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THE RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL TEACHINGS  
OF ISAAC BAER LEVINSOHN

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**INTRODUCTION**

## II.

### INTRODUCTION.

Although mechanical inventions may spread quickly from one country to another, spiritual and cultural teachings are slower in penetrating heretofore unexplored areas. A spiritual and cultural regeneration did finally come to the Jews of Europe, however, through the medium of Haskalah. Haskalah or enlightenment "is the general term applied to the remarkable cultural renaissance which developed in Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. It began with a revived interest in Hebrew and Hebrew learning."<sup>1.</sup>

This renaissance, however, proved to be a slow process. While it is true that here and there, ~~there~~ few scattered individuals were to be found who lent a sympathetic heart to cultural progress and development----to enlightenment, yet they were powerless to withstand the opposition of those who would not permit the rays of light to shine into the lives of the people. The Gaon Rabbi Elijah of Wilna (1720-1798) had made a good beginning by stressing the importance of the various branches of learning which he believed the people should possess. His emphasis upon reason and his attacks upon the Chassidim also contributed to the opening of the path for enlightenment.<sup>2.</sup>

The one person, however, most responsible for the spiritual and cultural emancipation of the Russian Jews, is without a doubt the indefatigable Isaac Baer Levinsohn. Levinsohn, it was who tried to accomplish in Russia what

### III.

Mendelssohn has succeeded in achieving to a great extent in Germany. Following in the footsteps of this great personage, for whom he had great admiration and from whom he drew great inspiration for his work, Levinsohn, Like his predecessor, had dedicated his life both for the emancipation of the Jews of Russia, and for their enlightenment. His influence was felt throughout Russia and he was "rightly named the father of Russian Haskalah, and the Second Mendelssohn".<sup>3</sup>

To the study of his life, writings and contributions this work is undertaken. It is hoped that this study might bring an understanding and an appreciation of a man who has labored unflinchingly in the face of many difficulties on behalf of his brethren.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



### EARLY BACKGROUND

Each person is the product of both his heredity and environment. And if we are to understand the individual, we must know his ancestors and his own surroundings. Isaac Baer Levinsohn, or RIBAL is the product of these two factors. His great grandfather, Rabbi Jekutiel Zalman lived in the city of Astra in the Volhynian district, and himself was a descendant of a distinguished and learned family, well versed in the Torah and Jewish lore. His youngest son, R. Isaac was a noted merchant and a scholar, who had married into a distinguished family. R. Isaac had many sons and daughters of whom the youngest was Judah Levin.<sup>1.</sup>

This R. Judah Levin seems to have inherited and crystallized in himself all the good qualities of his ancestors. At the age of ten his father passed away and as his elder brother Chayim was condemned in a blood accusation, the wealth of the family, whatever that may have been, was reduced to naught.<sup>2.</sup> At a later age he married Rachel, "a woman of valor", and although taken up with his business he found time for the study of the Bible, "Ein Yaakov", Mishna, Talmud and the later legal authorities. This love for learning, no doubt a family trait and tradition, was the driving force in his life. Being broadminded, sympathetic and charitable, he admired men of learning, be they plain individuals, Chassidim, Misnagdim, or even men of enlightenment.<sup>3.</sup>

Of such an ancestry, and of such a father was Isaac Baer Levinsohn born on September 2, 1788 in the city of Kremenetz, in the Volhynian district of Russia. With a deep love for learning throbbing within the heart of his father, young Isaac received a thorough Hebraic education. It is believed that at the age of three he began to attend the Cheder, the traditional means for Jewish education of the time. He seems to have been a very precocious and brilliant youngster, for at the age of nine he wrote a book on the Cabbala, and at the age of ten was well versed in the Bible and Talmud. In addition, he studied the Russian language and was perhaps the first one to do so among the Russian Jews of his day.<sup>4</sup>

What characterized Levinsohn was a deep curiosity for knowledge and an excellent memory. Day and night he would read and reread various books and retain the greater part of their contents. This in no small measure contributed to his world-wide view and his assimilation of the best of literature and culture.<sup>5</sup> Languages of the surrounding countries were known to him. These included Russian, German, French, Italian, and a little Greek. During the French-Russian War he served as copy writer and interpreter for the Russian government and thus made the acquaintance of many of its ministers. He wrote a victory poem at the end of the war which was well received by the Russian government and he was rewarded for his efforts.<sup>6</sup>

In 1807 at the age of nineteen, he married a girl whom he loved dearly from the city of Radzivilov, but evidently he wasn't destined to have a happy family life. And so, disilluisioned by his unsuccessful marriage, overworked both physically and mentally, he suffered a nervous breakdown. Owing to this condition he left Russia and came to Galicia. Here, too, however, he did not rest, but made every effort to acquire more knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Here, at Brody, in Galicia, he served as a bookkeeper and his presence in this city stood him in good stead. The city was full with men of enlightenment and he soon made the acquaintance of many of them. Among them "he met Joseph Perl, the noted educator; Dr. Isaac Erter, the immortal satirist; M. H. Letteris, the distinguished poet; S. L. Rapoport, one of the first and profoundest of Jewish historians; and Nachman Krochmal, the saintly philosopher".<sup>8</sup> Among the others whose friendship he cultivated were ~~Michael~~ Morris Block, Eliezer Landau, Leib Meisis and Blumenfeld. Especially did Levinsohn gain the friendship of Joseph Perl.<sup>9</sup> It was truly in this environment that his sense for enlightenment grew deeper in meaning and intensity.

In 1817 at the request of some of the "Maskilim", he returned to his native city of Kremenetz. Here, he now became a teacher in a private family, and at the same time devoted his time to the writing of a book on education entitled "Teudah B'Israel" ("A Testimony in Israel").<sup>10</sup> This book aroused great indignation among the leaders of the Jewish community in Kremenetz and throughout Russia. The reason for this was the suspicion which gripped the leaders

at every ray of enlightenment and every effort at reform.<sup>11.</sup> Haskalah, or enlightenment, was taboo to them, and they regarded it as irreligious and as a step of weakening their traditions, which will finally lead to apostasy, as in the case of many Jews in Germany, who had followed the enlightenment of Mendelssohn. To bring light amidst darkness was no easy task, especially when the right to introduce this light was continuously challenged by the leaders and authorities of the city. Change was foreign to these Jews, whose roots in tradition were deep. Furthermore, to mix with the non-Jew and partake of the non-Jewish teachings seemed sacrilegious to these stalwarts of custom and tradition.

Owing to this unhealthy atmosphere in the promulgation of his teachings, and because of continuous persecution, Levinsohn left Kremenetz and went to Berditchev, where once again he continued to spread his teachings of enlightenment. He formed an organization here called "Seekers of Haskalah", and remained here for two years.<sup>12.</sup> His health continued to weaken, however, and he moved on to Ostrog; then to Nemirov; then to Tulchin and finally back to his native Kremenetz.<sup>13.</sup>

Returning to his native city was natural to Levinsohn, for although he had many enemies, yet he also had many friends, and the surroundings were familiar to him. He felt that this was his home and that here belonged his activities. Not that Kremenetz offered any special advantages but rather that it was his birthplace, and the home of his youth.

"TEUDAH B'ISRAEL"

Describing the city of Kremenetz and its people, Levinsohn says that it is a small city, far removed from civilization. The population is divided according to him, into scholars, "Maskilim" and aristocrats, but in a very painful humor, he points out that the scholars never study, the "Maskilim" have no enlightenment, and the aristocrats possess only a little more money than the poor, whom they oppress and try to dominate and rule in the community.<sup>14.</sup> In a letter to a certain R. Israel he bewails the fact that in the city there is neither a writer, nor books, nor readers, nor anything which smacks of culture and enlightenment. And indeed it is amazing how Levinsohn was able to develop and mature in an atmosphere which was culturally and intellectually stagnant.

In 1828, with the help and support of friends his book on education "Teudah B'Israel" was finally published. Through the efforts of the Minister of Education, Levinsohn was rewarded with a thousand rubles by Czar Nicholas I. This recognition afforded him added courage and initiative in his work of ameliorating the spiritual, educational, economic and political status of the Jews of Russia.<sup>15.</sup>

In his letter to the Czar of October 16, 1836 he writes: "O Merciful King! I have received your gift and I was delighted. I thank you for your great kindness unto me; my heart overflows with joy, the same joy evinced by the old man

who according to the legend had brought a basket of fruit to King Hadrian, the fruit of the tree which he had planted in his old age.

"Perhaps the fruit of my labor which I have offered to the king is not yet ripe, but this is the result of my great labor, despite my poor circumstances. Your gift, indeed will serve a beneficent purpose, namely, that it will permit me to have my book printed. My purpose in this book is to awaken my brethren in regards to their ethical education provided by the State. Furthermore, it is my desire to have the rest of my books published.

"The educational means for the enlightenment of our youth were inadequate, but my hope now lies with the new generation. The studies which had no particular order must be done away with, and in their place must be substituted such studies dealing with the faith of our people as would leave their impress upon the minds and hearts of the young, and thus make them better Jews and more respectable men and citizens.

"In these schools the poor will have the opportunity of receiving an education, in order that in due time they might be fitted to become useful citizens of the country, contribute to the various trades, work on the land and serve in the armed forces.

"Their fanaticism and ignorance do great harm to our

very religion and our life (as I have pointed out in my book). But as a result of education, the leaders will teach the people ethics, which every citizen of the land must know in order to act righteously in the eyes of man and of God.

"My eyes truly behold the great achievement which the many copies of my book have made upon many of my friends who have read the book and upon others who have learned of its contents. Even greater will be the result if many more copies were distributed among the people, and if they knew that it is your wish that they be educated and that their economic conditions be improved. Without your consent and help nothing will be accomplished, and even the flowers of enlightenment which have begun to blossom will wither and die.

"Permit me, then, O Great King, to extend to you my greetings and may you accept my blessing, though humble, yet filled with love and faithfulness, sent to you in the name of my brethren." <sup>16.</sup>

In this letter to the Czar may be discerned the sincerity of the man, his firm resolve to better the conditions of his brethren and also his faith in the possibility of enlightenment among the Russian Jews. Levinsohn also evinces confidence in his books, and recognizes the influence which they might exercise upon the people. At the same time he appears as humble and in submission to the government. His purpose in writing

this letter is to get the good will of the Czar. Levinsohn believes that this would enhance enlightenment among the Jews. To some extent, however, since the purpose of the Czar was Russification and assimilation, suspicions arose which retarded progress.

The request for support in publishing more of his books, and the profuse thanksgiving which he showers upon the Czar, appear to be cringing on the part of Levinsohn. It is indeed very difficult to understand that members of the community did not rise to his aid sufficiently, so that he would be spared the humiliation of appealing to the government. However, he cannot be judged too harshly, for indeed he was weak in physically, constantly sick and unable to earn his living.

Evidently his book "Teudah B'Israel" made an impression upon many communities. On the 13th day of June 1827, the following letter was sent to Levinsohn from a Committee of Scholars in Warsaw:

"The Committee of the Jewish community in Poland, which adheres to the Jewish religion deems it a holy duty to answer your letter in regards to your book entitled "Teudah B'Israel"....we recognize and understand the great aim of the author for the amelioration of the conditions of his brethren in directing them on the right path, and we are favorably disposed toward your book. Since the book of the author shows great erudition in Rabbinical knowledge, you are deemed in great esteem in the eyes of the Committee



and we shall therefore try our utmost to find a position for you, fitted for the carrying out of your aims and goals." 17.

In 1832 Levinsohn published two short works entitled "These were on the style of Perl's work "Megale Temirin". "Dibrei Zaddikim" and "Emek Rephain". / The first work is a sarcastic criticism of the Hassidic sect. It is written in the form of three letters, with a conversation ensuing between two Hassidim in their "stiebel" or house of worship. The latter work deals with the same subject in the form of a vision in the spiritual world, where the misdeeds of the Chassidim are brought to light and criticized. 18. Levinsohn, like many of the Maskilim in other countries felt that the Chassidic sect actually was responsible for keeping enlightenment from the people. He also believed that hypocrisy reigned among them. The uprooting of their hold upon the people was his purpose, for their ways were degrading to the general welfare.

In 1833 added burdens were placed upon Levinsohn, for with the blood accusations now rampant, he took it upon himself to speak before the Czar and other government officials. This he did, not for his own glory, but rather in defense of his brethren. He constantly espoused their cause. Furthermore, he undertook the task of repudiating this heinous charge in a work entitled "No Blood" (Efes Damim). The work was written <sup>in 1834 and</sup> at the request of Moses Montefiore ~~and~~ translated into English. <sup>At the same time he employs the opportunity in explaining other charges against the Jew and</sup> ~~of the time of the "Damascus Affair".~~ 19. against Judaism.

OTHER WORKS

In this volume, in the form of conversation, between a Jew and a Christian, the Christian introduces various arguments in support of the blood accusation. The Jew ably answers these accusations and shows through examples from history and especially of the Christian Church, that there is no basis for such an accusation. It is only in 1250 that a certain priest in Castille, during the reign of Alphonse X, arose and levelled this accusation against the Jews. This accusation soon spread among the ignorant masses in Spain and Portugal and other European countries. Illustrating his arguments from the Biblical commands and Talmudic teachings, the Jew clearly shows that it is a fallacious accusation which has no basis. <sup>20.</sup>

Levinsohn dedicated this book to the Christian priests and to all the followers of the Christian religion. He pleads with them to read this book, and to consider its contents sympathetically. Levinsohn, like many of our own present day apologists (and good will literature) pleads with the followers of Christianity in the following vein. He says: "Has not the Christian religion been born out of Jewish tradition, and is it not based upon Jewish teachings? And does not the prophet Malachi plead in the following words:" 'Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us; why then do we deal treacherously one brother against the other to desecrate the covenant of our Fathers'". Levinsohn thus maintains that it is a Christian problem and it is therefore up to them to do away with the heinous accusation. <sup>21.</sup>

This was not the first and only time that Levinsohn had spoken on behalf of his people -- time and again he succeeded in defending them and in eliciting favorable comments on behalf of the Jews from all sections of the country, from many priests and even from ~~the~~ Czar ~~Nicholas I~~, Nicholas I, *himself*.

The book, needless to say was well received, especially by the leaders of the various Jewish communities. No matter what their antagonism toward Levinsohn may have been in regards to his enlightenment theories and views, yet here they gathered themselves around the banner of this man who was ever ready to champion their cause and the cause of Israel. In defense against a common enemy the Jews were truly united, prepared to strike deep and hard and often. Levinsohn truly served as the champion of his people at a time of grave peril. His scholarly refutation of all accusations against Jews reduced the harm that the accusations may have engendered. That he served the cause of Israel is an accepted fact that no one can dispute. He was thus a glittering light in a country of darkness, superstition, ignorance and bigotry.

In 1828 Levinsohn completed his book entitled "Bet Yehudah", aiming to give a systematized account of the philosophy of the Jewish religion. This work was not published until 1838, but it met with favorable comment from all sides, although here and there, some inaccuracies appear. <sup>22.</sup>

In 1840, in a proclamation entitled "A Voice Calling", the leading intellectuals of Vilna appealed to Levinsohn to encourage the setting up of additional committees for the amelioration of the economic and cultural conditions of the Jews of Russia. These men of "enlightenment" expressed their views that the Rabbis and leaders of the times have neither led nor guided the people and thus they have become like "Sheep without a shepherd". Furthermore, the teachers were bereft of any knowledge of the Bible or Hebrew, and so they were practically useless. Finally, the economic conditions of the Jew were very miserable, thus adding to the difficulty of receiving a good education.

These intellectuals therefore, advocate the establishment of Rabbinical Seminaries, on the order of those in Italy where Hebrew will be taught, the vernacular, philosophy, and other secular subjects.<sup>23</sup> The graduates of such a school, in their opinion, will be fit to lead their people, and in addition will bring honor and glory to them.

In regards to the education of the youth, they envision such modern schools on the style of Odessa and Riga -- where Hebrew, foreign languages, philosophy and the sciences will be taught. Furthermore, they believe that technical schools should be established where the Jewish youth might learn the various trades, in order to improve their economic conditions.<sup>24</sup>

From this appeal to Levinsohn and from many others, it is quite evident that his works, especially "Teudah B'Israel" exerted a profound influence upon the various committees.

Besides being a poet, a literary critic, a national author and a publicist, Levinsohn was also a philologist, writing the book entitled "Shorashei Lebanon" or "Bet Hatzotzar", printed in Vilna in 1841. In this work he shows the etymological development of Hebrew words, both Biblical and Talmudic.<sup>25.</sup>

In a letter to Levinsohn, Aryeh Tiktin of Odessa thanks him for opening his own eyes to the need of improvement of the Jewish youth. He also commends him for the interest which the minister on education now shows, in regards to the Jewish youth. Levinsohn is informed that there will be a committee to investigate the educational conditions. All this effort on behalf of the Jews, Tiktin attributes to the works and efforts of Levinsohn and his letter to the Czar.<sup>26.</sup> Similar expressions of gratitude were expressed by Gotlober, Jost, Erter and Blumenfeld.<sup>27.</sup>

Levinsohn definitely seems to have been recognized as the spokesman of his people. When in 1839 Alexander McCaul published an attack against the Talmud entitled "Old Paths", showing that it includes evil sayings against man and especially against Christianity, Moses Montefiore asked Dr. Lowe to write to Isaac Baer Levinsohn, urging him to write a defense of the Talmud and the Jewish religion. Also to repudiate the vile charges brought forth in this prejudiced and poisonous work "Old Paths".

After twelve years of continuous labor, the work was completed in 1853, containing six sections, and including the fifty three accusations and their answers. This was in reality a continuation of his work "Bet Yehudah", which endeavored to answer a Christian who had published an attack against the Talmud in Warsaw.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the book, Zerubbabel, his greatest work, Levinsohn says: "I have labored over twelve years on this book, day and night, and have thus consumed all my strength, and the source of my livelihood. I am weak and near death".<sup>29</sup> Thus, although, weak and feeble and in very poor health, and hardly possessing the bare necessities of life, still he devoted all his time and energy for the improvement of the conditions of his brethren. This in itself makes Levinsohn great ---- for he lived a life of devotion, consecrated to the welfare of his people.

Toward the end of his life, the Russian government bought from him two thousand copies of "Teudah B'Israel" and "Bet Yehudah" for 3,000 rubles, "in order to disseminate these works among the Jews in the various schools and to afford him (Levinsohn) the opportunity to labor on behalf of all his brethren."<sup>30</sup> Evidently, the Russian government recognized that his purpose was a good one, and that the dissemination of such ideas as to make Jews better citizens and more useful individuals of the state was definitely enhanced through the works of this great champion of enlightenment.

LAST TESTAMENT

Levinsohn died on the 24th day of Shebat 5620 corresponding to the 17th of February, 1860, in his birthplace, the city of Kremenetz, mourned by everyone, both young and old.<sup>31</sup> (~~Indeed, a great loss to Russian Jewry!~~)

The epitaph inscribed on his tombstone expresses more directly and succinctly the goal and purpose of his life. It reads as follows:

"Out of nothing God has created me,  
Alas! My earthly life is as if it had never existed,  
and once again I sleep in the Bosom of Mother Nature  
under this heap.

This tombstone is my witness.

I have bitterly fought the enemies of God,  
Not with steel arms, but with words.

The truth and innocence of my people,

I have constantly revealed to the nations,

"Zerubbabel" and "Efes Damim" are my witnesses." <sup>32</sup>.

After the death of Levinsohn it was his life long friend Gottlober, who expressed the importance of Levinsohn as a writer bringing enlightenment to his people, and as an intercessor on their behalf. <sup>33</sup>. He appealed to the Jewish community which had benefitted most through the personality of Levinsohn to contribute their share in order to establish an everlasting memorial to his name--- in publishing all of his works. Others who spoke in praise of Levinsohn were Joseph Rabinowitz of Odessa and Dr. Emanuel Solowitchik of the same city. A worthy man has departed from Russian Jewry!

EDUCATIONAL VIEWS



PROBLEM STATED

The educational views of Isaac Baer Levinsohn are best expressed in his book entitled "Teudah B'Israel" ("Testimony in Israel"). In the preface to this book the author expresses his purpose in writing this work. It is, according to him, to guide and lead the youth on the right path. Furthermore, it is to point out the indispensable studies necessary for the perfection of mankind, but especially for the perfection of Israel. His aim is to emphasize that in addition to the study of Talmud and later authorities (of the Shulchan Aruk) there is still additional learning which the Jew must pursue in order to improve himself and society.<sup>1.</sup>

Levinsohn discusses the following questions, which give us an insight to his educational philosophy and educational views.

(a) Whether it is indispensable for a Jew to study the "Holy Tongue" according to grammatical rules; and scientifically.

(b) Whether a Jew is permitted to study foreign languages.

(c) Whether a Jew is permitted to pursue secular learning.

(d) What advantages will be derived from the knowledge of such languages and such secular learning.

(e) Finally, are the advantages derived from such pursuits bring more harm than good to the religious faith and beliefs of the people.<sup>2.</sup>

## THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

Levinsohn believes that knowledge of Hebrew is obligatory upon every Jew and indispensable to the understanding of the Bible and other works. The teaching of Hebrew to the children is commanded upon the parents very precisely and definitely and it is a duty not to be taken lightly. Every Jew must be well versed in all the books of the Bible----this is a primary requirement.<sup>3.</sup>

This requirement is not something new, but the Hebrew sages of all ages employed expressions from the Bible and even sentences in order to illustrate their thoughts. Every Jew was well versed in the Bible, for he began studying it when still a child. Later they employed it in the study of Mishna and Gemara. The order for instruction was pointed out by the Rabbis when they emphasized that at the age of five a Jew should study the Bible, at ten the study of the Mishna and at fifteen the study of Gemara.<sup>4.</sup> The teachers of today begin teaching the Mishna and the Gemara without preparing the children for this advanced study. This tends to confuse the child and prevents him from acquiring complete benefit of the study of either the Mishna or the Gemara.<sup>5.</sup>

The present educational system, or rather lack of system, omits the study of the Hebrew language as such, and also neglects the study of the Bible. All emphasis is placed upon the study of Talmud without regard to

language. "Is it possible though", asks Levinsohn, "to build a house without having a foundation?"<sup>6</sup>.

This emphasis by Levinsohn upon the sound and scientific knowledge of the Hebrew language before attempting to study the Mishna and Talmud, seems almost superfluous to us in this day and age. However, we must realize that in his day the Hebrew language was neglected by the Rabbis and those who devoted time to Jewish learning. Their study of the Talmud before learning the Hebrew language may well be compared to the study of Chaucer or Shakespeare by some one who has not yet learned the English language, to say nothing of having mastered it. This was a new revelation to a group of people which has placed all emphasis upon content rather than on style or form of language.

It is very interesting to note in detail the reasons for Levinsohn's insistence upon the primacy of the Hebrew language. The reasons described are very modern, even to our very day. Some of the reasons are the same which are offered by great educators of our own day for the study of Hebrew in Hebrew schools or in Sunday schools. The reasons for the study of this eternal language evidently have not changed much, although the language itself did undergo changes and development.

First, it is because of our own self-respect. Every Jew must know the Hebrew language, for there are a number of non-Jewish scholars who might ask them questions and it is up to each Jew to know the language, and not to be embarrassed. Furthermore, in order to know what to answer these non-Jews. For if the Jew were ignorant of Hebrew, of his own language, and couldn't answer intelligently, he would lose the respect of the non-Jew and thus bring disgrace upon himself and upon all Israel.<sup>7.</sup>

But even more important and as a positive reason for the knowledge of the Hebrew language is the following: the study and knowledge of the Hebrew language has a cultural value and serves as a unifying force, knitting together the Jews of the world. And indeed for centuries it served as the language of the Jews, who in addition, had adapted the language of the country in which they lived.<sup>8.</sup> Levinsohn here stands on firm grounds, for no one will dispute the fact that the Hebrew language united Jews the world over in their common worship of the One God of the universe. If not for the language in which were couched the greatest ideals and forms of worship, the Jewish people and their religion might have vanished from the face of the earth.

Other reasons for the emphasis upon the study of the Hebrew language are more of a sentimental nature. Levinsohn believes, (and as a Jew imbued with the tradition he would) that the Hebrew language is a clear language and the most beautiful among languages. This view is expressed by an earlier great Jewish philosopher ~~who expressed this view~~ in his book entitled "Hakuzzari".

The Hebrew language is also a sacred language and a holy tongue, because it has become so through the many usages made of it. For all the laws, rules and regulations, all ethical guides for living are expressed in this tongue. The prophets spoke and thundered forth their messages in this language. Supplications, lamentations, words of comfort were uttered in this eternal language. The prayer book, furthermore, is written in Hebrew which expresses the pouring out of our soul before the Creator.

In addition, through association, every word has gathered unto itself a world of meaning and great associative significance. The Mishna too has been written in pure Hebrew, as was a great deal of the Talmud and Midrash. The great work of Maimonides, "Mishne Torah" was also written in that language.

Finally, in his great religious piety, Levinsohn ascribes Hebrew to be the language of God himself, the

language by which "He spoke and it came to be". It is the language by which God spoke to our ancestors, our prophets and sages.<sup>10.</sup>

To summarize, I would say that Levinsohn in the nineteenth century expressed what we have come to accept as a very progressive step in educational psychology. Just as our entire educational system is predicated on the theory that we have to master the simple before we may attempt to study the complex, so Levinsohn, too emphasized that in order to have a firm basis and foundation for studying the Bible, Mishna and Talmud and philosophical works, a mastering of the Hebrew language is indispensable. It is interesting to note, (but at the same time distressing) that we have not learned this simple view. In many schools and seminaries of Hebrew learning, this view has not been adopted, for students plunge into the study of difficult biblical Hebrew, and are completely drowned in the sea of the Talmud, to say nothing of the study of philosophy, using Hebrew texts. If professors and rabbinical heads view with alarm the lack of scholarly <sup>achievement</sup> ~~XXXXXXXX~~ among those pursuing Jewish studies, it is definitely because of employing a system which was used in Levinsohn's day and which has become even more antiquated in our own.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Driving the point home that Hebrew is indispensable to the study of other Jewish works, if they are to be understood properly and their full significance realized, Levinsohn moves one step forward in his educational views for the day. He is far ahead of the people for whom he writes. The Jewish community in which he found himself looked with disdain and contempt upon everything not written in Hebrew. To them, anything which belonged to the "goyim" was abominable, and they were not to be contaminated by it. Levinsohn, however, sounds almost revolutionary to them when he comes forward with the view, that ~~unacceptable~~ foreign languages <sup>are not</sup> /to be considered <sup>as</sup> /abhorrent, but rather that they must be encouraged, for they are indispensable to full living and participation in community affairs.

Levinsohn considers various questions, in trying to decide whether it is permissible to study other languages in addition to the study of Hebrew. Are the books written in a language other than Hebrew to be considered as books belonging on the "black list", and not to be consulted and learned? Should such an attitude prevail even if these books contain ethical principles and ideals and philosophy? He then turns to former Jewish scholars and leaders to see what their views and practices were, and finally what our own reason dictates for us in regard to this. <sup>12.</sup>

In answering the last question, Levinsohn points out that man is imbued with many exalted qualities and characteristics, namely, reason and speech, which distinguish him from other animals and make of him a spiritual being. It is through language that man expresses his innermost feelings, aspirations and thoughts.<sup>13.</sup>

In order to express himself clearly a man must know at least one language perfectly, so that he may communicate his views to the listeners. He should not mix up the languages. The Jews of Russia and Poland, however, do not know the language of the land in which they reside, and Hebrew has ceased to be the spoken language, known as Judaeo-German, borrowed from the German and mixed with words and expressions gleaned from various communities in Russia, Poland and France. Furthermore, this Judaeo-German language is not sufficient for expressing exalted thoughts, but is limited to simple conversation and every day usage. This language also debases the Jew in the eyes of the gentile.<sup>14.</sup> It is not a language with roots or with dignity, and brings only shame upon the Jews, in that they do not know even one accepted language.

Drawing his support from past tradition and practice, Levinsohn points out that throughout Jewish history, the



Jews have employed the language of the land in which they lived, and also the language of the ruling empires. Thus, he says, we find that Jews used Assyrian, Aramaic, Persian and Greek. At the present time too, says Levinsohn, each Jew must know Hebrew and an additional language, especially the language of the land. This helps the individual appreciate the people amongst whom he lives and thus to become integrated in the society.<sup>15</sup> It is, to use a modern concept, a system of Americanization.

How will the knowledge and perfection of the language of the land be achieved? Primarily through the schools which must be organized and which Jews must be prepared to attend zealously and enthusiastically. In our history we find many Jews who have excelled in the language of the land in which they lived. Among these are Aristobulus, Philo and Josephus Flavius who wrote in Greek. Maimonides, in another age wrote in Arabic his sacred writings, and greatest philosophical works. Saadya Gaon, too, wrote in Arabic.<sup>16</sup> Other examples are the following: R. Sherira Gaon, and R. Hai Gaon, and R. Isaac Alfasi; R. Judah Halevi who wrote his sacred "Hakuzzari" in Arabic. Then there is Bahya Ibn Pakudah who wrote "The Duties of the Heart"; and Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam who wrote in Spanish, Dutch, Arabic, Italian and English.<sup>17</sup>

There are scores upon scores of examples which form more than a basis for the use of the language of the land.

The Jews, Levinsohn says, believe that it is the Hebrew language which renders everything written in that language as holy. This is erroneous! It is not the language that is the basis for the worthwhileness and sacredness of a book, but rather its contents. Those who accept as holy everything that is written in Hebrew are misguided. Very often, exalted views may be written in that language; on the other hand, base and immoral views, too, may be presented.<sup>18</sup> Those who have any objections to the usage of any other language, save Hebrew, have no ground for their narrow views. For it is a known fact that according to the sages a Jew is commanded to recite the "Shema" in any language, as long as it is clear and pure.

What is to be considered then a worthwhile book? It is, according to Levinsohn, not the form but rather the contents. A book may be written in any one of the following, namely, Russian, German, Polish, French, etc., but as long as it contains moral instruction, ethical ideals, wisdom, philosophy and the sciences it is to be considered a worthwhile book. Rabbi Jonathn, in Midrash Esther (chapter 3) says, that the world should employ

four languages, namely, Greek, Latin, Syrian and Hebrew. This, says Levinsohn, illustrates how much the Rabbis had admired and respected foreign languages.<sup>19.</sup>

Levinsohn advocates the study of foreign languages for their practical value and especially for the better understanding of the Bible. For it is obvious that many commentators upon the Bible have employed foreign words and expressions in order to give a more exact meaning of the passage or of the Hebrew word. Thus, we find, that Rashi employed French and Italian. ( 1871 )

Furthermore, he argues, that the books of the Bible were written by different prophets and authors, in various countries and under diverse circumstances. Therefore, in order to understand the prophets better, for example, it is necessary to know the history of the various peoples. And in order to do so, it is necessary to know their language and their literature and culture.<sup>20.</sup> The history of Israel is intertwined with that of other peoples, those who have ruled Palestine and those among whom the Jews lived.

Thus, Levinsohn shows, that it is necessary to study foreign languages, because it will help the individual to integrate himself into the life of the community in which he lives. In addition, the study of foreign languages will help us understand our own Bible better and also the history of our people. For nations do not live in isolation but are inter-related.

It is interesting to note that the reasons for the study of foreign languages still hold true to our own days, even in our own country. For the knowledge of the language of the land and foreign languages will command the respect of the nations among whom the Jew lives. The non-Jew cannot possibly respect and admire the Jews who do not speak the language of the land, and who are limited in their intellect. Jews are put to ridicule when they are unable to express themselves clearly and are unable to discuss intelligently various problems. They bring the scorn of their neighbors when they cannot stand on equal footing as regards to knowledge and learning.<sup>21.</sup>

How much more secure would be the position of the Jew, how more respected would he be considered by the gentile if he possessed such knowledge! Philo and others were able to combat the enemies of their day through the use of the language of the land and through their great knowledge in general.<sup>22.</sup>

The knowledge of foreign languages must be regarded favorably, for it stood Israel in good stead and Israel has derived great benefits through such knowledge. For example, through the translation of the Torah by the elders of Israel as commanded by Ptolemy Philadelph<sup>us</sup> the

king was well disposed toward the Jews and freed more than a hundred thousand Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt. Another example, is R. Menasseh ben Israel, who through the knowledge of languages and general learning had made it possible for Jews to return to England after they had been expelled for many years. Mendelssohn, too showed that the blood accusation was false and thus he was responsible for the saving of many Jews.<sup>23</sup> This reason for the knowledge of foreign languages for self-protection and enlightenment of the various people is an excellent one. It is also a very practical one, for any person who knows many languages may make friends more easily and can get along better wherever he may be.

Another advantage in the knowledge of foreign languages will be the acquisition of the meaning of the laws, customs and regulations of the land. Our religious and civil leaders too, will thus bring about a closer relationship and better understanding between the Jew and the non-Jew. We would thus also appear as part and parcel of the country in which we live, and will not be looked upon as strangers and with suspicion.<sup>24</sup>

Finally there is an economic advantage. For such a knowledge will make it possible for a merchant to direct his business in a more profitable fashion.<sup>25</sup>

NATURE AND SCIENCE

After advocating the mastery of Hebrew and the study of foreign languages, Levinsohn goes one step further and emphasizes the importance and significance of the sciences----of medicine, astronomy, mathematics and philosophy. In this respect he stands for a positive participation of the Jew in all the sciences and the humanities, rejecting the policy of ghetto living and isolation from the literary and scientific achievements of the world.<sup>26</sup> These, he maintains, cannot be overlooked, for they broaden the views of the individual and enrich his life. The Jew must share in the knowledge of the world, for only as part of the entire humanity can he reach full development and maturity, and contribute fully to the world in which he lives.

Although Levinsohn is a pious Jew in every way, yet he rebels against the view of fate and against the idea that everything is destined. We cannot depend entirely upon God for everything, for God does not wish us to do so. We are not simply cogs in the wheel of the machine. Although everything may be decreed by God, still it is up to us to take cognizance of the importance of nature and medicine. Just as a person tills, the soil and plants and reaps its fruits, although God is the creator of the earth, so must an individual take care of his health

through medicine, although God created the body.<sup>27</sup> Man has been placed upon the earth to work and to strive for better things, but he must do it himself, and he must not shirk responsibility.

To those who advocated abstaining from pleasures, and to those who regarded nature inimically, Levinsohn points out that we are not commanded anywhere to abstain from it, but rather we behold the appreciation of nature on the part of many of the writers of the Psalms. For in many of the psalms, the author speaks of the beauty of nature, the sun, moon and stars. This admiration is so clearly stated in the verse: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי כָּל הָאָרֶץ Lord, our God, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth". Furthermore, throughout the Bible, descriptions of the glories of nature are beautifully depicted. It is, therefore, not contrary to the spirit of Judaism to partake of nature. On the contrary, it should be encouraged.<sup>28</sup>

Through this knowledge of nature and science, God's existence and actions manifest themselves. Thus, through this knowledge man may arrive at a clear understanding of the nature of God, and this understanding will lead to the love of God.<sup>29</sup> Even the friends of Job, says Levinsohn, with all their arguments, could not convince Job of God's justice until God himself calls Job's attention to nature, the creation of His hands. God, speaking to Job from a

whirlwind calls Job's attention to the greatness and mysteries of nature, and rebukes him with the following: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38.4); or "Who provideth for the raven his prey, when his young ones cry unto God, and wander for lack of food?" (Job 38.41). In all nature, God's wisdom, intelligence, might and guidance are revealed. It is up to us to draw close to nature and to study it. This will not cause us to deviate from the path of God, but rather will guide us on the path to Him.

In the other books of the Bible we see that the prophets too make us of nature by drawing parables therefrom to illustrate their messages to the people. The philosopher Joseph Albo too, emphasizes that we can learn ethical and moral lessons from nature. Another basis for the study of the sciences is derived from the work of Rabbi Abraham the son of Rambam, who urges everyone to study the physical world, plants, animals, and the nature of air, water, etc. 30.

Levinsohn's emphasis upon nature and its appreciation can readily be understood, when we realize that for several centuries, living in the ghetto, the Jews were far removed from nature. Meditating day and night upon the law, they have even come to look upon nature as a deterring element. This attitude, no doubt was also due to the fact that Jews were long divorced and removed from agriculture and the soil.



## THE SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

Just as one who is well versed in the Hebrew language must study and appreciate nature and science, so he must also study astronomy and geometry, the measurements and movements of the heavenly bodies, etc.<sup>31</sup>. This will enable the individual to derive at a better understanding and love of God, which in truth is the yearning and aspiration of man, the goal and purpose of his existence. Is the study of astronomy permissible? Of course, say Levinsohn. There is a precedent to the study of astronomy in all ages, beginning with Noah, Abraham, King David and continuing through R. Akiba and Hillel (who had fixed the intercalation of the calendar). Many books have been written on the subject and a great deal of discussion is to be found in the books of the Talmud and Midrash. The book attributed to Rabbi Akiba entitled "The Book of Creation" well illustrates that the study of the sciences is not contrary to the spirit of Judaism.<sup>32</sup>

Levinsohn advocates all knowledge and philosophy, for he believes that we derive advantage and benefit from every kind of learning. He is against the view of limiting our study merely to Bible or the Talmud. He envisages a system where all branches of learning will assume an appropriate place and distinction.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, he considers the study of philosophy as important for the understanding of the universe, the

essence of God, and the nature of creation. God has left for the mind the task of learning the purpose and meaning of the universe. Both Maimonides and Albo held that through the study of philosophy we draw closer to God.

The opposition to the study of philosophy has been on the grounds that it tends to undermine faith and mislead the individual who studies philosophy. Levinsohn maintains that those who abandon the belief in God through their study of philosophy are those who are not mature enough yet to study it. They have gone astray whether because of their lack of understanding of the subject or else because they delved too deeply into the subject. This was more than their minds could grasp and assimilate.

We have many precedents for the study of philosophy and the sciences. The leaders, priests, judges, prophets and members of "The Great Assembly", and "Sanhedrin", and the "exilarchs" and the heads of the Yeshivahs were well versed in languages and philosophy. Even Moses, the prophet of prophets is reputed to have known seventy languages, to have been a great law giver, great in wisdom and the sciences. Plato, for example, calls Moses "The Law Giver"; others called him "Father of the Wise". How dare then, anyone oppose these studies which our sages

encouraged, asks Levinsohn? The study of philosophy has always taken place! It is only the ignorant who continue to oppose it.<sup>34</sup>

Depending greatly upon tradition for the support of his views, Levinsohn draws upon past authorities to show that languages and the sciences are not only compatible with Judaism, but rather that they are required for any leader. He points to the passage where it is written: "Rabbi Jochanan said: 'only tall men, men of wisdom and good appearance, of mature age and versed in seventy languages may be chosen as members of the Sannhedrin'".<sup>35</sup>

Maimonides too, stressed the fact that only men educated in the Torah and other branches of knowledge, namely, medicine, science, astronomy, etc. may be chosen as leaders of a great or small Sannhedrin.<sup>36</sup>

To illustrate the role that Jews have played in the dissemination of philosophy, Levinsohn stresses the fact that it was through the Jews that the western world has come to know Greek philosophy. This of course is an important point, for it is the Jews, in their capacity as translators and interpreters who have translated the works of Aristotle and Plato from Greek into Syrian and Arabic. Thus only, were the Arabs able to pursue the study of philosophy. Many Hebrew and Greek works were also trans-

lated into Latin, and from Latin into the various European languages.<sup>37</sup> Among the translators we find such men as R. Alharizzi, R. Kolonymos and others. During the tenth and eleventh century in Spain, Jews have contributed greatly to philosophy and medicine. It is also probably correct to say that in most of the European countries the Jews excelled in medicine and other branches of learning.<sup>38</sup>

At the present time, however, says Levinsohn, due to ignorance and neglect of these studies, owing to persecution and ghettoization, the Jews have come to despise these secular studies. Nothing can be more foreign to our tradition than this attitude. Among the "great" versed in all these branches of study, the following are enumerated: King David, Ahitophel, King Solomon, the prophets, Daniel, Chananya, Azariah, Mordecai, Simon the Just, R. Eliezer ben Harson, Jose b. Yoezer, Jose ben Jachanan, Joshua ben Perachya, Aristobulus, Simeon ben Shetach, Shemaya and Abtalyon, Hillel and Shammai. Then we find Philo of Alexandria, R. Jochanan ben Zaccai, Josephus, R. Chanina ben Dosa, R. Gamaliel, Samuel the "short", R. Eleazar ben Hyrcanus, R. Gamaliel II, R. Eleazar ben Azariah, R. Akiba, R. Akiba ben Teradion, R. Meier, R. Simeon ben Jochai, R. Judah Hanassi (the holy), R. Ashi, R. Saadya Gaon, R. Hai Gaon, R. Samuel Halevi (Hanaggid) of Cordova, R. Samuel Ibn Gabirol, R. Moses Ibn Ezra, Rashi,

R. Joseph Ibn Megash, R. Judah Ibn Tibbon, R. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, R. Judah Halevi, R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, R. Bahya Ibn Pakkuda, Rambam, Ramban, R. David Kimchi, R. Joseph Albo, R. Isaac Abarbanel, R. Azzariah de Rossi, R. Samuel Duran, R. Yom Tov Lippman, R. Judah Muscato, R. Menasseh ben Israel, R. Moses Hayim Luzzato, R. Jacob Emden, R. Elijah of Vilna and many others.<sup>39</sup>

Listing these Jewish "greats" and describing their activities and contributions to the various fields of learning, Levisohn ably demonstrates, (if such demonstration is needed) that languages and the sciences are not contrary to the Jewish spirit or tradition. On the contrary, it enhances and enriches Jewish traditions and the Jewish spirit. Judaism is the greater for drawing from all these sources. If Judaism did not draw from various sources at various periods of its history, Judaism would have become petrified and unsuited for the times. It is only by assimilating of the best in the thoughts and views, and philosophy of the ages, that Judaism has become a living, positive religion, ever growing and ever developing. We, therefore, must not permit it to wither, and above all we must not limit it to a narrow environment. It needs wide areas in order to flourish and blossom.

**SOCIAL REFORMS**

ECONOMIC ADAPTATION

Progress is usually very slow and especially in an environment where past traditions are deeply engrained, and where light has been kept out for many centuries. Joseph Klausner ably describes the difficulties which Levinsohn had to face, due to the mentality, attitudes and prejudices of the Jews of this time and place. He says: "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Levinsohn began his literary work, the Jews of Russia and Poland were so far removed from even the most elementary idea of general culture that they regarded all 'external' knowledge including the knowledge of a non-Jewish language, as something fraught with grave danger to Judaism. They feared that secular knowledge would estrange their sons from the study of the Talmud and from "the straight path". Nor was their opposition confined to foreign languages; they even banned the study of Hebrew as an ordinary language with definite grammatical rules and a modern secular literature. The ancient Hebrew Language, and the religious literature written in it, they regarded as holy; and in the use of modern Hebrew for modern needs they saw a source of corruption, a poisonous root of heresy, atheism and anti-Judaism."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of such conditions, Levinsohn nevertheless was determined to bring order out of chaos, light out of darkness. Stressing throughout the importance of languages, philosophy, astronomy and the liberal art subjects, he also places great emphasis on the manual subjects---the handicrafts. He rebels against the status of the Jews who are far removed from the handicrafts and are to a large extent without strong economic roots in the economy of the country. He, therefore, advocates the necessity of having the children learn various handicrafts, and thus be better prepared to earn a livelihood.<sup>2</sup>

Such study and such a course to follow are not new, for according to tradition a father is in duty bound to teach his son handicrafts. This is expressed in Kiddushin 30b as follows: "Just as it is the duty of a man to teach his son Torah, so it is also his duty to teach him handicrafts." Furthermore, it is stated in Abot chapter 2.2 as follows: "Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince, said: 'an excellent thing is the study of the Torah combined with some worldly occupation, for the labor demanded by them both makes sin to be forgotten'."

In the book of Psalms the following is expressed: (Psalm 128.2) "When thou eatest the labor of thine hands, happy art thou, and it shall be well with thee". In



addition, from the command of God we may discern the importance of labor, for it is written: "Six days shalt thou labor, but on the seventh shalt thou rest".

Levinsohn is very modern in his views regarding the participation of Jews in trades. Thus, he feels, they would be useful citizens of the country in which they reside. This, in turn would reduce and even eliminate anti-Semitic feeling. It is interesting to note in this connection that even at the present time suggestions have been made that the great preponderance of Jews in the white collar occupations, and their reluctance to enter trades are responsible for the bitter feeling against the Jew among the non-Jews.

Just as he had discussed the various greats in Israel throughout the ages who were well versed in languages, the sciences and philosophy and other subjects, so Levinsohn discusses also in great detail the many Tannaim and Amoraim who earned their livelihood by various occupations. No one must be ashamed to earn a living through a trade and through the sweat of the brow. Thus we have a host of Rabbis and other luminaries who earned a living by means of a trade. Phineas (high priest during the Second Temple) was a hewer of stones, Hillel the elder was a wood cutter, Shammai was a mason, Abba Hilkiyah was a ditch digger, Simeon Hapikuli worked on cotton, R. Jochanan "hasandlar" was a shoemaker, R. Jose b. Chalafta

worked with skins, R. Chanina and R. Ushaya were shoemakers.<sup>3</sup>

Levinsohn urges the Jews of his day to enter the various trades, in order that they might become an integral part of the country and also find favor in the eyes of the Czar.<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that in many countries, Jews are actually to be found in the handicrafts in large numbers, for example, in Africa where they are employed as goldsmiths, carpenters, tailors, etc.

Being of a very practical nature, Levinsohn urges the establishment of Trade Schools in various districts. This is just as important, he claims, as the setting of schools in the districts for the study of religion and ethics, languages and mathematics. He realizes that someone must assume the responsibility of founding these schools, and he maintains that the responsibility should rest with the Jewish leaders and with the entire Jewish community. Furthermore, just as there are organizations for the Hebrew Schools, so there should be set up organizations which will help poor children to receive an adequate training in some trade. This will afford them the opportunity of earning a living and leading a more stabilized existence.<sup>5</sup> No more will they be depended upon hazy occupations, but will become rooted in a firm foundation. No more will they be hated and despised and be the target of envy and jealousies.

ETHICAL CONDUCT

Levinsohn's purpose in all his reforms was the amelioration of the conditions of his people. He felt that improvement in the spiritual, economic, cultural and political spheres would contribute to making the Jew a better individual and a better citizen of the land in which he lived. All these forces were intertwined, and reform in all would achieve the desired results. He therefore presented the following all embracing program:

(a) The founding of adequate schools for children and young men, which will teach Torah, Religion, Ethics, and especially responsibility toward God, the government and fellowmen. Books chosen should meet the age and the needs of the children. Girls, too, should get an education according to their needs. Both boys and girls should learn some kind of a trade so that they may be able to earn a livelihood. For indeed, lack of a livelihood is responsible for most of our evils.<sup>6</sup>

The teachers, too, should be trained teachers and men of character. Not everyone is suitable for that profession, although the teacher may know his subject well. In addition, he must also be trained in the methods of teaching, and acquainted with the handling of children.

Should every Jew be a professional man, namely, doctor, lawyer, philosopher or poet? No, answers Levinsohn: Only those who are best suited for those professions

should follow them, for they would thus make the best doctors, lawyers, or philosophers. The rest should be well educated in the fundamentals of the Torah, Hebrew grammar, the language of the land, etc. without becoming professional men. This general education should serve for their general improvement of character and behavior.<sup>7.</sup>

The ethical behavior of the Jews is not what it should be because of the chaos that reigns in its leadership. He advocates the following in his all embracing program:

(b) The selection of a Chief Rabbi, well educated and well versed in the Torah and all branches of learning. This Chief Rabbi should form a high court and together they should choose Rabbis, preachers and teachers. This high court with the Chief Rabbi at its head should serve as the central authority so that there might be a centralized system. As matters stand now, Leviaohn points out, there are diverse practices in every synagogue and very little order in any of them. In the various synagogues it is not uncommon to find that one smokes, another eats and drinks, and still another talks during the service and pays very little attention to the prayers. There is hardly any order or decorum in the synagogue and this tends to bad habits and demoralization.<sup>8.</sup>

Furthermore, how can you improve the social behavior of the people? To this Levinsohn advocates the following:

(c) There should be speakers who would preach on various occasions, especially on Saturdays and holidays, in order to instruct the people in right conduct and in order to point out to them their failings and shortcomings. These lecturers would serve as research workers to awaken the people whenever certain faults are to be found among them.

(d) Efforts should be made to obtain for one third of the people, land on which they would live and cultivate and raise cattle. Schools should be established nearby for the education of the young living on the land, and speakers should preach from time to time.

(e) All Israel should take a pledge upon itself, in accordance with a decree of the Rabbis not to wear silk and other expensive and luxurious clothes, silver, gold and diamonds. This is the cause of deterioration, and in addition causes envy and hatred on the part of the non-Jew.<sup>9</sup>

## RETURN TO SOIL

Another great reform, in addition to the stressing of education in the various trades, is advocacy to return to the land and the soil. Very emphatically Levinsohn asks the following questions? "Why should we not return to walk in the paths of our ancestors to work on the land? Why is it that our people are now neither farmers nor vinegrowers?" 10.

Levinsohn analyzes the situation by resorting to past traditions and practices. We have begun, he says, to despise agricultural pursuits, whereas our ancestors have regarded it very highly. All the minute laws in the Bible regarding farming illustrate the importance placed upon this occupation. Among other peoples too, agricultural pursuits were regarded in high esteem, namely, among the Chaldeans, the Persians and the Egyptians. In fact the Egyptians even considered holy the very cattle used to till the soil. 11.

The Roman writers too, such as Xenophon and Hesiod~~us~~ placed great emphasis on agricultural pursuits, for they felt that it is this labor which enriches the character and soul of the individual. Not only is farming productive and one of the most important pursuits, but it develops both body and soul. It does not permit the swindling which takes place in commerce, nor the taking of usury. And finally,

there is no hatred engendered in the form of competition, as is the case with petty dealers.<sup>12</sup>

What a true analysis of the importance and significance of farming and of labor! Several decades later, the protagonist of the "holiness of labor", A. D. Gordon, expressed in greater detail the view that labor actually develops character and enhances creativity.

Levinsohn also points out that most of our laws and religious holidays are intimately connected with the land, e.g. the bringing of the Omer, the holiday of Succoth with the command of employing the four species of the land; the holiday of Passover is also known as the "Spring Festival", because the wheat and barley ripen at the season; Pentecost is known as the "holiday of the ripening of fruits"; Succoth as the ingathering of the harvest. Most laws are based upon the life of a people, living on a land and cultivating it.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Levinsohn makes the following points very convincingly:

- (a) Formerly the chief occupation of the Jew was agriculture, a favorable and honorable pursuit.
- (b) The Jewish religion not only does not oppose farming, but actually encourages it.
- (c) The Jew is fitted by nature to till the soil. He is both strong enough and also very capable.

(d) Commerce was not greatly employed by our ancestors, but their descendants, scattered among the nations have learned commercial pursuits from other nations.

(e) The Jewish religion does not prohibit commerce. However, it is not normal that most Jews should limit themselves to that field.<sup>14</sup>

Levinsohn goes on to say that while it is true that the Jews are now removed from agricultural pursuits, and are limited to a great extent to commerce, yet this state of affairs is not of their own volition. Rather it is to be attributed to the various peculiar conditions in which the Jews have constantly found themselves. First, they were persecuted and driven from one locality to another, from one country to another. Of necessity they had to abandon agricultural pursuits and become merchants and even money lenders so that they might be able to carry their possessions with them.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, there were many restrictions placed upon our ancestors regarding the ownership of land, and so they engaged in commerce and the handicrafts instead. However, when they were forced out of the handicrafts, they were limited to commerce.<sup>16</sup>

Levinsohn, in all his utterings against the situation as it exists, whereby most Jews are engaged in



commerce, nevertheless realizes the great contribution made by the Jews in this great field of endeavor, in developing and enriching the various countries. He recognizes the worth of the Jew wherever he may reside.<sup>17.</sup>

Levinsohn was not satisfied with theory only but tried to carry out his aims in a concrete way. In 1823 he wrote to Prince Pavlovitch concerning the establishment of schools and seminaries for the Jews of Russia. In 1825 he wrote "Die ~~J~~efker Welt" describing the faults and shortcomings of his brethren, urging them to better their ways. In 1833 he wrote to the Commissioner of the Interior in regards to the publishing of certain books. This was done and many of the books used as textbooks. But above all he urged his brethren in all parts of Russia to return to the land and work upon it and earn their living in this way rather than by engaging in commerce. Many Jews heeded his call and Czar Nicholas too, was favorably inclined toward this project, and various colonies were actually organized in the South of Russia.<sup>18.</sup>

*which?*

**RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS**

### A UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE

In his preface to the book "Bet Yehuda" the author sets his purpose in writing the book. It is intended for both Jew and non-Jew, in order to inform both of "the Jewish people, its religion, books, sects, customs, sages and scribes, the wisdom of the Talmud (its worth and significance), the ways of worshipping God, and the means of living in peace and concord with our fellowmen".<sup>1</sup>

Levinsohn recognizes the close relationship between the Jewish nationality and the Jewish religion, and goes on to construct his views of the Jewish nationality. There are certain requirements or criteria which are needed for any nationality. The Jews meet such requirements and are a nationality in the fullest sense of the term. The following are the requirements for a nationality:

(a) A known origin and a long historical existence and continuity.

(b) Possession of sound ethical system and a valid and complete religious system, to the extent that other advanced nations will draw inspiration and sustenance therefrom.

(c) Recognition by the world of its books and teachings and authors as true.

(d) Possession of a beautiful, complete and distinct language.

(e) Possession of creative poets and writers.

(f) The dissemination of spiritual values for other religions through spiritual leaders.

(g) A good and modern educational system for the education of all, yes, even women.

(h) Having intelligent human beings with physical fitness for manual labor, in addition to dealing in trade and commerce.

(i) Possession of a religious system which edifies its followers.

(j) Possession of a prosperous land with outlets to the sea for trading and commercial purposes.

(k) Having men of valor and courage and militancy.

(l) Being successful both in peace and in war.

(m) Evincing the highest standards of morality toward a brother and stranger living in the land.

(n) Possession of fine looking men and women and of good character.

(o) A continuous existence though deprived of a land, and a continuous creativity, contributing to the country in which the people reside.

(p) Obedience and loyalty to the government and its rulers.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the Jewish people, Levinsohn maintains that unlike other peoples, they possess a way of life in which religion is intertwined and interwoven with ethics, the sciences, politics and scholarship. These aspects of life cannot be separated from religion. Religion, however, is the core of life and plays a leading role among the Jewish people. Thus, viewing life as holy and sacred, all its manifestations are therefore holy.<sup>3.</sup>

Since Levinsohn recognizes the close relationship between the Jewish religion and the Jewish nationality, he traces the development of the Jewish nationality to prove this fact. Originally, he says, our ancestors were nomads and dwellers of tents, as is seen from the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was a patriarchal organization. This lasted until the appearance of the great emancipator and leader Moses. Under Moses, a kind of democracy existed. Moses was a representative of God, with God serving as the actual King.<sup>4.</sup> Each tribe was represented in the community of Israel by elders chosen by the tribe. These elders served in civil, political and military matters. In addition to these representatives, there was a judicial system with various judges, Moses served in the capacity of Chief Justice. God of course was the final Judge.<sup>5.</sup>

The tribe of Levi and the priests among them were free from military service and civil obligations and therefore devoted their time to religious matters. They were ever the spiritual guides of the nation regarding God's law and commandments. They were also the arbiters and judges in matters pertaining to ritual matters. Furthermore, they were in charge of the Tabernacle of the Lord (and in later times of the Temple). In addition they served as doctors and healers.<sup>6</sup>

After the death of Joshua, a new stage began, namely, that of the judges or warriors. These judge-ships were somewhat similar to the dictatorship of Rome in later times. There were thirteen judges beginning with Athnial the son of Kenaz and ending with Samson. Eli the priest and Samuel the prophet were leaders of the state, not in military affairs, but in civil and spiritual matters.<sup>7</sup>

The third stage in the development of the Jewish nation was the creation of the monarchy under King Saul, followed by David and his son Solomon. With the division of the kingdom, we find the kingdom of Judah and that of Israel. Both kingdoms suffered destruction and exile. Scattered among the nations, the Jews suffered greatly. However, they soon partook of enlightenment and received rights.<sup>8</sup>

## RELIGION IN SOCIETY

It is in light of this background that Levinsohn presents his religious teachings. According to him, religion cannot exist in a vacuum or in a state of abstraction. Man is civil minded by nature and tends to live in a society. Society cannot exist and continue to flourish unless each member of society voluntarily abides by the various conventional laws which guide society. This makes for physical safety. In addition, there are rules and regulations decreed by the rulers or king, called civil law, which insures the welfare of all the members of society.<sup>9.</sup>

Furthermore, since man is also a spiritual being, he yearns constantly to achieve spiritual perfection through the fulfillment of spiritual dictates and commandments. This spiritual elevation and perfection is the true purpose and goal of man's creation and existence. All the conventional, civil and spiritual laws, Levinsohn places under the term "religion" (דת). He makes the distinction, however, between divine law (דת אלהית), which comprises all the spiritual dictates and commandments, and the conventional law, or etiquette, (דת הנימוסית).<sup>10.</sup>

The attainment of spiritual perfection may be attained only in society and society cannot be perfected without the conventional laws which guide it. Hence, it

follows that while conventional laws do not precede the divine laws in essence and importance, yet they precede them in time.<sup>11.</sup>

The religious law furthermore, may be subdivided into: (a) natural religion (b) revealed religion. Natural religion is gained through philosophical speculation and reason, as exhibited by Socrates and Plato. Revealed religion, however, is reached not through speculation or reason, but through God's revealing himself to the righteous and pious men whom He chooses. This takes the form of revealing unto them certain laws and precepts for the entire people to follow. These revealed precepts are superior to the natural precepts, or those achieved through reason. The revealed law is complete in its essence and is incumbent upon every individual, while the natural law is not complete. Only certain gifted individuals, such as prophets, are able to receive the revelation of God.<sup>12.</sup>

The natural law is based upon the following four foundations:

(a) The handicrafts and physical labor, agricultural pursuits and farming.

(b) Prevention of various evils, namely, robbery, theft, murder, etc.

(c) Accomplishment of good deeds, such as, charity, loans, etc.



(d) Knowledge and scholarship, such as the knowledge of languages, mathematics, medicine, astrology and ethics.<sup>13.</sup>

The revealed law, on the other hand is based upon the perfection and purification of the heart and soul. This may be achieved through the following:

(a) Knowledge -- i.e., recognition of a Creator, who is the Guide, All Wise, Omnipotent, Eternal Being. In addition, recognizing that there is Providence, immortality, reward and punishment. These are the roots of religion.<sup>14.</sup>

(b) Metaphysics -- or the search for the understanding of the nature of God, which is more exalted than natural knowledge.<sup>15.</sup>

Levinsohn does not limit himself to abstract views. He maintains that although the revealed law is based upon the purification and perfection of the heart, yet practical deeds must accompany this process. It is only through the concrete application and practice of these laws and commandments that the heart and will of the individual are improved -- and thus reach perfection.<sup>16.</sup>

Revealed religion, says Levinsohn, is also known by the name of "Faith", for it is by means of faith that an individual now accepts the revealed law with all its details. This must be so, since the individual has not been present at the time of revelation. This faith is enhanced by the following:

(a) Knowledge achieved through reason.

(b) Knowledge achieved through experience although reason may not support it.

(c) Knowledge achieved through tradition. Under this heading may be listed all the wonders and miracles wrought on behalf of Israel.<sup>17.</sup>

Reason is an important factor in religion. Faith which is supported in all its aspects by truth is pure faith. This truth must agree with reason to be real truth and the support of faith.<sup>18.</sup>

THE TORAH

In regards to the Torah, Levinsohn, as an Orthodox Jew holds to the traditional view, namely, that it was to Moses, who was the holiest individual, possessing a pure heart and a pure soul, that God revealed Himself. This revealed law on Mount Sinai is known as the Law of God (תּוֹרַת ה' ) because it was given by God. It is also known as the law of Moses ( תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה ), because it was handed to Moses.<sup>19</sup>

There are two aspects of this revealed law, namely, the written law and the oral law. The written law is a compendium of all the rules and regulations, of all the commandments and customs of the people put down in writing in order that the people may study them and teach them to their children. The explanations of the laws and commandments and their elaboration, form the oral law, which was also revealed unto Moses, and which he in turn, has transmitted to the elders of Israel.<sup>20</sup>

The oral law is as necessary and as binding as the written law. Many laws in the Torah would be unintelligible, were it not for the oral traditions and explanations. Levinsohn gives the classic example, of the commandment "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk". We would never have known, he says, that this commandment refers to the

separation of meat from dairy products. Traditions went hand in hand with the laws, and it was only through these traditions that the laws became clear.<sup>21</sup>

The oral traditions were not added to the Bible, for fear that the explanations might become incorporated as part of the Bible itself and thus corrupt the original text. In addition, the meaning of words change in different times and different places, and therefore, we may be misled as to the true meaning of certain laws.<sup>22</sup>

According to Levinsohn, Moses handed down the greater part of the oral law through his explanations of the laws found in the Torah. For it is written (Deut. ch. 1) "Across the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses explained this Torah". These oral traditions and explanations later came to be known as the Mishna. Moses, however, told the judges more than is to be found in the Mishna. He told them all the details by which they might be able to judge and guide the people.<sup>23</sup> All these oral laws and explanations were not observed by the entire Jewish people, because at times they were prevented from doing so by the rulers, and at times they followed the ways of the gentiles, becoming idol worshippers. This went on until the Babylonian exile. After the exile, however, these oral laws were slowly being accepted by the greater part of the Jewish people.<sup>24</sup> All these reforms and changes, however, came slowly until Judah Hanassi, codified this oral law into the six books of the Mishna.

Levinsohn goes on to explain the purpose of both the written law and the oral law. The purpose of the written law is two fold: (a) The improvement of the physical and social well being of the individual for the welfare of society. This is aimed at by the written law in order to make of the individual a better person of the community.<sup>25</sup> (b) The spiritual development and improvement of the individual, in order to reach the highest perfection,---- God. This may be achieved through the study of the Torah, and through deep contemplation. Since not every one is able to comprehend all the ideas connected with the understanding of God, the masses are required to perform the various observances. Only a few gifted individuals, through their reason, may reach and comprehend the true essence of God.<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of the oral law is similar in intent, and serves to enforce the written law. It explains and elaborates on the written law in order to achieve the same lofty purposes, of improving the individual, the doing of justice, and especially the knowledge of God. The oral and written laws are inter-related and intertwined. They complement and complete each other, and each in turn is rendered more meaningful. They are both binding upon us, and it is the oral law which makes possible the flexibility of Judaism.

LAWS AND COMMANDMENTS

Levinsohn classified the laws of the Torah into:

(a) commandments and precepts between God and man  
(b) conventional laws and precepts between man and man, or the social laws under which individuals in a society may live in harmony and concord. Of the former, those laws which are rational and universal are not dependent upon time or geographical location. Each nation striving for true knowledge and perfection follows these precepts. These laws may come under "natural religion". There are also laws of the former, commandments and precepts ( *אין אדם* ), which concern Israel directly and only Israel. These are the purely religious laws commanded unto the Jews by God.<sup>27</sup>

The laws which are rational and universal for every country and in every clime are immutable. These are known as ( *אין אדם* ), and are put forth from the point of view of justice and righteousness. These principles of justice and righteousness are universal, and are to be found among every nation, with but small variations in the particulars. For example, the law of the Torah which states that a thief must return the stolen goods is universal. The punishment for such theft, however, may vary according to the conditions of the land in which the theft has been committed, and according to the judgement of the judge.<sup>28</sup>

The purely religious laws, which God has revealed to Israel who dwell among all the nations, Levinsohn further sub-divides into:

- (a) Laws dealing with the commemoration of some historical events in the life of the Jews. Also those dealing with certain signs and certain symbols. Of such a character is circumcision, which is God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Other laws dealing with signs or symbols are: "teffilin", "mezuzah", "shofar".<sup>29.</sup> Then, there are also to be found laws relating to such historical events as emancipation from Egypt in the celebration of the Passover; the receiving of the Torah in the observance of Sabbath, etc. The reason for the observance of these laws is given in the Torah. These laws may not be changed. For example, there can be no addition of species regarding the Succos celebration, that is, you cannot add to the number of species prescribed in the Torah. However, to add or to diminish some new commemoration is permissible, e.g., the lighting of the Chanukah candles, the reading of the megillah, etc. The Great Beth-Din may make these changes. Thus also is the opinion of Albo expressed in his book entitled "Ikkarim".<sup>30.</sup>
- (b) Laws and commandments of separation (  $\text{מצוות הַתְּפִילָּה}$  ), expressed in the Torah, in order to separate the Israelites

from the bad practices and evil ways of the nations amongst whom they dwelt. This was done in order to make of the Jews a peculiar and unique people dedicated to the service of God. The separation of Israel from the other nations referred especially to the Egyptians, who were possessed of many superstitions regarding medicine. Also the Canaanites who were idol-worshippers.<sup>31</sup> These laws were for the purpose of improving and ennobling the character of the people, and preventing them from becoming contaminated by the various nations. Thus the purpose of these laws is to make it possible for Israel "to distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure". (Levit. ch.. 10)

These laws of separation refer to such matters as the sacrifices, purities and impurities, laws of prohibiting the eating of certain unclean animals, and the wearing of clothes made up of both linen and wool, (שֵׂטֶט), and the red heifer. No reasons are given for these laws and regulations as are given for laws of commemoration and historical significance. Nevertheless, their observance is imperative, for it is really for our good. To rid the Jews of certain harmful practices and beliefs, these rules were given. Reasons are not given for some of these laws, says Levinsohn, in order not to remind the people of certain evil practices of the nations. For if these reasons



had been given, the Jewish people might have been inclined to follow such practices, although they may not have known about such practices at first. It is the power of suggestion, which Levinsohn thinks, the Torah tried to avoid.<sup>32</sup>

Levinsohn emphasizes the importance of these various laws, not for their own sake, but for the greater glory of mankind. According to him "the Jewish religion may be summed up in two principles of belief: faith in one God, which involves the negation of idol-worship, and love of one's neighbor." Furthermore, "he shows by numerous citations that the latter means, the love not only of one Jew for another, but the love for any neighbor, irrespective of faith."<sup>33</sup>

CHANGE AND REFORM

Levinsohn is quite modern for his time, and his views in regards to reform are enlightenment and progressive. According to him, the Torah is based upon eternal principles, and it is upon these principles that the leaders of every generation construct their interpretation of Judaism. These interpretations which include changes, additions and omissions depend upon time and place. For surely, when the Israelites received the Torah, they were farmers and shepherds, and it is only later that laws and regulations concerning commerce and trade were evolved. These laws of adaptation, however, were based upon the eternal principles of the Torah.<sup>34.</sup>

In every generation, particulars change. The judges of any generation may interpret the social and civil laws in accordance with the time and place and conditions, so long as these interpretations and changes do not contradict the foundations and principles of the Torah, and so long as these changes are not contrary to "reason". Reason is an important factor in Levinsohn's views and philosophy of religion, for he believes that the knowledge of God, and the great love for Him, may be derived by "picturing God through our reason, and through a clear comprehension of His nature".<sup>35.</sup>

It is permitted therefore to add or to diminish from the Torah, in regards to these laws based upon time,

place and condition. Great principles founded upon justice and righteousness are expressed in the Torah, and in accordance with these principles, we are required to live and judge. The commandment "an eye for an eye" has been interpreted to mean, an amount of money equivalent to the value of an eye. Using reason and the principles of justice, this must be the intent of the Torah. This is the decision of the Talmud and Maimonides.<sup>36.</sup>

Levinsohn realizes that changes and reform take place in every age and in every period. And in discussing the development of the Mishna and the Talmud, and the appearance of Tanaim, Amoraim, Saboraim, Geonim, etc., he shows that there were always changes made and reforms introduced by these leaders. "All the reforms, prohibitions and laws of separation, actually strengthened our religion, and in every period and in every place these changes took place, out of real necessity. These reforms were introduced to keep in step with the many changes which took place between peoples, in conduct and in business."<sup>37.</sup>

In every age men of wisdom and men of understanding arose to guide and lead the people to better living, through various improvements. In addition to some of the improvements, there were many laws and restrictions which were

placed upon the people of their own generation, However, these many laws and restrictions accumulated throughout the ages (although they may have been intended for a limited period of time only), until people have come to accept them as binding as the fundamental laws of Sinai. Many of these have already become out of date and should therefore be done away with, for they have lost their usefulness and intent.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, since the Jews were scattered throughout the four corners of the earth, it is understandable that in every locality there arose men who added to the already burdensome restrictions. These they added in order to show their own great piety. Through these additions, emphasis was laid upon unimportant matters, whereas the fundamental laws of the Torah were neglected, leading to bad traits and deterioration among the people. This would not have occurred if the people had heeded the emphasis which the Torah and the Rabbis have placed upon laws relating to man and man. These ethical laws were always stressed even more than laws relating between God and man. For before man could approach God, the Rabbis felt, he had to come with "clean hands and a pure heart" fit to observe the commandments of God.<sup>39</sup>

From the various divisions and classifications which Levinsohn makes, the following may be stated regarding change and reform in Judaism.

(a) The individual cannot change of his own accord, laws which are to be found in the Torah or those of the rabbis, but must depend upon the decision of a Beth-Din.

(b) Laws and precepts which come under natural religion, cannot be changed, since they are based upon reason.

(c) The civil and conventional laws may be changed in particulars, but the fundamental principles must remain the same.

(d) Laws relating to commemoration of ~~historical~~ historical events may not be changed in their particulars, although there may be some additions, such as the commemoration of a miracle or a victory, such as Chanukah or Purim, and the various fast days. These institutions or celebrations may be permanent. However, those omitted may be for temporary duration only. This is so, since it may become necessary at some future date to observe the omitted institutions and practices.<sup>40.</sup>

(e) The various laws of separation for which no reasons are given, may be altered, added to, or put aside temporarily. Decisions regarding these laws must be rendered by a court acceptable to all Israel, and in accordance with the majority vote.<sup>41.</sup>

In regards to certain laws and precepts which the majority of the people are unable to observe, ways and

means should be devised to suspend these temporarily. The laws which fall under natural religion, however, may never be suspended. And even the laws which may be suspended, and the laws which may be changed must have the approval of "k'lal Israel". And if all Israel cannot accept them, the court is obligated to refrain from making these changes. This is done, in order to prevent divisions in Judaism, the rise of sects and the disunity of Israel. All changes in Judaism (with some exceptions noted above) may be made by a court, acceptable to all Jews, so that there may be only one kind of Judaism. This court may introduce "reforms and make changes according to time and place and need and in accordance with reason".<sup>42</sup>

Levinsohn was not a radical reformer by any means, although he may have appeared to be one to the people of his generation. He felt that of the tree of Judaism the roots must not be ~~disrupted~~ uprooted, but the decayed leaves must fall and the diseased branches be cut off. The healthy growth of the tree must be insured. Thus, "Levinsohn expressed himself as opposed to any fundamental religious reforms, though he afforded some latitude to minor ones, and like all the enlightened of his time, speaks against the excessive severities imposed by later Rabbis."<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Levinsohn "shows that Mosaism must be the religion of the philosopher, that without rabbinical restrictions the preservation of Jews and Judaism would have been an impossibility. Judaism is a progressive religion. Yet, though it had been and might be reformed from time to time, it was and must be along the line of its own genius."<sup>44</sup>.

## SECTS

Levinsohn describes the various sects which arose in Israel before the destruction of the Second Temple, and those which arose after the destruction. He analyzes the sects in rather great detail, and from his interpretation of Judaism, it is to be expected that he would not approve of sects, since they would thus tend to adulterate Judaism and cause division and disunity in Israel.

The Sadducees, the Nazirites or Essenes, and the believers in immersion (טובלי שחרית) are ably described. The Therapeutean Sect (or part of the Essenes) derives its name from the Greek "therapeutes" which has two root meanings.

(a) Virginity -- because the members abstained from any sexual intercourse.

(b) Healing -- because the members of this sect dealt with the healing of both body and soul.<sup>45</sup>

The Pharisees were of the group who followed Ezra the scribe, and represent the growth and flow of the true stream of Judaism, even to the present day. The name comes from the Hebrew root meaning "explanation", and those who accepted these "explanations" of the Torah (oral tradition), as accepted by the nation were known as the Pharisees. The teachings of the Pharisees, and later of the Tanaim



and Amoraim and Geonim, as crystallized after having come in contact with various philosophies and various influences were gathered into what have come to be known as Mishna and Talmud. Most of the traditions and interpretations of historic Judaism were incorporated. These interpretations depended greatly upon reason and the Pharisees did not hesitate (unlike the Saducees) to use many of the ideas prevalent in the various periods. Reason did not weaken nor destroy the religion of their fathers, but rather enforced it. Both tradition and ideas derived through reason are vitally concerned with the matter of God, and each supports and supplements the other.<sup>46</sup>

The Saducees of course rejected any of the oral traditions, and they abstained from research into the Sciences and the Godhead, and life after death, and even research into the Torah by means of reason.

The next major sect which Levinsohn describes is that of the Karaites which arose during the days of R. Juhudai Gaon in the year 700. Its founders were Anan and his son Saul in Babylonia. The adherents of this sect do not accept the explanations of the Bible as we possess it both in the Mishna and the Talmud. They accept only the "literal" translation of the Bible. Although they may have "explanations" of the Bible, yet they are not the accepted ones

according to the traditions and spirit of a living and ever adaptable Judaism.<sup>47</sup>

The Karaite sect is not an early one as their leaders claim, but rather a late one. The claim that their traditions extend over two thousand years is unfounded, for actually they cannot trace their ancestry.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the Karaites write certain books without any basis or foundation, and then they attribute these writings to great men of the past.<sup>49</sup> The Karaites have no right to exist.

In discussing the Chassidim of the eighteenth century, Levinsohn has nothing but contempt for them. His attitude is one of disdain, because they mislead the people. He condemns them as being full of superstitions, drunkards, interested only in eating, drinking and merry making.<sup>50</sup> They are interested more in gold and silver than in justice and righteousness.

The Chassidim exert a bad influence upon the people for they attack the rabbis and invent all kinds of false stories about them. Furthermore, they despise the Talmud, and belittle the rabbis who study the Bible, Mishna and Gemara. The Chassidim do not realize that the rabbis whom they criticize possess more exalted qualities than they. In addition, the Chassidim do not observe the oral law and thereby delay the coming of the Messiah.<sup>51</sup>

In his short work entitled "Emek Refaim", Levinsohn ridicules the Chassidim with their beliefs and superstitions concerning medicine. The Tzaddik or "Rebbe" is especially ridiculed for his foolishness. He is the source of folly and superstitions. Furthermore, he is an egotist, dressed in the best clothes and expensive jewelry, and even considers himself as the Messiah. He continuously drinks and eats of the best at the expense of his followers, completely ignoring the plight of the poor.<sup>52</sup>

In another little volume entitled "Dibre Zadikim", Levinsohn brings to the fore the ways of the Chassidim in their special houses of prayer, the "stiebels" or "kleizels". This he does in the form of conversations between two Chassidim. It is on the style of Erter and Perl, and his attitude toward the Chassidim is similar to theirs. It is one of ridicule and condemnation. Their dress is peculiar and their manners are intolerable. Their speech is peculiar and their Hebrew writing is atrocious. Indeed, the Chassidim are the cause of the low ebb of moral standards of the Jew at the present time.<sup>53</sup>

The attitude of Levinsohn is typical of the Maskilim of the day who felt that the Chassidim were greatly responsible for the lack of culture among the people. The stand of

Levinsohn has an uncompromizing condemnation of the Chassidim. One wonders, however, whether their emphasis upon purity of heart and soul, and prayer and the joy of living does not merit special commendation for them!

LEVINSOHN AND MENDELSSOHN

Both Levinsohn and Mendelssohn have exerted a great deal of influence in their respective countries and respective eras. Each stimulated culture among his brethren. While Mendelsson stimulated the Haskalah movement in the west, in Germany, Levinsohn did the same in the east, in Russia. Enlightenment first came to the west, and this of course may easily be understood, when we consider the fact that "Russian civilization itself was still in its infancy. Hence, the first rays of enlightenment travelled to Russian Jewry from Germany, where they were confined to the elite and reached the masses only when stated in Hebrew or and in Yiddish".<sup>54.</sup>

Although they lived in different periods and in different environment, yet, both Levinsohn and Mendelssohn had the identical purpose of bringing light and culture to their people. Levinsohn, following in the footsteps of his famous predecessor Mendelssohn whom he greatly admired and tried to emulate, attempted to bring to the masses both an awakening and an awareness for the much needed improvement in their social, economic and political status.<sup>55.</sup> Like Mendelssohn, he too was successful in laying the groundwork which finally led to increased culture among the Jews, increased economic opportunities and then emancipation itself.

The purpose of Levinsohn's role is expressed in the introduction to his book entitled "Bet Yehudah" when he says: "I am neither a high priest who may enter the Holy of Holies, nor a representative of the people, standing to ask mercy on their behalf, nor am I the Protector of the generation. My only aim is to seek the welfare of all Israel. Let the wise see and judge whether my purpose is for the welfare of the people, and if so let them accept my advice; and if it is not for the welfare of the people, let them reject it." 56.

And just as both Levinsohn and Mendelssohn had the same purpose of bringing culture to their brethren, and political rights and liberties, so they served also in the capacity of defenders of Judaism and Israel. Levinsohn ably defended the Talmud, Judaism and Israel. His concrete contribution was his vindication of Israel from that heinous charge against the Jew of using Christian blood. This Levinsohn did against the Englishman McCaul. Mendelssohn too defended Judaism and the Jewish people. He did this throughout his life, but especially when Johann Kaspar Lavater challenged him to refute a book written by the French theologian Charles Bonnet or embrace Christianity. Mendelssohn ably defended Judaism and showed that Judaism is indeed a very tolerant religion and one based upon reason and understanding. 57.

Indeed Mendelssohn "had become the most unostentatious and most successful reformer of one of the most unbending religious communities; nay, he defended them against their oppressors, with that philosophic calmness, with that philanthropic warmth, and with an irresistible eloquence, that even his most zealous opponents did not deny him their high respect." 58.

Both Levinsohn and Mendelssohn had a rather liberal point of view in regard to humanity. According to both all the inhabitants of the earth have a chance to gain salvation through their efforts, through natural religion of morality and good deeds. The purpose of man is to improve himself and help improve humanity. Not speculation but the doing of good is the aim of life. Mendelssohn "considered the ideal religion the one which was the most tolerant and which encompassed in love the entire human race." 59.

Both are rationalists, but Mendelssohn is more extreme in his rationalism. According to him all the rational laws are revealed laws. He places extreme faith in the power of reason. This is in accordance with the spirit of his time and country which considered rationalism as the religion of enlightenment and culture. 60.

Levinsohn placed more emphasis upon tradition, and reason was employed to collaborate or reject certain precepts based upon time and place.

As to religious views, Mendelssohn stands for the separation of Church and State in his discussions of each. According to him, each is a separate domain and cannot be controlled by the other. There are laws of the state and laws of religion. And indeed, he says, "happy the state which succeeds in governing the people by education itself; by instilling in their minds such morals and principles, as of themselves lead to actions of public utility, and need not be constantly impelled by the spur of the laws."<sup>61</sup>

The religious laws, according to Mendelssohn are unlike the civil laws. While every individual in society must abide by the laws of the state, whether he agrees with them or not, "religion knows no actions without persuasion, of no works without spirit, of no consonance of acting without consonance of thought".<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, "the state dictates and coerces; religion teaches and persuades".<sup>63</sup> In the sphere of religion it is a question of the heart and intent.

Levinsohn differs from Mendelssohn, for while speaking of civil and religious laws separately, yet Levinsohn considers them intertwined and inter-related, and even makes every effort to associate both religion and the state as one concept and places both civil and conventional laws (דת מוסרית), and the divine laws (דת אלהית) under the same term of religion (דת).<sup>64</sup> ~~The Jewish people are~~



~~The revealed religion has also revealed its own  
and even the fundamental content of the revealed religion  
the natural, namely, the doing good, of which we say, the  
word is the best.~~

Traditional in his views and yet modern in many respects, Levisohn combines historical Judaism with modern views. He claims that all the civil and ethical laws have been given unto us from the time of Moses or even before. They are not new, but they have to be brought to the fore and re-emphasized. 67.

Both Mendelssohn and Levisohn emphasize the importance of freedom and thought in Judaism. In matters dealing with the heart and mind Judaism is very tolerant. It doesn't force anyone to believe anything against his will or conscience. We are not commanded to believe but <sup>to</sup> do. Mendelssohn expresses this thought in the following way: "there is not amongst all the precepts and tenets of the Mosaic law, a single one which says 'thou shalt do'; or 'thou shalt forbear'." Furthermore, Mendelssohn feels that everyone "may act according to his own convictions, and rest perfectly assured that he will not displease his Creator in doing so." 69. Mendelssohn says furthermore that if he observes his religion, it is because of his "belief in its truth and purity". 70.

And like Mendelssohn, Levinsohn "emphasizes the importance of practical religion and states that every Jew, though, he may be allowed freedom of thought, is obligated to<sup>o</sup><sub>1</sub> serve the laws and not separate himself from the community of Israel."<sup>71</sup>.

Mendelssohn unlike Levinsohn does not accept any dogmas. He doesn't accept revelation as final and complete and not in the traditional way which Levinsohn accepts Torah from Sinai and revelation. Concerning revelation and dogmas, Mendelssohn says the following: "I believe that Judaism knows nothing of a revealed religion, in the sense in which it is taken by Christians; laws, judgements, statutes, rules of life, information of the will of God, and lessons how to conduct themselves in order to attain both temporal and spiritual happiness; those laws, commandments, etc., were revealed to them through Moses, in a miraculous and super-natural manner; but no dogmas, no saving truths, no general self-evident positions. Those the Lord always reveals to us, the same as to the rest of mankind, by nature and by events; but never in words or written characters." <sup>72</sup>.

Furthermore, he states that "the value of religion does not consist in the purity of the dogmas, it teaches, but in the ethics and morality it inculcates." <sup>73</sup>.

Levinsohn places greater emphasis upon dogmas. He also believes in the traditional view that the Torah as we possess it today is the exact one given to Moses by God himself. Yes, every word in the Torah is the word of God. Mendelssohn may thus be looked upon as believing in "progressive revelation" while Levinsohn in progressive interpretation of the law.

There is no doubt, but that Levinsohn kept closer to tradition and to historical Judaism. He was more a man of the people than Mendelssohn. In simple, clear and unphilosophic way he reached the hearts and minds of the masses of Jewry of Russia. He treated all his works with warmth and with a great personal love for Judaism and for the Jewish people. This may be discerned in all his works. Mendelssohn, however, treated "his subject (in Jerusalem) as an impartial non-Jewish philosopher might have done. He is frequently too reserved for fear of offending.

Levinsohn, in Greek-Catholic Russia is strictly frank." 74.

Finally, comparing the two, <sup>it may be said</sup> ~~the Christian writer~~

~~finds~~ that Levinsohn "has exerted an ever greater influence in his time than Mendelssohn". 75. For while Mendelssohn lived in an atmosphere of great intellectual activity, both among Jews and non-Jews, Levinsohn lived in a period and an environment where darkness prevailed and very little culture seemed to flourish, even among the non-Jews. Only

a few cultured individuals existed, and he therefore had to create enlightenment out of his own being and his erudition in the lore and traditions of his people. <sup>76.</sup>

Indeed, both were champions of their people!

IN OUR DEFENSE

DEFENDER OF JUDAISM

Besides presenting an educational program, social and religious reforms, Levinsohn stands out as a defender of Judaism and a defender of his people. In his work entitled "Zerubbabel", he defends the Talmud and the Jewish religion and its practices against the Englishman McCaul who had written "Old Paths" -- an attack against the Talmud and Judaism.<sup>1\*</sup>

At the request of Sir Moses Montefiore and other distinguished Jews, Levinsohn undertook to write this work and labored more than twelve years before it was completed. It is his greatest work and masterpiece. In it he sets forth the religious and ethical teachings of Judaism. Comprising four ~~many~~ volumes, a detailed analysis of his religious philosophy is presented, with clarity and precision, not lacking, however, in warmth and enthusiasm and love for Judaism and for the Jewish people.

Levinsohn defends the Talmud against all attacks. He points out that the Talmud, as an explanation of the Bible is an encyclopedic work, the result of many generations, in which scholars and rabbis at different times, places and circumstances have presented their views and interpretations of Judaism. For someone, therefore, to criticize the Talmud, he must be acquainted with the entire method of Talmudic logic. In addition, he must be an expert in the language

of the Bible, Mishna and Talmud; also he must have a sound knowledge in Semitic languages and other languages which are to be found in the Talmud.<sup>2.</sup>

Other requirements for one who is to criticize the Talmud include an understanding of the history of every ancient nation, its laws, rules, and way of life. This is not all, for he must also take into account the time and place and circumstances upon which certain utterances have been made. Only one who has such an encyclopedic knowledge is qualified to discuss or criticize the Talmud.<sup>3.</sup>

McCaul doesn't possess all these requirements, and therefore should refrain from criticizing the Talmud. He is not fit to do so. For he is completely confused and uninformed. He is not aware, for example that only the Mishna is the Oral Law. In addition, he mistook the various discussions as part of the laws, whereas, only the final decisions stand as laws. Another misconception, says Levinsohn, is that the person who attacked the Talmud did not distinguish between Halacha which is binding and Haggadah which is not.<sup>4.</sup>

An added drawback for the critic of the Talmud is that he does not know what is essential and fundamental in the Jewish religion, and what is mere custom. He thus confuses both, and criticizes certain customs as being fundamental in the religion of Israel.<sup>5.</sup>

Still another fault in his criticism, lies in the fact that he quotes short phrases from the Talmud, and usually takes them out of context, thus perverting its intended meaning. He also adds and omits certain words and phrases which do not fit his erroneous thesis and claims. Weaving commentaries into the actual text of the Talmud is also one of his techniques. This tends to mislead those who read his book of criticism, since they do not possess an adequate knowledge of the Talmud to discern the techniques of the impostor.<sup>6.</sup>

Throughout the work, Levinsohn ably illustrates that McCaul who attacked the Talmud was ignorant of its contents, and what is more significant, proved himself a liar, using every technique and every trick to pervert the true meaning of the Talmudical contents. McCaul built up a case based upon deceit, fraud and treachery.<sup>7.</sup>

The Talmud according to Levinsohn is far from worthless. On the contrary it serves a very excellent purpose. It is the practical guide of the Jew for leading a better and fuller life. And to the rabbis and leaders it offers a system of laws which serves as the legal code in their rendering of any decisions. The Talmud also offers the opportunity for scientific study.<sup>8.</sup>

An analysis of the Talmud reveals that it is very much worthwhile, for it contains a system of laws and regulations



by which man might live in harmony in a society. First there are to be found those laws which existed before the giving of the Torah. These laws were prevalent in all the advanced nations, beginning with the age of Noah and continuing to the time of Moses.<sup>9</sup> These may be considered under "natural religion" and included the following:

- (a) Prohibition of worshipping idols and planets.
- (b) Acceptance of One God.
- (c) Prohibition of murder.
- (d) Prohibition of adultery.
- (e) Prohibition of robbery.
- (f) Prohibition of eating of blood.
- (g) A court of justice with judges and operative  
in the lives of the people.<sup>10</sup>

The Jews have also taken upon themselves two additional commandments, namely, circumcision, and the abstaining from eating the sinew of the thigh.<sup>11</sup>

The seven Noahitic laws form the nucleus of all the laws of the Torah. It is upon these laws that the Torah is based. Whoever observed them, even if he be a non-Jew may be considered, according to the Talmud as a "Chassid", and merits "A portion in the world to come".<sup>12</sup> The seven Noahitic laws, just as the Torah itself is based upon the following two foundations:

- (a) The abolition of idol worship and the instituting in its place the belief in One God.
- (b) The love of our fellowmen.<sup>13.</sup>

The Talmud is very sympathetic toward the non-Jew. When the Christians observe all these laws of natural religion, they too, may be considered brethren of the Jews. This is an extremely liberal view, and Levinsohn thus shows that there need be no friction between the Jew and the non-Jew, so long as both follow the elementary required laws of the natural religion.<sup>14.</sup>

To the charge that the Talmud is worthless and has no basis, Levinsohn shows that without the Talmud, Judaism would have become stagnant and petrified. Throughout the ages, it was absolutely necessary to explain and interpret the scriptures (which no one would deny is the word of God), because the laws in scriptures had been forgotten by the people. Furthermore, reforms had to be instituted in order to strengthen the religion and meet the conditions of the times. The Talmud does not contradict the Bible, but rather, it is like a microscope revealing hidden and heretofore unknown or forgotten meanings. According to reason, it is obligatory upon every generation of scholars and rabbis to interpret the Torah for their generation. To accept the decision of the judges of the period in which one lives is imperative upon the Israelite.<sup>15.</sup> (Deut., 17.)

The charge that the composers of the Talmud were ignorant men is unfounded. On the contrary, they were men of great wisdom and understanding and learning. This may be discerned from the great homage paid the rabbis of the Talmud by such scholars as Ibn Ezra, Maimonides, Mendelssohn, Buxdorf, Wolf, J. Reuchlin, Dr. I. J. Bellerman of Berlin, and others.<sup>16</sup> The great Christian scholar John Buxdorf especially, says Levinsohn, recognized the greatness of the Talmud as an encyclopedic work of knowledge, including in its pages, precepts dealing with the knowledge of God, juridical teachings, medicine, physics, ethics, politics, astronomy and other branches of learning. St. Augustine, too, in his work entitled, "The City of God", praises the Talmud, as does John Reuchlin.<sup>17</sup>

The Talmud is indeed a great work. It is an explanation of the Torah, given to Moses, and most of the religions are either dependent upon the Bible or have drawn inspiration therefrom. Mohammedanism, founded by Mohammed is founded upon the Koran which in turn is dependent upon the Hebrew Bible.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the religions of the Samaritans, Abyssinians, Sadducees, Karaites have their foundations in the Torah of Moses. And no one would deny that Christianity, in all its denominations, is based upon the Bible. And throughout the ages, various nations drew

precepts for their ethical life from the Jews. Levinsohn finally points out that Flavius Josephus has shown that such philosophers as Solon, Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle and others have accepted many of the Jewish ethics and ideals.<sup>19</sup>

To defend Judaism, Levinsohn also emphasizes the fact that Christianity has its roots in Judaism. He implies, it seems, that an attack against Judaism is really an attack against Christianity and its ethics. All religions have drawn from Judaism and indeed it was intended to be thus. He quotes Genesis 17 in which it is said: "and in thy seed all the peoples of the earth will be blessed", and another such expression, "and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."<sup>17</sup> (Exodus 19). Levinsohn interprets this to mean that the Jews should serve "as teachers for the entire world".<sup>20</sup> This idea of the mission of Israel which has its foundation in the Torah and the prophets later became a cardinal concept in Reform Judaism.

It is interesting to note that freedom of conscience was regarded highly among the Jews. Indeed, Levinsohn points out that any one who doesn't accept the various beliefs or views regarding the nature of God, immortality of the soul, the hereafter, resurrection, or the coming of the Messiah, is not regarded a rebel. These beliefs are not

mentioned anywhere in the Bible in specific terms, but rather as hints only.<sup>21</sup> The Torah emphasizes deeds, in order that everyone may be able to observe them, the wise and the lesser wise, as it is written (Leviticus 18.5) "ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them. I am the Lord".

Levinsohn continues to answer every accusation made against the Talmud. To McCaul's accusation that the Talmud excludes Christians from the hereafter, he retorts that this is false. On the contrary, the Talmud emphasizes that "all the righteous of the nations have a portion in the world to come." The requirement, of course, is the observance of the seven Noahitic laws.

As a true defender of the Talmud and of Judaism, Levinsohn defends the rabbis and teachers of Israel, whom McCaul slanders. Far from being proud and selfish, the rabbis had to have the qualification of being righteous people in addition to their scholarship. Many of them taught without pay or reward, and led a life of consecration to the service of God and mankind.<sup>22</sup>

To other accusations, Levinsohn, like a true champion of the cause of his people emphasizes that Judaism has high regard for women, and indeed it is to be found that throughout the ages women were well versed in the Torah, as exemplified by Bruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir.<sup>23</sup>

Does the Talmud have a narrow view of morality and ethics? Of course not! The Talmud does not encourage tribalism or isolationism. On the contrary, it stresses kindness and brotherly love for all. "And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", was not limited for Jews alone, but included all human beings.

As to the accusation that the Talmud speaks out against the nations, Levinsohn shows by concrete examples, that this refers only to idolatrous nations. The Talmud speaks against these nations in order to uproot magic and superstitions from among the Jews.<sup>24.</sup>

Levinsohn finally defends the Talmud against the accusation that it lowers the position of women. He also defends the views of the Talmud in regards to divorce, dietary laws, circumcision, etc.<sup>25.</sup>

Concerning this defense of the Talmud and Judaism on the part of Levinsohn, Waxman says the following:

"The refutations are valuable not merely for their apologetics, but because they clarify the views of the Talmud on such important subjects and principles, as love of humanity, freedom of thought, the position of the ignorant man (am ha-Aretz) and of woman in Judaism, the Sabbath, and other theological principles."<sup>26.</sup>

DEFENDER OF ISRAEL

Not only does Levinsohn defend the Talmud and Judaism, but he also defends his people. As such an advocate, he is at his best. His work entitled "Effes Dammim" ("No Blood") consists of "a series of conversations at Jerusalem between a patriarch of the Greek Church and a Chief Rabbi of the Jews, concerning the malicious charge against the Jews of using Christian Blood."<sup>27</sup> It is a defense of the Jews of Damascus (in the famous Damascus Affair), who were accused of using Christian blood after "the priest Thomaso had mysteriously disappeared."<sup>28</sup> Translated at the request of Moses Montefiore, it served to vindicate the Jews.

Through the various conversations between Maimoon and Simmias, ~~who represent their respective faiths,~~ who represent their respective faiths, the result is a refutation of the heinous charge. Simmias quotes from Herder that "the time will come when it will be no longer asked in Europe whether a man is an Israelite or a Christian."<sup>\*</sup> Maimoon, however, is not so optimistic and immediately introduces the problem and tells of the accusation against the Jews.

Simmias believes that the accusation against the Jew using Christian blood dates from "the beginning of the Christian religion".<sup>29</sup> The rabbi, however, points out that the accusation is much later and had first appeared "at the time of Alfonso, the tenth king of Castille."<sup>30</sup>

\*From Herder's Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit. Tome 4, p. 41.

Maimoon goes on to show that the early Christians themselves were accused of all kinds of evil practices by such distinguished men as Marcus Aurelius, Nero, Domitian and Plinius. Yes, even the grave charge now brought against the Jews. And in the early history of Christianity, "the heathens asserted that the Christians used human blood at their Pass-over."<sup>31</sup> This accusation against the Christians owes its origin to "the *hætia*, which is a ceremony instituted in commemoration of the body and blood of Christ."<sup>32</sup> The accusation was later transferred to the Jews, when the Jews became scattered among the nations of the world.

It is interesting to note that when Simmias asks Maimoon whether some charges against the Jews are true, Maimoon offers the same argument that is being presented nowadays. He says: "But why should the whole nation of Israelites be stigmatized for the faults of a few individuals?"<sup>33</sup>

The rabbi goes on to say that the Christians hate the Jews almost from their infancy. This is so, because of the "mental vision" of the crucifixion of Jesus which the Christian child is imbued from infancy. He is told that the Jews "were the instigators of such a tragedy."<sup>34</sup> Thus the child naturally acquires an abhorrence and hatred for the Jews. As he grows older his hatred increases, for writers and preachers on the subject of Christianity emphasized time and



again the sufferings of Christ, and described it in a most pathetic manner. And furthermore, in the New Testament and amongst the Church interpreters of this book, "the wickedness of the Israelites is, in short, one of the essential parts of the groundwork of Christianity".<sup>35</sup>. This has a great effect upon every Christian.

Do the Jews hate the Christians? To this the Rabbi answers as follows: "If the Israelites do bear them any ill will, it can only arise from the bad treatment which they have so frequently met with from the Christians. But the disposition of our people is not to cherish hatred. On the contrary, they are by nature inclined to love the country in which they live, and the people who happen to be their neighbors."<sup>36</sup>. Yes, they are ever faithful to the country in which they dwell, although in many instances the country does not deserve their loyalty, because they are being discriminated against and persecuted.

To prove the groundless blood accusation, the Rabbi refers to Scriptures which the Christians themselves regard as holy. He quotes the following Biblical passages: "Thou shalt not murder" (Exod. 20:13). This, he says, has reference to the entire human race. Another verse is the following: "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made He man." (Ex. 19:6).

The accusation, furthermore, is preposterous because the Jew plainly and specifically is prohibited from eating any blood. And he is actually commanded to preserve life, and do no harm whatever to any human being. The Talmud constantly emphasizes all laws by which man shall live and not die. It is an abhorrence for a Jew to use any blood, and "if it were indeed an established fact that we did so, the whole world would rise up against us to our utter annihilation." 37.

The practices of the Jew which appear strange to the non-Jew may easily be explained. Red wine is used because it is preferred by Eastern peoples. The eating of Matzoh, of reclining on the sofa, of eating bitter herbs, commemorate the redemption from Egypt. All these practices tend to enforce the special significance of the holiday. This celebration is not strange, for the Romans too had similar feasts.<sup>38</sup> Israel must not be condemned for having these practices.

After bringing evidences from Biblical and Talmudic sources, and from Jewish tradition to prove the innocence of the Jews from such a vile and heinous accusation, the rabbi discusses historical sources. He maintains that before Christianity became powerful and began to persecute the Jews, the Romans especially regarded the Jews with great respect and admiration. During the reign of Trajan and Emperor Julian, and Queen Zenobia, Jews had the upper hand, "yet history contains no trace whatever of their having been

suspected of doing anything of the kind at that era; there is none even in the history of the Christian Church, which records all the evils which the Christians suffered from other nations by other means.<sup>39</sup>

The blood accusation arose for the first time about the middle of the thirteenth century in Spain and Portugal, when Christianity became all powerful. From Spain "after the introduction of the Inquisition into Spain in the year 1430, it spread rapidly all over Europe."<sup>40</sup> It captivated especially the minds and hearts of the ignorant masses who were always incited by prejudiced and fanatical priests.

It is interesting to note that Levinsohn is very modern and gives a psychological explanation for the blood accusation on the part of Christians, when he puts into the mouth of the rabbi the following words: "Doubtless the Christians, when they had become powerful in the world, remembered with anger the treatment which the early members of their religion had received from the Romans, and other Heathens, and wished to avenge their fate; but, as there was no Heathen nation against whom they could proceed, the Romans and others having been gradually converted to Christianity, their wrathful feelings burst forth upon the Jews."<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the ages, however, men of good will arose in defense of the Jews. Levinsohn is hopeful that such men will also arise now to defend the Jews and speak favorably

in their behalf. And at the end of the various conversations, the Patriarch of the Greek Church fully accepts the Rabbi's defense of the Jews against the blood accusation and concludes with the following words: "Brother Maimoon, blessed is the Lord who did not turn away from the prayer which I offered up to Him, that truth, which throughout the whole course of my life, I have cherished might not be withheld from me now."<sup>42</sup>.

Since the Patriarch realizes that ignorance is responsible for misconceptions, he asks the rabbi for a list of books for information regarding the Jewish religion and the Jewish people. The rabbi offers this list and hopes that this enlightenment will create better appreciation and better understanding of the Jews. Levineohn through this work has vindicated his people against the vile and groundless accusation.

## EVALUATION

A man may be evaluated by considering his contributions and the influence which he exerted over others. No other man has done more for the enlightenment of the Russian Jews than Isaac Baer Levinsohn. No one perhaps has exerted a greater influence upon their lives.

The life of Levinsohn was ever a life of dedication, dedicated to the welfare of his people whom he loved greatly. And "by his self-negation and his wretched fortunes, his isolated life in a remote town, weak in body, yet working for the elevation of his co-religionists, he won the admiration of his contemporaries without exception."<sup>1</sup>

For over forty years he labored for the sake of Judaism and the Jewish people. He spoke and wrote on behalf of the Jews in order to ameliorate their degraded spiritual, economic, cultural and political status. He defended Judaism and the Jewish religion, and was the continuous spokesman of his people -- a true advocate of Israel. His works "Zerubbabel" and "Efes Dammim" excellently presenting and explaining Judaism, bear witness to the good which he has accomplished.

To evaluate the importance of Levinsohn adequately, we must take into consideration the influence which he exerted over his contemporaries, especially the younger generation of Maskilim. These young men of enlightenment

needed someone to look up to. In Levinsohn they found the man, and "during his life he was regarded by the Maskilim as the fountain head of all wisdom. To him they looked as their teacher and guide; him they consulted in every emergency, and he was the mediator between them and antagonistic co-religionists on the one hand, and a tyrannical government on the other."<sup>2</sup>

Levinsohn was also regarded in high esteem by various great Hebrew poets. Adam ha-Cohen Lebensohn expressed his delight time and again in reading the works of Levinsohn. Judah Leib Gordon also constantly sought the advice of Levinsohn in regards to his own writings. Gordon felt that such an approval by a great author such as Levinsohn would be sufficient guarantee as to the merit of his own writings. Gordon, in a letter to Levinsohn, writes the following: "I beseech thee to consider my writings, and determine whether God has brought success to me. For who but a man of your standing may understand the importance of such a work for the youth? And who but you knows how to achieve great things out of insignificant ones, and who but you knows the way to solve difficult tasks as well as easy ones? I am convinced that you will understand the purpose of my books, and if you approve of it, please do not withhold such favorable comment from me. For when men will see your approval of the work, it will become all the more significant. I will remain your

most humble servant, sitting at your feet and drinking of the wisdom of thy words." <sup>3</sup>.

Levinsohn labored all his life for the spiritual elevation of his people, "for reforms in Jewish education, in the training of rabbis, in the reorganization of the Rabbinate, and the management of the communities, and finally for the economic pursuits." <sup>4</sup> There is no doubt but that progress was achieved through his efforts, for "on November 13, 1844, the enactment on the 'education of the Jewish Youth' was issued. It provided for the establishment of elementary and secondary schools for Jews and for the training of our future leaders by means of two higher schools for Rabbis at Wilna and Zhitomir." <sup>5</sup>.

Concerning these schools which were set up, there was a great deal of discontent among the Jews. Some felt that these schools went too far in attempting to Russify the Jews, while weaning them away from Judaism. There were some however, among the Maskilim who wanted a complete transformation overnight, without regard to the sensibilities of the masses of Jewry. Here again Levinsohn assumed the middle path and swayed neither to one extreme nor to the other. For while advocating changes and reform, he realized that you cannot force people to change overnight. He emphasized that the leaders must guide the people slowly but surely along the middle path, with love and patience and understanding.

Furthermore, he felt that just as it was necessary to eliminate the bad habits and faults of the people, so it was also necessary to do away with the faults and shortcomings of the enlightenment itself.<sup>6</sup>

It may be stated that the Maskilim "were just as fanatical in their ways as their opponents. The ill-feeling existing between the Maskilim and the orthodox elements contributed in no small degree to the failure of the educational reforms planned by the government."<sup>7</sup>

Although a reformer in the true meaning of the word, yet Levinsohn was not a rebel. He did not divorce himself from Jewish tradition, but rather "remained on strictly Orthodox ground in his writings, and in the name of traditional religion itself he attacks superstition, and urges the obligatory study of the Hebrew language, the pursuit of the various branches of knowledge, and the learning of trades. His profound scholarship, the gentleness and sincerity of his writing, earned for him the respect of even the most orthodox."<sup>8</sup>

In discussing Levinsohn's success in reaching the populace, Klausner says the following: "He knew how to set forth such learning as he had in a manner appropriate to the needs of the vital purpose he had set before himself, and also intelligibly to the contemporary Hebrew



reader. To such a reader Levinsohn's books unfolded a lively picture of the historical development of the laws and customs of Israel, with a description of the economic and political condition of the Jew at various epochs. Thus, the Jewish reader learned to understand which Jewish customs could be accounted fundamental, from the point of view of Jewish religion and culture, and which secondary and superfluous, a mere painful inheritance imposed on Judaism during the Middle ages, as a result of persecutions from without and of the confined life within the ghetto."<sup>9</sup>.

Levinsohn, it is true, was not an original thinker but his great contribution lies in the fact that he took views which had been neglected, forgotten for centuries and brought them to the fore. He elucidated fundamental principles and enlarged on them, adding various new interpretations and explanations, thus creating a strong edifice constructed upon tradition and upon a firm foundation.<sup>10</sup> However, whether an original thinker or not, a great scholar or not, the fact remains that Levinsohn "counterbalanced the negative tendency of the Haskalah and contributed toward making it a positive and constructive force in Jewish life."<sup>11</sup>.

Of course, we cannot compare the works of Levinsohn with those of Maimonides or even Krochmal. Their works are

far greater in depth and in analysis. Furthermore, theirs are the works of systematic philosophers and deep thinkers. It must be stated, however, that their works have not reached the multitudes in their time as did the works of Levinsohn. His were works intended for the masses, with the one purpose of instructing and uplifting them of their low intellectual abyss. While the works of Maimonides and Krochmal appealed more to the minds those of Levinsohn captivated the heart. The language which Levinsohn employed was clear, simple, practical. He was interested in the masses of Jewry rather than in a few gifted intellectuals. He poured forth proof for his thesis in order to influence even the simplest individual. He was primarily interested in the practical application of his teachings rather than in theoretical speculation.

Concerning the contributions of Isaac Baer Levinsohn, these may be discerned in his educational views, his religious teachings, his social reforms, and in his defense of his religion and people, which were fully discussed in this study. The following verse taken from Ecclesiastes chapter 12:11 beautifully describes the influence of the works of Levinsohn: "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails well fastened are those that are composed in collections".

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