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TOWARD A THEMATIC HIGH SCHOOL  
TEXTBOOK ON RUSSIAN JEWRY  
DURING THE PERIOD OF MASS IMMIGRATION  
TO THE UNITED STATES

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This thesis is dedicated to Ellen Lewis,  
Sylvan Schwartzman, and  
Michael Meyer.

## DIGEST

This thesis attempts to develop a textbook based on a thematic framework, for studying the impact made by Russian-Jewish immigrants upon the American Jewish community.

As outlined in the introduction, existing textbooks employ methodologies essentially chronological in nature. This thesis proceeds on the assumption that such methods do not adequately fulfill the needs of Jewish religious school students searching for their roots. The goal of this thesis, as explained in chapter one, is to fill this pedagogical void.

Chapter two is a motivational chapter entitled "Why Study Russian-Jewish History?" Chapters three through eight are the thematic chapters; each one centers on an element of Jewish life in Russia, and then concludes with a section that focuses on the specific ways in which our lives are reflective of a Russian-Jewish inheritance.

Chapter three explains the bases of "Russian Anti-semitism and Its Effects." Chapter four details the "Religious Life" of Russian Jewry. Chapter five discusses the "Cultural Life" of these Jews. Chapter six characterizes their "Communal Existence." Chapter seven reviews "Jewish Radicalism." Chapter eight analyzes "Jewish Nationalism."

Chapter nine, "Our Legacy," summarizes for the student the conclusions presented in the foregoing chapters. Chapters

ten, eleven and twelve offer to the more highly motivated reader a concise history of Jews in Russia. The final chapter reviews the thesis from a pedagogical standpoint.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | <u>PAGE</u> |
|--|-------------|
| UNIT I - Motivation and Overview   |             |
| CHAPTER ONE: The Pedagogical Questions.....  | 1           |
| CHAPTER TWO: Why Study Russian-Jewry<br>History.....   | 7           |
| UNIT II - Jewish Life in Late Nineteenth Century Russia  |             |
| CHAPTER THREE: Antisemitism and Its Effects.....   | 13          |
| CHAPTER FOUR: Religious Life.....  | 27          |
| CHAPTER FIVE: Cultural Life.....   | 37          |
| CHAPTER SIX: Communal Existence.....   | 50          |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: Jewish Radicalism.....  | 66          |
| CHAPTER EIGHT: Jewish Nationalism.....   | 80          |
| UNIT III - Conclusions and Enrichment  |             |
| CHAPTER NINE: Our Legacy.....  | 91          |
| CHAPTER TEN: The History of Russian<br>Jewry, from the First<br>Settlements to the Rise<br>of Muscovy..... | 94          |
| CHAPTER ELEVEN: Russia Becomes a Center<br>for Jewry.....  | 103         |
| CHAPTER TWELVE: Flight from Russia.....  | 112         |
| CHAPTER THIRTEEN: A Pedagogical Answer.....  | 124         |
| MAPS.....  | 127         |
| NOTES.....   | 131         |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....  | 143         |

UNIT I - MOTIVATION AND OVERVIEW

CHAPTER ONE:

The Pedagogical Questions



## THE PEDAGOGICAL QUESTIONS

Much of the emphasis in synagogue programming today deals with the plight of the Soviet Jew. This is found in all areas, from religious school classrooms to worship services, from brotherhood and sisterhood activities to inter-faith meetings. The plea to "Let my People Go" has proved well-suited to rallying Jews of all kinds: religious, ethnic and nationalist. We have witnessed parades and taken part in rallies, written letters and sent telegrams, feasted and fasted. Simply put, few other single issues have captured the attention and imagination of American Jewry so completely as has the continuing persecution of fellow-Jews in the Soviet Union.

The issues are relatively simple, and perhaps that is the key to our congregants' enthusiasm. Here we find no "gray" areas; but matters of clear right and wrong. The Jews in the Soviet Union want to emigrate in order to live as Jews in a free country, and the Soviet leaders won't permit them to leave. Peripheral issues have indeed arisen, including the debate over Israel vs. America as the prime destination following emigration, and the inability of many Russians to successfully meld into the American-Jewish landscape as quickly as we would like. But these secondary problems have not diminished the feelings and the spirit that the plight of these Jews has awakened in us.

One of the factors responsible in part for this commitment to Soviet Jewry lies much closer to home: our continuing search for "roots." Few children of religious school age haven't, in one class or another, engaged in a "family tree" search; few youth group members haven't visited a Jewish cemetery to take tombstone-rubbings. We have read books about our origins and heard lectures, talked with our grandparents and written to various Departments of Vital Statistics, all in the pursuit of finding out whence we came.

These searches have ended up, in all but a relatively few instances, with Russia as the major focus. Many Jewish children have learned, much to their surprise, that their family names aren't quite as old as they thought, or even what they originally were. Others have learned that their families haven't been "American" as long as they had always believed. Jewish children began to discover that the melting pot of America wasn't as deep as it looked on the surface. Children of parents who might have preferred the label "Americans of the Mosaic Persuasion" were beginning to realize the extent to which their ethnic origins had been submerged through the Americanization of immigrant ancestors anxious to find refuge in the "goldine medina."

Personal recollection is perhaps the best teacher in this area, yet obvious drawbacks are inherent. In the main,

too much time has elapsed since the days of the immigrants, therefore this thesis.

This thesis is an attempt to provide the high school student with a readable text for further study of his or her Russian Jewish origins. It is an attempt to fill a major educational void that the usual chronological study of Jewish history fails to fill. The customary textbooks that have been published on this subject suffer from two shortcomings: they are both difficult to follow, and inaccurate. They try to include every possible detail, and in so doing set themselves well above the academic level and attention span of most religious school age Jewish students. Most who portray the shtetl do so in an unrepresentative manner. One can say many things about Jewish life in Russia in the nineteenth century, but it is rarely the life reflected in "Fiddler on the Roof." Unfortunately, however, this is the image which is conveyed to many American Jewish students through most material.

The text contained within this thesis begins with the twentieth century search for roots on a thematic basis, then carries the student back into the fertile ground of the nineteenth century where these roots took hold, and ends with a brief excursus into his or her Russian Jewish legacy.

In a very real sense, this thesis is an attempt to cope with the Jewish student's aversion to studying Jewish history.

The great majority of students stop their inquiries once the "experiential stage" has been covered. The reasoning may be characterized in the following manner: If I have to read a book about it, it isn't that important after all. Or, Jewish history is boring, and if I have to study that in order to understand my beginnings, I'll pass it up.

Few Jewish history textbooks follow pedagogical models other than those employed by secular history books. What may succeed in regular school, however, is unlikely to succeed in "Sunday School." The problem is one of internal versus external motivation. Religious school texts must be in and of themselves motivating to the students due to the circumstances that prevail in most religious schools. Were examinations, grades and other typical forms of educational discipline employable in the religious school, regular texts might be suitable. But this is not the situation we face. Instead our texts must contain within themselves the motivation to help the student to want to learn.

Thus the educational value of the text proposed in this thesis will lie in the integration of motivational aspects and cognitive information.

The central thesis around which the text develops is the following: The world of Jewish children today is not theirs alone, but in actuality is an outgrowth or modification of the world of their ancestors -- particularly of those who

lived in Russia in the last century.

So the text commences with a motivating chapter seeking to inspire the religious school student. It then moves on into a discussion of six major themes whose impact is very much alive in the American Jewish life of the student.

e take up a study of Jewish life in nineteenth century Russia, focusing on the internal life of the Jewish communities as well as their relationships with the Russian government. This unit begins with a survey of the effects of anti-semitism, continues with chapters dealing with religious, cultural and communal issues, and concludes with the resulting Jewish radical and nationalistic movements.

Finally, the student is assisted in synthesizing the above elements and understanding them as important antecedents of American Jewish life today. The more motivated student is then offered a chronological history of Russian Jewry as a supplement to the thematic chapters.

The preeminent resources in this area are Simon Dubnow's History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, Louis Greenberg's The Jews in Russia, and Salo Baron's The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets. I have drawn upon them extensively, as well as many other scholarly and literary sources, in compiling this text. It is my hope and expectation that through its study, a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old Jewish student will be able to answer two basic questions:

1. What was the position of the Jew in Tsarist Russia during the last decades of the nineteenth century, politically, religiously, socially and culturally, which produced significant reactions?

2. What are the implications for the American Jew resulting from the above and how do they still motivate our thinking and actions today?

It is to be assumed that this knowledge will help Jewish students better understand their own Jewish commitments, and eventually result in their ability to deal more effectively with many of the problems and issues confronting Jews in America.

This study cannot, and by design does not, attempt to address all of the possible avenues of inquiry. It is by definition limited in scope, seeking to deal with areas that appear to be of primary importance. But, hopefully, once the student begins to understand his or her own identity in the light of the Russian Jewish inheritance, a desire for a much broader awareness of the past will emerge. Once the search reaches this stage, the student will supply his or her own motivation to continue seeking an understanding of the Jewish past.

CHAPTER TWO:

Why Study Russian-Jewish History?

## WHY STUDY RUSSIAN JEWISH HISTORY?

It's a bitter pill to swallow.

You've gone through years of religious school and you're still not sure why.

You've learned a lot of "things":

- how to recite the Shabbat blessings;

- what a sukkah is;

- where Moses received the Ten Commandments; and

so on.

But somehow as you look back, the questions that now seem to really matter were never answered.

These questions probably begin with a series of "Whys?".

- Why do we Jews do certain things and not others?

- Why is one thing considered "Jewish," and another thing not?

- Why must I feel tied -- "chained," maybe, to past generations of people with whom I have little in common?

This book is an attempt to help you answer some of these questions. Obviously there is no one right answer -- we are dealing with feelings and emotions and not things. One person's "answer" is another person's "nonsense." That's



central to Reform Judaism. Each of us, armed with certain information and basic knowledge, is given the opportunity -- the obligation -- to create a personalized Judaism.

The answers can't be found just by looking to your family, nor even to the community around you. Nor can you limit your research to the Jews of the United States nor even to all the Jews living in the world today.

The answers are most likely to be found in the worlds of your Jewish ancestors -- in Russia and Poland and Spain and Israel and in every other place where your roots lie.

For your "Jewish world" is the result of the decisions and the actions of the millions of Jews who came before you. Why you are the person you are is only partly due to genes and heredity; your environment is just as important. The nature of your surroundings has been determined largely by the character of your parents, whose environments in turn were shaped by their parents. And so on.

Each generation of Jews is in fact "tied" to the generation that preceded it, yet that chain is soft and pliable. It can be stretched however you desire; each of us has the ability to choose the qualities and characteristics we want to emphasize and develop. What we must do first is develop the ability to make these choices. That is what this book is all about.

Why should a "Jewish Roots" begin in Russia, and in the

nineteenth century? Don't they go back much further, to Egypt, Babylonia, Palestine? The answer is that they do, but only indirectly. Our major concern is not with the beginnings of the Jewish chain of tradition; you have undoubtedly covered those events more often than you care to remember! The point here is that our present ways of life are often more a direct result of immediate, shared family experiences than of ancient Biblical events. Thus we begin here with a group of our ancestors whose lives, and choices, affected us directly. Whether directly, or through marriage, practically all of us have a good percentage of Russian blood in us. And if Tsar Alexander II hadn't been murdered in 1881, many of us might be speaking Russian today! Why? Because most of our forebears left Russia when subsequent government policy reflected a call to:

"Throw one-third of the Jews out of Russia;

Convert the next third to Greek Orthodoxy; and

Let the rest die from starvation."

Many Jews did leave Russia. Some stayed behind and converted. And many died. Each Jew had to make a choice. Some did what they did for religious reasons. Others, for social and cultural reasons. Still others struck out in a new direction, with only the hope that Zion could rise again.

Several million Russian Jews chose to emigrate to America, and you are their offspring. But what do you know about these

refugees who, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, sailed into the New York harbor?

They brought with them few skills and little money, and a language, a culture and a variety of religious beliefs foreign to most Americans. All they had in common with most Americans -- with other Jews and non-Jews alike -- was the desire to start a new life in a free country.

Slowly they began to Americanize. Some more, some less. Many wondered whether they needed to re-evaluate their Jewish commitments in view of their new surroundings. Each generation inherits this sense of wonder. If we were to compare and contrast our Jewish feelings with those of our ancestors, we would find many differences ... and interestingly, many similarities. Judaism is never static; it is constantly in a state of change. And if we are to intelligently evaluate our commitments and our options for the future, we must have a clear understanding of our past. Otherwise, it's liable to repeat itself, antisemitism and all.

A good friend of mine is just beginning to wonder. He and I had a long talk not too long ago, about many of the issues troubling him. You may find you agree with him. Our conversation began like this ...

"You know, Bill," Mark said, "I really don't like services." It sounded to me like he was trying to make me

angry so that I would go away. (But he's bright enough to know that I wasn't going to let the conversation end there!) We started to talk about his feelings regarding Judaism in general, and it came to this: Nobody had ever told him what made him Jewish. (Or if someone had tried, he hadn't understood.) Were his roots in going to services? Or were they in trips to Israel? Or were they in planting trees once a year on Tu Bishvat? People around him were tracing their roots, but he was confused and did not know where to begin.

His great-grandparents had come from "Europe somewhere" he told me, but he didn't know where. Anyway, he added, all he remembered about them was that they hadn't spoken English very well and that they were "kind of Orthodox." "They were different from the rest of my family," he went on ... "I don't even think my parents understood them very well." Then after a pause, "...Maybe if I knew more about them I'd understand..."

Only now is Mark beginning to realize that some of the answers to his questions can be found by studying about the "Europe somewhere" of his great-grandparents. When they left Russia, they took with themselves two types of baggage: the kind that held clothing, and the kind that held their past. Today, there is nothing left of that clothing, but does the past live on?

Yes, it does. We can see it in our religious practices, our culture, our community organizations and our Zionism. Our job is now to bring that past to light. For in so doing, we can shed light on how we have been shaped by these roots.

Like Mark, if we only knew something more about those Russian refugees -- our grandparents and great-grandparents -- maybe we'd understand ourselves better...and why we react the way we do.

UNIT II - JEWISH LIFE IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY RUSSIA

CHAPTER THREE:

Antisemitism and Its Effects

## ANTISEMITISM AND ITS EFFECTS

### Introduction

It is difficult to find a time when Russian Jews did not live in fear of their non-Jewish neighbors. Far easier to find are the bases of this antisemitism. For subtle, the tsars were not, and the motives behind their Jewish policies were generally clear.

At about the time our country was declaring its independence from England, Russia was carving up its neighbor to the West, Poland. Virtually no Jews lived in Russia then; yet many lived in the conquered territories.

The Russian leaders were faced with a problem: What was to be done with them? Centuries earlier, the tsars' predecessors had decided that Jews would contaminate the native population, and therefore allowed only small groups into the country, for business purposes only. These Jews had lived in Russia almost secretly, knowing that occasionally a new regime would issue laws expelling them. They also knew that private understandings often accompanied such legislation; the commercial importance of these Jews usually outweighed antisemitic objectives.

After 1772 the situation changed, as more than one million Jews came under the control of the Tsar. What happened was not very pleasant. Although the specific rules changed frequently, the principle behind legislation concerning the Jews remained largely the same: These people



could be considered "Russians" only after they would change their ways, and think and behave like everybody else. Yet as the Russian leaders well knew, there was no "everyone else." There were many minority groups in Russia, each of which had its own distinctive traits and customs. What the government wanted was a country free of these groups, and the Jews found themselves under great pressure to change.

As you will see, some Jews did change, while others remained steadfast in their determination to live as their fathers and mothers had. These Jews who resisted "Russification" were attacked from all sides--spiritually and physically. Laws were passed forbidding them to live as they had in the past. Many jobs and professions were closed to them. They were forced to live in certain areas. Penalties were imposed if they continued to worship as Jews. And by the end of the nineteenth century, many died simply because they were Jews. Thus our forebears, the Russian Jews, developed deep-seated feelings about antisemitism which have had a great effect upon our own thinking. A key element of these feelings can be traced to the political nature of the hatred for Jews.

### Political Antisemitism

The Russian tsars generally saw themselves as rulers who had no need for advice from their subjects. Sometimes they governed with "state councils" that reviewed legislation. More often than not, however, either the councils would

"rubber stamp" the tsars' decisions, or else the tsar would simply ignore their existence. The best example of this came in 1882, when Tsar Alexander III put into effect what came to be called "The Temporary Laws." Fearing they might not be ratified by the Council of State, he ordered them enacted as "temporary" measures, thereby avoiding the need for council approval. These laws restricted Jewish rights to such an extent as to provoke an international outcry against the Russian government. The tsar's response was simple: "This is an 'internal matter' which should be of no concern to you. We do not interfere with your domestic policies, and ask you not to interfere with ours."

The tsars combined common "scapegoating" with attitudes that had developed in response to specific situations in Russia. Their antisemitism was the result of practical considerations and irrational fears. As others had found before them, it was useful to blame society's ills on the Jews. But the Russian rulers went further, hand-tailoring their Jewish policies to the religious and social conditions of their realm.

All the early leaders knew about Jews was based upon myths that had been told for hundreds of years. Some people spread these lies for religious reasons, some for economic reasons, and still others social reasons. What was common to all was the desire that hatred of Jews be passed on. One story the tsars heard, for instance, was that Jews used the blood of Christian children to make matzah. If a tsar had

never met a Jew, and if enough people repeated this claim, the possibility existed that he would begin to believe it. And many tsars did. Tsars were also told that the Jews caused the Russian peasants' drunkenness, that they poisoned water supplies, and that they aimed to conquer the entire world. Thus it was that superstition, fear and naiveté led to laws and regulations severely limiting Jewish life and opportunities.

This anti-Jewish legislation satisfied both their inherited suspicions and their desire for complete control over the country. Although the government claimed its "Jewish Constitution" of 1804 was prompted by "solicitude for the true welfare of the Jews,"<sup>1</sup> closer to the truth was the goal of destroying Jewish identities. Many "Committee(s) for the Amelioration (betterment) of the Jews" were to be formed. All concluded that changes in dress, occupation and allegiance were necessary to bring the Jew into the modern world. The "correct" person, went this type of thinking, looks like the majority in dress, acts like the majority at work, and prays like the majority in worship. The tsars could not accept Jewish differences. Black and white clothing with their wide-rimmed fur hats, occupations in commerce and as innkeepers, and prayers that Jerusalem be rebuilt were regarded as dangerous. The Jews seemed to form a "state within a state,"<sup>2</sup> and this was not acceptable. Concluded one such report: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you."<sup>3</sup> The Jews were enemies, unless they were indistinguishable from their neighbors.

Another aspect of this governmental antisemitism revolved around the relationship between the church and the state. The

two were very close in Russia, since Russian Orthodoxy was the "state religion." The tsars were taught from an early age that followers of other religions were heretics--"nonbelievers"--and by the time a tsar assumed power, antisemitism was "second nature." The tsars were the protectors of the church; to understand how that relationship colored the atmosphere in Russia, we turn to consider the nature of religious antisemitism.

### Religious Antisemitism

The Russian Orthodox clergy were in large measure directly responsible for the spreading of antisemitism. The idea of the Jew as "Christ-killer" was central to the anti-Jewish propaganda, and these clerics took every opportunity to exploit it. They were not alone, however, as one author notes in regard to the Polish Jesuits:

Was it possible...to foresee all the evil, darkness, and intolerance which ... Jesuit schools would spread all over Poland? Could it (have been known) that in these seats of learning, which soon monopolized the education of the ruling as well as the middle classes, one of the chief subjects of instruction would be a systematic course in Jew-baiting?<sup>4</sup>

It was a high church official and personal tutor of the tsar who orchestrated much of the violence of the 1880's. He knew there were many ways to stir up anti-Jewish sentiment, but that the religious approach was probably the most successful. The peasants had long been told that the Jew was in reality the devil, and the emotional appeal of the religious myths was powerful. No superstition was without its Jewish version; of

course no proof was ever found to substantiate the claim that Jews used Christian blood for dedicating synagogues, or for making matzah, but no proof was needed. It was assumed that Jews did these things since they were Jews.

The first documented Russian characterization of Judaism as a faith of "black magic" occurred in the fifteenth century. A Jew by the name of "Zecharia" founded a Judaeo-Christian sect which attracted a limited number of converts. It was said he used magic as part of his conversion process, and although there was no "blood" aspect involved, it did set the stage for later claims that Jews used blood in their rituals. The first accusation in Russia that Jews murdered Christians for a variety of religious reasons came in the early nineteenth century, after a Christian child had been found dead just prior to Passover. The police began their investigation on the assumption that a Jew was responsible, and a Jewish convert to Christianity came forward to "substantiate" such rumors.

The tsars used these blood-libel trials as proof that their restrictive policies were warranted even if the Jewish defendants were acquitted! One such case developed in the following manner. A three year-old boy had been found in a swamp, dead of multiple wounds. That Jews were responsible was affirmed by two Christian fortunetellers, a "prostitute beggar-woman," and "a half-witted old maid."<sup>5</sup> The judge dismissed all of obviously framed Jews, but the tsar accepted a petition requesting that the case be reopened. And following a second investigation, the tsar observed that "the above occurrence demonstrates that the Zhids ("kikes") make wicked use of the religious tolerance accorded to them..."<sup>6</sup>

All the Jews were ultimately cleared, but the tsar ordered all of the local synagogues and Jewish schools closed anyway and forbade all Jewish worship in the area.

As cruel as the blood-libel incidents were, what affected the Russian Jew to even a greater extent was the passage of religiously-motivated laws which made veryday life much more difficult. These were laws which affected every Jewish family, making it clear to all that in many situations the only barrier to personal equality was the acceptance of the religion of the land. These regulations included the following:

1. Jewish children could be baptised under certain circumstances if the government so decreed;
2. Jewish army privates were eligible for cash gifts if they converted voluntarily;
3. Jews convicted of crimes were given lighter sentences if they converted.<sup>7</sup>

The Jew, it was said, was like a man who "fleeth from a lion, and is met by a bear."<sup>8</sup> There was no respite from church leaders who believed that conversion of the Jews was a religious commandment as well as a patriotic obligation.

### Economic Antisemitism

The Christian businessmen in Russia took full advantage of the antisemitic currents in their country. They knew that they could sell more goods and raise their prices if they had less competition, and turned to an obliging government for legal support. Even when advised that Jewish business was valuable to Russia, with few exceptions the tsars imposed restrictions. Landowning, engaging in commercial competition with Christians,

and working on the Christian Sabbath were all prohibited.

As a result of these restrictions, many Jews became inn-keepers and liquor-traders. These businesses flourished throughout Eastern Europe and gave many Jews a livelihood. Other Jews were petty traders and pushcart-peddlers. One occupation which drew very few Jews was farming and agriculture; since they were not able to own land, it was not an attractive alternative. Nonetheless, the government felt this to be one of the leading causes of the "Jewish problem," and therefore established many schemes encouraging and forcing Jews out of the small towns and onto the farmland.

The efforts directed at altering the occupations of the Jews were ineffectual. What resulted instead was a further decline in the Jewish standard of living. Yet the government was intent upon requiring a change in life-style before it would relax the economic restrictions that caused the poverty in the first place. The tsars felt that through these measures, they could bring about the basic changes they sought. This was not to be.

The Jews resisted these changes, as they had done in other countries in other ages. Prior to the Russian conquest of Poland, these Jews had suffered from many of the same repressive acts under Polish law. Originally they had been welcomed into Poland; in the fourteenth century the king had invited them into his country in order to stimulate business. Nevertheless, as soon as the economy took a downswing, the Jews were blamed for the problems. Polish leaders had also tried to change the Jews, and had failed. As a Russian sympathetic to their difficult

position noted:

Reforms brought about by the power of the State are, as a rule, unstable, and are particularly untenable in those cases in which that power has to grapple with the habits of centuries. Hence it seems both better and safer to guide the Jews to perfection by throwing open to them the avenues leading to their own happiness, by observing their movements from a distance, and by removing everything that might turn them away from this path...<sup>9</sup>

The "avenues leading to their own happiness" were rarely considered. What was important to the rulers and their supporters was their own happiness, regardless of the cost to the Jews.

#### Social Antisemitism

Already prejudiced against the Jews by reason of political aims, religion, and economics, the tsars were determined to isolate them socially. They treated Russian Jewry like a contagious disease. Although it was announced, following the carving up of Poland, that "(All inhabitants of the territory annexed by Russia) of whatever birth and calling (are) solemnly assured by the sacred name and word of the Empress"<sup>10</sup> that various personal freedoms would be respected, the government qualified the statement by adding that Jews would be granted their rights only in the areas in which they were living. The interior of Russia was barred to their settlement. This was the beginning of the "Pale (area, or region) of Settlement," the only Russian land areas in which the great majority of Jews were permitted to live until the Russian Revolution in 1917. The region, spanning thousands of miles and populated by non-Jews



as well, was not unlike a ghetto. Yet if offered none of the potential benefits such restricted areas can provide. It did not give protection from physical violence, nor were its inhabitants allowed freedom of religion. It was a prison without walls, in which for one hundred fifty years, Russian Jews were pastured like cattle, subject to the whims of the tsar in power.

The Pale had the densest population of Jews on earth. No one knows exactly how many Jews lived there, for Pale residents avoided the census-takers, knowing that taxation and conscription depended on these numbers. It is estimated that by 1900, the figure was at least five million.

Initially, the government attempted merely to exclude Jews from living in the Russian Interior. Eventually, the residence restrictions grew to include banishment from villages and towns within the Pale itself, as well as from various Pale cities, and from its border regions. How were the non-Jewish Russians affected by these policies? Concludes one scholar: "A comparison between the standards of living of the Christian populations within and outside the Pale points to the conclusion that the non-Jewish population, too, would have benefited from the opening of the ghetto."<sup>11</sup> Various social and economic motivations were employed to justify the settlement restrictions he adds; among these faulty or dishonest suppositions were the following:

"Where the Jews are expelled...

...the Christians will enjoy greater population and financial growth."

...the peasants will have a higher standard of living."

...there will be less peasant drinking."

...there will be less crime."<sup>12</sup>

Another, unspoken motivation supposed the general isolation and impoverishment of the Jews under such living arrangements. This was entirely correct.

### Pogroms and Other Coordinated Acts of Violence

The antisemitism of the 1800's differed from that of previous persecution in several important ways. First of all, it was actively directed by the government. Secondly, it was much more violent. Alexander III reacted to the assassination of his father, Alexander II, with the decision to broaden and heighten Jewish disabilities. He knew little about the Jews, relying on a defrocked Catholic priest (charged with rape, embezzlement and libel) for his information. This tsar set no limits on his personal antisemitism, and his underlings worked ruthlessly carrying out his wishes. Ritual-murder accusations, once condoned by the government, now were instigated at the urging of high officials. More ominously, the pogrom was added to the list of available policy options.

Pogrom means "ruin" or "devastation." Originally it referred to damage inflicted by soldiers; today it generally refers to the outbreaks of mob violence against Russian Jews.

Up until the 1870's, Russian antisemitism had been surprisingly non-violent. The tsars had been wary of physical clashes, fearing that mob passions might easily be redirected towards the government. The first pogroms were accordingly greeted with official hesitation, until the tsar was assured that opposition to the Jews was solely responsible.

Once the government was assured it could restrain these outbreaks of popular sentiment, it proceeded to foment them. The tsar could take advantage of commercial resentment against the Jews, using it as a pretext for inciting violence. Before long, this violence was replaced by the "Temporary Laws" of 1882. Yet by the time the fire of the final pogrom was extinguished, many houses had been burned, businesses destroyed, and people murdered. "The Jewish community", noted one statistician, "is a veritable abyss, where people are simply swallowed up without leaving a trace."<sup>13</sup>

#### Conclusions: The Shaping of American-Jewish Sensitivities

The pogroms of the 19th century forced many Russian Jews into leaving Russia. Those who emigrated to the Land of Israel were faced with the challenge of building a country from the ground up. Those who left for the United States had to contend with integrating themselves into a developing society. The first group was intent on creating a society where antisemitism would not exist; the others had to be satisfied if it were minimized.

We are fond of saying "it can't happen here." To thoughts of many forms of antisemitism, we respond with a characteristic "not in America!" The truth is that we indeed have managed to control anti-Jewish prejudice, in many cases, in our society. And our ancestors' experiences with Russian antisemitism played a significant role in our achieving freedom from such oppression.

This freedom has not come easily. All of the elements of Russian antisemitism described in this chapter -- political, religious, economic, social and physical -- had to be faced in

American society. Legislative districts were "gerrymandered" to reduce Jewish representation; fundamentalist preachers took to the air to decry "nonbelieving Jews;" "blue laws" restricted Jewish businesses from opening on Sundays; various clubs and fraternal organizations were closed to Jews; and finally, Jews were lynched, here in America. Myths about Jews also grew, as one historian notes in an essay on American antisemitism.

"(I)deological anti-Semitism," he writes, "seems to have made its primary appeal to native Americans in areas of low Jewish density, where the supposed enemy was a remote and shadowy figure rather than a daily reality."<sup>14</sup>

The earliest Jewish defense organizations were founded by Jews of German descent. Having arrived here prior to the immigrants from Eastern Europe, they were already familiar with the intricacies of life in America. Thus they could respond to the pleas for help from Russian Jews, both here, and still overseas.

The most ambitious program was carried out by the American Jewish Committee. Although its original members were primarily of German-Jewish background, it grew to include a substantial number of Eastern European-born Jews. It was an ironic situation; these victims of persecution were considered "too radical" to help direct an organization founded for their benefit! Hence it was Eastern European oppression, if not the oppressed ones, that led to its establishment. As expressed in the legislative act granting incorporation, the goals of the American Jewish Committee are:

to prevent the infraction of the civil and

religious rights of the Jews, in any part of the world; to render all lawful assistance and to take appropriate remedial action in the event of threatened or actual invasion or restriction of such rights, or of unfavorable discrimination with respect thereto; to secure for Jews equality of economic, social and educational opportunity; alleviate the consequences of persecution and to afford relief from calamities affecting Jews, wherever they may occur.<sup>15</sup>

The Eastern European Jews did take active leadership roles in other organizations that developed, most notably the American Jewish Congress. Yet their greatest contribution to the ongoing struggle to preserve our rights was a vivid memory of what life was like in the Pale. This awareness was reflected in the positions and policies of Jewish politicians, government officials, business people, and community leaders whose roots reached back into Russia. Likewise, our own democratic ideals stir in part from the influence of these immigrant ancestors.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
Religious Life

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

### Introduction

The diversity which characterizes American Jewish life was practically unknown among our Russian Jewish ancestors. We have the opportunity to define our Jewishness in any number of ways, including ethnically, nationally, or of course, religiously. Russian Jews were far less fortunate. Their lives were largely fashioned by two uncompromising authorities: the tsar, and their own spiritual leaders.

The tsars were intent on destroying a Jewish way of life: the Orthodox rabbis and Hassidic rebbes were determined to maintain it. The masses of Jews, caught in the struggle between these two competing forces, were denied the benefits of religious self-definition and pluralism.

The Jewish spiritual leaders regarded their communities as parents would young children. They made all religious decisions and settled all religious disputes. They believed their best defense against the tsars' attempts to assimilate the Jews was unity through strict ritual observance. Through this inflexible reliance on the Talmud in every aspect of life, they hoped to erect barriers around their communities.

Although restricting Russian Jewry's contacts with non-Jewish neighbors and culture did serve to fortify it, "shutting the gates" of the communities also barred the

entrance of progress and change. As one writer was forced to admit:

The despotism of extermination from without was counter-balanced by a despotism of conservatism from within by that rigid discipline of conduct to which the masses submitted without a murmur..."<sup>1</sup>

This "conservatism" was scrupulous adherence to all of the Talmud's legal decisions, without any regard for the compassion it commands. This was life according to the "Kotzo shel Yod"<sup>2</sup> ("The dot over the 'i'") wrote one anti-Talmudic author disgustedly.

Many Jews, charging their rabbis with an unwarranted emphasis on the Talmud, turned toward a new way of life, Hassidism. They emphasized a religious "joyfulness," and substituted for talmudic authority an all-knowing "rebbe." As one can imagine, there was great antagonism between these groups; each professed to be the "true" Jews. The controversy continues today in America.

Most Russian Jews were either rabbinic (similar to what we would call "Orthodox" today in America) or Hassidic, until a nineteenth-century "enlightenment" began to shake the religious walls around their communities. New ways then emerged to express ones Jewishness, as some responded to calls for religious and cultural reform. Eventually, a resurgence of antisemitism made drastic changes inevitable. For now, though, we shall concentrate on the religious frameworks which dominated for so long Jewish life in Russia.



## Rabbinic Judaism

One way of visualizing the organization of the Jews in much of Russia is to imagine a domed stadium where everyone lives, eats and works. There would be a synagogue in the middle, and a board of directors making decisions for everybody. It's a comforting thought when you consider that outside the doors are crowds of people who don't understand you and therefore don't like you. It's not a comforting thought when you begin to realize that what you could learn from those crowds, whether they like you or not, is unavailable to you.

The rulebook you live by is the Talmud, instructions dating back two thousand years. Its laws, and the interpretation of those laws by the rabbinic leaders of the community, require men to study Jewish texts for many years. The study of foreign languages and non-religious subjects is forbidden, as is any change in ritual or belief. Women become the families' financial support while the men are engaged in their study. What could one say about the type of Jew who lived in such a community?

Some praise their virtues. They point to the fact that there was little violence, little drunkenness, and little marriage infidelity. It created a family closeness, and it sharpened the Jewish mind in preparation for the day when Jews would be admitted into universities.<sup>3</sup> Even non-religious intellectuals could defend this life, as a group did in writing a book for the purpose of "acquaint(ing) Russia with the lofty

ethical teachings hidden in our thirty centuries old literature."<sup>4</sup>

Other observers have not been as kind. Weighing the advantages and the disadvantages, some have argued that the concerns of the rabbis kept Russian Jewry in a perpetual backward state. Wrote one such critic:

At a time when all thinking elements in Russia are aroused by...new ideas...which offer a solution to the great problem of universal happiness, our honored men of letters make a big noise about some comment on a Biblical text, and pore over ancient (texts) whose ideas are as dried up as their withered leaves...Provide bread! Fresh air! Concern yourselves with the peace and happiness of our suffering brethren and sisters! Save our youth from extinction! Show them the road to life so that they may not exhaust themselves blundering in the dark!<sup>5</sup>

The "road to life" for the Russian Jew in the 1770's and 1780's was a whole network of interconnecting paths. No longer could the religious loyalties of an older generation alone satisfy all of their needs or their desires. Various movements grew in response to old longings and new pressures. Jews were drawn into Socialism, Zionism, revolutionary groups, and, among other options, emigration to America. The religious trends among this last group, our immigrant ancestors, helped shape their settlement -- and our lives -- here in America.

### Hassidic Judaism

Adjusting to life in America precipitated changes in the religious practices of most of these Jewish immigrants. The

Hassidim, however, tried to minimize these disruptions by establishing a community structure allowing them to re-create their Eastern European existence. Clustered together in close-knit fashion, they successfully retained much of their old life-style. Few of us can trace our roots back to these communities, but understanding the "road not taken" can help shed light on the choices our ancestors did make.

Hassidic Jews believed, as did their rabbinic antagonists, in the necessity of living each moment of life in a "Jewish way;" where they differed was in the recognition of what, or who, determined "what was Jewish." The movement began in the 1700's among Polish Jews dissatisfied with the intricacies of talmudic study. They felt too much time was spent debating unimportant points of law, and instead began to turn to the most revered rabbi among them for guidance. To them, the beauty of Judaism lay not in the mastery of its finer points, but rather in its "celebration." The singing and dancing which characterized their worship grew out of the conviction of the Psalmist who wrote: "Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with rejoicing."<sup>6</sup> Many joined the ranks of the Hassidim sensing a spirituality and hithlahabuth, a religious enthusiasm, they had never known before.

The Hassidic approach to Judaism originated with the "Besht," Israel Ba'al Shem Tov. Unhappy and unfulfilled by the "chilly Talmudic intellectualism"<sup>7</sup> that determined Jewish life in Eastern Europe, he sought to bring new life and warmth into the religion through an emphasis on prayer and "devekut,"

adhesion to God through faith. He was said to be a "faith-healer," and a person through whose special relationship with God others would be drawn out of sin. Central to the developing Hassidic philosophy was the idea of the Zaddik, or "Righteous One", who helped common Jews attain devekut.

Hassidism grew rapidly. It appealed to great numbers of Jews for whom religious life was tedious and repetitive. "It made life, with all its inconceivable misery and oppression, not only tolerable but enjoyable...Even with its cult of Tzaddikism," one historian commented;

fraught, as it was, with so many extravagances and abuses, introduced, or reintroduced, into Judaism the worship of the Hero, with the ennobling effect which the admiration of one higher than oneself always entails.<sup>8</sup>

Hassidism was not without its detractors, as the "extravagances" mentioned above imply. From the rabbinic point of view, Hassidism represented an escape from, and not a return to Judaism. The rabbis considered the exalted position of the Zaddikim a form of idolatry. They criticized them as "cult figures," as hereditary leaders worshipped by their followers.

These rabbis feared (and rightly so) that their own influence would be diminished by Hassidism's growing strength. Neither side was blameless. The rabbis were guilty of excesses also, as a prominent Jewish novelist described in a satire entitled The Mare, or Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He pictured the Jewish masses as a wandering horse, followed by the "town bosses" (the rabbis and community leaders). These

bosses kept the horse far from the "town cattle" (the Christians). Meanwhile, a "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals" (the Russian government) debated whether to grant the horse freedom and equality, or to leave it unprotected among the other animals. And while all of this is happening, the horse is dying, under the weight of ruthless members of the community itself.<sup>9</sup>

#### Conclusions: Religious Life in America

Many of the factors which helped create religious bonds among Russian Jews weren't to be found in America by the Jewish immigrants. Antisemitism was present, but wasn't nearly as constricting as it had been in the Old Country; neither was there the culture and communal apparatus of the shtetl reinforcing religious devotion. America's democracy reached into all corners of the community, including houses of worship. There was no "state religion" hounding the Jews, nor were Jewish religious leaders empowered by the government to exercise any control over their co-religionists. In short, America was the land of freedom the immigrants craved, and they were determined to take full advantage of their new autonomy.

Some of the immigrants retained their hold on Orthodox traditions, in spite of the diversity and distractions of America. They built "shuls", such as the Forsyth Street synagogue, in New York City, which

has a khevra kadisha consisting of over twenty

members who perform all the rites connected with the burial of the members: the khevra is social, for it gives banquets very often; on certain Sabbaths its members are accorded privileges at the reading of the law. The same synagogue has organized a khevra schas or mishnayoth. This society has forty or fifty members, and there are no dues. The members study the Talmud every evening in the vestry rooms of the synagogues. The Ladies Benevolent Society consists of over 150 members. The dues are paid monthly, and are devoted to charity.<sup>10</sup>

Not all the synagogues had as ambitious and as varied a program as the one described above; in fact some were little more than adjoining apartments in ill-kept Lower East Side tenements. But numerically they continued to grow, from eight of the approximately 200 large synagogues in 1881, to the majority of the over 500 large synagogues in America in 1890.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to those who remained thoroughly Orthodox, there were many who wanted to integrate the faith in the ways and beliefs of their traditional backgrounds with the modern setting. Rejecting Reform Judaism, which had been established by German immigrants, they aligned themselves with the then-evolving Conservative movement. Conservative Judaism became very much a product of these immigrants. It reflected the tension between their religious intentions and the secular environment; in the words of a Jewish writer from the Pale, the contrast between "my first Saturday in Boston" and "the Sabbath in Slutzk" was startling:

...my heart bled. Actually, there was no comparison, for Slutzk, though poverty-stricken, dressed up in glorious raiment in honor of the Sabbath. Even the horse grazing in the pasture, swishing his tail

and leaping on his forelegs, bound so that he might not frisk beyond the Sabbath limits, was permitted to enjoy sabbatical rest and partake of the goodness of the luxuriant meadow. But in Boston very few Jews observed the Sabbath. In the Jewish quarter through which she had just passed they trampled with weekday shoes the train of her bridal gown...leaving the synagogue after the Sabbath eve service, the observants were confronted by a tumultuous Jewish quarter: shopkeepers stood in their shop doorways; peddlers on their wagons shouted their wares. Mournfully I passed through this Jewish quarter that first Sabbath eve. As I entered our house it seemed to me that the Sabbath candles were bowed in mourning.<sup>12</sup>

Although many of the immigrants soon began to appear in shul on the high holydays and rarely inbetween, and many stopped going at all, some members of the New York immigrant community resisted the pull of America by installing a local "chief rabbi". Soon, a rival group proposed a chief rabbi of their own. By 1893,

"a third 'chief rabbi' was added to the roster in New York, Rabbi Hayim Vidrowitz, who had come from Moscow, gathered a few Hasidic shtiblakh (prayer rooms), and hung out a sign reading 'chief Rabbi of America.' Asked who had given him this title, Rabbi Vidrowitz replied 'the sign painter.'<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the patterns for American Jewish religious life were established in the main by the immigrants. Their Hassidism continued on in their self-imposed ghettos in the larger centers of American Jewry. Orthodoxy took on a new spirit of activity with the establishment of synagogues and yeshivas everywhere. And Conservative Judaism enjoyed an expansion that soon rivaled the Reform Jewish Community in numbers and influence. All these were the offspring of the first and second generation immigrants. It was not too long

after that Reform itself was infiltrated by the descendants of the Russian Jews, leading to a revival of many of the customs and religious modes that were reminiscent of the old shul.



CHAPTER FIVE:

Cultural Life

## CULTURAL LIFE

### Introduction

The movement that sought to interest the Jews living in the Pale of Settlement in secular European culture and intellectual developments in the nineteenth century is known by the name of haskalah, or "enlightenment." It developed rapidly in Russia in the 1850's, and grew throughout the century. Both rabbinic and Hassidic leaders felt they were the enlightened ones, and that introduction of foreign elements into the lives of the common people was "non-Jewish." As a result of their common resolve, this culture -- arts, literature, drama, philosophy -- never gained the acceptance its backers hoped for. There was, in fact, a wide gulf between the maskilim (those who spread this haskalah) and the rest of the population: neither side trusted the motives of the other.

To the average "religious" Jew, it seemed as if the maskilim were interested only in assimilation. They saw in the haskalah movement a desire to replace Judaism, in which they found strength, with new and strange ideas. To the maskilim, the orientation of the pious Russian Jews toward knowledge was incompatible with the modern age. Both sides were correct.

The maskilim were often "assimilationists." Many did feel that the Jews should drop some of their "separateness" in order to adjust to a Russian way of life. Many believed the tsars when they said: " 'Correct' yourselves and we shall welcome you with open arms!" Unfortunately, history proved otherwise, as the following quotation indicates:

When I remember what has been done to us, how we have been taught to love Russia and Russian speech, how we have been induced and compelled to introduce the Russian language and everything Russian into our families so that our children know no other language but Russian, and how we are now repulsed and persecuted, then our hearts are filled with sickening despair from which there seems to be no escape.<sup>1</sup>

The haskalah was instrumental in ultimately widening the scope of Jewish concerns--including Hebrew, nationalism, and socialism--but it was never successful in winning Jewish emancipation.

### Two Great Maskilim

The Russian haskalah was, in essence, a combination of various trends. Authors, playwrights, artists, philosophers, musicians, actors and educators rose in opposition to an existence they felt was stagnant. One such leader was Moses Leib Lilienblum, (1843-1910) whose personal journey took him from orthodoxy to haskalah and on to Zionism. One historian characterized the basis of Lilienblum's feelings in these words:

To Lilienblum as to his opponents the Talmud was practically a sacred book. But for them, its sacredness meant that every word in it must be observed for all time, and be made the foundation of other precepts which would encompass the life of the Jew in a chain of regulations growing ever more rigorous and complicated. For Lilienblum the value of the Talmud lay in its having developed out of the Bible a system of life which was suited to the needs of the age in which it grew up...<sup>2</sup>

Lilienblum, like most of the other Russian maskilim, was not interested in destroying the bases of Judaism, but rather he felt there must be more to life than was offered by the rabbinic and Hassidic leadership. He believed that Russian Jews should also be conscious of the philosophical, scientific and literary

movements that were increasingly part of the modern world.

The basic principles of this move to enlighten Russian Jewry were laid out by the "father" of the haskalah, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860), in his book Instruction in Israel.

1. The Jew is obliged to study the Bible as well as Hebrew grammar and to interpret the biblical text in accordance with the plain grammatical sense.
2. The Jewish religion does not condemn the knowledge of foreign languages and literatures, especially the language of the country...
3. The study of secular sciences is not attended by any danger for Judaism...
4. It is necessary from the economic point of view to strengthen productive labor, such as handicrafts and agriculture...also to discourage early marriages between persons who are unprovided for and have no definite occupation.<sup>3</sup>

A combination of religious and social pressures had led to a very narrow interpretation of Jewish holy writings. As a result, seemingly reasonable pursuits, as outlined here, were forbidden in Orthodox as well as Hassidic communities.

#### The Promotion of Secular Education

Lev Mandelstamm (1819-1889), the first Russian Jew to graduate from a Russian university, describes his early years this way: "I had to study Talmud, literally night and day, as is the custom among Jews in western Russia. So it was that by the age of twelve, I simultaneously acquired my reputation as a genius and the symptoms of tuberculosis."<sup>4</sup>

By the time Mandelstamm was fourteen, he could read books in four languages, and had decided he would take advantage of

this knowledge by reading books his society called "Gentile." Following his university education, he combined his secular with his religious training, in working for the government as the director of Jewish schools throughout the Pale. He felt a keen sense of sorrow for the narrowly-educated Jewish masses, and devoted his life to their betterment. "(T)he story of my people's misery has been inscribed in my heart and soul," he wrote in his autobiography. "If Fate...will allow me to help the government educate and improve our Russian Jews, I will not complain that I was born a son of this people."<sup>5</sup>

Mandelstamm was one of many Russian Jews who regarded general education as a way out of the ghetto. He was not opposed to religious schooling, but recognized that unless the study of Talmud was supplemented by mathematics, sciences and the humanities, Jews would find themselves increasingly isolated from their surroundings and greatly disadvantaged as a result.

Mandelstamm and other educational pioneers encouraged the translation of Jewish texts into Russian and the study of all aspects of Judaism. They were interested in developing Russian-Jewish schools that would succeed in integrating traditional Jewish subjects with a secular curriculum. Prominent in this movement was Max Lilienthal (1815-1882), a Jew of German extraction who was called by the Jews of Riga, in Russia, to establish schools for them. Later, he was hired by the Russian government to develop a network of Jewish schools throughout the Pale. Most Jews criticized his efforts, believing the tsar was using him as a pawn in an attempt to Russify the Jews through government schooling. Lilienthal eventually realized the truth

of this claim and emigrated to America. Nonetheless, a desire for secular education had been sown among an increasing number of Jews anxious to learn more than Talmud. And how they balanced this urge with the elements of a traditional curriculum was to have a great effect on the entire community.

## Hebrew Literature: Novels and Poems

Whereas Mandelstamm turned to secular education in search of a understanding of himself; Abraham Mapu (1808-1867) found his answers in the Hebrew novel. "Hebrew novels?" one might be tempted to wonder. What could be so important or so enlightening about such works?

Picture yourself in Russia, living under hateful tsars and among a populace that harbors suspicion and hostility. Now imagine yourself transported through time and space to a land where you can live in peace. Imagine yourself in a land of happiness and of freedom.

This is the historical setting Mapu created for his readers. He wrote in the language of those who had lived in Jerusalem, and "(t)he youths of the ghetto, who had been pouring over talmudic folios, fell eagerly upon (Ahavat Zion, 'Love of Zion') which breathed the perfumes of Sharon and Carmel."<sup>6</sup>

They read it in secret--to read a novel  
openly was not a safe thing in those days--,  
and their hearts expanded with rapture...  
and in their flight of imagination were  
carried far away from painful reality.<sup>7</sup>

Those who followed Mapu were greatly indebted to him. Our vision of a world Jewry safe from persecution and hatred has emerged in part from this novelist's pen. Mapu raised and strengthened the hopes and aspirations of generations of Russian Jews. And his influence grew as other writers developed the themes and the genre (type of literature) he had created.

Hebrew poetry, too, was reborn in Russia. Its beauty went

even further toward kindling optimism among many Russian Jews. Poetic verse was also employed to stimulate change in the communities themselves. Judah Leib Gordon (1831-1892), wrote "Songs of Judah," in which he cried out to his fellow Jews for spiritual renewal. To him, traditional Judaism was mired in ritual and legal arguments. His words expressed the conviction that Jewish ethical teachings and fellowship "in this life" should be emphasized over law and ceremony:

To live by soulless rites hast thou been taught,  
To swim against life, and the lifeless letter to keep:  
To be dead upon earth, and in heaven alive,  
To dream while awake, and to speak while asleep.<sup>8</sup>

Gordon's ability to voice his concerns about the future through poetry revived this lost art form. That his achievement came in an environment particularly hostile to such creativity is remarkable.

#### Yiddish Literature: Mendele Mokher Sforim

Most Eastern European Jews knew but one language, Yiddish, regardless of the countries in which they lived. Few Russian Jews learned Russian, and few Polish Jews learned Polish. Try as the various governments did to require that national languages be used in public life, most Jews resisted such regulations and continued to speak Yiddish. Most of the maskilim encouraged this linguistic conversion in their attempt to bring the Jews closer to "modern" civilization, but they were never very successful. The common Jews felt secure in few things; one of them was their language.



Thus it comes as no surprise that one of the bridges that served to unite some of the maskilim with many among their intended audience was the use of Yiddish. Most maskilim rejected this tactic; to them Yiddish was a "jargon," a crude combination of German and Hebrew, which kept its speakers isolated from advances and developments occurring outside of their societies. Shalom Jacob Abramovich (1835-1917), a Hebrew writer, also felt this way. But after wondering about the questions Judah Leib Gordon posed in a poem "For whom do I labor?", he decided that the Yiddish-speaking masses needed what he had to offer. Thus the author, "Mendele Mokher Sforim" ("Mendele the Bookseller") was born.

This "bookseller" wrote many clever stories dedicated to exposing the ills of the Jewish society. Saddened by what he saw, he tried to convince his fellow Jews of the need for changes in their religious and social orientation. He was a humble man, who wrote:

My birthplace, Kopyl, is a small town in the Slutsk district of the province of Minsk. God did not endow this town with resources and wealth or favor it with business and trade. Instead, He bestowed upon it a lovely landscape, beautiful forests and a placid life, with valleys and lovely fields all about. The date of my birth was not recorded anywhere, for we Jews did not bother about such things then, especially in the small towns. But I have assumed I was born in 1836 and my family decided on December 20 as my birth date.<sup>9</sup>

Mendele Mokher Sforim's adoption of Yiddish as a vehicle for his contribution to Russian Jewish life was important in many ways. Not only were his books important for their content,

but his belief in the common language of his people helped their culture survive. Its growth in America shall be examined shortly.

### Yiddish Theatre and Press

The same forces that limited Jewish creativity in literature and scholarship--rabbis and tsars--effectively squelched the beginnings of a Jewish theatre in Russia. The Jewish religious leadership considered drama an unacceptable Gentile intrusion into Jewish culture. The "Purim Spiel" (Purim skits, or plays) was a notable exception; on this holiday, such satire was welcomed. The tsars were opposed to the development of Yiddish plays, as they were opposed to any activities which might promote or strengthen Jewish identities.

It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, as Irving Howe, in World of Our Fathers, notes, that "groups of minstrels, acrobats, and singers began to wander from shtetl to shtetl, half-welcomed and half-scorned as ragamuffins of the culture."<sup>10</sup> Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908), later to be respected as the primary figure behind the development of Yiddish theatre in America, convinced one such group, in 1876, to refine their techniques and present a play he had written. This performance in a wine cellar in Romania, (as Howe relates), marked a "formative point" in the history of this theatre.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent developments took place in America, after Goldfaden emigrated to America. Here, freed of both religious and secular restraints, Yiddish playwrights and actors flourished.

The Yiddish press underwent a similarly restricted growth in Russia. The first Yiddish newspaper, a weekly called Kol Mevasser ("The Herald"), appeared in 1862. The government closed down its presses less than a decade later. The first Jewish daily, Der Fraind ("The Friend"), appeared in 1903. Its publication was halted in 1905. The Russian government was generally opposed to Jewish publications, unless of course they furthered Russification. The maskilim were likewise opposed to "separatist" journals, and sponsored Kol Mevasser with the proviso that it "should seek through a gradual refinement of the vulgar jargon to evolve a simple German as its medium of expression." 12

Kol Mevasser, during the years of its publication under the liberalized policies of Tsar Alexander II, offered maskilim and other reformers the chance to appeal to the Yiddish-speaking masses. Mendele Mokher Sforim's first Yiddish novel, Dos Kleyne Mentchele ("The Little Man") originally appeared in Kol Mevasser, as did the works of many other noted writers. With the 1870's came a return to rigid censorship, and the end of this, and other Jewish newspapers. It was not until the 1880's that press restrictions were relaxed and Jewish newspapers were once again available. By that time, many Russian Jews had left for America, where they were soon to hear news vendors hawking " 'Forverts!', 'Warheit!', 'Togblatt!', 'Morgen-Zhurnal!'" 13

#### Conclusions: Russian-Jewish Culture in America

One of the greatest ironies of the study of Russian Jewish

history and its effects on our development as American Jews is the gap between the maskilim and the masses. Our cultural inheritance came in large measure not from the millions of people who fought impossible odds to stay Jewish, but from a small group of self-appointed "enlightened" ones whose Jewish identities shifted as regularly as the winds.

True, our quest for education came from the rabbinic and Hassidic traditions, yet the educational values and methods we cherish today derived from the forces of the haskalah. Our "Talmud-Torah"--or Jewish Day School--grew out of the regard our Russian ancestors held for religious education. That secular subjects are taught in such schools is due to the influence and foresight of the maskilim.

Similarly, although Yiddish was the language of our "commoner" ancestors, the use of Yiddish as a modernizing and cultivating tool resulted from haskalah pressures. Abraham Goldfaden arrived in New York anxious to find an audience for his theatre. What he found, among the excitement and turmoil of the immigrant community on the Lower East Side, was a need for escape from daily pressures. He obliged, and set the stage for many Jewish playwrights and performers. One historian characterized this early theatre in the following way:

The early immigrant audiences, without esthetic training or experience but with wonderfully avid hungers, have little taste for realism--there is enough 'realism' in their lives. What they want is bang-up spectacle, florid declamation, turbulent melodrama. The Yiddish theatre becomes a passion among these immigrants, indeed their first major outlet for communal emotion. 14

Who were the "descendants" of Goldfaden's early theatrical "extravaganzas?" Paul Muni (originally Muni Weisenfreund), Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Irving Berlin, Geroge Gershwin, and many others. And the Jews who went west in search of movie fame, form and equally impressive group: Tony Curtis ("Bernard Schwartz"), Dustin Hoffman, Jerry Lewis ("Joseph Levitch"), and the Marx Brothers, among many others.

The Yiddish Press--best represented by Abraham Cahan's Forverts ("Forward")--grew out of the same experiences. These papers were more "journals" than anything else, giving space to novelists, poets and others who had something to offer the community.

In America, free from government intervention and censorship, Yiddish journalism began where its Russian forebears had left off. In Russia, the Yiddish/Hebrew press existed primarily as a mouth piece for the haskalah; in America, it evolved into a much more complex institution. Not only did it seek to educate its readers, but it was also a source of entertainment, gossip, political happenings, and, of course, news. (Like the time a Yiddish journalist in Philadelphia headlined an article "The Empress of China Has Come to America to Look for a "Husband", after reading in a local paper that the empress in question had "Arrived Yesterday on Her Maiden Voyage."<sup>15</sup>) Each newspaper had its own style and own personality. Most continued to press for change in the Jewish communities, as the following article from the Forward of January 3, 1910, indicates:

The Forward "Mailbox" receives numerous letters from immigrants who have cut off their

beards and forgotten the name of their birth-place in Russia but they are helpless because they still don't know English. It is understandable: when your stomach is empty and your head full of worry about making a living, you're not going to think about studying. But just as their muteness has a cause, it has results--they could get a better job if they knew English.<sup>16</sup>

No one was immune from this self-criticism, in the crowded ghetto of New York; nothing escaped the papers' eyes:

A High School teacher had the following talk with your editor about Jewish children in New York schools. 'All the teachers are amazed by their ability,' he said. 'The best minds in each class are Jewish. The children show the greatest interest in the studies. Jewish boys, however, are disrespectful and untidy; non-Jewish boys conduct themselves better.'

The teacher cited the children's behavior during Passover. Many of them brought matzo and onions for lunch. When they finished, the floor was covered with onions and crumbs that greeted teachers of the next class. Our guest said a German, American, or even an Irish boy would never do that.

Children of Jewish immigrants have ways, he went on, that are inappropriate to cultivated students. They gesticulate with hands and eyes, speak in talmudic singsong, and sway prayerfully. When teachers call on them they respond with noises, gestures, and uncontrollable laughter. He described wonderful pupils who recite their lessons with yeshiva-style outcries. 'Too bad,' he commented. 'These children with manners would be gems.'<sup>17</sup>

The areas in which these immigrants contributed to our culture--Jewish and American--are practically endless. We tend to picture our ancestors as Fiddlers on the roof. More appropriate are images of hard-working, urbanized men and women torn by allegiance to tradition and respect for modernity. Their culture--and ours--reflect the constant pull of these forces.

CHAPTER SIX:

Communal Existence.

## COMMUNAL LIFE

### Introduction

"Do you want to meet a landsman from Lemberg, a freshly baked greenhorn who can give you the latest news about your city; or an Americanized landsman who knows how to transfer from one streetcar to the next...?"<sup>1</sup> Then head to the corner of "Clinton and Riverton," suggests the Forward of January 17, 1906, where you can find out about anything "that interests you."<sup>2</sup>

Who, or what would one find? This corner, we can imagine, must have been a center of the Eastern European Jewish community on the Lower East Side of New York. Here, one could find a landsman, a person from one's own shtetl (little Eastern European village), a "compatriot," a fellow sufferer. New York was such a big city! It was so far in so many ways from the thousands of hamlets and towns whence our ancestors hailed. These immigrants found themselves thousands of miles, mentally and physically, from the tight-knit little communities they once had called "home." So they would meet at the various "Clinton and Rivertons" to catch up and keep abreast.

These Jews had fled persecutions of many kinds, including one which had gnawed at them from the inside. This was the local kahal, the board of rabbis and elders empowered to rule over each of the Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe.

Originally, the kahal had provided a useful structure in lands where the various groups of people functioned somewhat autonomously, and in times of oppression. Yet like most governing



bodies, they were not immune to corruption. Thus these immigrants were certain of at least one thing among the novelties and uncertainties of the New World: They would jealously guard their own decision-making rights, and prevent consolidation of the various community organizations.

They were successful in this venture. They did give their support to all types of community endeavor, but thanks to their experiences in Russia, they insisted that each remain fairly independent. They resisted the idea of a general, all-encompassing "kehilla," (like the word "kahal," it means "congregation" or "community") although they did give their support to a "Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropies."<sup>3</sup> What caused them to support this diversification? Why were they so intent on democratizing their communal structures? A look at the various functions of the Eastern European kahals, and what followed in the wake of their demise, will help give us some answers.

### The Origins of the Kahal

In the mid-sixteenth century, the Jews of Poland were granted a charter allowing for self-government. They were permitted to elect rabbis and judges, who in turn were to rule on religious as well as many civil matters. The king further commanded his local officials to support the Jewish leaders. This arrangement was, in theory, marvelous for the Jews. Insulated from the antisemitism of non-Jewish legal administrative systems, they were responsible instead to Jewish law and

Jewish authorities. It was, as many antisemites were later to claim, "a state within a state." "The Jewish community," wrote Simon Dubnow,

constituted not only a national and cultural, but also a civil, entity. It formed a Jewish city within a Christian city, with its separate forms of life, its own religious, administrative, judicial, and charitable institutions. The government of a country with sharply divided estates could not but legalize the autonomy of the Jewish Kahal...<sup>4</sup>

These local boards, elected annually during Pesach, included up to forty members. They collected taxes, assessed duties, and supervised synagogues, schools, cemeteries, charitable committees, commercial organizations, and handicraft groups. They handled property transfers, settled disputes, and hired rabbis. There was literally no facet of life which escaped their purview. They set dietary guidelines and dress restrictions, guarded the "chastity of Jewish women," and set limits on Jewish money-lending.

When Russia conquered and annexed the Polish lands which were to be fashioned into the Pale of Settlement, a debate arose within the government over the usefulness of the kahals. For a number of years the issue remained unsettled. Whether to continue allowing Jews the privilege of self-governance was finally resolved with the following order:

(I)n order that their (the Jews') taxes may be more regularly remitted to the exchequer, Kahals shall be established in which they (the Jews) shall all be enrolled, so that every one of the "Zhyds," ("kikes") whenever he shall desire to travel somewhere on business, or to live and settle on one place or another, or to take anything on lease,

shall receive a passport from the Kahal. The same Kahal shall pay the head-tax, and turn it over to the provincial exchequer.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it was decided: The Jews shall be permitted to retain their autonomy as long as it facilitated tax-collecting and government control over the community.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian tsars continued this policy. They exploited the kahals as much as possible. In the process, they further heightened the tensions and divisions that had grown up between the wealthy "haves" who served on these boards, and the poor "have-nots" who were ruled by the former. In 1844, however, the government ordered the abolition of the kahals, which by then had degenerated essentially into local arms of the government, existing to channel Jewish money into the national coffers.

Actually, their standing within the Jewish communities had been practically destroyed already when the tsar had charged them with the obligation of providing conscripts for the army. As Dubnow noted, they "had long become thoroughly demoralized and had lost (their) former prestige as a great Jewish institution."<sup>6</sup> What had begun as a promising framework for cultural and civil freedom and advancement, ended as a discredited dictatorship of the wealthy and privileged. It is understandable, then, that the Jewish immigrants to America would search out new ways to control their destiny.

#### Administrative and Judicial Functions

The administrative functions of the Kahal were evident

in all areas of life, from military conscription to taxes to self-defense. Originally, both the Polish and Russian governments had hailed this internal organization for the services it performed. Certain tasks, such as the collection of the "head tax," were delegated to these local Jewish officials. It was assumed and rightly so, that the Kahals could be made to function within the Jewish communities essentially as arms of the Russian government. The kahal elders were frequently held personally responsible for the carrying out of government orders. And since the power of these administrators derived from the national government, the members of the Jewish communities had little recourse if oppression by their own leaders occurred. Wrote one observer:

The leaders (rabbis and elders) consume the offerings of the people, and drink wine for the fines imposed by them. Being in full control of the taxes, they assess and excommunicate (their opponents); they remunerate themselves for their public activity by every means at their disposal, both openly and in secret. They make no step without accepting bribes...<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of these excesses, Simon Dubnow concludes, the kahals were "largely instrumental in unifying communal Jewish life."<sup>8</sup> They established trade groups, set fees for various services, and protected consumers through the setting of uniform weights and measures. The kahals also acted as "title agents" for the transfer of land from one Jew to another. They settled litigation. These Jewish courts were well respected by Jews, and were preferred by Christians who were used to the inefficient and out-dated Russian legal system. A Hebrew writer contrasted

the two judiciaries in the following terms:

In all monetary litigations, quarrels between husband or wife, or any other controversies they (Jews) usually repaired to the Jewish court which enjoyed the full confidence of the local Christians as well. Whenever the latter had a controversy with a Jew, they usually turned to the rabbi who, after listening to any plaintiff, immediately sent his beadle for the defendant who appeared almost instantaneously. Both parties placed on the table the judicial fee--both having to pay the same amount--and the proceedings began. Shortly thereafter the rabbi pronounced the sentence which, as a rule, the litigants accepted without demurrer or the help of court marshals.<sup>9</sup>

The equality of the Jewish courts--even, as noted above, in times when Jews were free to turn to the civil officials--stands in direct opposition to the system adopted to fill the Russian draft quotas. When Tsar Nicholas I decided that the most effective manner to rid Russian Jewry of their religious and cultural identities was to draft Jewish children for twenty-five-year stints, he added to the evil of his decree by mandating that the kahals choose the inductees. Khoppers ("kidnappers") were hired by the kahals to help fulfill quotas since the kahal elders were eligible for army service if their quotas were not reached. Tax-evaders, vagrants and criminals were drafted first in most cases. After them went derelicts, the poor, and unsuspecting travellers from other cities. The rich fared better:

The more or less well-to-do were exempted from conscription either by virtue of their mercantile status or because of their connections with the Kahal leaders who had the power of selecting the victims.<sup>10</sup>

The common people despised the kahals during this era, and in fact, their wishes for the abolition of the institution

were fulfilled in 1844. By that date, however, the kahal was merely a shadow of its former strength. As of 1835, the government had restricted its functions to the implementation of government decisions, and the remitting of taxes. The government had further stipulated that the elders must be fluent in Russian and that their election be ratified by the local government. No longer was the exploitation of their tax-collecting abilities paramount. Rather, the government correctly viewed them as substantial barriers to Russification.

### Charitable Organizations

One Russian Jewish author noted in his autobiography that

the Jewish pauper does not ask for alms, as does his Christian counterpart standing before the door or near the window and bending down to the ground, but he brazenly enters the room and demands a gift as if it were his due.<sup>11</sup>

One shouldn't assume that all Jewish paupers were as "brazen" as this commentator might lead us to believe, but the fact remains that the Jewish communities in Russia were extraordinarily kind to their own. Talmudic law demanded it, and the realities of the situation added further emphasis--if the Jews didn't care for the needy among them, nobody else would. Far from prescribing lives of social "misconduct," as the tsars claimed, Jewish law required activities such as the following:

Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, burying the dead and comforting the mourners, redeeming the captives, educating the orphans, sheltering the homeless and providing poor brides with dowries.<sup>12</sup>

Aiding the "have-nots" was not the "nice gesture" we might

consider it today. By the same token, our conception of "poor" does not adequately describe the living conditions of most of the Pale Jews. As one statistician wrote:

Death was more successful in the crowded dirty hovels inhabited by Jews, who comprise one-eighth of the population of the state. Look into one of these hovels, which is about to collapse and bury as many as fifteen male and female souls, and you will be struck by the filth and stench. The swarm of half-naked children can hardly find room in this dark hut, three-quarters of which is taken up by the stove, bed and table...Tuberculosis, asthma, nervous fever, nose bleed and hemorrhoids find not a few victims among these Jews.<sup>13</sup>

One didn't contribute to raise incomes above a "poverty line;" one gave food and money knowing that life itself hung in the balance. In one survey taken in 1857, it was officially reported that 22.4% of the Jews were unemployed. In reality, however, it is possible that 50-75% were unemployed, with the discrepancy in figures attributable to fears that arrest and/or conscription would result if one admitted lacking work.

The fact that so many Jews did survive is testimony to the charitable obligations assumed by the communities. By our standards, they shouldn't have survived. Their best efforts, as an English missionary describes them in the following passage, were hardly sufficient.

In the Jewish hospital we saw forty-five young and old, of both sexes, seemingly without any classification of disease, placed in several small rooms; they certainly presented one of the most appalling scenes of wretchedness I ever witnessed; filth, rags and pestilential effluvia pervaded the whole place.<sup>14</sup>

Yet the charity did provide sustenance for many. That we are alive today is proof.

## Religious Functions

In addition to their control over much of the charitable work of the community, the kahals also held sway over religious matters. All questions of religious ritual were submitted to the rabbinic members of the local Kahal, or to rabbis hired by the Kahal to serve the community. Since religion played such a major role in the lives of Russian Jews, the power wielded by these rabbis was enormous. Some used it for the good of the community; others were corrupt and took advantage of their positions. One eighteenth century observer put it this way: "The learned cater to the rich, and, as for the rabbis, they have only contempt for one another. The students of the Talmud despise those engaged in mysticism and Cabala, while the common people accept the testimony of both, and conclude that all scholars are a disgrace to their calling."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there is evidence that in times of stress these representatives helped provide stability and support. During a period of Polish decline, for instance, the following plea was offered in an effort to rally spirits and boost morale:

Gravely have we sinned before the Lord.  
The unrest grows from day to day. It becomes  
more and more difficult to live. Our people  
has no standing whatsoever among the nations.  
Indeed, it is a miracle that in spite of  
all misfortunes we are still alive. The  
only thing left for us to do is unite ourselves  
in one league, held together by the strict  
obedience to the commandments of god and to the  
precepts of our pious teachers and leaders.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, "organized religion" was serving as a bond in a time of desperate trouble.



Rabbis were generally subservient to the upper stratum of wealthy Jews in each community. Some were elected to positions on the kahals; others were selected by the kahals to serve as spiritual leaders for specified lengths of time. These rabbis felt that they alone were responsible for all religious decisions, on personal as well as community levels, and until the growth of Hassidism, their authority was largely unquestioned.

This religious authority held by the rabbis was only partly due to the common Jew's belief in God and Jewish law. The government was active in this area, too. With the partitioning of Poland, and the subsequent Russian rule over Pale lands, the tsarina declared that existing kahal powers were to be left in force. In subsequent years, the kahals were told to deal strictly in spiritual matters. According to the Jewish Constitution of 1804, the kahals were to "look after all the ceremonies of the Jewish faith and decide all disputes bearing on religion."<sup>17</sup>

Another source of rabbinic strength, and of government concern, was the use of the herem, "excommunication." This was the most powerful weapon in their religious arsenal, since it meant exclusion from Jewish life. The mere threat to use it was generally sufficient to bring about obedience to Mosaic Law, as interpreted by the rabbis in these impoverished isolated communities. If a Jew were driven out of his or her spiritual community, there would exist little additional reason to live. The Russian government was well aware of the power inherent in those who could pronounce a herem, and thus made efforts to ban

its use in its overall attempt to wipe out this "state within a state."

### Shtadlanim

The final question to ask is: If the kahals spoke for the Jews, who spoke for the kahals? Who was it who occasionally appeared before the tsars to respond to royal decrees or to plead for Jewish rights? The answer is the shtadlan, the "court Jew" or the "Jewish representative."

Shtadlanim existed in Eastern Europe as far back as the early part of the seventeenth century, when one of the jobs of the supreme kahal in Poland and Lithuania was to send such men to the government in order to press for recognition of Jewish privileges. At that time, these representatives were chosen by the elected elders of the communities. But, as the power of the kahals declined, other "volunteers" stepped in to protect the interests of the Jews. One historian writes that:

(from 1857 on) there are to be found in the archives of the various Russian ministries constant references to petitions of individual Jews pleading for concessions and favors for their people. The petitioners had no authorization from those on whose behalf they pleaded. In many instances some of these self-appointed leaders came to be recognized by the authorities as spokesmen of the Jewish community, and they rendered a much needed service.<sup>18</sup>

What were some of these "services" they performed? Some, like the noted jurists Henry B. Slizberg and Oscar O. Gruzenberg, were schooled in Russian law and tried to find ways to ameliorate the condition of the Jewish masses through the Russian

legal system.

These men were not attorneys; Jews could study for the bar but were prohibited from reaching it. Their training, however, brought them into close contact with Russian decision-makers, and they tried to use their influence in whatever ways they could.

It is interesting to note that neither of these men felt that antisemitism was basic to the character of the Russians. Being products of the haskalah, they believed strongly in a positive future for Jews in Russia--even as their efforts became more and more futile. They made a distinction between the Russian people and the government. "What connection," Gruzenberg is quoted as having once exclaimed, "(is there) between the creative Russian spirit and its tsars and their government!"<sup>19</sup>

The most effective shtadlan was probably Baron Horace de Günzburg, who lived from 1833 to 1903.<sup>20</sup> His accomplishments came in one of the darkest periods of Russian Jewry, the last decades of the nineteenth century. During the era of pogroms and expulsions, wrote Henry Sliezberg, Baron de Günzburg worked tirelessly for his coreligionists.

One may think of these days as of an epidemic which kills right and left, and among the fallen and the wounded one sees the mighty figure of Baron Horace de Günzburg rushing aid wherever it was needed, seeking to alleviate pain and wipe away a tear.<sup>21</sup>

De Günzburg was responsible for the pro-Jewish conclusions of the 1883 "High Commission for the Revision of the Current Laws governing the Jews," and for the rejection of increased

disabilities suggested by this committee's successor, once the initial recommendations were rejected by the tsar. He was also the guiding force behind a conference of Jewish notables in St. Petersburg, in 1882, which called for the abolition of oppressive laws and for government protection from marauding peasants. The conferees simultaneously rejected emigration as answer to Jewish problems and suffering, wishing instead for a governmental change of heart. Such a response was not to come.

Even though the influence of the shtadlanim continued to wane, these representatives continued to push for reform of Russian policies toward the Jews. Their presence lasted until early in this century, when they were replaced by Jewish members of the duma, the national assembly.

### Conclusion

Much of our Jewish life here in America mirrors that which preceded it in Eastern Europe. Our communal structure and our organizations, our societies and our approach to our needs reflect, in many ways, the methods of our ancestors. Those who rejected the advice of Baron de Gunzburg and took advantage of America's shores arrived with as many spiritual needs as physical. Some of the answers from the old country would work here in America; others would have to be adapted to new surroundings. Still others would be happily scrapped.

Charitable organizations were a necessity. The existing German-Jewish relief agencies were helpful to a degree, but they

were not able to provide all the help that was needed.

Unfortunately, some elements of that society were not particularly anxious to provide the kind of help that was needed.

Many German Jews felt the best answer to the plight of the indigent Russian immigrant was a one-way ticket out west.

The immigrants were highly suspicious, and understandably so, of any and all governments--Jewish and non-Jewish. Thus, they fought the idea of an all-encompassing Jewish "kehilla," but did ultimately settle for a unified Federation, for fund-raising purposes. These Jews were not, by and large, active in the American political scene, although the majority of them aligned themselves with the Democratic Party.

Health was almost as much a problem in the crowded slums of the Lower East Side of New York as it had been in Russia, although here in America the possibilities for improvement were much greater. "Jewish hospitals" were built throughout the United States, first by German immigrants, and later by Eastern Jews who felt the earlier ones hadn't a sufficiently Jewish "character." In these hospitals, Jewish patients could eat kosher food and be treated by Jewish doctors in an atmosphere in which they were comfortable. As the Forward, of July 6, 1909, marvels:

On Second Street near Avenue A stands Mount Moriah Hospital. It deserves our attention: In a sense it's a real popular institution. It was founded and is supported by members of the various societies affiliated with the Galicia-Bokovina League. From the pennies of its members, mostly paupers, arose the tiny, or, more nicely put, tidy and informal Mount Moriah Hospital. "It's a penny hospital," said an official who respectfully received

me as a Forward representative. Pennies have created it...An employee greets me with a friendly face. How marvelous this is...No haughtiness, just "Shalom aleichem"...<sup>22</sup>

Of course there were many other organizations, large and small. There were trade unions (to be discussed later), lending societies, and "brotherhoods." The most popular group, however, was the landsmanshaft, a combination in a sense of all of the above. This "crackerbarrel" group was, in the words of one writer, simply a "society of people."<sup>23</sup> He continued:

(The members) would get together, say, once a month, go through their ritual of business, play cards, reminisce about the old country, raise a few dollars for hungry relatives...It served many of the social purposes that the welfare state would undertake on a larger scale in later decades. It was a credit union, it provided modest sick benefits, it brought some relief to destitute members, and above all, it bought land for a cemetery, so that traditional Jewish rituals for burial would be satisfied.<sup>24</sup>

From birth to death and for every conceivable situation in between, this community of immigrants provided for its members. They weren't rich, nor were they powerful, nor were they certain what or where their future was, but they were free. In America, these Jews had found a "house"; in the merger of two cultures, they found a "home".

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Jewish Radicalism

## JEWISH RADICALISM

### Introduction

Jewish radicalism grew out of the failure of the haskalah as a prelude to Jewish rights in Russia. As the nineteenth century progressed, Jews who had turned to assimilation and secular education as a means of overcoming persecution found that equality was still an elusive dream. The Russian government had no intention, they began to realize, of granting emancipation to the maskilim. With the advent of the pogroms, even the most Russified of the Jews realized this. The long-awaited emancipation was illusory. New options would be needed if the Jews were to survive as a people.

The last decades of the nineteenth century did give birth to new ideas. Among these potential courses of action was an upsurge among Jews of an interest in socialism and revolutionary activity. Many of these Jews contributed greatly to the advancement of their own people in Russia, and the ideas they developed and imported into this country had a major effect on the welfare of their descendants. Their class-consciousness led to the formation of labor unions and to the betterment of working conditions for all Americans.

As one Jewish workers' newspaper, the Arbeiter Tzeitung, reported in 1891:

In New York the grand parade began at 9:00 A.M. By 3:00 P.M. all Jewish unions were gathered at Rutgers Square...



In all, 14,775 marched on Union Square. In addition to the unions there marched 200 pale and worn-out young boys, bastards in the tailor shops. That carried a banner that read: We Want to Go to School, Not the Shops.

Other banners read:

We Make the Clothes, Yet Go Naked!

Americanization, Culture, and Organization!

Down with the Sweat System! Down with Capital!<sup>1</sup>

To account for the fervor of these marchers, and for their regard for the workers of all backgrounds, we must return to the country from which most had come.

### The Revolutionary Movement in Russia

One course of action within Russia in which some Jews took part, was aimed at overthrowing the regime they considered beyond redemption. And yet Jewish participation in this movement was quite surprising, since the majority of the non-Jewish Russian revolutionaries were antisemitic. To these radicals, Judaism was a barrier to the integration of all persecuted Russians.

So in his book entitled The Russian Truth, a noted Russian revolutionary leader, Paul Pestel, outlined his reasons for feeling this way. Jews, he felt, were not acceptable partners in society, because:

1. They "foster among themselves incredibly close ties."

2. They have "a religion of their own which instills into them the belief that they are predestined to conquer all nations...[which] makes it impossible for them to mix with any other nation."

3. Their rabbis enslave the masses spiritually, "forbidding the reading of all books except the Talmud."

4. The Jews "are waiting for the coming of the Messiah who is to establish them in their kingdom ...[and therefore they] look upon themselves as temporary residents of the land in which they live."<sup>2</sup>

The aims of the non-Jewish revolutionaries were expressed in two words: Russia and Orthodoxy. These were disaffected young Russians who felt that the various tsarist regimes were not acting in the best interests of the Russian people. Although there were revolutionary "cells," secret groups, prior to the latter part of the nineteenth century, the largest and most effective of them arose in the 1860's and 1870's.

These cells sprang up largely in response to two major issues:

1. Tsar Alexander II's refusal to proclaim a constitutional government; and
2. Inequities in peasant land policies.

These same discontents were shared by many Jews, and their participation in the revolutionary cause should have been welcomed by the Russian Orthodox leaders of the movement. But these leaders were not able to overcome the same anti-semitic prejudices which they shared with the authorities whom they were trying to overthrow. Thus these Russian Jews found themselves caught in the middle and attacked by both sides. Not only did the radicals condemn them as "separatist," but the press portrayed them at the same time as revolutionary! "Everyone knows that these Jews," wrote one newspaper, "since time immemorial the representatives of the revolutionary spirit, now stand at the head of the [movement]."<sup>3</sup>

:

The goal of the Russian revolutionaries--the uniting of all Russian minorities against the oppression of the tsars--simply did not welcome the preservation of any remnant of Jewish identity. To them, the Jew was an exploiter, weaned on the Talmud's alleged hatred of Christians. To them, the Jews were part of the problem, not part of the solution. As one prominent revolutionary put it, either the Jews should divest themselves of the bonds and autonomy of their communities, or they should "form a separate commonwealth of their own in some portion of Asia Minor."<sup>4</sup> These words were unusually prophetic!

#### Jews as Revolutionaries

Those Jews who did join the ranks of the Russian revolutionary movement did so more out of sympathy for the plight of all Russians than for the troubles faced by their own people. They were driven by concern for universal rights, unaware that the groups they joined generally had much more specific objectives in mind. This self-sacrifice was made for the general good, but this was rarely reciprocated as far as the welfare of the Jews was concerned.

Interestingly enough, many of the prominent Jewish revolutionaries were "yeshiva buchers," rabbinical students from the seminary at Vilna. Their talmudic-bred idealism led them in this direction. Among such students were Aaron Zundeleovich, called by some the "Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Revolution" for his activities abroad in support of

the radicals, and Aaron Lieberman, one of the few Jewish radicals who insisted on maintaining some part of his Jewish identity.

This issue of Jewish identity, of course, created a problem for most of the Jewish radicals. In line with the accepted revolutionary philosophy of assimilation, they felt compelled to disavow their past. As one such Russified Jew wrote:

For us, there existed but one unhappy, dispossessed people, consisting mainly of tillers of the soil and partly of factory workers whose speech was the dominant Russian language. The artisans [including the Jews] we regarded as exploiters.<sup>5</sup>

Although the ethical principles of Judaism might have been considered proper revolutionary teachings, they saw its other aspects--national, cultural, and religious--as detrimental to the amelioration of the people. "For a Jewish Narodnik ["populist"] the motto--'Go to the people'--meant go to the Russian people" wrote Zundeleovich. For this Jew,

Jewry as a national organism did not present a phenomenon worthy of support. Jewish nationalist, it seemed to us, had no raison d'etre. As for religion, that cement which combines the Jews into one unit, it represented to us complete regression.<sup>6</sup>

Were many Jews revolutionaries? One study of the tsarist archives indicates that about 4% of the Russian revolutionaries were Jewish--approximately the same proportion of Jews within the population at large.<sup>7</sup> What is certain is that the number of Jewish revolutionaries--and their influence--was greatly exaggerated by the tsars in order to further their scapegoating of this hapless minority. Just a single Jew--

a woman by the name of Hessie (Hesia) Helfman--was involved in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. Yet this minor participation was greeted with major retaliation by the new government. Jewish revolutionaries acted as Russians, but were punished as Jews.

Beyond Jewish Revolutionaries: Jewish Socialism

The spread of Jewish disabilities in the 1870's led to a reappraisal of many Jews' revolutionary commitments. Originally, they had concentrated their energies on the downtrodden Russian peasants, feeling that oppression of the Jews would diminish as all segments of Russia were emancipated. They found, however, that their loyalties were misdirected, as one Jewish revolutionary was to note:

I see two and a half million people in bondage, and I say: "One must stand up on behalf of this humiliated and defenseless people, and fight for its freedom."<sup>8</sup>

The fight for improving the lot of the Jews, as distinct from the aims of the revolutionary movement in general, crystalized into the "General Jewish Workingmen's Party of Russia, Poland, and Lithuania," or, the Bund.

The 1880's brought economic, as well as physical destruction to the Jews of the Pale. As the boundaries of the area decreased, and as more restrictive rights of residence were introduced, competition among Jewish merchants, and between Christians and Jews, increased. In addition, as industrialization spread, fewer petty artisans could hope any longer for shops of their own. Class distinctions widened. A permanent

proletariat, or working class of wage-earners, developed. This, along with the ruinous economic climate that pervaded throughout the Pale, created greater dissatisfaction.

The fact, too, that most Jews were not able to integrate themselves into the Russian revolutionary movements, led to the formation of small Jewish socialist "cells." In the beginning, there was little to distinguish them from their non-Jewish counterparts. Class conflict was felt to transcend religious and cultural boundaries, and therefore such issues were not considered important to the "cause."

Only in 1895-6 did these groups take on a distinctly Jewish character. The appearance of Di Arbiter Stime, "The Worker's Voice," an illegal Yiddish newspaper, indicated the growing feelings on the part of some Jewish radicals that Jews must fight for their own consciousness within the larger context of class freedom. Ultimately this led to the formal organization of the Bund ("league"), with its goals defined by its founder, Arkady Kremer, in a speech as follows:

A general union of all Jewish socialist groups will have as its goal not only the struggle for general Russian political demands; it will also have the special task of defending the specific interest of the Jewish workers, carry on the struggle for their civic rights and, above all, combat the discriminatory anti-Jewish laws. That is because the Jewish workers suffer not only as workers but also as Jews, and we dare not and cannot remain indifferent at such a time.(1897)<sup>9</sup>

The influence of the Bund on Russian, radicals, Jews and non-Jews alike, was remarkable. Here was fusion of the needs of a religious nation, as well as of an oppressed economic

class. The Bund spawned a generation of socialist-minded politicians, in Russia, which carried over directly to the United States. It also gave new meaning and new vitality to the desparate, downtrodden Jew.

The following story is illustrative. A Jewish cobbler by the name of Hirsh Leckert was condemned to death after firing several shots at a Russian official who had commanded the whipping of several Jewish protestors in 1902. Leckert, a member of the Bund, was simple and uneducated, yet died a hero's death.

First there was the word, the word stirred the consciousness, consciousness called to action, and the action came like lightning. In Vilno there lived a shoemaker whose name was Leckert and he had a wife and child. By day he worked with his last (shoe pattern) and awl, and at night he would go to secret meetings to listen to the message concerning his fellow toilers. And one day when the cup of suffering was filled to the brim his comrades went forth into the street in a demonstration to proclaim the coming of a better day for the workingman--a day which would see neither rich nor poor but equality for all.

And those in power who feared these messages of the oppressed sent out their lackeys who arrested, imprisoned, and tortured these men and women. So there awoke within this humble cobbler a holy wrath; quietly he procured weapons and unknown to anyone and without a word of farewell to wife or child went to the theatre where the tyrant was enjoying himself. As this tyrant emerged from the theatre this cobbler shot him, seeking to wash out with his blood the shameful indignity perpetuated against his humiliated sisters and brothers.

In the middle of the night they hanged Leckert in the field called Voennoe Pole. No one knows where his grave is, for he did not die. There in the field of execution he came to life again to proclaim to the world

the honor and the dignity of the Jewish workingman.

From that day forth every blow upon the body of the Jewish worker became transformed into a mark of honor, and the yellow badge shone with the radiance of the sun. And in that radiance there gleamed four letters: Bund. And wherever these letters appeared they testified to the birth of a new Messiah--the Jewish workingman.<sup>10</sup>

This messianic ideal grew in America, and its power is still felt today.

#### Conclusions: Jewish Socialist Thought in America

The more lasting contributions on the part of these socialist pioneers came in the development of labor unions in the United States. Men and women such as David Dubinsky, Rose Schneiderman and Sidney Hillquit fought the "system" and won with the creation of a powerful labor movement. Their calls for workers' rights cut across religious, ethnic and national lines. They combined a sense of ideological fervor with a determination that America could, and should, become their people's haven from persecution.

They were able to organize and lead the masses in the sweatshops of New York, fighting for better pay, safer working conditions, and shorter hours. This movement also bred key politicians and intellectuals, as well as noted writers and poets. It even encouraged the growth, for a short time, of several American "kibbutzim."

These Jewish collective farms were found in Louisiana, South Dakota and Oregon. Unfortunately, as members of these



communes wrote, the enthusiasm of the settlers was not sufficient to overcome physical hardships.

Land was free or very inexpensive, but the cultivation of that land required considerable sums of money and unusually great exertion. The available land was usually virgin and had to be cleared and prepared. Farming implements and machinery, livestock and homes were needed. Without aid, the Jewish immigrants, who were unaccustomed to this type of hard work, could not accomplish anything.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, the disheartened immigrants returned to the hardships of the urban existence they had fled, and their organization, Am Olam ("Eternal People") withered away. Of course their Palestinian counterparts--the first Israel "kibbutzniks"--fared better, and their descendents farm Israeli lands to this day.

The slums of the Lower East Side of New York provided the perfect setting for growth of the socialist idealism carried from Russia into American political life. It is no wonder that the first Jewish congressman came from this area. Meyer London was elected to Congress on November 3, 1914, and the Forward reported the excitement in the following article:

About fifty thousand persons gathered yesterday in the park across from the Forward building. They'd started gathering toward evening, and the human sea grew from minute to minute...

By 2:00 A.M. there was no longer any doubt that London had been chosen. We announced this with an extra.

At that time over ten thousand were gathered at the Forward building. They took to singing and dancing for joy. People who didn't know each other kissed...<sup>12</sup>

Slowly, Jewish participation in politics widened. The objections raised by some segments of the Jewish community that

"secular politics" was only for the non-Jews gave way to the comprehension that in America Jews should also play their full part in the political process. "Socialist officeholders....," wrote one Jewish political reformer, "appeal less to surface emotions and more to what they regard as fundamental economic causes and to the general social passion for a new order of things." 13

What were these "causes?" Consider the following list, enumerated by this same reformer, Henry Moskowitz:

"Resolutions pertaining to municipal purchase and sale of food."

"The establishment of a bureau of school feeding to provide the poor children of the public schools with hot and nourishing lunches"

"An inquiry into the conditions of labor in the street cleaning department"14

The political aspirations of many Jewish socialists were best expressed by one of the leading Jewish socialist intellectuals of the era, Morris Hillquit. Hillquit typified the position which many of these public figures took on specific "Jewish" issues: "The interests of the workingmen of the Ninth District are entirely identical with those of the workingmen of the rest of the country,"15 he declared in one speech.

Hillquit was a socialist, he wrote in his autobiography, "because I cannot be anything else. I cannot accept the ugly world of capitalism, with its brutal struggles and needless suffering, its archaic and irrational economic structure, its cruel social contrasts, its moral callousness and spiritual degradation."16 Hillquit was the spokesperson for thousands of

Jewish workers whose lives were constricted by the meager offerings of the garment barons. His conscience called on him to speak out against the pressing social ills of his day, and his forceful leadership and charisma propelled the labor movement forward.

Originally the labor movement was viewed by many as largely a "family affair," pitting Russian-Jewish workers against predominantly Russian-Jewish bosses. As one Jewish statistician wrote, in 1905: "Almost every newly arrived Russian-Jewish laborer comes into contact with a Russian-Jewish employer, almost every Russian-Jewish tenement dweller must pay his exorbitant rent to a Russian-Jewish landlord."<sup>17</sup>

The situation was not pretty, as a noted Yiddish journalist reported:

Among the workers, the concept of "home" was a fiction. Every inch of space in apartments had to be utilized for practical purposes. People earned pennies...In addition, every immigrant considered it his duty to save up money for boat fare for relatives remaining in Russia...The sun never reached these dismal habitations. A heavy burden of hopelessness weighed on the hearts of the immigrants; their entire surroundings bred despair.<sup>18</sup>

Such servitude was recorded by a whole generation of poets and writers. Morris Rosenfeld, for instance, penned the following lines:

I work, and I work, without rhyme, without reason--  
produce, and produce, and produce without end.  
For what? and for whom? I don't know, I don't wonder  
--since when can a whirling machine comprehend?

No feelings, no thoughts, not the least understanding;  
this bitter, this murderous drudgery drains  
the noblest, the finest, the best and the richest,  
the deepest, the highest that living contains.

Away rush the seconds, the minutes and hours;  
 each day and each night like a wind-driven sail;  
 I drive the machine, as though eager to catch them,  
 I drive without reason--no hope, no avail.<sup>19</sup>

Hope eventually came in the form of labor unions, beginning at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. The ability of workers to band together and strike made an enormous difference; the most effective groups were the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. Well-organized strikes replaced the previously ineffective and isolated sporadic work stoppages.

Abraham Rosenberg, a president of the ILGWU and prominent Jewish labor organizer, is oft-quoted as comparing the hordes of Jewish workers taking to the streets in one such job action to the stream of Israelites pouring out of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> As a result of union pressures, poor working conditions were ameliorated, wages were raised, and working hours were reduced. The days of servitude were nearing their end.

In the long run, perhaps the greatest achievement of these immigrant socialists was the uplifting of Jewish morale. For hundreds of years, Russian rulers had attempted to break the bonds of the Jewish "nation" within their borders. In America, an identifiable Jewish "nation" in the sense of a community needed to be built.

American freedom provided liberty and justice for all. The question, however, was: how were these Jews to integrate themselves into the American working force and still retain their Jewish identities? What would replace antisemitism and the kahal as elements that helped provide community cohesiveness?

What would sustain Jews in an era when the importance of a Jewish homeland and religion was diminished or ignored?

Out of these concerns the Bund grew and took even greater root in America. For above all, these activists "wanted to remain Jews--nonbelieving, radical, modern, but Jews."<sup>21</sup> Their drive and their resolve---born in the fields where Hirsh Leckert and others like him died--served us all. For from them and all their fellow Jewish radicals, we have inherited a heritage of fair labor practices and a sense of justice.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Jewish Nationalism

## JEWISH NATIONALISM

### Introduction

Most American Jews, if questioned about the origins of Zionism, would respond with the name Theodor Herzl--and would stop there.

Most of us are familiar with the beginnings of Herzl's commitment to the settlement of Zion, starting with the trial of the French-Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus on charges of treason. We can understand the drama of the antisemitic court, and the effect it had on this assimilated Jewish journalist from Austria, whose passion and leadership led him to conclude that the Jews required a nation of their own, an idea that eventually gave birth to the State of Israel.

What most of us are not aware of is the story "behind the headlines," the adventures of the people--mostly Russian Jews--whose actions brought about this return to Zion. This attachment to the land of their ancestors had remarkable consequences.

Israel exists for different reasons for different people. For many American Jews, it is a center of Jewish excitement. We go on trips through reclaimed deserts, visit kibbutzim, and pray at the Western Wall. Others choose to live in Israel, considering Jewish life there to be more fulfilling. Still other Jews of American ancestry believe it is God's commandment to live, and die, in a land where Judaism began, and so they make the pilgrimage for that reason. Few of us, however, feel forced to move to Israel because of persecution. American

antisemitism can be powerful, yet laws and friendships have largely dissipated its threat.

This was not true in Russia. For the Russian Jews, Zionism represented a chance for physical and spiritual freedom. Born into an age of nationalist feeling, thousands of Jews turned to each other in the latter half of the nineteenth century and wondered: "What about us? Are we not entitled to a land of our own?"

The failure of the Russian Jewish haskalah to reduce Russian antisemitism was crucial to the rise of Zionism. The assimilation and Russification of the maskilim had secularized Jewish thought, but it hadn't brought acceptance. One poet, who felt a keen sense of disappointment and frustration, wrote: "I believed that Haskalah would surely save us, but that blessing was turned into a curse, and the golden cup of which we drank was flung into our faces."<sup>1</sup>

Another factor in the turn to nationalist expression was the non-Jewish socialists' rejection of Jewish participation in their cause. These Russian socialists spurned the Jews, as did the peasants into whose fields the Jewish socialists trudged, offering assistance. "Of what concern is socialism to us?" questioned Moses Leib Lilienblum, a nineteenth century maskil and Zionist,

We are regarded as strangers in a capitalist society and we shall be treated as strangers in a proletarian regime. Granted that capitalistic society is responsible for Henry the drunkard and Arthur the nondrunkard, but what matters it to us? Each of them will loot our home, destroy our furniture, tear our pillows, and chase us...<sup>2</sup>



It is important to note, however, that not all Russian Jews looked favorably upon Zionism. Resistance to Jewish nationalism came from the religious, as well as the secularized Jews, and from the Bundists, as well as from capitalists. Far from galvanizing the community, Zionism in its early stages was attacked by many groups as destructive and divisive.

The Orthodox considered Zionism to be a secular breach of faith. Many religious Jews (constituting the majority of Russian Jewry) believed that it was God's place, and not theirs, to return the Jewish people from exile in the diaspora. Others felt that political activity of any kind would create additional problems for the community.

The socialists were equally repulsed by the Zionist ideal. To them, Zionism would divert attention from the real problem affecting Russian Jewry, class oppression. Those Jews who wished to see their coreligionists assimilate completely into the Russian countryside found Zionism abhorrent, in that it fostered rather than dissolved, distinctions. And the rich were concerned lest this Jewish separatism would call their allegiance to Russia into question.

Seemingly, Zionism faced many insurmountable obstacles. Nevertheless, its supporters pushed forward with the conviction that there was no other answer for the Russian Jew. And indeed, their efforts succeeded as the poet Eliakum Zunser marveled:

Through the windows what am I seeing,  
Like turtle-doves hitherward fleeing?  
Are my Joseph and Benjamin knocking at my door?  
O Heavens, O mighty wonder!  
Those are my children yonder!  
Yes, my dearest and my truest coming home once more!<sup>3</sup>

To many disaffected young Jews who had abandoned the religion of their parents because they felt it had little to offer, here was a reason to return.

#### Hibat Zion ("Love For the Land of Israel")

Although emigration from Russia to the land of Israel predated the events of the 1880's, it was the violence of this decade that created widespread interest in "aliya" ("going up"). No longer could those who stressed the importance of this tiny bit of land be ignored. Suddenly, years of praying for the possibility of returning like Moses and the Israelites to their Biblical homeland became an exciting reality.

Several nationalist currents already wending their way through Russian Jewish culture began to merge. In 1879, Eliezer Perlman (later to change his name to Eliezer Ben Yehuda) had written in Ha-Shahar, the newspaper edited by another famous nationalist, Perez Smolenskin, that Jews possessed all the requirements for nationhood:

- a common past;
- common feelings and heritage;
- a sense of unity; and
- a language.

In the past, he argued, the religious aspect of Judaism and antisemitism had served to unify Jewry. Now, he continued, there was another dimension needed.

The Jewish faith can live on in the Diaspora. It will assume new form according to time and environment, and will share the lot of all other religions. But as for the Jewish nation, it can exist only on its own soil. Only upon the soil can it find rejuvenation and bloom forth in splendor as in the days of yore.<sup>5</sup>

Another Zionist thinker was Leon Pinsker, whose essay "Auto-emancipation" was based upon the continuing threat of antisemitism. "Judeophobia," he reasoned, "is a psychic disorder. As such it is hereditary and, as a disease transmitted for two thousand years, it is incurable."<sup>6</sup> Pinsker joined with those who saw freedom from persecution through the colonization of Palestine, nearly two decades before the First Zionist Congress regarded a Jewish homeland as both practical and possible.

In terms of numbers of settlers or sums of money, Hibat Zion (Love of Zion) may not have been of great significance, but it raised the consciousness and hopes of Russian Jews. As a movement, it established clubs throughout the Pale, organized rallies and sponsored educational projects. It served as a national umbrella organization for many smaller groups that tried to incorporate Zionism into the established Jewish activities.

Unfortunately, hindered by the Russian government's refusal to legalize the society, and Turkey's periodic barring of immigration into Palestine (which it owned), Hibat Zion never achieved the success its founders envisioned. Spiritually,

however, it cleared the path upon which Herzl and his followers were later to proceed.

"BILU" ("O House of Jacob, Come Let Us Go")

Whereas Hibat Zion is remembered for the emotional stimulus of its Zionist programs, the BILU group ("O House of Jacob, come let us go"--from Isaiah 2:5) is known for the activism of its commitment to settlement in Palestine. In the spring of 1882, a group of Jewish university students organized this society, with the intention that its members themselves make aliyah. Most emigrants from Russia were then heading for America. But these young Jews, imbued with the Zionist philosophy then developing, felt that the future of Judaism lay more appropriately in the East.

The "Biluim" as they were called were determined to live on the land, sustaining themselves as farmers. Not only would they found settlements in Palestine, but they would support themselves through agricultural pursuits. The parallels with Am Olam, the organization that sponsored the farming settlements in America, are noteworthy, both in terms of motives and results. Like their America-bound counterparts, the Biluim also wanted to work outdoors, and try to rid the Jew of the "money-making" stereotype. And like Am Olam, Bilu, too, failed. Lack of experience, finances, and the ability to deal successfully with the stresses they encountered, forced the twenty or so Biluim who made it to Palestine to return to Russia after a relatively short period of time. They were never able to form the type

of model colony they believed would serve to draw other youth to Palestine.

Thus the Biluim, like the members of Hibat Zion, were important as "morale-building" antecedents of modern Zionism. Their idealism faded only with the realization that their goals simply were not yet attainable. They served as "yeast," noted one historian, "which kept the Russian Jewish community in a permanent state of creative fermentation."<sup>7</sup>

### Spiritual Zionism

The emphasis of the two groups described above was on colonizing, as expeditiously as possible, the Land of Israel. A different approach, however, was taken by still a third group, the members of Ahad Ha'am's Bnei Moshe.

Ahad Ha'am ("one of the people"), as Asher Ginzberg called himself, was reluctant to embark on programs of resettlement in Palestine without the foundations of a Jewish cultural rejuvenation. "Our national spirit is perishing," he cried, "and not a word is said."<sup>8</sup> He continued:

There are indeed a few individuals among the Zionists who recognize and acknowledge that the spiritual trouble of which I have spoken hitherto is fraught with danger to our people's future no less than the physical trouble; and that a "home for refuge" for the national spirit is therefore not less imperatively necessary than a home of refuge for our homeless wanderers. But they imagine that there is one method of solving both problems; that the very attempt to create a healthy and well-ordered settlement in Palestine involves the creation of that national spirit in that country...<sup>9</sup>

Ahad Ha'am believed that this thinking would lead to future failures, as it had in the past. He recognized that in the normal course of events, new countries were founded first upon a firm political and economic basis, and upon spirituality once these tasks were completed. But in Palestine, they argued it was different. First must come the spiritual renaissance.<sup>10</sup>

"The salvation of Israel will be achieved by prophets not by diplomats,"<sup>11</sup> he commented following the first Zionist Congress. He was certain that regardless of the appeal of Zionism, the majority of world Jewry would continue to live outside Palestine's borders. But Palestine, he believed, should serve as a hub for the surrounding Jewish communities, as a radiant center of light and of hope. His major concern was not with the problems of the Jews, but with the deficiencies within Judaism itself. And these could be overcome only through the rebirth of Jewish culture that a Jewish homeland could produce. This, to him, was the essence of the Jewish state, the real motivation for its creation.<sup>12</sup>

### Socialist/Zionists

A fourth group emerged that worked to substitute for separate socialist and Zionist programs a platform that represented a hybrid of both modes of thought. These were socialists who believed that Jews needed a territory of their own on which to develop a socialist way of life.

One of these groups, the Poale Zion ("Workers of Zion"), furthered the aim of socialist settlements in Palestine.

One of its most important leaders was Nachman Syrkin. He defined the goals of the movement in his 1901 "Call to Jewish Youth" as follows:

1. Social-democratic movements must be joined in those countries where the Jewish masses live.
2. A Jewish socialist commonwealth must be founded in Palestine and the neighboring lands;
3. Jewish clericalism (rabbinic control) must be fought through its replacement by a socialist, nationalist ideal.<sup>13</sup>

Syrkin's socialism was born out of his conviction that the "essence of the Jewish national spirit" was a "new universal order."<sup>14</sup> To him, Zionism and socialism were not mutually exclusive, as many believed. They were not separate paths to better lives, he reasoned, but mutually supportive elements of a single route. "The guidelines of the new Jewish state," he proposed, "must be justice, rational planning, and social solidarity."<sup>15</sup>

Most socialists and most Zionists could not accept the integration of the two philosophies. Each faction felt it held the key to survival of Russian Jewry. The Socialist-Zionists, on the other hand, were convinced that neither answer, alone, would suffice. Hostilities ran deep, especially between the Socialist-Zionists and members of the Bund. Tempers often flared and physical violence -- even murder -- was not unknown in the conflict that raged between the groups. In retrospect, we

can state that indeed no one solution did prove sufficient, as each has contributed to the growth of Judaism here, and in Israel.

Conclusions: Zionism in America

The American Jew is a combination of many historical, cultural and religious strands. Very few of us would be able to define ourselves simply in terms of "religion" or "ethnic background" or "political allegiance." One often hears: "It's hard to be a Jew", but to that we must add, "It's also complicated."

Our society allows us the freedom to pick and choose from among many, many "Jewish" options. We can label ourselves in any number of ways and are free to state our own "Jewish" priorities. Just as it is difficult to find two people who look alike, it's not easy finding two Jews who think alike! And our vitality, many believe, lies precisely in the pluralism of our community.

Our Russian ancestors arrived with many different convictions. Traditional labels would no longer be appropriate. Each Jew was free to choose from a wide range of options, and still find acceptance within the community. Openness to difference became the hallmark of that, and succeeding generations. Certainly it is evident today in various areas--religious observance, communal structure, and culture, to name but a few. Varieties of Zionism are no less included here.

The wide spectrum of Zionist attitudes expressed in the



American Jewish community today reaches back into the immigrant community of the last century. An American Hibat Zion was organized in 1884. Some of its members advocated rapid colonization of Palestine as a first step towards world-wide aliyah, while others supported the concept of a homeland for those Jews (unlike themselves, they felt) who still lived in lands of oppression.

Zionism was not without its detractors, also. Many religious immigrants felt this movement represented a religious heresy, that it was to be under God's direction, and not human leadership, that Jews would return to the Land of Israel. Most Jewish socialists, arguing that freedom for the worker-- Jewish and non-Jewish alike--should be a priority of all Americans, opposed Zionism as an unproductive rival for Jewish sympathies. Many Yiddish writers and poets were likewise hostile to Zionism, antagonized by its disparagement of Jewish achievements in the Diaspora and its claim that "galut" (Diaspora) Jewish culture was distorted or disfigured. Other immigrants simply felt that support for Zionism was incompatible with citizenship in America.

Opposition to Zionism began to wane, however, as the openness of the American Jewish community encouraged the growth of various "kinds" of Zionism. Today, there are American cultural Zionists and American political Zionists. There are American Socialist-Zionists too. Some American Jews feel it is necessary to live in Israel in order to be a Zionist. Others feel that financial and moral support of the Jewish State is enough. This is all part of the heritage bequeathed to us by our Russian-Jewish forbears.

UNIT III - CONCLUSIONS AND ENRICHMENT

CHAPTER NINE:

Our Legacy

## OUR LEGACY

Jewish history is divisible into any number of periods, depending on the factors considered.

One possible criterion is the exercise of "hegemony" (leadership, or predominance). Thus we might trace the development of Judaism according to the position of influence among world Jewry that various groups of Jews possessed at different points in time. Jewish hegemony began, of course, in the Land of Israel. Then it moved eastward to Babylonia, eventually turned towards the west, and ultimately reached America.

There are some who claim that today Jewish leadership has once again returned to Israel, or that it is shared between Israel and America. Others maintain that it remains in the United States, believing that our culture and learning still have the greatest effect on the continuing growth of Judaism throughout the world. If indeed this is true, we must attribute it in large measure to the efforts of our Russian-Jewish immigrants.

In a real sense, as we have seen, these men and women were Jewish pioneers. America was their frontier--full of risks, yet full of promise, too. Although Russia had grown increasingly intolerant of its Jewish minority during the latter third of the nineteenth century, many Jews remained behind, holding out hope that the oppression would subside.

It never did. And in Communist Russia today, it has come to include emigration restrictions in addition.

Our Russian ancestors arrived in this country financially impoverished, but with a wealth of experience. They came from different places, from different backgrounds, and from different walks of life, but they all brought one thing in common: hope. And here many found fulfillment. As one immigrant was supposed to have written to his family back in Russia:

...To my worthy wife, Mashel Mindel, and to my loving son, Susha Feifel, and to my precious darling daughter, the apple of my eye, the pride of my life, Tzipkeleh!

Long years and good luck on you! May the blessings from heaven fall over your beloved heads and save you from all harm!

First I come to tell you that I am well and in good health. May I hear the same from you.

Secondly, I am telling you that my sun is beginning to shine in America. I am becoming a person - a businessman...

Thirdly, I come to tell you ... white bread and meat I eat every day just like the millionaires.

Fourthly, I have to tell you that I am no more Gedalya Mindel - Mister Mindel they call me in America.

Fifthly, Mashel Mindel and my dear children, in America there are no mud huts where cows and chickens and people live all together. I have for myself a separate room with a closed door, and before anyone can come to me, I can give a say: "Come in," or "stay out," like a king in a palace. Lastly, my darling family and people of the village of Sukovoly, there is no czar in America.<sup>1</sup>

That America had no czar allowed years of repressed creative energy to flow through the pores of this writer and his contemporaries. Now they could live and work and pray, when and how they wanted. And they were able thereby to channel much of this energy into the fashioning of a new American Jewish life-style.

Some brought religious commitments and built synagogues. Others emphasized cultural refinements, singing and writing and acting. Many preached nationalism, and worked to make possible the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. And then there were those who used Judaism as a springboard into socialism, the labor movement, and politics.

This in brief is their legacy to us, and with it remains the influence it has had upon us in a wide variety of ways. In many respects -- in terms of occupations and cultural contributions, in political and social ideology, in dedication to fellow-Jews in Israel and elsewhere, in Jewish communal and religious life, and in vigilance against the abuse of power and oppression of minorities -- we continue to reflect our Russian-Jewish inheritance.

For our immigrant grandparents and great-grandparents have left an indelible impression upon our lives in ways that confirm our legacy from them.

CHAPTER TEN:

The History of Russian Jewry,  
From the First Settlements To the Rise of Muscovy

THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN JEWRY  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENTS TO THE RISE OF MUSCOVY

Early Settlements in the Crimea

We know a great deal about the Russian Jews who were our grandparents and great-grandparents, yet what do we know about their predecessors? Who were the Jews who first came to Russia; where did they settle; and how were they treated by their neighbors?

In the reign of King Tiberius Julius Rhescuporides, the pious friend of the Caesars and the Romans, in the year 377 (Bosporan era), on the twelfth day of the month of Peritios, I, Chresta, formerly the wife of Drusus, declare in the house of prayer that my foster son Heracles is free once (and for all), in accordance with my vow, so that he may not be captured or annoyed by my heirs, and may move about wherever he chooses, without let or hinderance, except for (the obligation of visiting) the house of prayer for worship and constant attendance. (Done) with the approval of my heirs Iphicleides and Heliconias, and with the participation of the Synagogue of the Jews in the guardianship.<sup>1</sup>

This inscription represents one of the earliest records of a Jewish presence in what is today Russia. By the first century of the Common Era, Hellenized Jews -- that is to say, Jews who had adopted various Greek customs and mannerisms -- inhabited the northern shores of the Black Sea. (Refer to Map #1.) When they arrived is open to speculation; it has



even been suggested that the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel immigrated to this area in the eighth century B.C.E.! Of greater certainty is that following the fall of Jerusalem in the sixth century (B.C.E.), Jews emigrated westward and settled in this region -- known at that time as "Tauris." (St. Jerome, living in Palestine in the fourth century C.E., claims that mention of this Taurian Jewish community is found in this verse of the Hebrew Scriptures:

וְגֵלַת יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בְּסִפְרָד  
 "The Jerusalemite exile community of  
 Sepharad..." (New JPS translation).<sup>2</sup>

Actually, he interprets the Hebrew "bi-Spharad" as referring to the "Bosporus" area.)

Evidently this community of Tauris grew as other Jews came seeking refuge from the persecution by the Eastern Orthodox Church. By the eighth century, the Jews comprised the largest community in the region, as the Byzantine writer Theophanes noted. "In Phanagoria, and the neighboring region," he wrote, "the Jews who live there are surrounded by many other tribes."<sup>2</sup>

### Under Khazar Control

Although Greek in name and language, these Jews along the Black Sea remained thoroughly loyal to their faith and successfully resisted the repeated attempts of the Byzantine Church to convert them.

Perhaps they are best remembered for their effect on the conquering Khazars, who swept into the area in the mid-seventh century. By the middle of the following century:

The King, or Khagan, of the Khazars, by the name of Bulan, had resolved to abandon paganism, but was undecided as to the religion he should adopt instead. Messengers sent by the Caliph persuaded him to accept Islam, envoys from Byzantium endeavored to win him over to Christianity, and representatives of Judaism championed their own faith. As a result, Bulan arranged a disputation between the advocates of the three religions, to be held in his presence, but he failed to carry away any definite conviction from their arguments and mutual refutations. Thereupon, the King invited first the Christian and then the Mohammedan, and questioned them separately. On asking the former which religion he thought was the better of the two, Judaism or Mohammedanism, he received the reply: Judaism, since it is the older of the two, and the basis of all religions. On asking the Mohammedan which religion he preferred, Judaism or Christianity, he received the same reply in favor of Judaism, with the same motivation. "If that be the case," Bulan argued in consequence, "if both the Mohammedan and the Christian acknowledge the superiority of Judaism to the religion of their antagonist, I too prefer to adopt the Jewish religion." Bulan accordingly embraced Judaism, and many of the Khazar nobles followed his example.<sup>4</sup>

This narrative may be apocryphal, but the basic thrust is true; the Khazar elite (and an unknown number of the common people) did embrace Judaism. (An unusual side-effect of the conversion of these powerful Khazars was a new respect for the "physical prowess" of the Jews -- certainly not part of the standard stereotype!) (Refer to Map #2.)

The Khazar kingdom provided a haven for Jewish refugees fleeing from continuing Byzantine oppression. From the beginning of the eighth century until the mid-tenth century, when the next great regional power began to chip away at Khazaria, many Jews fled the lands of "Rum" -- Byzantium -- for the protection of Bulan and his successors.

### Kievan Russia

This next dominant force, stretching from the Baltic Sea southward, came to be known as "Kievan Russia." According to the "Primary Chronicle," a history/sourcebook dating from the twelfth century, in the year 862 various groups of Slavs and Finns, unable to decide upon a leader,

accordingly went overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, Angles, and Goths, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the Slavs and the Krivichians then said to the people of Rus, "Our whole land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us!" They thus selected three brothers, with their kinfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, in Byeloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of the Rus. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforetime they were Slavs.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps more fiction than fact, many questions remain as to the real origin of the name "Rus." What is clear, however, is that the new rulers established themselves over the Jews.

Initially pagan, they became Christian around 986.

Kievan Prince Vladimir's acceptance of Christianity in the tenth century merits a brief comment. First, as the story goes, the Prince spurned Islam, due to its restrictions on liquor. ("Drink is the joy of the Russian," he is quoted as remarking.)<sup>6</sup> Next he turned to Judaism. According to

Simon Dubnow's The History of the Jews in Russia and Poland:

The church legend narrates that when Vladimir had announced his intention to abandon idolatry, he received a visit from Khazarian Jews who said to him: "We have heard that the Christians have come to preach their faith, but they believe in one who was crucified by us, while we believe in the one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Vladimir asked the Jews: "What does your law prescribe?" To this they replied: "To be circumcised, not to eat pork or game, and to keep the Sabbath." "Where is your country?" inquired the Prince "In Jerusalem," replied the Jews, "for the Lord was wroth with our forefathers, and scattered us all over the earth for our sins, while our land was given away to the Christians." Thereupon Vladimir exclaimed: "How then dare you teach others when you yourselves are rejected by God and scattered? If God loved you, you would not be dispersed in strange lands. Do you intend to inflict the same misfortune on me?"<sup>7</sup>

Under the Kievan regime, however, Jews were well-treated, being both legally "free," and enjoying freedom of religion. There is in fact only one recorded incident of violence against them (1133), and this was more a result of class struggle than religious antagonism. The crusade-mentality rampant in Western Europe bypassed Russia, and Jewish life continued on uneventfully. (Refer to May #3.)

### Mongolian Rule

The Mongol put an end to Kievan power in 1240. They came out of the East, and with lightning speed destroyed the already deteriorating Kievan unity. Except for widespread destruction, their rule had no real impact upon the lives of the Russians. The position of the Jews also seems not to have been greatly affected, and on balance this "Empire of the Golden Horde" even provided them with greater contact and more trading opportunities throughout Asia. (Refer to Map #4.)

### "Appanage Russia"

Mongol rule eventually resulted in several hundred years of internal chaos and infighting that produced the dismemberment of Kievan Russia. Now three predominant groups, with individual ethnic and cultural differences, began to emerge in a region that now includes Poland and Lithuania, which historians call "Appanage Russia." These peoples are:

1. The "Great Russians" (or simply, "Russians");
2. The Ukrainians, essentially Lithuanians;
3. The Belorussians or "White Russians."

The first group comprised those who lived in what was to become (Muscovite) Russia, the "true, full-blooded" or Great Russians. They considered the others minority peoples, just like the Jews -- potentially divisive and therefore dangerous.

However, in comparison, the position of the Jews was markedly worse, because in addition to everything else, they had no land of their own, they spoke a foreign language, they didn't believe in Jesus, and they weren't farming peasants.

### Lithuania and Poland

Our "Litvak" ancestors came from this region. Sandwiched between Poland and Muscovite Russia stood Lithuania, the home of our "Litvak" ancestors. (Litvak is "Lithuanian" in Yiddish.) Lithuania was a kingdom of confederated tribes dominated and inhabited by assorted types of Russians, under the rule of Grand Princes who filled the power vacuum left by the destruction of Kiev. Their territory was also coveted by the emerging Muscovite state to the east, a state whose power was eventually to envelop the entire area. (Refer to Map #5.)

By the end of the fourteenth century, Jews were living in both Poland and in Lithuania, having been pushed east from Germany by oppression, and pulled west from the Crimea by economic opportunity. Initially, Polish and Lithuanian leaders were glad to receive them. With them came access to foreign markets and an instant commercial middle-class. And they granted the Jews religious freedom, transit and trading rights, and protection from the indigenous population.

Casimir the Great of Poland (mid-fourteenth century) went so far as to initiate an internal autonomy for Polish Jews with its own kahal, or "Federation." As such, it became the forerunner of other similar institutions throughout Poland, Lithuania, and Russia with power to regulate many aspects of their religious and secular lives.

Yet as prized as the Lithuanian and Polish Jews were for economic reasons, they were also useful as scapegoats. Though conditions were generally more favorable in Lithuania, persecution was frequent in both countries throughout the fifteenth century. One such incident occurred after the Poles were defeated in battle and the Christian clergy claimed that it was because of "God's disfavor" with their pro-Jewish policies. A statute was soon written revoking Jewish rights on account of their being "equally opposed to Divine right and earthly laws."<sup>8</sup> Ultimately great numbers of Polish and Lithuanian Jews became Russian Jews, as the Russian empire swallowed up both countries.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

Russia Becomes a Center for Jewry



## RUSSIA BECOMES A CENTER FOR JEWRY

### The Growth of Muscovite Russia

There were probably always some Jewish residents in Muscovy, but these were the "exceptions," based on individual utility. For example, the Muscovite Grand Duke, Ivan III, had a Jewish doctor for a time. It is recorded that having been summoned to the palace one day, the doctor declared to the Muscovite ruler: "I shall not fail to cure your son; otherwise you may put me to death."<sup>1</sup> The son died shortly thereafter, as did the doctor.

Muscovite Russia was xenophobic in general. The Russian word for "German" for example, comes from the word "dumb". The rulers were overwhelmingly antisemitic. The "mythical Jew" took root in the Muscovite mind. As is often the case where no, or few Jews live, fictionalized or devilish accounts and images take the place of what otherwise would be true representations. Muscovite Grand Duke Basil III's ambassador to Rome remarked at one point in the early 1500's that "the Muscovite people dread no one more than the Jews, and do not admit them into their borders."<sup>2</sup> These sentiments were magnified by the Grand Duke's son, Ivan IV, when the latter answered a request by the Polish king later in that century to allow Jews into Russia for trading purposes:

"It is not convenient to allow Jews to come with their goods to Russia, since many evils result from them. For they import poisonous herbs (medicines) into our realm, and lead astray the Russian from Christianity. Therefore, he, the (Polish) king, should no more write about the Jews." <sup>3</sup>

Ivan IV's antipathy toward the Jews was not out of keeping with his general malevolence; the first ruler to crown himself "tsar" (which came from the word "Caesar") was after all known as Ivan "the Terrible." The disintegration of Muscovy following the death of Ivan's weak son late in the sixteenth century bears out the assessment that Russia's size and the number of ethnic groups within its borders has led to inevitable despotic rule.

The problem of administering an enormous area, of holding the parts together, of co-ordinating local activities and efforts remained a staggering task for those in power, whether Ivan the Terrible, Nicholas I, or Stalin. And the varieties of peoples on the great plain was bound to make such issues as centralization and federation all the more acute. One can appreciate, if not accept, the opinion of those thinkers, prominent in the Enlightenment and present in other periods, who related the system of government of a country directly to its size and declared despotism to be the natural form of rule in Russia.<sup>4</sup>

The Soviets have done nothing to allay the fear that despotism is as Russian as borscht, and that the Jews are subject to especially cruel and unusual punishment.

#### Under Romanov Rule

After a period of internal trouble the Romanov family was placed on the throne. Although they were to face many threats during their 300 year reign, it was not for a century

and a half that they were faced with a "Jewish problem."

Russian antisemitism continued throughout this period, as exemplified by a clause in an early 17th century statement by Russian nobles: "No churches or temples of the Latin or any other faith shall be allowed in Russia. No one shall be induced to adopt the Roman or any other religion, and the Jews shall not be allowed to enter the Muscovite Empire either on business or in connection with any other affairs."<sup>5</sup> In reality, however, many Jews were allowed into the Russian interior -- for business purposes. As Dubnow noted: "Hatred of the Jews has at all times gone hand in hand with love of Jewish money."<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-seventeenth century, Russia annexed a portion of the Ukraine known as "Little Russia," murdering or expelling most of its Jews. Then, following a century of Polish decline, which included the destruction of many Jewish communities, Poland was carved up by the countries that surrounded it. Russia annexed an area inhabited by more than one million Jews, the land that became the "Pale."

### Jews in Russia

Such a multitude of Jews was unknown in Russia, and the government was not certain how to deal with them. For the following hundred years, the tsars pushed, pulled, cajoled, banished and threatened -- and sometimes, they did it all at one time.

The goal behind most of the policies was Russification;

a Russianizing of the Jews in thought, dress and occupation. It was contrary to the tsarist mentality that plurality should exist within Russia. The purity of the Russian people was blemished by these Christ-killing business- and craftsmen who wore black coats and spoke Yiddish. There was almost total agreement within the various regimes that the Jews must be dealt with, but rarely was any one policy pursued for any length of time. And the laws that were promulgated usually served to increase, rather than decrease cohesion among the Jewish population.

(The same paradox exists within the Soviet Union today. Although government-sponsored assimilation remains the goal, the internal passport of the Russian Jew for instance, is stamped "Jew". At every turn Jews are reminded of their ancestry. It has been suggested that the removal of such notations, along with a cessation of other governmental labeling, would cause much, if not most Jewish self-identification in the Soviet Union to disappear within a very short time.)

In 1772, at a time when the American colonies were thinking about independence and liberalism was sweeping through Europe, Catherine the Great's first Governor-General of White Russia issued the following proclamation: "(All inhabitants of the territory annexed by Russia) of whatever birth and calling (are) solemnly assured by the sacred name and word of the Empress" that various personal freedoms will be respected.<sup>7</sup>

However, he continued,

From the aforesaid solemn assurance of the free exercise of religion and the inviolability of property for one and all, it follows of itself that also the Jewish communities residing in the cities and territories now incorporated into the Russian Empire will be left in the enjoyment of all those liberties which they possess at present, in accordance with the (Russian) law and (their own) property. For the humaneness of her Imperial Majesty will not allow her to exclude the Jews alone from the grace vouchsafed to all and from the future prosperity under her beneficent rule, so long as they on their own part shall live in due obedience as faithful subjects, and shall limit themselves to the pursuit of genuine trade and commerce according to their callings.<sup>8</sup>

The Jews were to be granted freedoms, but only as long as they acted, in mind and in body, like other Russians. Obedient subjects they could be, but farming would be difficult. For centuries Jews had been forced off the land and into the cities and villages and into the occupations others were forbidden to pursue, such as money-lending. Farming and other "productive" occupations seemed to require an adjustment. It proved to be just that. (Resettlement of its Jewry into sparsely populated farmland was a policy of Russian governments right into the twentieth century. None of these schemes have succeeded.)

There were still more "conditions" for the Jews to accept: Non-Jews, it was soon announced, would be accorded in all parts of Russia all former rights enjoyed under Polish rule, whereas the Jews would be granted their rights only in the areas in which they had been living at the time of the partition.

### The Pale of Settlement

This was the beginning of the Pale of Settlement, the only Russian land areas in which the great majority of Jews were permitted to live during the period between the partitioning of Poland and the Russian Revolution (March, 1917). It is hard to believe that one could define a ghetto in terms of thousands of square miles, yet it was crowded, impoverished slum. There is nothing positive that can be said of the establishment of the Pale. It did not provide -- as ghettos can -- protection from physical violence. It did not provide -- as the following notations indicate -- respite from banishment. It did not provide a sanctuary for religious freedom. There were few jobs to go around. Illness and disease were rampant. It was a prison, with walls and wardens. (Refer to Map #6).

The boundaries of the Pale were not static. As the following list of events covering less than a century indicates, Russian Jews were subject to the government's continually changing policies and whims regarding the Pale.

- 1772     Vitebsk, Moghilev, and Polotzk are made the basis of the Pale.
- 1791     Yekaterinoslav, Taurida and Kherson are added.
- 1794     Minsk, Volhynia, Kiev and Podolia are added.
- 1794     Kiev (city), Chernigov and Poltava are added.
- 1795     Grodno and Vila are added.
- 1795/6   Courland is added.
- 1804     Astrakhan and Caucasia are permitted for Jewish agriculture settlement.
- 1807     Expulsion of Jews occurs from villages and

hamlets in Astrakhan, Caucasia, Kiev, Chernigov, Poltava, Yekaterinoslav, Taurida and Kherson.

1808 Expulsion occurs from villages and hamlets in all other governments.

1825 Expulsion occurs of Jews from Moghilev and Vitebsk who were admitted during relaxation of rules.

c.1835 Expulsion occurs from rural areas within 50 versts of border.

c.1827 New enforced expulsion occurs from villages and towns in Grodno.

1828/9 Expulsion occurs from city of Kiev.

1829/

1830 Expulsion occurs of non-native Jews from Courland and Livonia.

1830/

1831 Expulsion occurs from cities of Sevastopol and Nicholayev.

1831 New enforced expulsion occurs from villages and towns in Kiev.

1835 Redefinition of Pale:

- a. Grodno, Minsk, Kovno, Vilna, Podolia and Volhynia -- no restrictions on Jews.
- b. Vitebsk, Moghilev -- Jews are prohibited from living in villages.
- c. Chernigov, Poltava -- Jews are prohibited from living in crown hamlets.
- d. Kherson, Yekaterinoslav, Taurida and Bessarabia -- Jews are prohibited from living in Nicholayev and Sevastopol.
- e. Kiev -- Jews are prohibited from living in the city of Kiev.
- f. Baltic Provinces -- new Jewish settlers are prohibited.
- g. Border areas -- 50 verst strip is closed to new Jewish settlers.

In addition, there were specific policies concerning the

# Interior Provinces:

- a. Six-week allowances are permitted with passport and Russian clothing.
- b. Certain merchants are permitted to remain in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in port cities and at trade fairs for up to six months.

## 1860 Revocation of various earlier laws:

- a. Nicholayev and Sevastopol are open to Jewish settlement.
- b. Temporary visits without restrictions are allowed in Kiev.
- c. Certain street exclusions in Zitomir and Vilna are annulled.

## 1882 Temporary Laws of May 3:

- a. No new Jewish settlement in Pale villages is permitted.
- b. Owning and managing land outside urban areas is prohibited.

The territory with the world's densest population of Jews was now part of Russia, and life within its confines was miserable. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the slaves in America and the serfs in Russia were freed. The Jews in the Pale, however, were still captive.

The true number of Jews living in the Pale at any one time was never known. For reasons of taxation and conscription, Pale residents avoided census-takers and other forms of registration. Figures range from one-and-one-half to several million. By 1900, probably five million Jews lived in the Pale.

What began as an attempt to exclude Jews from the Russian Interior widened in scope to include banishment from villages and towns within the Pale itself, as well as from various



cities, and from border regions.

Much of the impetus for more and more restrictions came from Christian merchants anxious to reduce Jewish competition. The government was generally sympathetic to this argument; yet as Louis Greenberg noted: "A comparison between the standards of living of the Christian populations within and outside the Pale points to the conclusion that non-Jewish population, too, would have benefited from the opening of the ghetto."<sup>9</sup> Greenberg quotes sources which effectively destroy most, if not all of the supposed "motivations" employed to justify the settlement restrictions, including:

Where the Jews are expelled...

...the Christians will enjoy greater population and financial growth.

...the peasants will have a higher standard of living.

...there will be less peasant drunkenness (The inns and liquor trade was mostly Jewish-run).

...there will be less crime.<sup>10</sup>

None of the above was correct.

CHAPTER TWELVE:

Flight from Russia

## FLIGHT FROM RUSSIA

### The Antisemitism of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55)

Catherine the Great initiated an era when "everything (was) forbidden to Jews unless permitted by special law."<sup>1</sup> Her successors continued and expanded upon this legacy to the point where just after mid-century the liberalized policies of the new tsar, Alexander II, were greeted with messianic fervor:

"At about one o'clock in the morning, while we were all asleep in the barracks, we were awakened by a great commotion in the street. The noise came nearer and nearer, and soon we heard vigorous knocks at the iron doors and shutters: 'Get up children! A deliverance! You are free!' someone shouted. 'An ukaz (order) from the tsar to release you (from army conscription at age 12)!', shouted another. 'Praise God, children! Say Hallel!' (a special prayer of praise in the Jewish liturgy), several voices called out together. The news was to us as the sound of the great Shofar which will awaken the dead on the day of Resurrection. With a cry of joy we sprang from our wretched straw heaps, washed and fell to saying Hallel. I was the chazzan (cantor) and my choir accompanied me. After Hallel we all joined hands and danced a Jewish 'Karehod' (folk dance). It was a gruesome scene, making one laugh and weep in turn. After the dance I wrote my song, 'The Deliverance'..."<sup>2</sup>

This response was prompted by the extreme nature of the antisemitism that characterized the preceding regimes. The harshest and most debilitating measure had been the "Statute of Conscription and Military Service," whereby Jewish youth between the ages of 12 and 25 were drafted into the Russian

army for a minimum 25 years of service.

They were forbidden to speak their language, practice any Jewish ritual, visit Jewish homes or speak with one another. They were mocked on account of their Jewishness, and were often forced to attend church. The tsar himself is said to have commanded a mass river-baptism at one point: all of the children committed suicide.

Added to the juvenile conscription was a censorship of Hebrew books, the abolition of Jewish communal authority and autonomy, a plan to completely subvert Jewish education, and increasing taxation. And there was always the fear that, as bad as the situation was, the government would find ways to make it worse.

Nicholas I, father of the "messianic" Alexander II mentioned previously, was a particularly evil person, whose basic antisemitic tendencies were intensified by his fear of foreign agitation. The tsar wanted to make certain that revolution would not upset the "normal order of things" in Russia.

Towards this end, his Doctrine of "Official Nationality" proclaimed orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality -- the church, the tsar and the allegiance of the Russian people -- as the weapons with which Russia would help destroy liberalism. Thus he forbade travel abroad, stifled academic freedom and invoked wide general censorship -- for all Russians; and he continued to single out the Jews ("commercial leeches," he called them) for special treatment.

As Dubnow wrote: "Had all the disasters of that era been perpetuated (as fasting days), the Jewish calendar would consist entirely of these commemorations of national misfortunes, whether in the form of 'ordinary' persecutions or 'extraordinary' afflictions."<sup>3</sup>

What to Dubnow was "national misfortune" was to the tsars national "correction." If the Jews could only be corrected -- through a program of nationwide behavior modification -- then they might become suitable for inclusion into the Russian people. This policy of Russification through complete assimilation was renewed periodically through euphemistically named "Committees for the Amelioration of the Jews," made up of groups of ministers. They were charged with examining the state of Russian Jewry for the purpose of recommending legislation and policy, but as the following example illustrates, the private mandate was quite different from what was proclaimed to the public.

It was announced, for instance, in the 1820's that a committee would

"examine the enactments concerning Jews passed up to date and point out the way in which their presence in the country might be rendered more comfortable and useful, also what obligations they are to assume towards the government; in a word, to indicate all that may contribute towards the amelioration of the civil status of this people."<sup>4</sup>

Privately, however, the goal was quite different, as noted in this ministerial report: "At the very establishment of the Jewish Committee one of the obligations imposed upon it was to devise ways and means looking generally towards the reduction

of the number of Jews in the monarchy."<sup>5</sup>

A governmental report some twenty years later indicates what the government considered "correct" Jewish conduct. The Talmud, it stated, was responsible for:

1. "foster(ing) in the Jews utmost contempt towards the nations of other faiths;"
2. the Jewish urge to "rule over the world:"
3. the fact that Jews consider any residence outside of Palestine a "sojourn in captivity;" and
4. Jewish allegiance toward their own, rather than the government of the nation in which they reside.<sup>6</sup>

Jewish teachers, the report continued, were "immersed in profoundest ignorance and superstition," and created a hatred in Jewish children toward Christians.<sup>7</sup> The ministers therefore suggested religious reforms, including the introduction of secular schools, changes in the rabbinate and in Jewish dress. They further recommended the abrogation of the kahals in order to put an end to Jewish autonomy.

It should be noted in closing this section that on occasion a "humanitarian" faction did express itself. However, it was always a minority and never commanded much influence. Rare was the Russian official who was sympathetic to Jewry. Also uncommon, yet heard more frequently, was the opinion that the government's methods of Jewish "amelioration" were counter-productive. "(T)he attainment of the goal indicated in the imperial ukaze (order) of 1840," wrote one official to Alexander II, "that of bringing about the fusion of the Jews with the general population, is hampered by various provisionally enacted restrictions which, when taken in conjunction

with the general laws, contains contradictions and engenders confusion."<sup>8</sup>

### The Reforms of Tsar Alexander II (1855-63)

Russian Jews experienced a climatic period of happiness and renewal after mid-century. This joy, as described earlier, came about as a result of tsar Alexander II's coronation. The three decades of Nicholas I's reign had brought pain and anguish. Many children had been sent to the army and would probably never be seen again; families had little food and money and were in poor health; housing was primitive; and Jews throughout the Pale were targets of relentless missionaries. As the "Jewish Constitution" of 1804 began: "(the laws which follow are made to assure) the advantage of the native population of those governments in which these people are allowed to live."<sup>9</sup>

When Nicholas I died, many of his policies died with him. "The time of the (birds') singing is come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land" was the way one Russian Jewish newspaper was later to characterize the new Tsar's enlightenment.<sup>10</sup>

Alexander II, his successor, was a practical person, whose mind acknowledged a range of imperial options far greater than any of his predecessors. Recent military defeats, restive peasants and national bankruptcy suggested to him certain courses of action never before seriously considered.

He freed the Russian serfs, reformed the legal system, and established strong local government. To many Jews it seemed possible, even probable, that they, too, would be emancipated from centuries of burdensome discrimination. It was not an unreasonable thought, as some of Alexander's decisions indicate:

Residence and Occupational Rights

- 1857     Border areas of the Pale opened to Jewish settlement
- 1858     Additional border areas opened to settlement
- 1859     Certain Jewish merchants and foreign Jews allowed residence and trade rights in the Interior
- 1860     Certain Jewish soldiers allowed to remain in St. Petersburg after their tour of duty
- 1861     Certain Jewish university graduates permitted trading rights in the Interior, and the opportunity to serve in government
- 1861     Certain Jewish merchants allowed permanent residence rights in Kiev
- 1867     Certain Jewish physicians allowed to serve in certain government ministries
- 1868     Jews allowed transit rights between the Pale and Poland
- 1879     All Jewish university graduates permitted to live in the Interior

Military Reforms

- 1856     Child conscription ended
- 1859     Military oath changed to eliminate anti-Jewish bias
- 1861     Jewish privates allowed to become officers and clerks



### Educational and Religious Reforms

- 1859 Non-interference in religious education of Jews promised
- 1859 Private religious instruction permitted
- 1861 Baptism of Jewish children under fourteen years of age prohibited without parental permission
- 1864 Financial gifts to Jewish privates who would convert to Greek Orthodoxy eliminated
- 1866 Policy of reducing sentences of Jews convicted of crimes who would convert to Greek Orthodoxy stopped

However, Jewish emancipation -- complete personal freedom -- never came. Instead, Alexander II began a retreat from reform. Various explanations for the tsar's change of heart have been suggested; most begin with the assumption that he never really intended to emancipate the Jews. Whether out of political sophistication or intuition, he may have realized that certain actions were necessary to ensure peace at home and to preserve Russia's influence abroad. That was as far as he went. Complete Jewish emancipation would have brought no appreciable benefit.

At the same time there were specific, unsettling events and circumstances which must have contributed to his growing reactionism. Nicholas Riasanovsky, in A History of Russia, suggests for instance, that an unsuccessful assassination attempt on the tsar's life in the mid-1860's had affected his subsequent actions.<sup>11</sup> Other factors may have involved the gentry's dissatisfaction with certain land reforms, peasant uprisings, student disturbances and a rebellion in Poland. In any event, official policies favorable to the Jews ceased.

Alexander II's Retreat from Reform (1863-81)

Alexander II's growing conservatism was occasionally muted by seemingly liberal currents during the remaining years of his rule. Yet they were essentially negated by the introduction of a new force -- the pogrom. The first one took place in southern Russia, in Odessa, in 1871. It seems that local Greeks, angered by Jewish competition in the fruit and vegetable trade, started a rumor on Palm Sunday that Jews had stolen a cross and had thrown rocks at a church. During the four days of mob violence that ensued as the rumor spread, the local Governor-General ignored Jewish pleas for assistance, claiming instead that the Jews were to blame for the trouble! In fact, it was only after the drunken populace threatened to turn its attention towards non-Jews that the government interceded. By that time a new pattern had been set. Violence against Jews would be condoned -- even initiated -- by many authorities as long as it was attributable to Jewish provocation and stayed within certain limits. Pogrom-management was refined and used successfully by Alexander II's successors well into the 20th century.

Alexander II himself was not prone to such incitement. Rather, he was concerned that such actions might be indicative of -- or lead to -- general revolution. He was reassured, however, when advised that the issue in Odessa was simply one of common antagonism against Jewish profiteering.

The pogrom had come while Alexander was in the process

of naming another "Jewish Committee." This one proved to be a carbon copy of the previous ones. As far as the majority of the committee was concerned, "communal cohesion" was responsible for anti-Jewish sentiments.<sup>12</sup> And, as before, a minority viewpoint continued to express the position that heightened disabilities reinforced Jewish separatism: "Human reason does not admit of any considerations which might justify the placing of many millions of the Jewish population on a level with criminal offenders."<sup>13</sup>

To no one's surprise, the reactionary majority took little heed of "human reason." Instead, the committee proclaimed that:

"as long as the Jews remain what they are, the government cannot treat them on a footing of equality with other nationalities of the Empire...The government cannot grant them residence all over Russia. Such permission should be granted to them only when the measures adopted by the government to transform them into productive and useful citizens in their present places of residence will prove successful."<sup>14</sup>

On March 1, 1881, Alexander II, the "tsar-liberator", was assassinated. His fear of revolutionaries proved to be well-founded, for it was one of their bombs that blew him apart. Ironically, that very day he had signed a document which many believe would have led to a constitutional government. As far as Russian Jewry was concerned, the horizon was not simply clouded as it had been so often in the past; now it was black. Hope for Jewish emancipation was, for the foreseeable future, over. The only real future for Jews seemed to lie outside of Russia; many did leave.

Alexander II was followed by his son, Alexander III. The latter tsar had a mentor whose mentality was typical of the 1880's and 1890's; democracy, Count Pobedonostev thought, was "the great falsehood of our time."<sup>15</sup> He was against freedom of the press and secular education, and he didn't like innovators or their innovations. Liberals were purged from the government under his direction, and any thought of pursuing the reforms outlined in the constitution Alexander II had approved was dropped.

In its place came a "Statute concerning Enforced Public Safety", which declared that "the Voice of God hath commanded us to take up vigorously the reigns of government inspiring us with the belief in the strength and truth of autocratic power, which we are called upon to establish and safeguard."<sup>16</sup> All "faithful subjects" were called upon to "eradicate the hideous sedition and to establish faith and morality." Included in the statute were clauses providing banishment to Siberia without any due process of all those accused of "political unsafety," giving local officials the power to replace existing laws with ones of their own choosing.<sup>17</sup>

Once this martial law was established for the population as a whole, specific attention and abuse was directed at the Jews.

Alexander III's knowledge of Russian Jewry, upon which this maltreatment was based, came from the usual sources: his Russian Orthodox background, Christian clerics "schooled" in Talmud, and common gossip and slander. This tsar's contribution to antisemitic legislation, due to the manner in which

it was enacted, was referred to as the "Temporary Laws" of 1882. Because these provisions were so reactionary, the tsar circumvented the normal "Council of State" deliberation, fearing that even this body -- normally sufficiently reactionary -- might balk at such actions. Henceforth, the five million Russian Jews were:

1. forbidden to settle outside of towns and hamlets within the Pale;
2. forbidden to engage in real estate and commercial transactions outside these towns and hamlets, and all pending deals were suspended;
3. forbidden to engage in business on the Christian Sabbath and on Christian holidays.

The consequence was that Jewish livelihood and residence was now restricted by an additional 90%; only 10% of the Pale was open to Jews. The tsar's advisor, the Count Pobedonostev who distrusted humanity in general, was well on the way toward his goal for the Jews:

...the conversion of 1/3;

...the emigration of 1/3;

18

...and the death of the rest.

And with the "Temporary Laws" of 1882 (commonly known as the "May Laws"), the Russian Jew desperately sought ways to escape a gruesome future. Some turned to revolution, some to socialism, and some to Zionism; many others sought to flee. In fact, this marked the start of the greatest emigration in Jewish history, when millions fled Russia.

Thus was the present-day American-Jewish community

founded, as millions of Russian Jews poured into the United States from 1882 until 1924, when immigration laws barred thousands more from entry.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

A Pedagogical Answer

### A PEDAGOGICAL ANSWER

As we noted, this thesis presents a framework for transmitting the ideas, values, and movements which we as American Jews inherited from our immigrant Russian-Jewish ancestors. It is based on the presupposition that a thematic approach to the subject will sharpen the students' understanding of their inheritance from the past.

So, in six thematic chapters the thesis deals with some of the main factors that affected Russian Jewry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which ultimately helped shape the nature of the present-day American Jewish Community.

"Antisemitism and Its Effects" explores the many forms taken by Russian oppression, and the determination of immigrants (and their German-Jewish patrons) to strike back forcefully whenever antisemitism surfaced in America.

"Religious Life" discusses the dichotomy between rabbinic Judaism and Hassidism, and indicates the similarities and differences in these movements once they began to germinate here.

"Cultural Life" charts the course of the Russian-Jewish Haskalah, outlines the importance of the Yiddish language and lore, and recounts how the immigrants expanded upon these intellectual and emotional outlets in America.



"Communal Existence" analyzes the positive and negative aspects of the Kahal in Russia, and the reasons behind the immigrants' concern for Jewish causes, and yet their reluctance to support community wide organizations.

"Jewish Radicalism" explains why a number of Russian Jews turned to socialism and revolutionary activity, and describes the contribution to America by the activist Jewish immigrants.

In the final thematic chapter, "Jewish Nationalism", the early Zionist stirrings in Russia are related, as is the course Zionism took here in America in its formative years. The following chapters, particularizing a chronological history of Russian Jewry, then appear for the benefit of the more highly motivated student.

All in all, this text is a first step in a new direction; i.e., of teaching Jewish historical material from a thematic perspective.

To be sure, there is much more that might have been added to supplement this present material. Certainly one could have enlarged upon existing chapters. In addition, one could provide chapters dealing with such themes as:

- 1) The immigrant women;
- 2) Relations between parents and children;
- 3) Social cleavage within the Russian immigrant community;
- 4) Relations between Russian and German Jews.

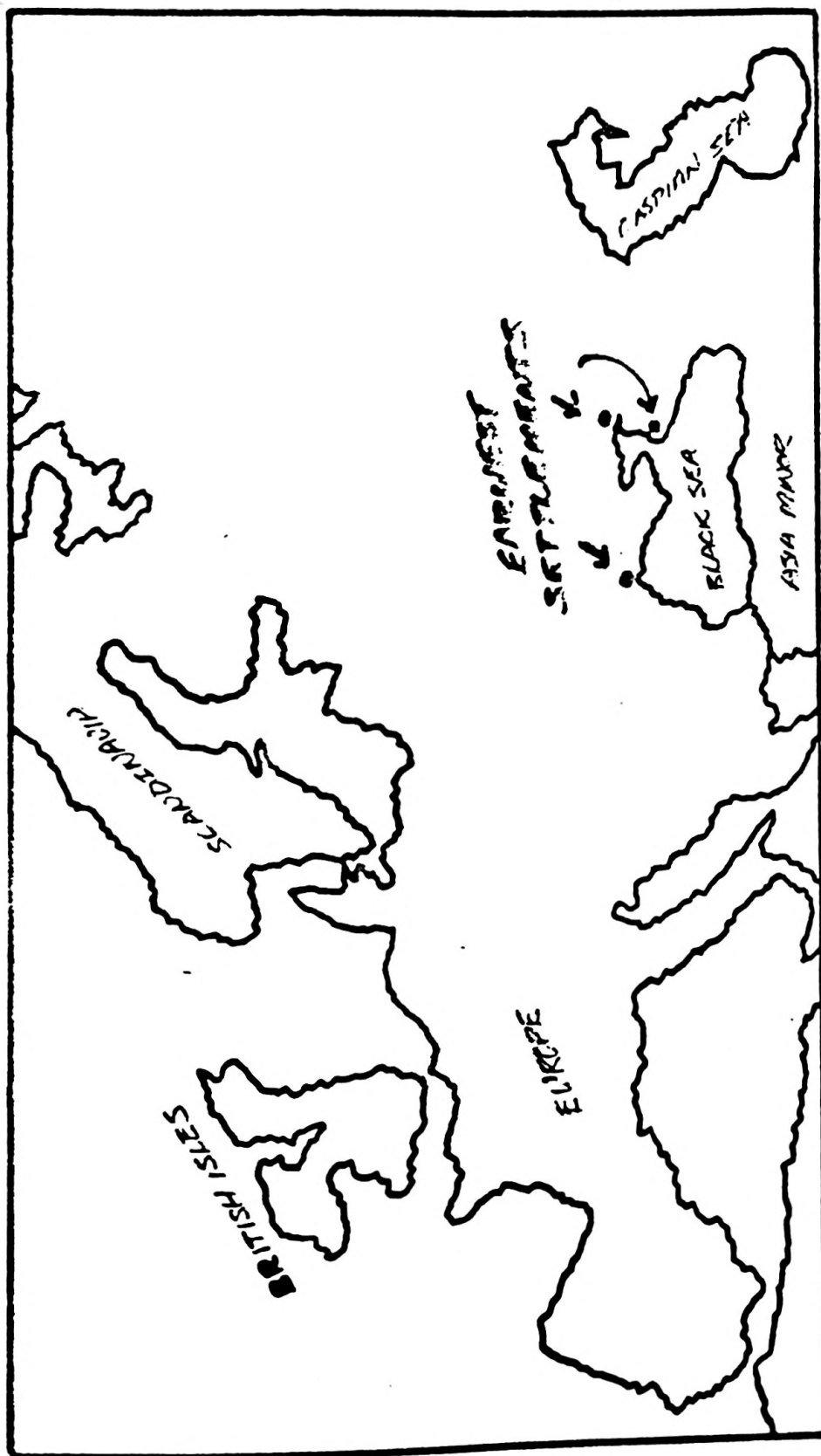
Chapters outlining biographical sketches of prominent Russian Jews and their descendants might enrich the content.

Nonetheless, this thesis serves as a beginning, with eleven chapters presented as the basis of what may hopefully

become an active text. Hopefully, too, such a work may prove pedagogically effective in stimulating the continuing search for our American-Jewish roots and a deeper appreciation of all that our Russian forebears have bequeathed to us.

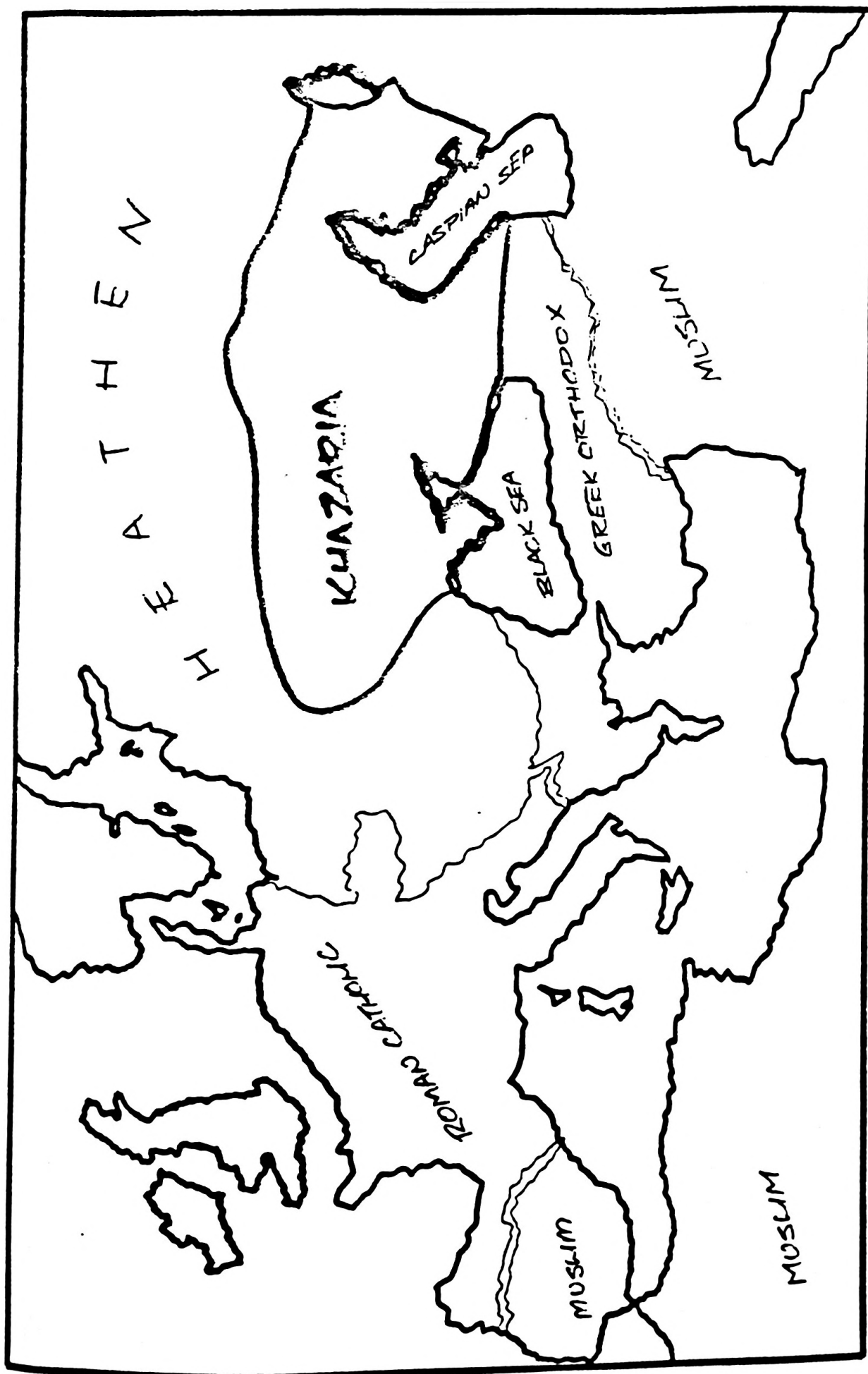
## MAPS

MAP #1:  
Early Jewish Settlements in Russia



(Adapted from Shepherd's Historical Atlas,  
pp. 2-3, and Jewish History Atlas, Map #17.)

MAP #2:  
The Kingdom of the Jewish Khazars



(Adapted from Jewish History Atlas, Map #25.)

MAP #3:  
Kievan Russia



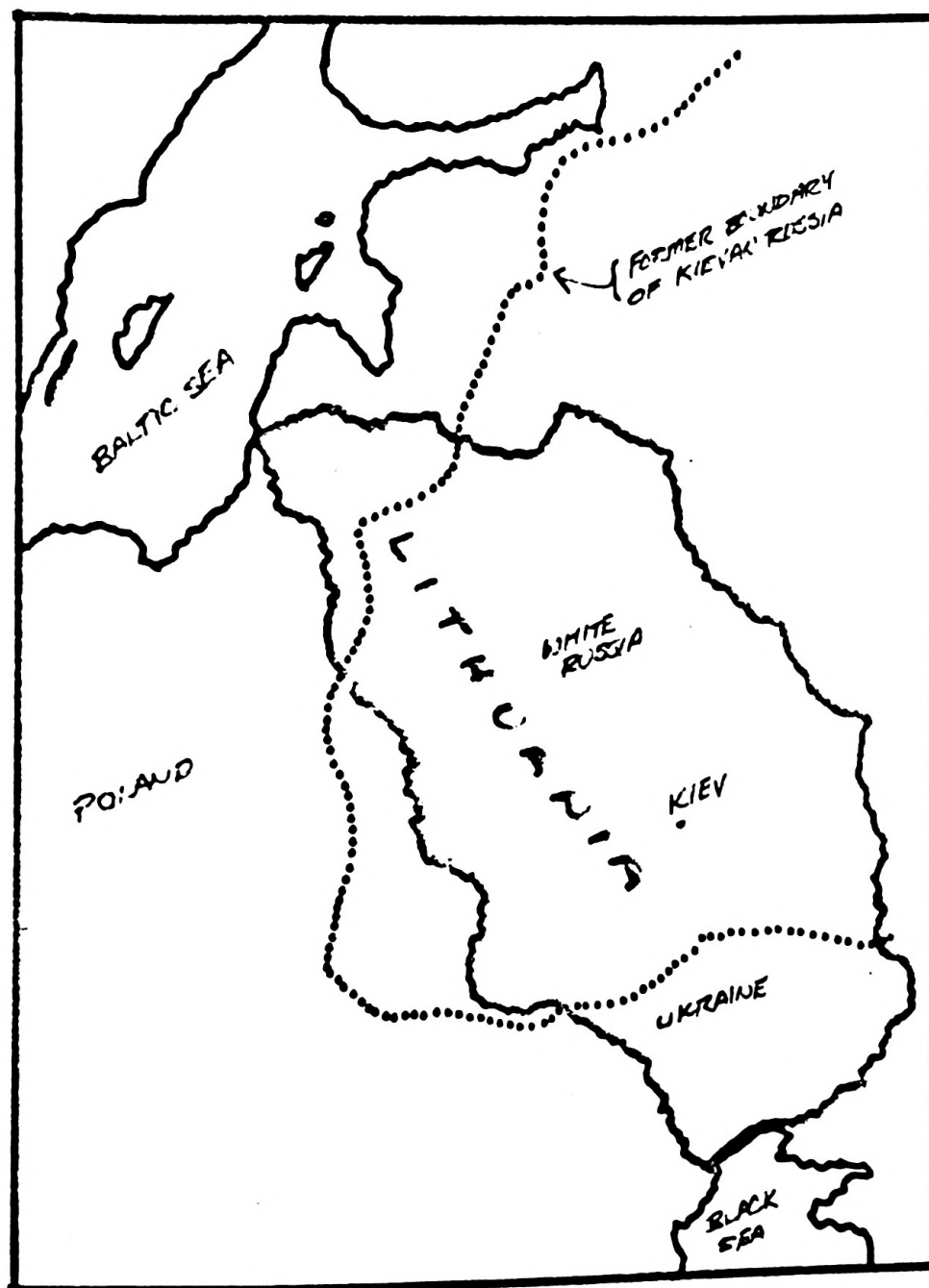
(Adapted from Riasanovsky, p. 37.)

MAP #4:  
The Extent of Mongol Rule in 1294



(Adapted from Riasanovsky, p. 24.)

MAP #5  
Fourteenth Century Lithuania



(Adapted from Riassanovsky, p.147.)



MAP #6:  
The "Pale" of Settlement



(Adapted from Jewish History Atlas, Map #71.)

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE  
 "Antisemitism and Its Effects"

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2. Ibid., 1:409-10.
3. Ibid., 1:333.
4. Ibid., 1:90-1.
5. Ibid., 2:75.
6. Ibid., 2:78.
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10. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:306-7.
11. Greenberg, op. cit., 1:168.
12. Ibid., 1:169 ff.
13. A. Korev, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:163.
14. John Higham, "American Antisemitism Historically Reconsidered," in Antisemitism in the United States, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 74.
15. Quoted in Rufus Lears, The Jews in America: A History (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1972), p. 214.

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3. Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1:61.
4. L. Rosenthal, Toldot Hebrat Marbe Haskalah Be-Yisrael, in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:111.
5. Ibid., 1:124.
6. Israel Friedlaender, The Jews of Russia and Poland (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1920), p. 193.
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10. Quoted in Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 191.
11. Ibid., p. 195.
12. Quoted in Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, How We Lived: 1880-1930 (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1979), p. 96.
13. Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 195.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE  
"Cultural Life"

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2. Leon Simon, Moses Leib Lilienblum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), p. 23.
3. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 2:125 ff.
4. Quoted in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition (New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 155.
5. Ibid., p. 159.
6. Dubnow, op. cit., 2:227.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 2:229.
9. Quoted in Dawidowicz, op. cit., p. 273.
10. Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 461.
11. Ibid.
12. Quoted in Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 2:112.
13. Quoted in Jacob Frumkin, Gregor Aronson, Alexis Goldenweiser, eds., Russian Jewry (1860-1917), trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York and London: Thomas Yoseloff, Ltd., 1966), p. 442.
14. Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, How We Lived: 1880-1930 (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1979), p. 239.
15. Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 526.
16. Quoted in Howe and Libo, How We Lived, p. 103.
17. Ibid., pp. 199-200.

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1. Quoted in Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, How We Lived: 1880-1930 (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1979), p. 72.
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3. Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972, s.v. "New York City," by Arthur Aryeh Gordon, 12:1099.
4. S.M. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, trans. I. Friedlander, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916-20), 1:103.
5. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:309.
6. Ibid., 2:60-1.
7. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:227.
8. Ibid., 1:195.
9. Abraham Jacob Paperna, "From the Era of Nicholas I: Reminiscences," quoted in Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), pp. 125-6.
10. Dubnow, op. cit., 2:29.
11. Abraham Jacob Paperna, op. cit., p. 128.
12. Moed Katan 27b, quoted in Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1:63.
13. P. Bobrovsky, Statisticheskoe Opisanie Guberniia Grodno, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:165.
14. Robert Pinkerton, Russia, or, Miscellaneous Observations on the Past and Present State of That Country and Its Inhabitants, quoted in Baron, op. cit., p. 129.
15. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:277.
16. Appeal issued in 1676 by the "Council of the Four Lands," quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:188.

17. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:344.
18. Greenberg, op. cit., 2:129.
19. Oscar O. Gruzenberg, Vchera, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 2:137.
20. The title "Baron" had been granted in 1871 by the archduke of Hesse-Darmstadt. Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972, s.v. "Guenzburg," by Simha Katz, 7:960.
21. H.B. Sliozberg, "Baron G.O. Gunzlurg i Pravovoe Polozhenie Evreev," quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 2:131.
22. Quoted in Howe and Libo, How We Lived, p. 75.
23. Ibid., p. 72.
24. Ibid.

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2. Quoted in S.M. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, trans. I. Friedlander, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916-20), 1:410-11.
3. Novoe Vremia, quoted in Louis Greenburg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1:159.
4. Paul Pestel, The Russian Truth, quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:412.
5. Lev Deich, Rol Evreev v Russkom Revoliutsionnom Dvizhenii, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:147-8.
6. Ibid.
7. Katorga i Ssylka, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:149.
8. H. Magat, quoted in Historische Schriften, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:148.
9. Quoted in Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), p. 170.
10. David Einhorn, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 2:156.
11. Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 84.
12. Quoted in Howe and Libo, How We Lived, p. 198.
13. Henry Moskowitz, quoted in Howe and Libo, How We Lived, p. 233.
14. Ibid.
15. Quoted in Howe, World of Our Fathers, pp. 313-4.
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17. Encyclopedia Judaica, 1972, s.v. "New York City," by Arthur Aryeh Gordon, 12:1086.
18. M. Osherovich, quoted in Jacob Frankin, Gregor Aronson, Alexis Goldenweiser, eds., Russian Jewry (1860-1917), trans. Mirra Ginsburg (New York and London: Thomas Yoseloff, Ltd., 1966), pp. 441-2.
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2. Quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 2:162.
3. Quoted in Jacob S. Raisin, The Haskalah Movement in Russia (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1914), p. 270.
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5. Ibid., p. 145.
6. Quoted in Baron, op. cit., p. 175.
7. Ibid., p. 175.
8. Ahad Ha'Am, Selected Essays of Ahad Ha-'am, trans. Leon Simon (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), p. 287.
9. Ibid., pp. 287-8.
10. Ibid., p. 290.
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14. Nora Levin, Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917 (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 385.
15. Nachman Syrkin, quoted in Levin, op. cit., p. 385.

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2. Ibid., 1:17.
3. Ibid., 1:18.
4. Ibid., 1:21.
5. Quoted in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia (New York, London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 26-7.
6. Ibid., p. 38.
7. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:30.
8. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:63.

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2. Ibid., 1:242.
3. Ibid., 1:243.
4. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia (New York, London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 9.
5. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:244.
6. Ibid., 2:342.
7. Dubnow, op. cit., 1:186.
8. Ibid., 1:306-7.
9. Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1:168.
10. Ibid., 1:169 ff.

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"Flight from Russia"

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2. Eliakum Zunser, A Jewish Bard, Being the Biography of Eliakum Zunser, quoted in Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1:75.
3. Dubnow, op. cit., 2:87.
4. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 1:408.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 2:47.
7. Ibid., 2:48.
8. Ibid., 2:157-8.
9. Ibid., 1:342.
10. Ha-Meliz, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:83.
11. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia (New York, London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 421-2.
12. Dubnow, op. cit., 2:195.
13. Ibid., 2:198.
14. V. Grigorev, quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 1:96.
15. Quoted in Greenberg, op. cit., 2:2.
16. Quoted in Dubnow, op. cit., 2:246.
17. Ibid.
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