonathan D. Sarna.

<sup>3</sup>Louis Marshall (1856-1929), United States lawyer and president of the American Jewish Committee (1912-1929). Marshall specialized in constitutional and corporate law and argued major cases before the Supreme Court. He was the chief spokesman for German Jews in New York City, as well as a champion of civil rights and immigrant needs.

<sup>4</sup>Oscar Solomon Strauss (1850-1926), diplomat, author, and public servant. He was the first Jew to hold a cabinet post, serving as Roosevelt's Secretary of Commerce and Labor (1906-09). He also helped to found the American Jewish Committee.

<sup>5</sup>See "Reform Judaism," note 9.

<sup>6</sup>Max Raisin, "Zionism and Liberal Judaism," Jewish Exponent (July 3, 1914).

<sup>7</sup>Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), philosopher of the German enlightenment and spiritual leader of German Jewry.

<sup>8</sup>Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), rabbi, leader of Reform Judaism, and scholar of Wissenschaft des Judentums (science of Judaism). He wrote a prayerbook in which he changed translations of prayers and omitted references to Zion. Geiger directed the Hochschule, the academy for the scientific study of Judaism in Berlin.

<sup>9</sup>See Uriah Z. Engelman and Charles Reznikoff, The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950).

<sup>10</sup>Max Lilienthal (1815-1882), born in Munich, Bavaria, an educator, author and rabbi, immigrated to the United States in 1845. From 1855 until his death he served Congregation Bene Israel in Cincinnati. A moderate reformer, he worked with Wise in promoting Reform Judaism.

<sup>11</sup>Refers to "Protest Rabbis," a phrase coined by Herzl



in 1897 for five German rabbis, two Orthodox and three liberal, who signed a protest letter against Zionism and the Zionist Congress in the name of the German Rabbinical Association.

<sup>12</sup>Caspar Levias (1860-1934), professor of Bible and Aramaic at Hebrew Union College. He received his appointment in 1895. Levias was an advocate of Zionism who read Zionist documents to his students. He was an active Hebraist who published many Hebrew articles. Levias was dismissed by Kohler, anti-Zionist president of the College, in 1905.

<sup>13</sup>See "Reform Judaism," note 10.

<sup>14</sup>Henry Malter, professor of Medieval Jewish philosophy and rabbinics at Hebrew Union College. He arrived from Galicia in 1900. Malter was an active Hebraist and Zionist. He resigned from the faculty in 1906.

<sup>15</sup>Max Schloessinger, professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College from 1904 until his resignation in 1907. He was an active Zionist. He also took steps to introduce Biblical criticism into the curriculum.

<sup>16</sup>Moses Mielziner (1828-1903), Talmud professor at Hebrew Union College. He joined the faculty in 1879. He was an extremely capable modern Talmudic scholar and teacher. Mielziner wrote a great deal concerning Talmud, including his Invitation to the Talmud (1894).

<sup>17</sup>Gotthard Deutsch (1849-1921), History professor at Hebrew Union College from 1891 until his death. Deutsch was a colorful figure on campus, and beloved, but his talents were more in writing than in teaching. He wrote prodigiously on numerous aspects of Jewish history.

<sup>18</sup>Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891), Jewish historian and Bible scholar whose History of the Jews (c. 1891-98) was the first comprehensive attempt at a living history of the Jewish people.

<sup>19</sup>Isaac Marcus Jost (1793-1860), a German educator and historian. He was a pioneer of modern Jewish historiography. Jost was also a supporter of the Reform movement; he was a moderate Reformer, defending the use of Hebrew in the synagogue.

<sup>20</sup>The term "tzaddikim" here refers specifically to Chasidic rebbes.

<sup>21</sup>Ephraim Feldman, a gifted philosophy professor, was on the faculty of Hebrew Union College from 1883 until his dismissal by Kaufman Kohler in 1905. Feldman was an active Zionist.

<sup>22</sup>Moses Bottenweiser, a noted Bible scholar, joined

the faculty of Hebrew Union College as Assistant Professor of Exegesis in 1897. His scientific approach to the Bible focused on Prophets and Writings. His most celebrated works are The Prophets of Israel (1914), The Book of Job (1922), and The Psalms (1938).

<sup>23</sup>Judah L. Magnes (1877-1948), United States Reform rabbi and first president of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Following his ordination in 1900, he served on the faculty of Hebrew Union College for one and a half years, as a Bible instructor.

<sup>24</sup>David Neumark, a Hebraist and cultural Zionist, was a Professor of Philosophy at Hebrew Union College from 1908-1922. He wrote many articles on philosophy and social literary problems.

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