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TITLE Towards an understanding of the philosophy of history of the Maharal  
of Prague  
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"TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF HISTORY OF THE MAHARAL OF PRAGUE"

by

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Master of Hebrew Letters and Ordination."

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### Thesis Digest

This paper is an attempt to relate the historical thought of the Maharal of Prague (1512-1609) to the general European historical scene of the 16th century. The basic underlying assumption is that the philosophical or historical emphasis in any thought system is in direct relationship to the shifting structural needs of the society in which it is developed. The truth of this assertion will be tested in an examination of the historical thought of the Maharal, whose life was lived out against the turbulent background of the Humanist Revolution, the Protestant Reformation, its attendant movements and counter-movements, and the resulting period of religious wars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

Vital to the thought pattern of the Maharal is his notion regarding the Jewish people. Owing to his haphazard, yet elaborate, scheme of Jewish history, his conception of the apparent unity of the Jewish people despite their dispersion among the nations, and his feeling for the Jewish national consciousness, it has been held that he, in an age of emergent European nationalism, not only set forth principles of political theory that provided a basis for the concept of the modern national state, but also predated in his approach similar theories advanced by later non-Jewish political theorists, notably Grotius. As a direct result, this fascinating quasi-Kabbalist, quasi-rationalist personality has been placed, in our day and age, in the Zionist pantheon, primarily it is presumed to lend a respectable antecedent to the emergence of the modern Jewish state.

However, since the structural need of a world which saw the

birth of the State of Israel were quite different from those of the sixteenth century world of the Maharal, it is not conceivable that his words are related to modern conceptions of nation or nation-state, except to serve doctrinaire purposes. The problems of his society, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to which he addressed himself could not admit of answer in the twentieth century idiom. A similarity of certain particular ideas or the appearance of corresponding terminology (or a combination of the two) is not sufficient to impute similarity of meaning or purpose to different groups in the same age, much less to groups divided by centuries of time. Jewish society in every age must grapple with the problems of the age and must come to terms with these problems in consonance with the Jewish life situation of that age. In the era of emergent nationalism of the sixteenth century, there were bound to be echoes in Jewish thought, for any book or system reflects its age. Yet, as echoes are not the same as the original sound both in quality and quantity, so too does the adaptive mechanism in the area of thought transform ideas as to meaning.

It is suggested in this paper that the concept nation to the Maharal was a vague abstraction, that the Jewish nation to him denotes a religious unity (and not a unity of state and people), that the problem of Jewish suffering could no longer be cast in the medieval martyr-logical mold but prompted a different rationale which the Maharal attempted to provide by adapting the thought and structural patterns of his age which consequently generated his views concerning the Jewish people, and that the Maharal, irrespective of his views on education and psychology, is a typical historian of the Reformation era.

SECTION I

## CHAPTER I

The Sixteenth Century

The sixteenth century was an age of great turbulence, movement and change. It was an age that saw the breakup of medieval Christianity amidst an economic revolution dominated by a religious warfare which was the legacy of medievalism.<sup>1</sup> The old self-sufficient manorial system and its monopoly of merchant and craft guilds was replaced by new forms of production and distribution. This was an era that saw the rise of a middle class of merchants and financiers and the growth of large cities amid a set of conditions that feudalism could not cope with as it had with previous centuries of change within its structure. As geographical and intellectual frontiers were widened, various forces were unleashed to clash with the existing religious and political structure, at a time of economic distress and decline. In the late sixteenth century, the widespread depression after decades of plagues and famines forced alliance between financiers such as Couer in France and the Fuggers in Central Europe and rulers who needed money to shore up tottering thrones. Between 1500 and 1600 prices doubled, but rent, wages, and interest did not rise accordingly.<sup>2</sup> Economic regulation arose as a result of increasing centralization and burgeoning nationalism. With the rise of national monarchies within territorially limited areas, there was a corresponding growth in civil service, the establishment of armies, the transformation of nobles into courtiers, the development of kingly law, and the assignment of the church to be under the national aegis. In the main, the foregoing refers to the countries of Western Europe where absolutist monarchy as a centralizing agency was the last



stage in the transformation from the feudal to the modern, from the feudal to the capitalistic, i.e. France, Spain, and England. In a declining feudalism, the states of Central Europe and Italy (with its powerful city-state structure) were too weak on the whole to apply the same unifying inclusive principle as in the states of Western Europe where the monarchy was more powerful. The vestiges of feudalism weighed most heavily upon the peasant classes.

The old medieval notion of a world community was shattered as the Holy Roman Empire became a fiction in reality and the ideal of a world church was profoundly shaken by the emergence of national churches within the various states of Western Europe. Along with this growing differentiation, there was a corresponding differentiation among diverse groups who shared either social, economic, or cultural experiences or who vaguely held to certain indefinitely defined territories or ethnic feelings.

#### Position of Jews at Beginning of Sixteenth Century

The Jews were part and parcel of the feudal system, with a definite place within the larger structure. Yet they were outside the feudal hierarchy since they could own no land which was the primary source of wealth in that system and could not swear fealty according to the Christian oaths required. They were also restricted from the emerging capitalistic ventures. The role played by the Jews in the economic life of the various countries was to be the middle class until the native counterpart could arise. They were primarily utilized to keep feudalism from collapsing until the new money economy would emerge. Thus, they usually found support in the merchant class which allowed

them to fill in as petty money-lenders and the like. Within the confines of their autonomous communal structure, the Jews were highly decentralized throughout Europe, and usually under the aegis of decentralized elements in the towns and cities.

The latter half of the fifteenth century and the entire sixteenth century witnessed severe troubles for the Jew, as the old order could not cope with the crises of the rising money economy in which prices rose too fast. In general, when conditions in society are favorable, the Jews are treated well; when conditions are adverse, the Jews are subject to persecution and expulsion. In this span of a century and a half, the Jews are continually blamed for recurring crises. It is not sufficient to assume the enmity towards the Jew as part of the normal hatred of the rural population to the urban or to the fact of Jewish heterogeneity or to the accusation of Jewish profiteering, though the words used at various times of persecution do echo these sentiments. However, one must look to the underlying, not the superficial, reasons for persecution, which were both economic and religious (the Jew was to wander about with the sign of Cain for rejecting Jesus.)

The rise of cities and the development of a new middle class did militate against the Jews, increasing already existent pressures. With the Reformation and its ideology of expropriation aimed at wresting property and lands from the monolithic Church, it was only natural that the Jews also feel the stings of the expropriatory urge, especially since a portion of the Church properties were mortgaged to Jews. In the ensuing wars between the Catholic orthodoxy and the Protestant heresy, the Protestants were often accused of judaizing tendencies, and, in order to prove themselves innocent of the charge, only increased their

own polemical attacks against the Jews. In general, the emergent nationalistic groups saw in the Jews an alien people.

These statements apply in the main to those strong states already centralized in the sixteenth century, where nationalism was the outgrowth of a unifying set of conditions which tended to include rather than exclude. The same is not especially true in all instances for the Empire and Poland, the geographical locus of this paper and the seat of the Maharal's activity. To this area we now turn.

### The Empire and Germany

The Holy Roman Empire dates from the period of Charlemagne and his sons when the forceful crown, hereditary in nature, showed signs of a centralizing agency. But the investiture controversies, the extinction of several dynasties, and quarrels with princes in time weakened the power of the crown. The monarchy became elective, dependent upon the rulers of the many feudal states which had developed unchecked. Such states, Bavaria, Saxony, the Palatinate, Brandenburg, and Bohemia as well as the imperial cities of Nuremberg, Hamburg, Lubeck, Augsburg et. al together with the many feudal princes controlled the Empire in the absence of a royal system of taxation, a royal army, and an effective royal administrative apparatus.<sup>3</sup>

In the sixteenth century, when the world trade routes shifted away from the regions of Central Europe and the sovereigns spent themselves in the dynastic wars, the internal condition of the lands of the Empire deteriorated rapidly. Under Maximilian I (1493-1519) certain stopgap measures were taken to retard the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire, though they could not stop it. In an attempt to unify the Germanies for military reasons, to arrest the territorial disintegration,

and put an end to the internal feuding, at the Diets of Worms in 1495 and at Augsburg in 1500, perpetual peace was proclaimed between the 300 or more princes of the realm, a court was established, and an imperial council of Regency was set up to advise the Emperor in selecting officials and in formulation of policy.<sup>4</sup>

In 1512, the territories under imperial control were divided into ten "circles" for administrative purposes. Not included was the independent kingdom of Bohemia. But for all these reforms in an attempt to strengthen the monarchy, they were not enough to prevent the growth of the territorial principalities, each of which tried to develop sovereignties patterned after those of western Europe.

In Bohemia towards the end of the fourteenth century, the Hussite movement arose as a result of this same set of circumstances -- the establishment of an independent kingdom free from penetration and control of either Church or foreigners, i.e. Germans. In this movement of appropriation (the same ideology as that of the later German Reformation and for the same reasons) the nobility joined ranks with the townsmen and the peasants to appropriate lands of the Church and of the Catholic German nobility. Once the appropriation process was completed, the peasants were engaged in fighting with the nobility in order to keep what they had won for themselves. In the Hussite Wars (1420-33), the moderate conservative elements successfully defeated the radical peasant groups led by dispossessed members of the lower nobility (called Taborites after their biblically named fortress center).

John Huss (1369-1415), master at the University of Prague had served as the focus for all the forces of discontent which resulted from the explosive growth of towns in Bohemia in the later Middle Ages and

the increasing alien control in the towns and rural areas by both Church and nobility. The Hussite period saw thousands of Germans expelled from Bohemia, for Bohemia had been colonized earlier by hosts of Germans in the general movement of the Drang nach Osten. Under decree of Kutna Hora (1409) native Czechs gained supremacy and Church was so appropriated that clergy no longer sat in Diet. Even the University was rid of its German master.<sup>5</sup>

The results of the Hussite Wars gave impetus to feelings of Czech nationality but the quickening of the national spirit did not necessarily give rise to the national movement as it developed in later centuries.<sup>6</sup> In this instance the appeal to nationality is seen primarily as an appeal to cover up the process of appropriation. Although there was an increased use of the Czech language in arts, in the churches, and in the government, it is to the political and economic results of the movement that one must look. And in this area, what resulted from these wars was a shift of power in the center and not from the center. The native Czech nobility in alliance with the native Czech bourgeoisie in the towns gained control of the affairs of the kingdom along with the confiscated properties. The feudal system was yet intact, albeit with a weakened monarchy, but with a yet viable monarchy. At the Council of Basel in 1434, there was signed the pact of peace between Hussite nobility, the remaining Catholic landowners and representatives of upper classes in towns.-- a compromise which made possible the selection of George Podebrady as king later.<sup>7</sup>

The Hussite revolution is seen generally either as a forerunner to or an earlier phase of the Protestant Reformation. General discontent within the church in Bohemia is known for previous centuries.

The Waldensians had found refuge in Bohemia and Poland, but these instances of earlier discontent did not involve a protest against the incipient capitalism.<sup>8</sup> In the case of the Hussite revolution, it can safely be said that although it was fought in the name of nationalism and religion, it was mainly for reasons of economics and dynasty, following the pattern of most of the struggles of the following sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

The anti-German, anti-papal character of the Hussites enabled the Czechs to find allies in the Poles, who incidentally were the only ones present at Constance who defended Hus. Later, Hussites and Poles banded together to rid Poland of the Order of Teutonic Knights, who had colonized significant sections of Poland. Also later in the fifteenth century, there was serious talk of electing a Pole to the Bohemian crown.<sup>10</sup>

The Church had owned one-half of the land in Bohemia; the Catholic patrician nobility were dominant in the councils of the towns and in social position; the University was controlled by its German masters; the King owned one-sixth of the land. The principle of split inheritance had decreased the power of the nobility, while the Church was able to increase her power. By the time of the Hussite rebellion, aside from the King, six or eight nobles owned almost all the land.<sup>11</sup>

Hus never considered any changes in the feudal monarchic structure or the structure of society and was content to perpetuate in his system the existent order as long as his church replaced the Catholic. Though it is claimed that the Hussites destroyed the feudal caste system entirely in Bohemia<sup>12</sup>, there are no republican ideas enunciated either by Hus or his successor during the period of the wars, John

Zizka. Within the framework of the existing order was the revolt which was otherworldly directed, against the loose living of the clergy, for voluntary poverty---in brief, the emphasis in terms of the words spoken was on deeply religious affairs yet directed to the amelioration of the lot of oppressed have-nots. The same words appear in the words of charismatic leaders throughout history since the human situation in periods of stress can find appeal in these words.

Prague had grown to become a large sized city, with the influx of the "chudina" the rural population entering the big city to form as it were a rudimentary proletariat, wage workers with no property. In the absence of a strong monarchy, the city grew in power and with the removal of the alien German city patricians and the vestiges of the royal power in the early stages of the Hussite rebellion, the city assumed leadership and directed a great part of the war effort. A combination of the guilds and "chudina" in the city supported the dissident Czech nobility from the rural areas against the patrician class from within the city and the Catholic nobles from without.<sup>13</sup>

So-called Czech nationalism is encountered in the first history of Bohemia, written in the twelfth century. This Latin Chronicle of Cosmos of Prague through and through displayed an anti-German bias, for already were the Germans from the North colonizing the Bohemian and Moravian territories. The Germans even gained control of the Church by the time of the Hussite revolution, and were among the leading prelates and holders of the richest abbacies.<sup>14</sup> It was Huss who attacked the power structure of the Church in his raising the issue of the indulgences and simony. All through the Hussite period, in letters and dispatches, Bohemia is referred to as "our kingdom, our nation," or as

"lingua bohemica," not to nation in nationalistic sense, but rather as subject of monarchic kingdom and confession (or religion) of Czech Church, either Catholic or later Hussite. Aeneas Sylvius, the papal envoy to Bohemia who later was elected Pope, in his journal of travels through Bohemia during the wars, refers to the country in these words: "No other kingdom in Empire can compare to Bohemia in wealth, size, and beauty of its churches and monasteries."<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the initial uprising in 1419, the Jews were unmolested as the monasteries were raided, testifying to the fact that where there is sufficient property to appropriate, the Jews were not attacked.

From the list of demands by the Czech Hussite nobility to the king after the wars, their grievances can be inferred. The nobles urged that there be non-religious interferences, that the King, Sigismund, influence the Pope to cease denouncing the 'Czech nation' as heretic, that no priests hold temporal power, that no Germans hold office in towns where native Czechs were able to, and that the courts use the Czech language.<sup>16</sup> Huss himself made a fetish of preaching in the Czech language, but the use of Czech by him and the desire to use the language in the administrative functions of government in the fifteenth century still did not stimulate the growth of a national literature.<sup>17</sup> The use of Czech is seen mainly as a protest against the Latin of the Church and the German of the colonizers. It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that the Bible was translated into Czech (by Jan Blahoslav in 1568) and the literature in Czech was begun.

The use of the word nation in reference to the Czechs in the list of demands clearly refers to a religious grouping, since it in-



weighs against calling the Hussites heretical. It might be mentioned that a number of Germans of the lower strata in the towns joined the Hussite churches and thus would be subsumed under the word 'nation' also.

Zizka's military ordinance of 1423 stated that "Czech people were in forefront of all peoples in international demand to get rid of sinful kings." 18

"We cannot, of course, think of Zizka's national feeling as something independent of his religion. It was...one and the same. God had revealed His truth, at this great moment, to the Czechs and it was up to them to prove worthy." 19

The word used for nation is same as that used for language-- JAZYK rather than the more general Slavic word NAROD which signifies country. In literature of the period reference is also made to 'lingua Bohemica' and 'lingua Germanica'.

Though the word 'nation' may be used in either a roughly geographic sense or a religious sense, during the Hussite period in Bohemia, it certainly was understood to mean a group of individuals in an independent feudal kingdom, tied to the Empire, but with a common cultural bond as well as a common devotion to the confessio bohemia.

If the Hussite revolution engendered any national feelings at all, they were in an anti-German sense and these in turn were appreciably weakened after the permeation of German Lutheranism in the next century. The Hussite movement must be thought of in terms primarily of social and economic friction in the towns, German vs. Czech conflict in all strata of that feudal society, and a religious movement of ap-

appropriation which was "only thinkable in a feudal situation with a King on top," and not in terms of a national sovereign state.<sup>20</sup>

From the time of the reign of George Podebrady (1458-1471), a native Czech who was a member of conservative Hussite Utraquist nobility until the end of the seventeenth century, Bohemia was an independent state or rather kingdom. Although there were loose bonds to the Empire, the Bohemian King only appeared in imperial role at election of new Emperor. Bohemia was completely unaffected by the imperial administrative rulings of 1512. With the accession of the Hapsburgs in 1526, the decade which also saw the spread of Lutheranism in this territory, the independence of this kingdom was guaranteed, to the extent that no taxes were collected from this region for the Empire.

As a result of the Basel Compact and the increasing strength of the nobility, the peasants, who had originally sparked the Hussite movements, were soundly put in their place to bear the vestiges of the feudal system even more heavily. By the end of the fifteenth century, the peasants were firmly tied to the land. Especially notable was the land Ordinance of 1500 which tied the peasant and his family to the estate of his residency. Because of the widespread depression at the end of that century, vast amounts of cultivable land was flooded and given over to pisciculture, thereby making the lot of the peasant that much more onerous.<sup>21</sup>

In the face of George Podebrady's attempt to strengthen the monarchy supported by an alliance of the Utraquist and Catholic nobles, the dissident elements from the towns and the lesser nobility eagerly joined the new movement founded by Peter Chelcicky which was called the

Bohemian Brethren (or Unitas Fratrum). This group called for a complete break with Rome -- (George wanted peace with the papacy on the basis of the Basel Compact of 1434 in which Utraquist moderate Hussites were recognized as true sons of the Church) -- abolition of all church property and institutions -- (the Church had by this time regained much of its properties) -- and abolition of all secular power from the church. They also made an appeal to the Czech national consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

The silver mines of Bohemia, the most important commercial asset of the country, saw a decline in output rapidly snowballing by 1530 until the period of almost no production between 1570- 1600. The picture of Bohemia is part of the larger shift of power from the region of Central Europe to the North, as a consequence both of discoveries in New World and of changes in the internal European economic structure.<sup>23</sup>

Yet during the sixteenth century, many of the intellectual currents of the time met in Prague. Among the non-Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia, there were many diverse denominations. The "Bohemian Brethren," the successors of the Hussites, and the Utraquists, closely connected with them, were fortunate to gain many converts to their denominations. Of the three million or so inhabitants of Bohemia, only about two per cent were Catholic, but these received strong support from the Hapsburg emperors in the latter half of the century, especially as the area had been opened up to the forces of the counter-reformation. By then, it appears that the Jesuits had secured a strong hold on the nobility and on the University. The Kings were much dependent upon the support of the nobles, who had to sanction the yearly budget and also provide it. After 1471, the Kings were Catholic, the Jagellonians ruling until 1526 and the Hapsburgs thereafter, the latter also

being Emperors of the Holy Roman Empire concurrently. The century saw numerous clashes between the Catholic Kings who attempted centralization and the Czech nobility which resented it. The end result of the struggle for power and control was the final defeat of the Czech nobility by the forces of the Emperor at the battle of White Mountain in 1620. From then on, Bohemia becomes more and more centralized with the introduction of alien Germans to replace native Czechs and the Catholic reaction assumed full power.

### Jews in Bohemia

As is true in the case of the Jews in many of the Italian city-states, the Jews did not arrive in Bohemia until the beginning of the decline of the feudal structure. Thus Bohemian Jewry is associated in the main with the crises resulting from this decline. There is an estimate that only about three thousand Jews are to be found in these lands by the beginning of the fifteenth century, settled mainly in the ghetto along the Charles River in Prague. They were mainly playing out their role in the pre-capitalistic scheme as money-lenders and petty merchants.<sup>24</sup>

Overtones of anti-Jewish feeling was already engendered during the Hussite period when the Jews were accused of giving counsel to Huss himself in the formulation of his heresies. Added fuel to the fires resulted from the fact that the Hussite movement was, for economic reasons, nationalistic in a negative sense, i.e. against foreigners, mainly Germans, and Jews were also included among the alien and singled out for persecution.<sup>25</sup>

In the next century, the sixteenth, what with the constant at-

tempt of the nobility to consolidate its powers in the face of a growing and ever strengthened monarchy, the Jew was again between the hammer and the anvil. In addition, when in 1526, Bohemia became part of the Empire, the way for intensification of troubles ensued as the Reformation took hold among the already dissident remnants of the Hussite churches.

There were a series of expulsions and readmissions of Jews in 1542, 1557, and 1571,<sup>26</sup> incidentally a period of extreme warfare between the crown and the nobility. This time the towns threw their weight behind the crown in the face of diminishing noble power and the Jews were expelled to increase liquidity of these two power groups.

In 1559 all the Hebrew books in Prague were seized and examined for anti-Christian references. The Talmud was burned six times in the sixteenth century -- 1553, 1555, 1559, 1566, 1592, 1599. In 1561 the Jews of Prague were forced to listen to Jesuit sermons and Christian censorship of Jewish books was begun in 1562.

The Jewish community of Prague was ruled by an oligarchy, with the board of elders representing the totality of Bohemian Jews before the government. They apportioned and collected taxes, elected Rabbis, and made all the important decisions involving the Jewish community. The Jews lived in comparative freedom in their tight little ghetto and were wards of the crown in the usual feudal manner. They were forced to wear the yellow badge, suffer their sporadic pogroms, face the insecurity of threatened expulsion, but the worst was sometimes averted by playing up the threats of Turkish aggression (a longstanding problem in the region) or the religious differences of the Christians.

The inner life of the community in Prague was racked with inner strife and dissension owing in part to the heterogeneity of the Jewish population and to the permeation of the new humanism. As to the first, the community was comprised of Jews from Spain, Italy, Turkey, Poland, Germany, and Palestine as well as the native Czech Jews. The new humanism was possibly carried by some of these settlers from the South. In addition, Prague, as already noted was an important center for the new ideas, the residency for a time of Kepler and Brahe. By the time of the Maharal, the latter half of the sixteenth century, Poland had become a center of the activity of the Reformers, though mainly of the non-German Calvinist variety, due in great part to the yet lingering anti-German bias of the population. Most of the reforming activity reached only the nobility and the urban merchant classes, the peasants remaining relatively untouched. The Church had owned about ten to fifteen percent of the lands and villages in Poland and the rest were in the hands of the szlachta or Polish nobility who rode herd over the weak monarchy. Had the reformatory movements in Poland (or for that matter in Germany or Bohemia) deep religious or national convictions, they would have survived the changes in the institutions, but both Polish and Czech as well as German Reformation by the end of the sixteenth century had lost dynamic force with changed economic conditions. By the terms of the Pact of Confeation of 1573, the Polish nobility promised religious toleration in their states. By that time, Poland was open not only to Calvinism, but to Lutheranism, and the doctrines of the Bohemian Brethren, the successors of the Hussites, as well as Anabaptists. The Calvinist Church was the strongest and by mid-century more than two thousand churches in Poland switched from Catholic

to Protestant. Yet the terms were the same as those set forth by the Peace of Augsburg---*cuius religio, eius regio*, which was the general law in the various principalities and kingdoms of Central Europe. Not toleration of all varieties, but rather freedom of the prince or king to decide which brand he wished in his lands.

Assimilation was one answer to the problem of Jewish suffering and persecution. Especially in Bohemia was the practice noticeable as Jews in great numbers crossed the boundaries of religion. The everyday language of the Bohemian Jews was Czech and by 1550 many had adopted Czech names. There resulted a certain laxity among the ghetto Jews towards some of the religious prohibitions which were intended to strengthen Jewish cohesiveness and separatism. The Maharal himself expended great energy in reprimanding his people to keep the fences intact.

In 1559 Rabbi Aaron of Posen responded to the new ferment (which also was a threat of course to the authority of the Jewish communal organization) by delivering a sermon denouncing all secular studies as well as study of the Bible. He called for complete absorption in the study of the Talmud.<sup>27</sup> This was to be survival through obscurantism, and not through assimilation. The same approach was taken by the Maharal, though he did advocate secular study of the natural sciences as well as Bible.

### Poland

Poland had emerged as a state in the tenth century and early in the thirteenth century, the German Teutonic Knights were invited in by the ruler of the country to Christianize the Slavs to the north and east.<sup>28</sup> The acquisition of the lands in these areas by the Knights proved a thorn

in the side of the growing Polish Kingdom and by the fifteenth century, although they had added important territories to the country, the Kings had been unable to develop their royal authority. The townsmen, mainly Germans and Jews, controlled to a large extent the economic life of the country and did little to support the growth of the royal authority. Instead, the nobility increased power at expense of townsmen, king, and peasants who were reduced to status of serfs.

Poland was just beginning its feudal rise in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the other countries of Europe were in the throes of a breakdown of the feudal apparatus. Poland needed the Jews and the Germans to serve as a native middle class, so both groups were welcome. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Poland had a Jewish population of about fifty thousand. At the end of that century, there were half a million Jews in the land.

But with the widespread depression of the latter half of the sixteenth century and the declining prosperity of the towns as a result, the Jews in Poland too began to feel the stings of crisis in the order. Numerous business restrictions were imposed upon the various Jewish communities throughout the country. People were burned for judaizing tendencies. The final breakdown in the seventeenth century culminated with the vicious massacres and pogroms of 1648.

The sixteenth century in Poland also saw the rise of the Socinian Unitarian movement,<sup>29</sup> notably in the centers of Posen, Crakow, and Rakow. There were numerous anti-trinitarian movements antecedent to Socinianism in that century but did not flourish in more disciplined centers and did not have affect upon the Maharal as this group did. The founder of the movement was one Jacob Palaeologus who moved from



Prague to Crakow to Transylvania enlisting supporters. The movement represented a humanist reaction against medieval theology. They retained the Scriptures, admitting that it might contain things superrational, but that nothing should be accepted which was contrary to reason. Reason is man's tool in learning the substance of that contained in Scripture. In addition to the emphasis upon reason the Socinians stressed love, piety and godliness. Dogmas were not essential, but devout living was.

They were freely accepted in some of the Polish states, but were oppressed in others. Hence, many of their groups attempted to seek out other congenial territories in which to settle. They had no nationalistic ties whatsoever with any specific nation or principality, their second generation leaders stemming from Italy, the Sozzini (hence their name).

To them, the State was not essential at all, existing only because of evil and evil men in the world. They lived beside the state rather than in it and can do well without it. These doctrines led these anti-trinitarians to pacifism and a further break in the Church-State medieval ideology.

Socinianism was a school rather than a church, their congregation being associations for Christian learning and not communions for prayer and devotions. They set up good schools, staffed with famous scholars and were generally concerned with education. The Italian humanist influences on this movement are major. They found (Ochino, Faustus Sozzini) support among the nobility, though the increasing Jesuit power in Poland tended to place a wedge between them and the nobility. Unfortunately, their period of troubles began in the late sixteenth century and reached a climax in 1638, with heresy stake burn-

ings and destruction of their center at Rakow. In 1648 they, along with Jews and other minority groups, were victims of Cossacks.

Such was the humanist and reformation ferment in Germany, Bohemia, and Poland at the time when the Maharal of Prague was formulating his thought. It was an age of decline, typified by the splintering process, involving ethnic groups, nationally cultural groups, or just plain religious groups. From the unity of the medieval world to the multiplicity of late Renaissance-baroque.

SECTION II

## CHAPTER II

Rabbi Judah Loew

The Maharal of Prague, whose life spanned the greater part of the sixteenth century and spilled over into the early seventeenth, is one of the great Jewish thinkers in Mitteleuropa during the age usually referred to as the "Reformation Era."<sup>30</sup> At various times classified as a rationalist thinker in the Maimonidean tradition and at others categorized as an exponent of the occult mystical Kabbalah, this learned man is chiefly remembered for the host of legends that grew up after his death associating him with the formation of the "golem." These legends are based on his meeting once with the Emperor Rudolph, presumably to discuss matters of alchemy and magic. Yet, even a superficial acquaintance with his writings (and he has left a remarkable corpus of writings) reveals a man of wide knowledge of the intellectual currents of his time, though he lived and worked chiefly within the Jewish community. Though the world was his stage, he addressed himself to the problems of his people. It is difficult to assign him with any reasonableness to the rolls of the Kabbalists (as B. Z. Bokser attempts) or to the philosophic camp. On the one hand, R. Kuk describes him as a "Kabbalist writing in philosophic style." On the other hand, his interest in theosophy (with emphasis on the soul of man and his relation to God) is said to be a bridge between the lofty Kabbalah (Torah in the upper spheres) and the world of Hasidism (Torah in terrestrial reality). And it is indeed the Hasidim who held the Maharal as one of the forerunners of their movement, thereby preserving his memory in the centuries when the Wissenschaft scholars paid little heed to him as a thinker, re-

legating him to the non-mainstream Kabbalists.

The Maharal was heir to the conventional Jewish education, centered about the Talmudic pilpulism, which he later denounced as the "sharpness of thorns" and attempted to supplant by reforming the system of Jewish education to center around the study of Bible, Mishna, and Aggadah. Along with this, he seems thoroughly grounded in the Zohar, the Bible commentaries, the philosophy of Maimonides, Albo, and Crescas. In addition to his knowledge of Jewish subjects, he also was well versed in the secular teachings of his age and knew Greek philosophy, physics, astronomy, geography, and mathematics. In his writings he does not quote any of the non-Jewish sources by name, though he alludes quite definitely to his knowledge of them. This principle of not naming non-Jewish scholars played a significant role in his differences with the Italian de Rossi, though in many ways, notably in his views of education, the Maharal echoes the thoughts of other Italian Jewish Renaissance figures (especially those of Provençali).

A painstaking writer, the Maharal wrote on many themes and seemed to touch every area of import to Jews and Judaism, showing great versatility, imagination, and originality. Yet his chief contribution is found in his philosophy of history. It has been asserted by some scholars, notably historians of the Zionist inclination, that several hundred years prior to the French Revolution, the basic idea patterns of the concept known as the right of nations was expressed by the Great Rabbi of Prague, Rabbi Judah ben Bezalel.<sup>31</sup> It is true that, in the writings of this man (not in a systematically contained presentation but rather sprinkled throughout his prolific writings), one finds the clear lucid

statement that each and every people has its own specific nature and form. As a direct result thereof, each people is not to be subject to any other people, but is to be sovereign on its own soil, in its own land, its own natural location. Once on its own land, he continues, each nation is to be granted the freedom to select the God of its choice to worship. These principles are not grounded in an appeal to a supernatural or suprahistorical covenant nor is it rooted in the contractual-type agreement sanctioned by humans when they enter into societal groupings. To him, these principles are rooted in the very process of the order of the world itself, so that every violation of these basic rights of all peoples signifies a violation of the basic order of the world.

This in brief is the philosophy, clear-cut and straightforward, of Rabbi Judah. In its overall aspects, it is a system, perhaps the first, of a specifically Jewish philosophy of history, an attempt to understand the destiny of the Jews within a larger world plan. Therein one finds a universality which includes the historical destiny of the people of Israel. It is true that the Maharal's interpretation of the early history of the Jews remains the traditional view. That is, the reasons for the destructions of both the First and Second Temples and causes for the Dispersion parallel the Talmudic and later traditional accounts. Jews had sinned and all that had come upon them was a direct result thereof. These punishments were grave because the election of Israel caused their sinning to have weightier import, for their sinning signals a betrayal of creation and hence a disruption of the order of the world. "The people of Israel are inclined to extremes; they are righteous or they are sinners. If sinners, they are great sinners; if righteous, they are outstanding." <sup>32</sup> Even so, he does cite a political

reason for the destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, namely that "Israel sparked a rebellion." But by and large, he remains close to the traditional views.<sup>33</sup>

The novelty in the system of the Maharal is in his addressing himself to the problems of his age and especially the problems of Jewish helplessness, suffering, persecution and expulsion throughout Central Europe, following rapidly on the heels of the Spanish expulsion and continuing intermittently in the century thereafter. Most of the Maharal's comments regarding this theme are to be found in his short volume "Netzach Yisrael," though various statements important for the system as a whole are come upon at random throughout his other writings. If one places together all the statements on the theme, the result is a symphonic structure of ideas.

The Maharal is seemingly thoroughly imbued with the idea of national existence, with people and state as an indivisible unity, though he does not involve himself in a discussion of the state as such, as one finds in the writings of others, non-Jews, of his age.

About him, Rabbi Judah saw the Jew as a subject people, torn, racked with inner divisiveness and dissension, scattered among the nations, arousing the fear and jealousy of the non-Jewish population, a true pariah people.<sup>34</sup> To him, the Galut, Dispersion, which began with Abraham, was no danger to the Jews in terms of suffering or punishment, but was an acute danger because of the internal dissension and assimilation which it engendered.<sup>35</sup> Of course, there was something radically wrong with this state of affairs. And this something could be adduced to a disturbance in the order of nature. The one chief lack of the Jews

was their sovereign right as a people and their sovereign homeland.

To counter basic Christian claims that the primacy of the theocratic people had passed from Israel to the Christian nations, Rabbi Judah's main concern was to show that the Jews were yet a living people, in spite of historical dispersion. And because of this similarity with other groups of people, they too could make the same claims for their peoplehood as others. Whatever the dispersion was -- and to him it was a private affair between the Jews and God, thus having no bearing upon any aspect of Christian doctrine -- the Jews had not lost the spark of national consciousness because of it.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, the election of Israel and its special relationship with God has a special place in the thought of the Maharal, but only in reference to the concept of "holy people" and the God-Israel covenant. In no way does that concept have a bearing upon that which the Maharal enunciates for the first time in Jewish sources -- that the Jews are to be treated as other groups of people on the basis of natural right, which is to be applied universally. It does have bearing, however, on what he means by the "peoplehood of the Jews" as we shall see later.

The Maharal begins with the basic Aristotelian statement that each group of people has two aspects, one as a people (and this aspect refers to the matter) and one as a particular people (which refers to its particular form). What this signifies is that each group of "people" is simply a "people," yet distinguishable from all others by virtue of the particularities developed by that people with the basic matter and material from which all peoples are formed.<sup>37</sup>

The independence and differentiation of peoples leads to the postulate that one people should not subjugate another. It is not in



accord with nature and the order of the world that one people should be under another. For "every existence has its own strength since it is not seemly for any existing thing to be in another's hand."<sup>38</sup> To Rabbi Judah, this is an "exceedingly great principle." From this great principle, it follows that Israel's subjection to other peoples is a disruption of the true order and harmony of the world.

In exile, Israel is likened to a sick man who is no longer in his natural healthy state. To him, a group of people that has lost its land is very ill, robbed of an integral segment of its essential nature. This in turn is symptomatic of cosmic disruption; since if any one nation is unable to attain its essential form, then all other groups of people are incapable of reaching theirs.<sup>39</sup>

In the discussion of the relationship between Israel and its land, Rabbi Judah takes the natural order of the world as his starting point. Echoing a widespread medieval notion, it was apparent to him that every nation has its natural place. According to the divine economy of the world, it is the duty of every people to remain in its given place, in order to fulfill itself. Once having left, then it is almost impossible for any group of people to gain a secure foothold in another place, for all other places are alien to that group. Moreover, other places have been designated as the natural place for other groups. Only by returning to its own designated land can a group become attuned to the natural order of the world. For Israel, the natural land is the land of Israel. That is its territorial plot. In exile, not only have the Jews suffered from this unnatural condition, but the land has deteriorated as well. Only when the Jews inhabit that land will it "flourish and reveal its inner excellence in all things." When the

Jews were yet in their land before the dispersion, there was, in his eyes, great growth of population, development of large cities, enormous productivity, (i.e. all the signs of normalcy).<sup>40</sup> However, "when Israel no longer inhabits the land, the land loses its quality," i.e. its super-mundane quality. For "just as the navel is the center of man, so Israel is the center of the world and Jerusalem is the center of Israel."<sup>41</sup>

Exile has effected a serious deterioration in Jewry as well. Diasporais confusion, and the political condition of the world remains disturbed as long as this unnatural disorder continues. A group of people in exile is clearly contrary to the laws of nature and cannot continue in this manner, since it will ultimately wither away. So in order not to disintegrate (assimilate), there must be a return. "The dispersion itself is evidence and clear proof of eventual redemption, for the dispersion is clearly a change, a deviation from the order of nature. The Lord...provided for every nation to reside in its proper place and He provided for Israel a proper place to them, and this is Eretz Yisrael. For them to be exiled from their place is a radical change and deviation. And all things that leave their natural place and find themselves outside their place cannot subsist...but they return to their natural place...The nature which God bestowed each being gives it durability so that it persists permanently, and if what is unnatural were also to endure permanently although it is not in accordance with the order and nature of existence, then the nature of that being would become something vain and superfluous, without need. This cannot be."<sup>42</sup>

Ancillary to the doctrine of "natural place," originally derived from Aristotle, utilized by many including Copernicus is the concept that parts of any organism whole which separated tended to unite.

"The dispersion is similarly unnatural and as each being tends to return to its place, so the parts which are scattered and separated reassemble to become one whole." Rabbi Judah easily applied this doctrine to the Jewish people. "The dispersion of Israel is contrary to nature. As they are one people it is proper that they be together and united, like all beings in nature which are not divided in two, but gather to be one... If this dispersion were to last indefinitely, then, what is unnatural would become natural."<sup>43</sup> Just as a group of people that is temporarily removed from its land will eventually rebound back to its natural land, so too will the temporarily scattered segments of the Jewish body reunite to reconstitute its essential nature.

The question remains; when will the exile with all its attendant suffering and unnaturalness end? The Maharal opposed the chiliastic tendencies of his day and age and would not speculate concerning the date of the arrival of the Messiah. He regarded the Messiah as an incorporeal being -- "the birth of the Messiah is not an actual birth because it is not something material but abstract."<sup>44</sup> He felt that the day of the return would come, but was not really close at hand, and therefore admonished "that one should not busy himself with calculations of the end." For "a frail house is built by those who are engaged in calculation of the end of days."<sup>45</sup> Exemplary of his universality is the statement that even in his incorporeality the Messiah will be non-Jewish one one side,--a further citation of the universal significance of his scheme of thought.

To the claim that recourse to the empirical facts in the history of the Jews would only suggest that God had indeed forsaken them and that consequently their natural condition is fossilization or complete dis-

integration, Rabbi Judah counters that it is further proof of the cohesiveness of the Jews as a people which has allowed them to survive under the adverse conditions to which they were subject in the medieval world. "When one thinks of all the many sorrows which have befallen them, how they have been humiliated and have sunk into dust, one could conclude that perhaps God had forsaken them. If such thoughts should arise within you, do not give heed to them, because reason and experience show conclusively that it is not so."<sup>46</sup> The plain fact of survival to the Maharal spells peoplehood. He admits that other peoples, in spite of their characteristics of peoplehood, did vanish from the pages of history. But Israel has a special relationship to the world as a people because of the covenant with God.<sup>47</sup> This is cited as a support to an obvious fait accompli, in an age when support was yet needed for such matters.

From the foregoing, it is easily seen that the Maharal could demand freedom of a people as a demand of the natural order, against which any form of suppression must eventually prove ineffective. "According to the order of nature, it is not proper that one nation should be subservient to another...for the Lord...intended each nation to be independent...If exile were to endure permanently and nations always exercise their might over Israel, then this condition would be contrary to the order of existence...Such a thing cannot be. And thus from the facts of the exile one may draw inferences which point to the redemption."<sup>48</sup>

The deviation from the natural state does not always preclude a return to the natural state. The other alternative, as we have seen, is towards disintegration. But Rabbi Judah saw great vitality and life in the Jewish people which more than compensated for the influences

leading to disintegration. Aside from the particulars which distinguished the Jew, there was, he maintained a conscious desire for the restoration. These are two basic ingredients in the concept of nation: specific marks of differentiation and a conscious patriotic bent. The distinctiveness of the Jew was in his cultural baggage, i.e. the Torah which was the sum total of the expression of Jewish culture, and which contained the pattern for a continuation of this distinctiveness. As to the patriotic consciousness, he held that "there remains the power of unity among the Jews, in the face of exile, and they are not entirely divided. And thanks to this power of unity which survives among them, they will yet be gathered together into full unity...Through this power of unity, Israel will return from exile yet."<sup>49</sup>

In order to assure this return, the Maharal urges the Jewish people to retain their marks of differentiation and all those distinguishing signs which class them as a distinct community.

Why is redemption so slow in coming? The Maharal employs Aristotelian doctrine of time in which the process has its own chronology as it works itself out to the final order and harmony. Creation was in potentsia, a definite limitation so that history could ever move towards its final realization. "Each being finds its realization in its own distinctive time...All things come into being in their own special time."<sup>50</sup>

This historical movement is a dual process, involving both creation and destruction. This particular concept, Neo-Platonic in origin and also found in Gabirol's "Fons Vitae," suggests creation through the power of opposites. "Since every event is engendered by its opposite, it is also necessary that being shall come from non-being, or what is,

from nothingness."<sup>51</sup> In the light of such a doctrine, suffering, persecution and destruction take on a positive significance. The old forms give way to the new forms which may be their very opposites but which eventually replace the old. The Maharal compares the process to the breaking of the egg shell which allows the chick to enter the life process or to the bursting of the pod and shell as the fruit comes forth. Such principles do not only govern the life of the individual but are also applicable to the life of the total community.

Life is a process of becoming, a changing of various forms until a right form emerges, a movement towards perfection. In such a system, the individual facts of historical experience, both negative and positive, assume a new function as stepping stones towards the universal fulfillment.

What is singularly noteworthy in the system is that these steps are not arbitrary, miraculous, or supernatural, flowing beyond the bounds of human history, but are rather the rational steps in a movement of stages.<sup>52</sup> He had no doubt that the Messianic day would arrive when all mankind would be one and divine, for that was the goal and purpose of history. For, Jews, they must behave like other peoples and attempt to return to their land in order to satisfy conditions of the natural world. Or at least they must wait with hope to await the realization of the final day.

The Maharal's doctrine of man and history led to an analysis of society and the reasons for the lack of harmony within it. To him, justice, the end concern of world harmony, was lacking. And cosmic justice would obtain only when each nation is on its own soil, independent and able to work out its own specific destiny. "Just as each man retains

self-esteem in his own place, so does each nation."<sup>53</sup> If every object of the world is in its proper place, then justice is satisfied and the world equilibrium is attained.

It follows then that the greatest violation of the principle of harmony in the world is the mistreatment or oppression of one man by another or of one group of people by another. Now it is possible to discover why the Maharal cannot be assigned to either of the two streams, the Kabbalistic or the philosophic. The former attempts to bring man into relation to a soulful perfection with the deity, while the latter aims towards perfection of the rational faculties, the intellect. The Maharal, though in other books closer to the former, here is interested in problems not raised by either of the two groups.

Man, in his natural state, was meant to be self-esteeming and independent. "It is not proper that one man should be subservient to another."<sup>54</sup> (In other instances, the Maharal inveighed against the oppressive rule of the upper classes of his day, both Jewish and non-Jewish.)

Though Rabbi Judah does not enter into a discussion of the state per se, he does have a few remarks concerning the monarch. The King is not to be superior to any of his subjects. His person is not sovereign or sacred in any sense "since it is possible for some one else to be king, inasmuch as all men are by their inherent nature eligible to be king." The King performs a special function in the State and for this only does he and his office exist. "The business of the King is not that he be for himself, but that he attend to the needs of the people...and improve their affairs in whatever respects they are defective. In discharging these duties, moreover, he must concentrate

on the needs of the poor, the lowly in spirit, rather than upon those of high rank." "The King has divine powers...which come to him not for his personal merit...but only as he deserves them by the people and from the people."<sup>55</sup>

The King then is the servant of the people and not their master. The subjects must love the King, not fear him, since only God is to be feared by humans. To the Maharal there is no absolute right or divinity to the King. The state is a human institution, meeting certain needs. But it is in no sense necessary or natural and will wither away when men are capable of living in peace, with freedom for all.

Whereas states may be artificial, to the Maharal, nations are not. The state apparatus had no place in the thought of the Maharal, as it had in the thought of non-Jewish thinkers of the time from Bodin to Grotius. But nations are a natural differentiation in humanity. "Each nation is endowed with a distinctive essence...with a character pattern of its own."<sup>56</sup> Each nation plays a unique role in history depending upon its special qualities which are maintained by distinctive cultural patterns, including religion (which he held to be central to the cohesiveness of the Jews), language, diet, and the possession of a national territory. Any suppression of these vital elements by which a group of people maintains itself is an injustice which disturbs the basic harmony and equilibrium of the world organism and the human community of peoples.



SECTION III

## CHAPTER III

Before the sixteenth century, there was no idea of nationality growing into an idea of national unity. In the medieval system, human relationships were based upon tenure and tenure had little distinction between race and/or nation. It was only when the feudal decentralization gave way before the ideal of nation as in France, England, and Spain, did the national king come to embody national law. If anything, the Reformation in Central Europe gave added impetus to this already progressing movement by adding a national religion which found its appeal in natural law and not in the law of revelatory scripture. The natural law appeal for both national religion and national law (with national sovereign) enabled the fragmentation of diverse monarchies and principalities, each with a solid *raison d'être*. In place of the medieval unified European religious community, there were now splintered geopolitico-religious groupings. The ideal of one faith, one king, one law, one nation was the medieval ideal, only writ smaller for each of the smaller replicas of the united Christendom of the Reformation Era. It was the subtle transformation of the political and religious to a grounding outside Scripture that paved the way for the growth of national monarchies. Theology was to deal with doctrinal affairs solely but not with affairs of the State.

Luther and the other reformers were not interested in the State as such or for any particular form of the State, but were mainly concerned that the State should permit practice of what they termed the true religion.<sup>57</sup> In the countries of central Europe, the allies of the

Catholics were the Catholic absolutist monarchs, so necessarily the sixteenth century saw an alliance of the reformers with the opponents of the centralizing absolutism, in this case, the princes. Luther had no systematic theory of the state. Basically he took hold of the medieval concepts and adapted them to his teachings of God, aided by his classicist moral theologian, Melancthon. Prince's authority, as in feudal structure, was divinely given and is as spiritual then as the word of the priest. State is to be supreme in matters of faith. To him there is an essential rightness in the sovereign territorial state and he denied every extra-territorial or independent communal form of life. The State is to be a self-subsistent entity, holding a divine sanction apart from the ecclesiastical. Although there is a great deal of German patriotism in Luther, it is generally held that it was more cultural and racial than national and political.<sup>58</sup>

To Calvin, both Church and State were conceived as the New Israel.<sup>59</sup> The State was Christian, God is the only true king, and political Calvinism is therefore anti-monarchic (influenced by the Strassburg theocracy of Bucer). In this case, the Church in regulating the lives of men is supreme over the State. Calvin was able to carry out his principles of authority and theocracy because of the city-state structure in Switzerland where he lived. Luther, on the other hand, had to fit his ideas into the total divided German Reich. In Calvinism there was extremely slight appeal to nationalism of any sort. It is interesting to note in passing that autocratic, disciplinarian, authoritarian Calvinism was a chief agitator for civil liberty in many European countries. Not because civil liberty was an aim of Calvin, but because Calvinism was usually borne by a suppressed minority group

who needed freedom to survive. (Jewish demands for liberty can be viewed in a similar light.)

The Renaissance humanists were not in the main polemicists for a new philosophy but were interested in a new field of learning. In the general shift away from Aristotle towards the teachings of Plato, they displayed more concern for ethics than for theology. In both tendencies is seen a shift away from the medieval scholasticism and a concern with man and the world. In the same terms does the Maharal come to be called a Renaissance humanist insofar as that description is befitting a thinker still tied to a revelatory system of authority. Yet his interest in education and the new sciences of his day show him amenable to the new attitude. In addition, his shift away from philosophy and from the Kabbalah both and his turning toward theosophy, the study of human relationships within a divinely ordered pattern, show him akin to the age in which he lived.

However, the central problem for him was not the reconciling of the old to the new (though he does exhibit a tendency to do so) nor was he bothered by Church-State relationships nor did he overly engage in doctrinal disputes. As a historian, or rather as one who was searching for the place of the Jew in history, he turned his eye to the question of how the Jew fitted into the ferment of the sixteenth century. In the medieval world, the Jews were called a nation in order to deny their universality. Apparently in the sixteenth century age of diversification, the Jews were dislocated from society by being called a religious group, as well. This was the age when religion was identified with certain so-called national units and the Jews were alienated from these by their pariah status in religion and nationality. It was only in the

latter seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the state became thoroughly secular that the Jew was termed an alien by virtue of his belonging to a separate nation. But as yet in the baroque period, the bifurcation of state and religion had not been completed and the Jew was alien on both counts.

In the sixteenth century, a nation was an arrangement consisting of a group of people who have a vaguely defined contiguous land mass, a government, vague linguistic affinities, possibly a national awareness as a unified group, a common origin, a common history, and a common religion. It was more cultural than political; more racial than national.

The Jews of that era could apparently only satisfy the last few of these conditions satisfactorily. The fulfillment of the other conditions was lacking and thus it was necessary to go back into the past to show that the Jews did have a government (for the sixteenth century, pointing up the ancient monarchy was most effective -- in the modern world the democratic Sanhedrin is usually pointed to as a former example of Jewish self-governing), a land, name, language, religion, and a national consciousness. All of which was to signify that the Jews are a unified oneness despite their dispersion upon the earth.

All the apparent diversity of the Jews scattered about the sixteenth century world could be subsumed under the facts of past history or more definitely under the heading of Torah in the larger sense. Not only are the Jews seen to be as normal as any other of the groups of peoples in central Europe who, under one flag and one religion, were ready to set up their independent sovereignties, kingdoms, and dukedoms, but also their normalcy has cosmic significance. Also having cosmic

significance helps to explain the condition of the Jews in the present, as well as the state of the world generally.

The same was true in the process at work in the general Reformation movements, especially with the creation of national or ethnic churches as part of the splintering process, as exemplified with the conditions of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555 in its assertion of *cuius regio eius religio*. The process proceeded peaceably enough in the more developed countries of Europe such as Spain, France, and England, but more convulsively in Central Europe.

In his use of the word *Gemeine*, which is translated usually as nation, it is seen that the Maharal has made use of a word current in Europe in his day and with precisely the same meaning. It is shown how the same meanings in the word nation as used in the various Hussite groups in Bohemia up to and through the Reformation era. What the word signified, of course, was a grouping under a religious monarchy structure. To him in spite of all the other characteristics, it was the religion that tied the Jews together and welded them into the nation.<sup>60</sup> Nation then not in the way the contemporary usage has it, but nation in a religious sense. In using the word in this manner, the Maharal could claim for the Jews the same things claimed by all the other groups about him. in Germany, in Poland, and in Bohemia. In his system as he worked it (as we have shown) he follows the general guidelines of one faith, one law, one king, one God.

The question is raised as to whether this type of 'nationalism' is a literary movement or a momentary reaction to feelings of oppression? As we have attempted to indicate, from the necessity of institutions, one comes to the formulation of political theories. And therefore, the

feelings of oppression and discontent which led to the general particularization of the age also led the Maharal to formulate his theories in the manner which he did.

Why does the Maharal, then, answer the question of Jewish suffering the way he does, not content to remain satisfied with the medieval explanation? In the first place, it was clear that the old answer did not solve the problem. Jews continued to suffer no matter how light their transgressions or how heavy. Secondly, the answer that punishment was God's love-taps led to a belief in the Messiah which the Maharal formulated in abstract form only. Jewish Messianism only occurs historically when there is no other solution to Jewish problems. The Maharal possibly thought that he did find a way out---i.e., Jews just like everybody else, only more so in their particularism. Thirdly, to ascribe fact of Jewish suffering to God (and not to some of the unrefined characteristics of the Jews) would have meant placing his entire theory out of the range of natural law. The Maharal wished no appeal to supernatural powers when it came to talking about the Jews and their state of affairs. He does, however, appeal to the supernatural in his discussion of Torah and the specific requirements of the Jew qua Jew. But not in his discussion of Jewish peoplehood.

The Maharal does not show an interest in the ideals of government per se; he is not concerned with the philosophy of law which was already beginning to bother non-Jews of his age as their states were founded in reality. The problems of the Maharal in regard to the state were identical to those of the Protestant Reformers, juridical and abstract, and the Jewish tradition was beautifully arranged for such an approach.

When the Maharal speaks of the King, he probably has in mind a King on the order of the local German prince or Polish count though he might be making reference to the Emperor. The frame of reference is certainly feudal in any case.

Regarding recourse to the laws of nature in the sixteenth century, it is easily seen that any revolt usually breaks down into multiple groupings. In this case of the reformation, there were cogent politico-economic reasons for this. Since all could not find a denominational Scriptural authority that would support each, they had to go to the laws of nature to substantiate the unification into states and religions. The Maharal, in his statement of Jewish nationhood on the basis of the world order, went to the same eternal laws of nature to substantiate his claims. Not on the basis of the Torah and the covenants of that holy book, but on the basis of the world order. Scripture, as for the reformers, was only to be an authority in the realm of the particularly Jewish, in the ritually religious questions. But for the political questions, the paramount questions of the day, thinkers no longer depended upon Scripture. The theories as to natural law were the same as those used in the Middle Ages, but by the sixteenth century they were divorced from theology by necessity of the institutions which depended upon them for support.

Any book reflects the age in which it is written and so does any thought system. The novelty in the thought of the Maharal is not that he sets forth an altogether new and novel answer but that it is a restructuralization of medieval Jewish notions under the influence of contemporary thought patterns and slogans. Of course, for Jewish



historiography, many of the statements of the Maharal were introduced for the first time. If they exemplified any anticipatory trends for the Jewish national movement at all, it is only because the certain stock words in the age old tradition were there to use when the occasion warranted. The Maharal was speaking to his age in the idiom of his age.

Renaissance man attempted to seek the bond between himself and his present by returning to the Greek and Roman fathers for authority and guideposts. Reformation man went back to the Christian fathers and Paul for the same purpose. Maharal, the Jew, went back to the Rabbis of the Talmud and the still earlier monarchy. All are much interested in history in adjusting to the new age, a significant characteristic of that era.

To prove normalcy for the Jews in a period of particularism and nationalism, Judaism must be reduced to the same common denominator. In many instances, the Maharal shows marked agreement in his analysis of the historical situation with ibn Verga (author of the *Shevet Yehuda*) and de Rossi (author of the *Meor Eynayim*). Verga emphasizes the structure of society in his pseudo-chronicle while Rossi is interested mainly in the question of authority of the old sources in the face of the new humanism.

For ibn Verga as for the Maharal, there is high regard for the monarchy as an institution and both refer back to the period of the monarchy in ancient times as a sign of the Jews' normalcy. Verga as far as I know does not speak of a return as a solution to the Jewish problem nor does he at all present his view systematically as does the Maharal. Verga also cites that enmity towards the Jews was a result

of their own natural characteristics of ostentation, dissension, and evil ways. Here one also finds the appeal to naturalness, presumably to claim that just as natural reasons brought about misfortune, so can natural causes solve the problems. In Macchiavelli as in ibn Verga, religion is a private affair and has no bearing on societal problems. The Maharal, in bifurcating theology and political science, proclaims the same. The chief difference between ibn Verga and the Maharal lies in the fact that the former is yet writing apologetics while the latter is not. The Maharal's history is not secular history and he is not troubled with sources or methodology; therefore it is suggested that he is not a historian. He has just managed to convey an historical outlook, a general philosophy of history within the framework of his very rabbinic writings. Jewish history even in the form of chronicle books does not appear in Central or Eastern Europe until after 1648, as a direct result of the massacres and pogroms. After 1492, the same reasons prompted the writing of history among Western Sephardic Jewry - the attempt to provide a rationale for the persecutions. The Maharal stands as a half-way house between these two periods of productivity in Jewish historiography.

De Rossi, on the other hand, grapples with Jewish history in order to show that the Jewish tradition was consonant with humanism. Though to a large extent his words have a traditional flavor (as they had to in order to be accepted by his Hebrew reading public), his aim is to trace the religious tradition of the Jews as a critical historian in order to demonstrate that that tradition was as humanistically grounded as the new philosophy of his era.

With keen rational judgment, he calls for utilization of non-Jewish sources, searches out the reliability of the sources he used, and attempts to establish a criterion for truth. Without denying revelation, he points out contradictions within the Talmud, accepts the Halacha without question, but waives the reliability of the Aggada on the basis of accumulated knowledge of his age. The famous controversy between the Maharal and de Rossi centered around this conception of the Aggada. The Maharal, yet within the Talmudic and Kabbalist tradition, could not do away with the Aggada as the Talmudists utilized it as an important source of authority, while the Kabbalists always saw themselves as carrying on the Aggadic tradition. De Rossi, by translating the Letter of Aristeas, desired to show that the Rabbis knew Greek. He pointed up Philo to emphasize the fact that Jews had a figure corresponding to Plato who had been newly resurrected by the humanists. The Christians need no longer go to Plato the pagan when Jewish Platonists are available.

The question remains as to why the Central European Jews did not write the type of history written by such Italian and Spanish Jews as de Rossi, ibn Verga and others. In part, the answer to this question lies in the lack of sophistication and absence of a philosophic tradition that prevailed among Central European Jewry. For the same reasons, general history writing in Central Europe lagged far behind that of Italy and the other Western countries. Also, the disintegrated particularism of the Empire provided no focus for any kind of state history as in France and England of the sixteenth century. One noted scholar feels that the German interest in genealogical history

which flourished during this century came as a result of the desire of the Germans to prove that they were not barbarians but also had rights to belong in the age of humanism.<sup>60</sup> In addition, owing to the splintering of the Empire, historians were led to themes of universal history, with many of the theological connections, in order to provide an adequate setting for the heroic Germanic peoples. And too they had no one rising state to write about and even though the monarchy in the Empire was weak, it could still claim universal validity.

It is not difficult to see many parallels between the philosophy of history of the Maharal and the general history being written all about him in this Germanic environment, especially in regard to the emphasis on particularism of Jewish peoplehood set as it is in a universal world outlook.

The Maharal's desire to understand is a Renaissance humanist attitude. His feeling for his people links him to the baroque. In vacuo, his thoughts might be given many meanings, but related to the age in which he lived, it is suggested that his ideas are typically sixteenth century, reflecting the Jewish world and cultural condition as well as the non-Jewish of that period.

## NOTES

1. Bowle, p. 237
2. F. C. Lane, in lectures at Johns Hopkins, contributed much of economic background to this paper.
3. Lucas, p. 34f.
4. Grimm, p. 30f.
5. Heyman, F. G. "Role of Towns in Bohemia" (Journal of World History) 1955. pp. 993-994.
6. Brock, p. 21.
7. Ibid. p. 18ff.
8. Fox, p. 16.
9. Hayes, Essays on Nationalism. p. 31.
10. Fox, p. 17f.
11. Heyman, John Zizka and Hussite Revolution. p. 38ff.
12. Ibid. p. 13, 43.
13. Ibid. p. 43ff.
14. Ibid. p. 49f.
15. Ibid. p. 58, 68.
16. Ibid. p. 70ff.
17. Spinka, p. 11.
18. Heyman, p. 347.
19. Ibid. p. 403.
20. Kaminsky, p. 994-995.
21. Brock, p. 23.
22. Ibid. chaps. 2 and 3.
23. Nef, "Silver Production in Central Europe 1450-1618" (Journal of Political Economy 44) 1941.

## N O T E S (Continued)

24. Bokser, p. 28.
25. Ibid. p. 28ff.
26. Ibid. p. 29
27. Ibid. pp. 31-32.
28. This section is dependent in great measure to Fox.
29. This section is dependent upon Kot, Wilbur, and Hasting's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.
30. For biographical details of the life of the Maharal, see Bosker, Thieberger, and Gottesdiener.
31. Buber, pp. 77-89.
32. Gevurot, 23.
33. Netzach Yisrael, chap. 5 ענין 10 יעקב
34. Gevurot, 44.
35. Netzach Yisrael, chap. 25: (Dissension) פניא פניא  
(Assimilation) חקוב ח'כני
36. Thieberger, p. 71.
37. Or Chadash, part 1. יש לך אלה אלה מאלך ענין 23 אה
38. Tiferet Yisrael, 38. כל נחל הוא נחל ענין 23 אה... ואין כלל  
ענין 23 אה.
39. Netzach Yisrael, chap. 24 ענין 24 אה... ואין כלל  
ענין 24 אה.
40. Ibid. chap. 6.
41. Ibid. chap.
42. Ibid. chaps. 22, 24, 26, 31.
43. Ibid. chap. 11. כל הנחלים בענין אה מאלך
44. Ibid. chap. 26.
45. Ibid. chap. 24. ענין 24 אה... ואין כלל  
ענין 24 אה.
46. Ibid. chaps. 11, 24, 10.
47. Ibid. chap. 11

## NOTES (Continued)

הגלות צמח בימי סטב להאואלד...

48. Ibid. chap. 30, 1.49. Ibid. chap. 26, 30.50. Ibid. chap. 14.51. Ibid. chap. 1.52. Ibid. chap. 4

ואין להחזיר להם במקרה

53. Derech Hahayim, 98.54. Netzach Yisrael, chap. 1.

הגלות היא קציון בארץ... האדם  
 מכוונן אל הארץ במקומו  
 } צדקות צמחו ואלו קבוצות אחר

55. Or Chadash, part 2.56. Ibid. part 2; Netzach Yisrael, chap. 1.

57. Bainton, p. 230.

58. Ferguson, p. 33f.

59. Hunt, R.N.C. "Calvin's Throty of Church and State" (Church Quarterly Review 108) 1929.60. Netzach Yisrael, chap. 5; Or Chadash, part 1. (un foi, un roi, un loi)

בידי דת, חקוקה איכא דתים נצחיים...  
 } אלהים אמת אלהים

61. Ferguson, op. cit. p. 34ff.

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 -- Tiferet Yisrael. Venice, 1599.
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