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ALAN DAVID RABISHAW

TWO CRITICS OF CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RELIGION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY GALICIA:

JUDAH LEIB MIESES AND JOSHUA HESCHEL SCHARR

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**TWO CRITICS OF CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RELIGION
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GALICIA:
JUDAH LEIB MIESES AND JOSHUA HESCHEL SCHORR**

by

Alan David Rabishaw

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of the requirements for Ordination

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DIGEST

This thesis examines the religious radicalism of two nineteenth-century Maskilim, Judah Leib Mieses (1798-1831) and Joshua Heschel Schorr (1814-1895). Both men, as part of the left wing of the Galician Haskalah movement, were highly critical of Hasidism and Rabbinism. They believed that traditional Judaism was neither rational nor congruous with a modern lifestyle. Mieses presented his views in his primary work, Kinat Haemet. Schorr presented his radical religious views, over the course of many decades, in his periodical, Hehalutz.

Chapter One discusses the relationship between the German Haskalah and the development of the Haskalah in Galicia. In Germany conditions were such that the Haskalah thrived. Yet, in Galicia, despite the fact that the goals of the Maskilim were similar to the ideals of the Austro-Hungarian government's enlightened absolutism, traditionalist elements in the society prevailed over the Jewish masses.

Chapter Two looks at the reason Hasidism had a stranglehold on the Galician Jewish masses. Then, this chapter focuses on the religious radicalism of Mieses. It outlines his attacks on the Hasidic leadership and their foolish beliefs and practices. Mieses placed the Hasidim in a long chain of religious leaders who have purposely misguided the masses in order to achieve personal glory and profit. Some attention is also given to Mieses' vision of contemporary Judaism.

Chapter Three outlines the religious radicalism of Schorr. Schorr was clearly influenced by both Geiger and the "Scientific Study of Judaism". He was willing to place the entire corpus of traditional Jewish literature, even the Torah itself, under the lens of critical analysis. Schorr believed that his generation was not bound by the decisions of earlier sages and, further, that every person in every generation possessed the right to determine his own religious practice. Some attention is also given to Schorr's vision of enlightened Jewish education.

Chapter Four compares and contrasts the religious radicalism of Mises and Schorr. It also examines the gap that existed between the left-wing Maskilim and the moderate Maskilim, regarding the posture that Judaism should take in modern society. Solomon Judah Rapoport, a moderate Maskil, was among Mises' and Schorr's most bitter opponents.

For her love and her friendship,
For her unending encouragement and patience,
For all the hugs, kisses and smiles,
For the strength she gives me,
For the next seventy or so years we will spend together,
This thesis is dedicated to Laura.

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I am fortunate that there are people and places that have shown me that, despite the rational arguments of the nineteenth-century Maskilim, Judaism really begins in the heart.

Rabbi Mark Shapiro will always be my rabbi and Congregation BJBE will always be my temple. MSS has shown me that a rabbi not only teaches Judaism, but lives it. He is my teacher, role model, confidant, and friend. As I venture into the rabbinate I have no choice but to take my rabbi and my temple with me--they are an inseparable part of me.

Words cannot express how I feel about Roy, Eliot, Aryeh and Elyce, Jerry and Olin Sang Ruby Union Institute. I know how much they all care for me and I hope that each knows how much I care for them.

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PREFACE

While most scholars recognize the relationship between the German Haskalah and the development of the Reform movement in Germany, little attention has been given to the reform-minded activities of the Galician Haskalah. Ezra Spicehandler suggests that this oversight may be due to a number of factors: a) the ideas of the Eastern European Maskilim never led to institutional results, b) many historians had prejudices against Reform and were unwilling to associate the Haskalah with it, and c) some early historians of the Reform movement were unfamiliar with or unequipped to read the Hebrew literature that represented ideas of the Eastern European Maskilim.

This work is intended to explore the relationship between the left-wing of the Galician Haskalah and the development of Jewish religious reforms. Since it would be impossible in the scope of this project to explore all the Galician Maskilim with "Reformist" tendencies, I will focus on Judah Leib Mieses' Kinat Haemet (published in 1828) and Joshua Heschel Schorr's Hehalutz (published sporadically between 1851 and 1887).

Despite the fact that Schorr lived for the better part of seventy years while Mieses fell to the cholera epidemic of 1831 at the young age of thirty-three, there are striking bits of irony that

unite the lives of these two men and make it appropriate to study their works together. First of all, a mutual friend and prominent maskil himself, Isaac Erter, was with Miseses when he died.¹ Upon Erter's own untimely death in 1851, Schorr, his good friend and colleague, took it upon himself to complete a manuscript which Erter was writing. The paper happened to be the introductory article to a new periodical which the two men had agreed to co-edit, Hehalutz. Second, Solomon Judah Rapoport, a fellow maskil who was known for his moderate views, especially when compared to the likes of Miseses and Schorr, in the preface to the biography of Nathan of Rome, rebuked Miseses severely for the blistering attack which he launched against rabbinic Judaism in Kinat Haemet.² Years later, in Hehalutz, Schorr made the moderate Rapoport the object of his own writing.

Finally, in 1816, Rabbi Jacob Ornstein, the chief rabbi in Lemberg imposed a *herem* on a group of four prominent young maskilim. Included in this group were Rapoport and Erter, but noticeably missing was Miseses. Joseph Klausner suggests that Miseses may have been excluded because of his extreme wealth or because Ornstein attributed his radical attitude to his youthful misjudgment.³ By 1861, Schorr must have felt as though he himself

¹Israel Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, Trans. and Ed. Bernard Martin, 12 vols. (New York, 1977), 10: 95. Zinberg reports that when Erter moved to Brody to practice medicine in 1831, his good friend Judah Leib Miseses died in his arms his first day there.

²Meyer Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 3 (New Jersey, 1960): 195. Waxman explains that the attack, which does not mention Miseses by name, appears in the preface to the biography of Nathan of Rome.

³Joseph Klausner, Hahistoria Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah, vols. 2 and 4 (Jerusalem, 1953), 2:269.

was in *herem* . Because of his difficult personality as well as the unrelenting attacks which he directed at anyone who disagreed with him, he was left alone as the sole contributor to Hehalutz.

It should be noted that there is not a significant amount of scholarly work that focuses on these two men. Bernard Martin's translation of Israel Zinberg's, A History of Jewish Literature, is the only English work to devote serious attention (about ten pages) to Miseses. Spicehandler (in a series of articles presented in the Hebrew Union College Annual) and Joseph Klausner (in Hahistoria Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah) are the only ones to give Schorr serious attention. Further, Spicehandler's writings represent the only English discussion of either man's influence on the development of Jewish religious reforms.

In an attempt to better understand the contributions of Miseses and Schorr to the development of Jewish religious reforms this thesis sets out three basic goals: a) to identify and understand the objectives of the Haskalah in Galicia, b) to present and analyze the religious radicalism of Judah Leib Miseses, and c) to present and analyze the religious radicalism of Joshua Heschel Schorr.

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CHAPTER ONE:

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE HASKALAH IN GERMANY AND GALICIA

A majority of the world Jewish population was centered in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. This Jewish population was spread throughout the Western, Central, and Eastern portions of the continent, united, primarily, by a desire to keep with traditions of the past. However, by the mid 1700's conditions were such that many Jews in Germany were ready to associate themselves with the intellectual movement that began to spread throughout the land. Meyer Waxman described the state of the German Jews at this time as follows:

That Jewry was, in the middle of the eighteenth century, in a state of spiritual exhaustion. It lacked, first of all, the strength and solidity derived from the compactness of masses. . . . They were scattered in small communities throughout the land.¹

In addition to a sense of "spiritual exhaustion," certain social, economic and political realities in the German states also made the lives of the Jews difficult.

¹Meyer Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 3 (New Jersey, 1960): 58.

For the most part, Jews found themselves stuck in ghettos with no real chance to participate in the larger society. They were not allowed to buy real estate or engage in agriculture. Further, most Jews were limited to moneylending and petty trade.² Waxman remarks that "these discriminations generated in the hearts and minds of many Jews a feeling of impatience with the ghetto, its life, and all that was connected to it."³ However, in contrast with their dismal ghetto existence, the Jews found that the attitudes of the non-Jewish population became more favorable. Suddenly, there was a chance to establish relations with their non-Jewish neighbors. Therefore, these Jews sought to establish social and cultural ties. The efforts of these Jews to establish such relationships mark the beginning of a process that eventually inspired profound changes in the political and spiritual make-up of the entire world Jewish population.

Initially, many Jews in Germany found themselves changing their outer appearances (shaving of beards and wearing of wigs), clothing, and private and public behavior, hoping that these changes would lead to greater social proximity (social gatherings and card games) with their non-Jewish neighbors.⁴ While social relationships remained somewhat limited, cultural assimilation, namely the learning and using of the vernacular, was more widespread. Jews who knew the language of the land in which they lived had a greater opportunity to make commercial and political

²*Ibid.*, 59.

³*Ibid.*

⁴H. H. Sasson *et al.*, A History of The Jewish People (Cambridge, 1976), 780.

contacts than those who did not. Even a task as common as reading the newspaper increased the prestige of the Jew in the eyes of the community.⁵ As early as the 1730's-1740's children of well-to-do Jewish families in Germany studied the vernacular as a regular component in their education. These well-to-do families eventually served as models for all sections of Jewish society "and knowledge of the language spoken in the country of residence gradually became common in the Jewish community."⁶

These increased contacts with the non-Jewish world wrought many changes for the Jewish community. While Jews of the early eighteenth century were, for the most part, convinced that adherence to the laws and precepts of their faith would insure a special relationship with God, those who established relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors, as well as those who were desperate to establish such relationships, were often willing to abandon certain beliefs and practices required by the Oral and Written Law . Some of these people were even willing to go to the extreme and abandon Judaism altogether by converting to Christianity. Others were inclined to explore ways to modernize the Jewish community so that their Judaism would not interfere with their integration into the greater non-Jewish society. Those who devoted their efforts to this modernization of Jewish society in eighteenth-century Germany were recognized as the first of the Maskilim, while the ideological justifications for their changes

⁵*Ibid.*, 781.

⁶*Ibid.*

were based on the Enlightenment which was quickly spreading throughout Europe.

The Haskalah was a complex movement which aimed to change the Jewish way of life through education and enlightenment. The main objective of the Maskilim was to create a Jewish renaissance that would bring the Jews into the modern world and closer to their non-Jewish neighbors. Instead of accepting the way of life that was directed by Jewish tradition, the Maskilim wanted Jewish life to reflect the modern belief in the "supremacy of reason." Following the ideas of the European Enlightenment, which were prevalent in the secular and philosophic literature of their time, the Maskilim claimed that the human mind was the criterion for judging all social and natural phenomena. Ultimately, the Maskilim wanted the Jewish masses to let the power of reason lead them away from the backward practices that had come to characterize their Jewish way of life. If the Haskalah were to succeed, the Jewish masses would have to modernize their way of life and, eventually, be accepted in the greater society.

Before the Jewish masses endeavored to learn German they functioned inside their ghettos by speaking an informal Yiddish, which only served to further separate them from the larger community. While there were a few Jews who were able to understand German, the only formal language which was familiar to a majority of the Jews was Hebrew. However, since Hebrew was considered the "holy language" it was only used for prayer, Torah, and Talmud study. As the Haskalah began to spread, it became

evident to the Maskilim that the Hebrew language, contrary to its traditional usage, could serve as an effective medium to bring their enlightened message to the Jewish masses. Therefore, in order to supplement their German writings, these early Maskilim began to publish in Hebrew as well. While the Maskilim could have chosen to write in Yiddish, their love for the Hebrew language prompted them to write in the classical Jewish language.

The early Maskilim broke from the Hebrew style that was used in rabbinic literature and reverted to a style of Hebrew that was popular in the days of the Prophets. Rather than write in the "dry style of rabbinic casuistry" the Maskilim attempted to write with the same beauty and vigor that characterized the writing of the Hebrew prophets.⁷ The periodical, Hameassef, was the first of the enlightened Hebrew literature to be produced by the Maskilim. The periodical was founded in 1783 in Koenigsberg, East Prussia by the Society of Friends of the Hebrew Language (*Doreshei Leshon Ever*) and quickly became the literary forum of the early Haskalah period:

This little magazine, containing on the average twenty pages, served as the forum of German-Jewish followers of the Enlightenment. Specifically, Hameassef sought to revive biblical Hebrew, esteemed for its purity, as a means for elevating the aesthetic sensibility of the Jews and as a vehicle for introducing its readers to the value of the Enlightenment and to secular knowledge.⁸

⁷Joseph Klausner, A History of Modern Hebrew Literature, Trans. Herbert Danby (London, 1932), 2.

⁸Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World (New York, 1980), 72.

Though the publication contained a few articles that were written in German, most articles expressed the thoughts and desires of the Maskilim in pure grammatical Hebrew. Hameassef featured poetry written in the Biblical style, articles on natural science and general history, and studies of Hebrew grammar and Biblical literature.

Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) was one of the collaborators in the project while Isaac Euchel, Mendelssohn's biographer, was one of its chief editors,⁹ and Hartwig Wessely¹⁰ one of its main contributors.

Mendelssohn himself was one of the most significant of the early Maskilim. His circle was centered in Berlin and included Wessely, David Friedlaender, and Herz Homberg. Mendelssohn's ardent reading exposed him to some of the great literature of modern and medieval times. Under the tutelage of his teacher, David Fraenkel, Mendelssohn not only familiarized himself with Talmud and other traditional texts, he also mastered the German language by reading German literature. Despite the fact that he was raised as an orthodox Jew, Mendelssohn managed to study medieval philosophy, particularly the works of Moses Maimonides. He was known to pore over the Guide of the Perplexed day and night to such an extent that he later attributed his hunched back to that book! Mendelssohn's commitment to studying Maimonides' rationalistic approach to Judaism prompted Simon Dubnov to remark that:

⁹Klausner, A History of Modern Hebrew Literature, 4. Klausner suggests that the appearance of *Hameassef* marks the beginning of modern Hebrew literature.

¹⁰Hartwig Wessely is referred to in different sources as Naphtali Herz, Hartwig Naphtali Herz Weisel, Naphtali Herz (Hartwig) Wessely, and Hartwig Wessely. For the sake of simplicity, all references in this work will be to Hartwig Wessely.

The book that curved his spine also served to straighten his mind, diverting him from the thickets of the Talmudic sea, to the straight path leading directly to the 'religion of reason,' and then to the rationalism of the 18th century.¹¹

Mendelssohn used his traditional Jewish upbringing and philosophical background to draw together traditional Judaism, medieval philosophy, and the enlightened ideas which were rampant in the eighteenth century. Mendelssohn did not understand Judaism to be based on a series of specific dogmas. Rather, he called for religious tolerance and pluralism.

None of us feels and thinks exactly alike with his fellow-man; then wherefore impose upon one another by deceiving words? . . . For your happiness' sake, and for ours, lend not your powerful authority to the converting into a law any immutable truth, without which civil happiness may very well subsist; to the forming into a public ordinance any theological thesis, of no importance to the state. Be strict as to the life and conduct of men; make that amenable to a tribunal of wise laws; and leave thinking and speaking to us, just as it was given to us, as an unalienable heirloom; as we were invested with it, as an unalterable right, by our universal father.¹²

Congruous with Mendelssohn's call for religious tolerance and pluralism was his belief that religious leaders should not have the right to excommunicate any individual. Michael Meyer points out that Mendelssohn believed "that the human mind must not be

¹¹Simon Dubnov, History of the Jews, Trans. Moshe Spiegel, 6 vols. (London, 1971), 4: 326.

¹²Moses Mendelssohn, Jerusalem, Trans. M. Samuels, 1 (London, 1838): 170-172. As it appears in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, The Jew in the Modern World, 61-62.

constrained by ecclesiastical coercion and thus urged the abolition of excommunication among all religious groups."¹³ This belief prompted Mendelssohn to write:

All societies have a right of expelling members; religious ones only have not: for it runs contrary to their principle and object, which is joint edification and participating in the outpouring of the heart, by which we evince our thankfulness to God for the many bounties he bestows on us, and our filial trust in his sovereign goodness and mercy. Then, with what conscience can we deny entrance to dissenters, separatists, misbelievers, or sectarians, and deprive them of the benefit of edification?¹⁴

When Mendelssohn applied his notion of tolerance and pluralism to his own Jewish faith, he was left with an enlightened view of Jewish religious life. He did not view the commandments in the Torah as a set of Divinely revealed universal religious truths. Mendelssohn wrote,

To express it in one word, I believe that Judaism knows nothing of a revealed religion, in the sense that it is taken by the Christians. The Israelites have a divine legislation: laws, commandments, statutes, rules of life, instruction in 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 supernatural manner; but no dogmas, no saving truths, no general self-evident propositions. Those the

¹³Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, (New York, 1988) 16.

¹⁴Moses Mendelssohn's Preface of 1782 to the German translation of Menasseh ben Israel's Vindiciae Judaearum, in Mendelssohn's, Jerusalem, 108-116. As it appears in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, The Jew in the Modern World, 77.

Lord always reveals to us, the same as to the rest of mankind, by nature and by events; but never in spoken or written words [of revelation]

Mendelssohn drew a clear distinction between universal religious truths and Judaism. Universal religious truths were understood to be derivatives of human reason and were capable of being apprehended by all human beings. On the other hand, Judaism, as a composite of universal natural religion and the divinely revealed commandments, did not interfere with one's free use of reason. The laws and precepts which were put forth by Judaism were merely "directions to general practice."¹⁵ Mendelssohn wrote that the commandments were "directions to general practice, and rules of conduct, both the written and unwritten laws have public and private happiness as their immediate object."¹⁶

Yet, in spite of Mendelssohn's non-traditional understanding of the Oral and Written Laws, he still believed that all the laws were incumbent upon every Jew. He wrote,

The lawgiver was God himself And he gave the laws a sanction, than which nothing could be more solemn; he gave them publicly, and in a marvellous manner never before heard of, whereby they were imposed upon the nation, and on their descendants for ever, as an unalterable duty and obligation.¹⁷

¹⁵Moses Mendelssohn, "Jerusalem, or on Religious Power and Judaism," Jerusalem, 89. As it appears in Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz, The Jew in the Modern World, 88.

¹⁶*Ibid* .

¹⁷*Ibid* .

Despite his enlightened tendencies, Mendelssohn's belief that every Jew was obligated to fulfill the Oral and Written Law caused him to be labeled a moderate when it came to the issue of Jewish tradition. Other members of his enlightened circle, such as Friedlaender and Homberg took a more active role in discrediting anything that had to do with traditional Judaism. They were much more willing than Mendelssohn to abandon Jewish tradition in order to achieve the aims of the Haskalah movement, namely, to modernize the Jewish way of life so that Jews would be accepted in the greater society.

While Mendelssohn was alive, David Friedlaender espoused basically the same message as his teacher. In 1778 in Berlin, he was the first to establish a modern Hebrew school which taught both secular and Jewish studies. His *Juedische Freischule* offered general elementary school subjects in German, Hebrew grammar, and Bible study in the original. He considered the school a living protest against the *heder* and *yeshivah* which he regarded as obsolete institutions.¹⁸ Friedlaender's school never succeeded in creating Hebrew scholars, but it did manage to turn out good Germans.¹⁹

In his later years Friedlaender espoused Mendelssohn's belief that a human being, through the use of reason, could attain universal religious truths. However, he did not believe, as did Mendelssohn, that there were ceremonial laws which were divinely revealed and, consequently, required to be followed by all Jews. Referring to Friedlaender, Meyer writes,

¹⁸Dubnov, History of the Jews, 4: 344.

¹⁹Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 79.

He thus had no more basis for a religious expression of Jewish identity Since there was no good reason for the preservation of Judaism, why should the Jew continue to suffer all manner of disabilities on its account?²⁰

He went so far in his attempt to escape Judaism that he turned to the Protestant pastor, Teller, asking him on behalf of the group of enlightened Jews to allow them to embrace Christianity without being forced to believe in its founder or to attend Church services. While there is some question as to Friedlaender's motive in contacting Teller, it is clear that Friedlaender felt compelled to break from Jewish tradition instead of modernizing it. Friedlaender's request to join the Protestant Church was eventually rejected and his prominence as a leading Maskil was lost. In the meantime, however, some of Mendelssohn's other colleagues ventured out of Germany and helped bring the Haskalah movement to Galicia.

As the Haskalah made its way into Galicia, the Maskilim faced a different challenge than they had in Germany. Many of the Jews in Galicia had stronger connections to the Orthodox and hasidic establishments than their German brothers and sisters. Therefore, they were more familiar with the Bible, the Talmud, and post-Talmudic literature. Those associated with the Hasidim were fluent in teachings on Jewish ethics and Jewish mysticism. Secular

²⁰Michael A. Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew (Detroit, Michigan, 1967),

scholarship and familiarity with the non-Jewish sections of the greater society were relatively scarce. Further, it was made clear by the masses that they had no intention of placing their lot with the enlightened ideas that were making their way in from Germany. Yet, despite the negative response that was received from the Galician Jewish masses, the Maskilim found allies for their cause in the Austrian Empire. Indeed, the Maskilim were able to show the government that the aims of the Haskalah were congruous with the enlightened absolutism that was sweeping the land..

In early 1782 Joseph II, then the ruler of the Habsburg Empire, introduced his "Edict of Tolerance" (*Toleranzpatent*). This edict represented the first of a series of attempts by Joseph II to protect minority rights and integrate them completely into the Habsburg Empire. It stated:

Since the beginning of our reign we have made it one of our most important aims that all our subjects, whatever their nationality or religion, since they are accepted and tolerated in our states, should share in the public welfare which we are endeavoring to nurture, enjoy liberty in accordance with the law, and encounter no hindrance in obtaining their livelihood and increasing their general industry by all honorable means.²¹

These aims held true for those minority groups that he liked, such as the Protestants, and for those that he disliked, such as the Jews.²² The government was inclined to attempt to achieve a level of so-called equality for all people, not as a matter of sentiment, but of

²¹Sasson *et al.*, A History of the Jewish People, 756.

²²Robert A. Kann, A History of Habsburg Empire 1526 - 1918 (Berkeley, 1974), 186.

utilitarian rationalism.²³ Their political concept of enlightened absolutism saw the welfare of the state as most important and maintained that the public good and the interest of the subjects were one and the same.²⁴

While a call for complete equality for the Jews was an evident theme in the ruler's proclamation, the Jews were only granted certain rights according to the degree that they were deemed useful to the state, that is, according to their personal wealth and their ability to pay an inordinate amount of taxes. This meant that the wealthiest of the Jews were able to survive, possibly even flourish, while the poor masses suffered from the burden of the taxes every time a payment came due.

The taxes that were introduced in the last decades of the eighteenth century lasted well into the nineteenth century and always remained a hardship for the bulk of the impoverished Galician Jewish community. In 1782 a tax on Kosher meat was introduced. It was subsequently increased in 1789, 1810, and 1816, at which time it was three times the original levy and caused the price of Kosher meat to be twice that of non-Kosher meat.²⁵ There was also a candle tax. Jewish women were required to pay a weekly tax before they could light the two Sabbath candles. Those who did not pay were raided on Friday nights by tax collectors who, if the tax could not be paid, were empowered to seize household goods.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Sasson *et al.*, A History of the Jewish People, 756.

²⁵Raphael Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, Trans. from the Yiddish by Eugene Orenstein and from the Hebrew by Aaron Klein and Jenny Machlowitz Klein (Philadelphia, 1985), 4.

Women who chose not to light the Sabbath candles were subject to arrest, forced labor, or whippings.²⁶ Additionally there were marriage taxes, residence taxes, and *bet kneset* and *minyán* taxes. The government's aim, of course, with all these taxes was not to create pious Jews. Rather, it was self-serving. The government sought to increase the income brought in from the Jews, thereby increasing the Jews' value to the Austrian state and obligating them to fit in with the enlightened vision of the Austrian Empire.

Through the advice of certain politicians and philosophers, the government hoped that these taxes, in addition to a compulsory secular education, would successfully "Germanize" the Jews and integrate them into the larger community. Joseph II was convinced that the German language of administration and instruction served the best interest of all the people in the empire regardless of their particular nationality. Not only was German the language of the educated class, he also believed that German culture was superior to any other.²⁷ Therefore, his goal of total equality meant nothing less than complete acculturation and assimilation of the Jewish community.

The so called "Germanization" of the Jews that was proposed by the government was received favorably by many of the Maskilim, particularly Wessely and Homberg, both of whom had been associated with Mendelssohn in Berlin. Though they did not share Joseph II's vision of complete assimilation, the Maskilim considered the "Edict of Tolerance" the first step towards revitalizing the Jewish way of

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Kann, A History of the Habsburg Empire, 185.

life in accordance with the spirit of the new era. In a response to Joseph II's edict, Hartwig Wessely, Mendelssohn's longtime friend and colleague, composed a "laudatory ode" in honor of the "Emperor-Liberator" and his "Edict of Tolerance."²⁸ In his "Divre Shalom V'emet" Wessely urged the Jewish communities to accept and follow the Emperor's edicts."²⁹

Wessely stressed that a solid secular education would ultimately lead to the Jews being accepted in the non-Jewish community. He wrote,

In general, "human knowledge" is comprised of etiquette, the ways of morality and good character, civility and clear, graceful expression; these matters and their like are implanted in man's reason. He who possesses "human knowledge" will gain much from the poetic expression of the divine Torah and from the ways of God that are written therein. . . . Similarly, history, geography, astronomy and the like--which are inscribed in the mind of man as innate "primary ideas" whose foundation is reason--produce truths in every matter of wisdom.³⁰

Wessely believed that secular studies must serve as the foundation for the study of Torah. Therefore he suggested that it was necessary to reform the entire system of education by initiating the teaching of general elementary subjects, teaching the Bible in conjunction with Hebrew grammar and German translation (as

²⁸Dubnov, History of the Jews, 4: 346.

²⁹Joseph Edelheit, "Naphtali Herz Wessely's Educational Philosophy According to Divre Shalom V'emet: A Textual-Historical Analysis (Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion), 1973, 40a.

³⁰Naphtali Herz Wessely, Divre Shalom V'emet, Trans by S. Weinstein and S. Fischer (Berlin, 1782). As it appears in Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World, 63.

opposed to Yiddish), and, by eliminating extensive Talmud study except for those who were preparing for the rabbinate.³¹ Wessely realized that most of the Galician Jews would not accept his proposal out of a fear of introducing innovations into their lives. Knowing this, he devoted a number of chapters in his treatise to prove that "not only is the study of secular studies compatible with religious principles but that the acquisition of such knowledge will strengthen one in the mastery of the Torah and will improve his conduct both as a man and as a Jew."³²

Despite his effort to win over the masses, Wessely recognized that "the immediate effect of [his] educational philosophy was less than startling. By his own admission . . . his plans were not being fulfilled."³³ Nevertheless, Joseph Edelheit writes,

Although this admission of partial failure or disappointment must be taken into account, Wessely did effect certain immediate changes. These alterations . . . were not always the desired reforms, but once the process of change began there was nothing to stop it.³⁴

Despite of his concerted efforts to influence the educational system in the Austro-Hungarian empire, Wessely himself was never party to Joseph II's regime. Instead, the government's task of "Germanizing" the Jews was handed over to Herz Homberg, another of Mendelssohn's close associates.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 115.

³³ Edelheit, "Naphtali Herz Wessely," 94.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1787 Homberg was appointed the chief inspector (*Oberaufseher*) of the new Jewish schools which he was authorized to establish in Galicia. Within four years he established roughly 400 "German - Jewish" elementary schools where Jewish studies were subordinate to German studies.³⁵ In 1789 a new edict was circulated which obligated Jewish children to obtain a certificate which stated that they were studying in a "German - Jewish" school. This required certificate was necessary before they could study Talmud in *hadarim*. Additionally, this edict required all Jews to study the German language and pass a test in general subjects before they could get married.

While a majority of the Jews who fell subject to the government's educational reforms complained vehemently about the teachers to the police and tried to use bribes to have their children removed from the "German - Jewish" schools, the Maskilim complained that the government reforms were not enough. ~~They~~ asked for the shutdown of *hadarim* as well as for censoring of rabbinic and hasidic books.³⁶ By the early nineteenth century the traditionalists prevailed and the "German - Jewish" schools were shut down by Francis I.³⁷ Nevertheless, a few years later in 1810, Francis I approved a catechism³⁸ that was put together by Homberg

³⁵Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 670.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷Maria Theresa ruled from 1740-1780, Joseph II from 1780-1790, Leopold II from 1790-1792, and Francis I from 1792-1835.

³⁸This was one of over one hundred and sixty such textbooks which undertook to give a systematic presentation of the Jewish religion. See Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Period of the Emancipation," Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History, Alexander Altman, ed. (Cambridge, 1964), 48.

and ordered it to be published at the expense of the Jewish communities of Bohemia, Moravia, and Galicia. This manual "expounded dogma of Judaism in the spirit of civic morale and of official patriotism"³⁹ and was to be taught to all Jewish youth as well as to those who applied for a marriage certificate.

During the period from 1815-1848, the Austro - Hungarian authorities gave up their attempt to modernize the Jews by force and reconciled themselves to the existing condition. The Jewish masses were loyal to the Habsburg empire so the government saw no real reason to continue to force them to change their way of life. However, despite the governments' stated intentions, the Jewish community was still heavily taxed, limited by job opportunities, restricted from living in certain cities, and faced with other oppressive measures carried out in the name of enlightened absolutism.⁴⁰ While the traditionalists were appalled at the conditions which the Austro - Hungarian Empire continued to force upon them, a younger circle of Galician Maskilim, men who were born and raised in Galicia and not directly influenced by Mendelssohn in Germany, continued to fight for enlightened ideals. When emancipation finally came for most minority groups in Europe after the revolution in 1848, the Galician Jewish masses were slow in accepting the ideals that were promoted by the Maskilim. By the 1860's the fervor associated with the Haskalah moved from Galicia to Russia.

³⁹Dubnov, History of the Jews, 4: 671.

⁴⁰Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 172.

After the government eased its pressure on the Galician Jewish community around 1815, until the time of the revolution in 1848, the ideological battle between the Haskalah and Hasidism reached its most heated phase. The Maskilim worked with all their might to oppose the religious spirit that the Hasidim were spreading throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This was the time that men such as Joseph Perl (1773-1839), Solomon Judah Rapoport (1790-1867), Nachman Krochmal (1785-1840), Isaac Erter (1792-1851), Joshua Heschel Schorr (1814-1895) and, to a lesser extent, Judah Leib Miseses (1798-1831) emerged as the new leaders of the Haskalah in Galicia.

Unlike their German counterparts, these men intentionally used the Haskalah as a means to revive the Hebrew language. While most of the Haskalah literature of Germany from 1815-1848 was written in German, the Haskalah literature in Galicia was composed almost exclusively in Hebrew.⁴¹ Also, the literature that was produced in Galicia was mostly polemical and anti-Hasidic satire instead of the poetry and *belles lettres* that were typical of the German Maskilim.

Isaac Erter was one of the leading contributors to this new type of literature. He was a master of satire who "endeavored to improve the life of the Jews of Galicia by withering ridicule of their [his opponents'] defects."⁴² Erter was a teacher at Joseph Perl's middle school in Tarnopol. Erter, like Perl, devoted much of his writing to ridiculing the ways of the Hasidim and the *mitnagdim*.

⁴¹Dubnov, History of the Jews, 5: 135.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 187.

Erter used his satire to depict the lives of his opponents in a dark way. In his most popular satire, Gilgul Nefesh, Erter masterfully depicted the whole range of contemporary Jewish life. His essay portrayed a bleak picture of the Jewish lifestyle in Galicia. Not only did he describe the zaddikim as grim characters, he also attacked the orthodox rabbinate, meat-tax officials, burial society people, and other "refined" Jews who robbed the masses.⁴³

Most Haskalah literature of this period took the form of satire. Generally, writers wrote their essays in the form of letters or in the form of accounts of dreams and visions. Waxman suggests that "these devices gave a certain objectivity to the ideas conveyed and enabled the authors to express their views more freely."⁴⁴ The periodical, Kerem Chemed (1833-1843), presented a series of studies in Jewish history and literary criticism that took the form of friendly correspondence. Schorr, Erter, and a number of other prominent European Maskilim took their place among the writers who engaged in this unique form of enlightened communication.

The task which the young Galician Maskilim took upon themselves was overwhelming because Galicia was a center for the Hasidim. While the Hasidim considered the Maskilim heretics and deemed them responsible for what were perceived as anti-Jewish government decrees, the Maskilim were constantly approaching the government authorities with ideas and plans to continue the modernization process. The Maskilim were persistent in their

⁴³Israel Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, Trans.. and Ed. Bernard Martin, 12 vols. (New York, 1977), 10: 99.

⁴⁴Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 183.

efforts to sway the Austrian Empire. They tried to impress upon the government that the Jews could be a people of learning and culture and that not every Jew was as fanatical, misguided, and ignorant as the Hasidim. The Maskilim regarded the Hasidim as nothing more than a cult that encouraged religious fanaticism and ignorance of modern science. Their case was strengthened when Rebbe Hersh of Zydczow wrote a letter enjoining his hasidic followers to refuse medicine at the time of the cholera epidemic in 1831. He claimed that "the true healer was the zaddik who is a link between the Jews and the Almighty." He also called the zaddik "the healer of the sick among his people."⁴⁵

Rebbe Hersh of Zydczow had numerous confrontations with the leaders of the Haskalah. Years earlier Joseph Perl established a middle school in his home town of Tarnopol where students studied European languages and elementary natural sciences as well as the Hebrew Bible, Mishnah, and Gemara. In 1819 when Perl turned the school over to the Jewish community, the government appointed him as its director for life. Perl also established a Reform synagogue near the school where, on the High Holydays, he would give sermons in German.⁴⁶ Around this same time, in a memo to the government office in Tarnopol, Perl let the Austrian officials know that the popular rebbe Hersh of Zydczow was going to visit the city of Zbarazh on a Shabbat and that his presence was sure to draw crowds of people away from the Reform synagogue. Perl suggested that if people were allowed to see the rebbe they would be exposed to

⁴⁵Mahler, Hasidism, 15

⁴⁶Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 9: 240.

hasidic fanaticism. The day after the memo was issued "an order was issued to the magistrate of Zbarazh directing him to exercise strict supervision and, when this 'false rabbi' (*Irrlehrer*) appears, to send him packing at once."⁴⁷

The Maskilim feared the hasidic leaders because they knew that the rebbes and zaddikim would resort to propaganda to boost their position and influence over the masses. Each zaddik controlled a particular area and was responsible for his followers in that territory. Ignorance of secular, and in many cases Jewish studies, was common among the zaddik's followers because religious fervor was stressed over study. The fact that the zaddikim did not promote education prompted the Maskilim to hold the zaddikim responsible for the fact that the Jewish masses were not educated enough to see the benefits of the Enlightenment.

Rapoport, himself a bitter opponent of the Hasidim, produced anti-hasidic literature that was typical among his fellow Maskilim. In an article titled "Ner Mitzvah" Rapoport divided the "great men and saints of the Hasidim" into two categories: "deluded dreamers, men without knowledge and understanding, who, with their overheated fantasy, have imagined that the holy spirit rests on them," and "vile frauds who, from their youth on, have devoted all their thought only to cheating people and to dazzling and misleading the multitude."⁴⁸

Rapoport did not limit his enlightened work to polemics. He, along with men such as Nachman Krochmal and Leopold Zunz, **was**

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10: 54.

largely responsible for *Chochmat Yisrael*, the "Scientific Study of Judaism." This particular literature was considered high scholarship, based on the belief that Judaism must not merely be a matter of belief and tradition, but also an object of scientific investigation. *Chochmat Yisrael* sought to apply methods of scientific research, such as critical analysis and interpretation, to the realm of Jewish history and literature. Ultimately, these men believed that critical analysis and interpretation would bring Judaism in accord with modern thought. Those who subscribed to *Chochmat Yisrael* hoped that this literature would help produce a newer, more liberal attitude towards Judaism, while maintaining a reverence for Jewish people and tradition. It was particularly painful for Erter and Schorr that Rapoport became a leader of this more moderate viewpoint, for up until 1837 they considered him a fellow radical.⁴⁹

The Maskilim also had their troubles with the *mitnagdim*. Dubnov wrote that Rabbi Jacob Ornstein in Lemberg and Rabbi Solomon Kluger in Brody sought out the Maskilim, or as they called them, "heretics" against religious tradition.⁵⁰ Like the Hasidim, the *mitnagdim* did whatever they could to stop the Maskilim. As mentioned in the preface of this work, in 1816 Rabbi Ornstein imposed a *herem* on four of the young prominent Galician Maskilim. However, before the *herem* was enforced, the Maskilim persuaded

⁴⁹Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Eastern European Maskil and Reformist," in *HUCA*, 31 (1960): 192.

⁵⁰Dubnov, *History of the Jews*, 5: 132.

the government to force Ornstein to reverse his ban, citing an edict which had forbidden the rabbis to use the *herem* as a mode of punishment against the Maskilim.

One of the fiercest battles that took place between the Maskilim and the obscurantists erupted when Rabbi Jacob Ornstein died. After his death in 1839 each of the groups wanted their candidate to be his successor. Though the traditionalists represented the majority, the Maskilim found great support among the local officials. As a result of their battle, in 1842, only those with a European education were appointed as leaders in the Jewish community.⁵¹ In 1844, Abraham Kohn, a young Maskil from Abraham Geiger's school in Berlin, was invited to Lemberg to serve as rabbi and preacher. He quickly gained support in his new city, and eventually was appointed Ornstein's successor. However, he was not accepted by every Jewish element of the Lemberg community. Meyer writes,

That a "German" with relatively little Talmudic knowledge should be Ornstein's successor and "their" rabbi was more than the Orthodox could bear.⁵²

Kohn preached in German, established a high school, composed text books, and in general did whatever he could to foster education. However, in addition to his enlightened "spiritual" activities, he also crusaded against kosher meat taxes and candle taxes. Unfortunately for Kohn two of the leading tax collectors were "wealthy leaders of

⁵¹Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10: 101.

⁵²Meyer, Response, 157.

the Orthodox party who now saw the intruding rabbi not only as a spiritual foe but also as a dangerous underminer of their fortunes."⁵³ In 1848, the year of the revolution, he died at the hand of a poor goldsmith who was commissioned by the fanatical party in Lemberg to poison him.

Despite the fact that the enlightenment never really took hold in Galicia, it would be incorrect to say that the Maskilim failed in their task. Regardless of their particular difficulties in winning over the masses, a number of the Maskilim emerged from this era as the type of thinker Ezra Spicehandler refers to as "Reformist."⁵⁴ They were the ones who openly called for changes in religious practice and beliefs without ever affiliating with the budding Reform movement in Germany. The Galician "Reformists" worked within the confines of their traditional Jewish society, hoping that their efforts would bring about a "reformed" Jewish way of life. Ultimately, they believed that the Jews could both participate in and be tolerated by the larger non-Jewish society. However, the most radical of the "Reformist" Maskilim were willing to break from their past, without any reverence for the long chain of Jewish tradition, in order to achieve their aims. Judah Leib Miseses and Joshua Heschel Schorr were such Maskilim.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Eastern European Maskil and Reformist," 181.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE RELIGIOUS RADICALISM OF JUDAH LEIB MIESES

During the late years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century conditions for the Jews in Galicia were quite arduous. The taxes that were imposed by the Austrian government were especially onerous because of the poverty that was prevalent in the Jewish community. In his book, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, Raphael Mahler described the situation as follows:

The extraordinary impoverishment of the Jewish population in Galicia is clearly illustrated by the fact that the government was initially forced to exempt 4,000 Jewish families from the candle tax and to reduce the tax by half for 11,000 families. Since the entire Jewish population consisted of about 45,000 families (about 225,000 to 250,000 people), it appears that one-third of the Jews were in such an extreme state of poverty that even the ruthless, reactionary administration had to make allowances.¹

This extreme poverty and perceived government exploitation inclined the Jewish masses "to seek solace from their grievous needs and sufferings"² and turn to Hasidism.

¹ Mahler, Hasidism, 6.

² *Ibid.*, 7.

Robert Seltzer suggests that the Jewish masses found comfort in the hasidic teachings of the *Baal Shem Tov (Besht)* , particularly his complete faith in God's goodness and providence--"a faith that is realized in the total cleaving (*devekut*) of the soul to God in worship, but also in man's other activities."³ The impoverished Jewish community found hope in the hasidic emphasis on individual redemption and the belief that *devekut* was not just for the intellectual and spiritual elite, but something that could be achieved by everyone in his daily life.⁴

. . . the founder of Hasidism tells a parable in the form of a commentary on the verse, "A prayer of the poor when he fainteth and poureth out his plant before God" (Psalms 102:1). Once a king, on a day of great joy, issued a decree that every one of the inhabitants of his land might come to him with his wish and each person's desire would at once be fulfilled. One man requested power and glory, another wealth; the wish of each was granted. But there was a certain sage there who said that his only desire was that he might speak personally with the king three times a day. This greatly pleased the king--that the man regarded a personal interview with himself as more precious than wealth, power, and glory. So he commanded that his royal palace be opened to this man, and that he might speak with the king whenever he wished. And thereby all the royal treasures, all the riches in the world, were accessible to him.⁵

Yet, despite the hopeful message of the *Baal Shem Tov* , hasidic tenets were not accepted by all. It is clear that the Galician

³Robert Seltzer, *Jewish People, Jewish Thought* (New York, 1980), 491.

⁴*Ibid.*, 493.

⁵Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, "Parashat Vayigash," Toldot Yaakov Yosef (1780). As it appears in Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 9:42.

officials would not, under any circumstance, embrace Hasidism. Mahler recorded the attitude of one such official.

One recognizes such a Jew [a Hasid] very easily. He goes about with a bare throat, with rolled up sleeves and usually is very dirtily and shabbily dressed. . . . The most common Jews belong to this sect. They attach themselves to no profession, are usually common tavernkeepers, swindlers and soothsayers [*Sagerer*], for they have the firm conviction that God will provide for and help them even in the face of complete indolence.⁶

Not surprisingly, the Maskilim were in agreement with the Galician authorities. Unlike the masses who found promise and comfort in hasidic teachings, the Maskilim worked endlessly to disassociate themselves from the Hasidim. For them, redemption would come in the form of the Jews being accepted by their non-Jewish neighbors. This acceptance, they insisted, would only be possible if Jews were to reject Jewish medievalism and recognize the value of science and reason. Rather than turn to outdated religious beliefs and rituals for solace, thereby furthering the separation of the Jewish community from the mainstream population, the Maskilim sought to modernize Jewish life.

According to the Maskilim, a modern Jewish life could only be achieved by modernizing the system of education. Therefore, they fought to raise the standard of education, using the educational system which existed for the elite circles in Germany as their model. The educational program of the Maskilim aimed to create "a Jew [who] would embody a synthesis of Judaism and general culture

⁶Chassiden, 18g (1827), document 16. In Mahler, Hasidism, 7.

and would live up to the standards of common sense, tolerance, and reasonableness as espoused by universalistic humanitarianism."⁷

Modern education had to be grounded not only in religious instruction, but also in secular knowledge, modern languages and training for productive labor. This sort of education was the only viable way to prepare a place for the Jew in the secular society.

Mahler wrote,

Among practically all Galician Maskilim, education was regarded as a means of proving to the nations that the Jews were also a people of learning and culture and that not all Jews were to be identified with the fanatical, ignorant, and superstitious Hasidim.⁸

Among the early Galician Maskilim who severely criticized the hasidic and Orthodox establishments and also presented their own enlightened educational program was Judah Leib Mises. Mises has been described "as a battler by nature with a great deal of temperament and a huge thirst for knowledge."⁹ He was born into a wealthy family in 1798 in Lemberg. Not much is known of his early life except that he was committed to education. Klausner wrote that the young Mises was acquainted with a number of other the Galician Maskilim. He studied Kant's writings with Erter. And, "by 1816 Mises was not only a student of Solomon Judah Rapoport, but also his friend."¹⁰

⁷Seltzer, Jewish People, 567.

⁸Mahler, Hasidism, 37.

⁹Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10:34.

¹⁰Joseph Klausner, Hahistoria Shel Hasifrut Haivrit Hahadashah, vols. 2 and 4 (Jerusalem, 1953), 2:269.

Mieses was an excellent student of both Hebrew and secular studies¹¹ and remained committed to education throughout his life. In his adult years he had a large library which he not only used himself, but also made available to his fellow Maskilim. Mieses was also known to have established a number of funds to support young men as they endeavored to study in universities. Meir Letteris, a Galician Maskil, said that a number of doctors and other professionals in Lemberg, Prague, Vienna, and Berlin were able to complete their schooling because of Mieses' help.¹²

Mieses had a reputation as a fierce "battler." Meyer Waxman described Mieses as a wealthy man who, because of his high social standing, "was not afraid to express his liberal opinions openly."¹³ In 1816 when Rabbi Jacob Ornstein, the District Rabbi in Lemberg, imposed a *herem* on four of Mieses' fellow Maskilim, which included his two friends Rapoport and Erter, Mieses was among a group of Maskilim who petitioned the Galician authorities to force Ornstein to cancel his decree. When an aging Ornstein was finally compelled to go before his fellow rabbis and reverse his decision, a young Judah Leib Mieses cried out, "Louder, rabbi louder, we cannot hear you."¹⁴

Though the *herem* imposed by Ornstein did not include Mieses, Klausner suggests that he suffered from it.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² M. Letteris, Zicharon B'sefer, 15; Haim Nachman Luzzato, Toledot Erter, Hatzofeh L'veyt Yisrael, 131-132. As quoted by Klausner, Hahistoria, 269.

¹³ Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 195.

¹⁴ Klausner, Hahistoria, 2:269.

The herem caused many divorces because a number of the young married men who turned into heretics were pressured by their zealous fathers-in-law to divorce their wives. Mieses, too, was pressured to do so.¹⁵

Another battle saw Mieses rallying the Galician authorities against the Hasidim. Rather than participate in large congregations like the orthodox Jews, small *minyanim* were common among the Hasidim. However, during the days of Empress Maria Theresa, small religious gatherings outside the synagogue were prohibited. Later, during the rule of Joseph II taxes on *minyanim* were introduced. By August 22, 1823 the policy was such that,

The householder on whose premise a *minyan* was held and where Torah was read would annually have to submit an application and pay the stamp tax. In addition, he was required to prove that the members of the *minyan* could not attend services in the synagogue because of advanced age, infirmity, or great distance. Furthermore, to obtain a permit in the first place it was necessary to establish that both the householder and those attending the *minyan* are known as law-abiding persons and are not suspected of being religious enthusiasts."¹⁶

Yet, despite these restrictions, "the Hasidim generally circumvented the 1823 decree which excluded 'religious fanatics' from receiving permission to conduct a *minyan*."¹⁷

However, Mieses would not tolerate their practice. On October 23 of the same year, Mieses complained to the Galician authorities that "the managing boards of the *kehillot* were issuing false

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 2:270.

¹⁶Mahler, Hasidism, 81-82.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 82.

certificates to the hasidic *minyanim* " and, at the same time, "he took the opportunity to point out what an obstacle the Hasidim were to the cultural development of the Jews."¹⁸ As a result of his efforts, on October 31, the Galician provincial administration instructed their district offices "to keep under watchful surveillance people who, under the name of Hasidim or hypocritically pious men (*Frommler*), wander about the country and collect considerable sums from the Jews under all sorts of pretenses and counteract the intentions of the government to spread enlightenment and education among the Jews, to draw them closer to other groups in the population and to suppress their superstitions and fanatical customs."¹⁹

Much of Mieses' effort to battle Hasidism and religious fanaticism and, at the same time, promote the ideals of the Galician Haskalah, came in the form of writings. His efforts are represented by his recast of David Caro's Techumat Harabanim²⁰ and by his own book, Kinat Haemet. In these works he presented his own radical views regarding the Hasidism, rabbinism, and realities of Jewish life in his own day. In the course of his writings, Mieses presented his own unique understanding of the historical development of Judaism and other religious movements, as well as his bold

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Piller, Galizische Provincialgesetzsammlung (1823), no. 60718. As it appears in Mahler, Hasidism, 82-83.

²⁰There are two editions of Mieses' Techumat Harabanim. One was published in Vienna in 1823, the other in Lemberg in 1879. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of either edition.

characterizations of religious leadership in the past, present, and future.

In 1820 David Caro published Berit Hakehunah (also known as Techunat Harabbanim). In this book Caro discusses "what the rabbis once were, what they are now, and what they ought to be."²¹ In 1823 Mieses republished this book with his own money, adding a few of his own comments. It is worth noting that this fact has not always been known, even to some of the finest Jewish scholars. Israel Zinberg wrote that Heinrich Graetz and William Zeitlin thought that Mieses authored Techunat Harabbanim instead of merely republishing it.

The historian Heinrich Graetz and the bibliographer William Zeitlin indicate that [Techunat Harabbanim] was composed not by David Caro but by [Judah Leib Mieses]. This, however, is in complete contradiction with David Caro's own statement in Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums (1837), p. 370, where he notes that he is also the author of [Techunat Harabbanim]. The wealthy [Judah Leib Mieses] merely printed Caro's work at his expense and added a whole series of notes whose purpose it was to sharpen the attack against the rabbis.²²

Despite the confusion surrounding the publication of Mieses' edition of Techunat Harabbanim, it is clear why Mieses would have associated himself with Caro's work.

Techunat Harabbanim contains both a criticism of the rabbis of his time and an outline of the characteristics and duties of the ideal rabbi. According to the description in Techunat Harabbanim the

²¹Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 9:259.

²²*Ibid.*

modern rabbi was to possess both Jewish and secular knowledge, master the language of his country, and be able to preach on principles of the Jewish religion and moral conduct.²³ Additionally, the modern rabbi was "to be a morally clean person," "implant patriotism and love of the fatherland," and "take account of the requirements of the time and circumstances and adapt the conduct of his people to the cultural situation of the land."²⁴ These demands that were put forth by Caro and reemphasized by Miseses reflect the ideals of the Haskalah and its desire to modernize the Jewish way of life.

Miseses' recast of Caro's Techumat Harabbanim was only the beginning of his enlightened work. Zinberg pointed out that,

This [recasting of Techumat Harabbanim] could not assuage his lust for battle. Filled with the spirit of youth, he undertook to battle on his own account for the ideals of the Haskalah that were so dear to him and to storm the fortress of Hasidism and "superstition" that he so despised. It was this that he intended with his [Kinat Haemet] (Vienna, 1828) which made a rather strong impression in the orthodox circles as well as in those of the Maskilim.²⁵

Kinat Haemet was first published in Vienna in 1828, and later, republished in Lemberg in 1879. The book includes a lengthy introduction and a series of three discussions between Maimonides and his admirer, Solomon Chelm, the 18th-century author of "Mirkevet Hamishneh," a commentary on Maimonides' Mishneh Torah.

²³Waxman, A History of Jewish Literature, 195.

²⁴Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 9:259-260.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 10:34.

These discussions take place in the "world of the souls" (heaven) and must be understood as Miseses' interpretation of what he believed Maimonides would have said regarding the state of Galician Jewry and the stranglehold which Hasidism and rabbinism had over it. In effect, Maimonides provided the voice that Miseses used to express his own rationalistic argument against the foolishness and superstitions which he believed had been spread among the Jews.

Miseses did not use Kinat Haemet to espouse Maimonidian Judaism. Rather, he put his words into Maimonides' mouth in order to elevate his own rationalist argument to a level that could have only been achieved by the respected Rambam. Even if Miseses intended to convey Maimonides' form of Judaism, which he did not, his own beliefs were probably too radical to allow him to do so. For instance, while Maimonides affirmed the divine revelation at Sinai and was able to minimize the philosophical conflict between reason and revelation, Miseses rejected the traditional notion of a divine revelation in favor of a purely rationalistic view of Torah. He explained that Torah is built on reason²⁶ and that the only purpose of the Torah relates to its "usefulness for our people [the Jews]."²⁷ If a particular commandment was ever deemed not useful, then Miseses suggested it ought to be abolished.²⁸ Yet, despite obvious differences between the two men, Miseses was inspired to write:

There has never been a man in Israel who did so much good for them regarding the enlightening of their

²⁶Judah Leib Miseses, Kinat Haemet (Vienna, 1828), 80.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 90.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

understanding as Maimonides. For only he aroused them from the languor of their foolishness and awakened their minds."²⁹

Mieses admired Maimonides, as did most of the Maskilim, because Maimonides' beliefs provided the precedent that was needed to give a rational account of the Jewish faith.

Mieses began Kinat Haemet with a parable:

Not too long ago, in the darkness of night, as I was strolling in a field, a man came up to me and in his hand was a book, and he stood before me and said: Take this scroll and read from it. In it you will find words of philosophic inquiry concerning the origin of the faith of our people in demons, spirits, sorcery, and about their customs and the other things of great value which touch on their moral condition. [These words represent] that which I investigated many years and found to be close to the truth, and [they represent] that which many of my acquaintances who are known as the intellectuals, advised me to make known to the Children of Israel. And now, if my words are favorable to you, do this then for the sake of truth, and publish them! That is what the man spoke to me, and he placed the book in my hand, and went on his way. And since I was scared from that vision, I was not able to speak and ask him his name; and when I came to my house, I read the matters which are expounded on with intelligence, and I examined them with my mind, and I was completely happy with them as one is over a treasure, for I had found that which I had hoped for, and that which I had waited for in vain for many years. Therefore I decided in my heart to fulfil the desire of the one who spoke to me.³⁰

²⁹*Ibid.*, 14.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 3.

This parable is symbolic of the process that one must go through in order to become a Maskil. Mises begins as one who walks in the darkness of night and is eventually transformed into one who has everything he ever hoped for. The book that the stranger asks him to read is responsible for this transformation. Of course, the contents which are described by the stranger, correspond to the ideas which Mises presents in Kinat Haemet. Both Mises' willingness to accept the stranger's book and his desire to read it serve as an example for the reader of Kinat Haemet. Once one is willing to open himself to enlightened ideas the process of becoming a Maskil flows naturally. By enticing the reader to consider his enlightened ideas, Mises is fulfilling his own decree "that every Maskil is obligated to work endlessly to enlighten his ignorant brothers by showing them the truth that is hidden in their hearts in plain, clear words so they no longer have to walk in darkness."³¹

When Mises stated in the parable that he examined the book with his own mind, he certainly would have utilized two sources of knowledge which were commonly employed by the Maskilim, reason and philosophy. First of all, knowledge is derived from an individual's ability to reason. Knowledge that is derived from reason is, according to the Maskilim, truth. Mises' notion of knowledge and truth was compatible with that of his fellow Maskilim. He wrote in the introduction to Kinat Haemet that "most of the words [in Kinat Haemet] are based on the pure reason that the Lord favorably

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

bestowed upon us," and therefore ought to be accepted as a source which reveals that which is hidden and difficult.³²

Second, knowledge is derived from philosophy. For Mises philosophy certainly included the works of the Greek philosophers, Maimonides, Kant, the deists, Mendelssohn³³, and other fellow Maskilim. In Kinat Haemet, Mises explained that many of his ideas are based on knowledge that had been presented by the philosophers. In Kinat Haemet he offered a number of prooftexts from "the wise men of the nations. . . [who] found these matters [presented by Mises in Kinat Haemet] important enough to expound upon."³⁴ When their thoughts are not his thoughts, Mises "makes it a point to refute their words."³⁵

Mises realized that most of his readers would not be familiar with the different philosophical works that were popular in his day. Therefore, his own enlightened work, as well as the work of other Maskilim took on great importance. Since Mises' hope for the future rested on the young Jews who would eventually turn to the Maskilim for their education, he wanted Kinat Haemet to be a source that could be easily understood. He wrote:

There are among the Jews some people who are young and called Maskilim, who wish to study books of wisdom and research. Yet, they will not want to tire themselves with the preparatory work that is necessary before we begin to study books of research which are written in

³²*Ibid.*, 3.

³³In the introduction to Kinat Haemet, Mises alludes to the "books of the Berlin Maskilim." See Mises, Kinat Haemet, 12.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 4.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 4.

philosophic language that is too difficult for the beginner to understand. . . . Therefore they will always have confused thoughts and their knowledge in philosophic inquiry will be exceedingly limited. People such as these will find great benefit in reading this book. For by doing so they will broaden their limited knowledge in matters of philosophic inquiry, and they will find new ideas which are not known to them, they will straighten their confused thoughts and the doubts concerning many matters will be removed from their hearts. . . . They will accustom themselves to exploring theological matters and to seek their views using common sense. For the author wrote this book in simple language and worked hard to clarify matters which are in his power to make easy to understand, even for the person who does not study much [philosophical] text.³⁶

Despite his efforts to make Kinat Haemet accessible to all , Mises realized that his book and his ideas would, in actuality, only enlighten a small number of people.

If I would only know for sure that only one out of a thousand would be inspired by this book to study philosophical matters and change his way of living . . .³⁷

However, Mises relied upon the words of Maimonides to give him the assurance he needed to move forward with his project.

I am the man who when the concerned pressed him and his ways was straightened and could find no other device by which to teach a demonstrated truth other than by giving satisfaction to a single virtuous man while displeasing ten thousand ignoramuses--I am he who

³⁶*Ibid.*, 10.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 13.

prefers to address that single man by himself, and I do not heed the blame for those many creatures.³⁸

Though Mises claimed that he would have been satisfied to know that his Kinat Haemet demonstrated the truth to a single virtuous man, he sought to disclaim the entire hasidic leadership, particularly the *Besht* and his disciples (*Beshtanim*), and change the way of life which had been promulgated among the Jewish masses. He vigorously rejected the legitimacy of demons, spirits, superstitions, and especially Hasidism, which, according to Mises, was based on all of these falsehoods. Mises stated a number of times that, "battles must be waged against uncivilized belief in spirits, demons, and magic, from which all trouble originates."³⁹

The *Beshtanim* were a frequent target of Mises' blistering attacks. Mises claimed that many false beliefs had been spread by the *Beshtanim* and accused them of being a group of "evil men" and "schemers" who acted "wickedly under the veil of piety."⁴⁰ In denouncing Hasidism and the *Beshtanim*, Mises attacked the credibility of Israel ben Eliezer, the *Baal Shem Tov*.

His ancestors were among the poorest and among the neediest of the people who lived in a small village in Volhyn (a place of darkness and ignorance), and were unable to provide him a teacher who would teach him in his youth Torah, wisdom and piety; and later, when he grew up, he never came upon those who are wise at heart, his legs never brought him to the doors of their houses, for his heart was closed to wisdom and his intelligence

³⁸*Ibid.*, 13. Translation taken from Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, Trans. Shlomo Pines, 2 (Chicago, 1963): 16.

³⁹ Mises, Kinat Haemet, 6, 9, 28.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 7.

was too limited to understand the words of the sages. Therefore, when he became an adult he was empty and lacking words of Torah and knowledge and did not understand any passage in the Talmud, and even less in the Bible.⁴¹

Despite his apparent lack of any knowledge of Jewish ideas, the *Besht* was able to steal the hearts of the Jewish masses. Mises suggests that the *Besht* appealed to the people's ignorance. The *Besht* convinced the ignorant masses that their redemption would come by carrying out certain rituals and by reciting various incantations. He convinced the masses to do three things which, to the uneducated, appeared to be important. They had to dip themselves in springs, pray meaningless prayers, and read confusing ideas.⁴² The truth was, according to Mises, that these things were not essential to their faith. Nevertheless, the people believed that the *Baal Shem Tov's* rituals and incantations had redemptive powers. Soon word spread throughout the land that the *Besht* was a man of God and a healer. It was said that he revealed things to the masses which had never before been revealed, not even to Moses! In just a short time many of the poor people of the land gathered to be with him, and when being with him was not enough, they wanted to be like him. The people imitated his ways. They paid to learn his rituals and his incantations and then they went out to spread his message of healing and redemption. However, Mises wrote that the real intention of the *Besht* and his disciples was not to save the masses. Rather it was to profit from the spread of Hasidism. These

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 23-26.

people wanted to rob and plunder the people by lying. Mieses claimed that the *Beshtanim* were deceitful men who wanted the people to think that their rituals and incantations were derived from the Jewish religion. They wanted the people to believe that the rituals and incantations were what God demanded in return for His goodness and providence. According to Mieses, the *Beshtanim's* teachings were filled with enough absurdities to disgust every sensible man!⁴³ But not everyone was sensible:

The words of theses liars and fools were accepted by almost all the Jews (in Volhyn) with complete faith, and they believed their nonsense, and they followed their evil ways. Therefore, pure piety was destroyed in Israel and . . . all their days they [the Jewish masses] participated in customs which have no reason or purpose.⁴⁴

While the masses assumed they were performing authentic Jewish customs, Mieses castigated them and their hasidic leaders for engaging in nothing more than superstitious behavior based on their belief in demons, spirits, and tales told by swindlers and fools.⁴⁵

Mieses' attack against Hasidism went deeper than an attack against its leaders. He claimed that their practices were nothing more than meaningless superstitions. Hasidism, and everything it represented to Mieses, was just another link in a chain of tradition that had been corrupted by certain individuals who had used their religious beliefs and practices to fill their own needs. He accused the early priests and sages, as well as the Hasidim, of perpetuating

⁴³*Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

many falsehoods and superstitions which had been passed from generation to generation. These laws and rituals were used by the deceitful men of every generation who purposely misled the Jewish masses. Mises wrote that there is evidence from books of Roman origin that superstitions already existed in earlier generations.⁴⁶ He also suggested that there is evidence in texts of the great sages of Israel, "that as early as their generation [the superstitions] were rooted in the heart of Israel."⁴⁷

Mises is rather discursive in his attempt to identify the original source of various superstitions. First of all he explained that there were "certain deceitful men [among the Jews] who arose who had some knowledge of the beginning of the 'science of nature,' and when they realized how foolish and ignorant the masses were, they figured out how to exploit their knowledge and lead the masses with their falsehoods."⁴⁸ These deceitful men convinced the masses that they were close to God and close to the spirits, and made the people dependent on their made-up rituals and incantations.

Second, Mises said that these men composed numerous books filled with incantations and false rituals that eventually fell into the hand of the ignorant masses who believed and followed every word. The authors of these books were so clever that the masses perceived deep mysteries and profound wisdom in books that were filled with nothing more than lies.⁴⁹ Though not stated explicitly,

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 49-52.

Mieses was probably referring to books such as the Zohar and all the mystery which surrounds them.

Third, Mieses attributed superstition to the various people who the Jews lived with over time. There were always clerics among the non-Jews who tried to lead the Jews onto crooked paths in the same way that the deceitful men used to do among the Jews.⁵⁰

Finally, Mieses wrote that the "liars and clerics" are to blame because they orchestrated laws, claiming to be inspired directly by God, and then, for money, pretended that they could fulfill God's commandments on behalf of all the people.

These pietists were pleasing to the rest of the people who, because of heavy burdens of their work and affairs were unable to always pray to their gods and dedicate themselves to them. For they thought that the hearts of the pietists are full of holiness and purity, and that the spirit of God rested upon them. . . . the masses undertook to support them and all who are theirs and they gave them gifts and many contributions each according to his ability These crooked and foolish pietists established commandments, regulations and laws for the people and said that they received them from the Lord who spoke with them.⁵¹

These laws, Mieses claimed, were created to increase the pietists' name, honor, glory, and fortune.

Many of these silly customs were increased among the Jews by fakers and liars who were teachers and heads of the people. These [men] were lovers of honor, authority, and glory whose every deed and intention was to increase

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

their name among the Jews and be considered and respected among the "holy ones on high."⁵²

Mises' attack was not limited to the non-Jewish religious leaders, he also accused the sages of Israel of spreading superstitions. Realizing that superstitions were not foreign to Jewish tradition, he wondered how the sages could have believed in such falsehoods.

Why did many of the great Jews, who themselves sought with wisdom to understand every happening under the sun, and who sought the truth in other matters, believe in all the nonsense and distorted ideas when it comes to matters of faith about which we have spoken till now and similar matters which are foolish without number? What was it that darkened and obscured all of their eyes from seeing the truth in these matters?⁵³

Mises offered three possible reasons for their misguided faith. He suggested that the sages did not really believe in the falsehoods, rather, they chose to hide their real beliefs out of fear. He also suggested that not every one who claimed to be a sage was really a sage who was committed to seeking wisdom. These sages, he pointed out, only engaged in Talmud study and did not know anything that had to do with nature or causes in the world. Finally, Mises suggested that the sages learned these falsehoods in school at an early age and were unable to change their ways.⁵⁴

Mises denounced more severely those rabbis who, though they did not believe the superstitions, remained committed to

⁵²*Ibid.*, 94.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 57.

transmitting the falsehoods. He believed that they were motivated to protect their own corrupt rabbinic institution which only existed to insure their own honor and fortune. Rather than tell the truth to their constituents, Mises accused the rabbis of not being honest with the masses.

It was the intention of the sages that a majority of the people would not understand, on their own, their words. [The sages wanted the people] to be obligated to seek and hear their solution from their mouths. And they interpreted them to every questioner according to his intelligence and his capacity.⁵⁵

Mises criticized the fact that the sages considered themselves experts in matters that were not really essential to Jewish faith. Superstitions were spread by the rabbis because they maintained an institution that compelled the masses to follow their ways out of a "Fear of God." By saying that their rituals and laws were what God demanded, the sages made themselves indispensable to their community. Once a person went to a sage for advice on a particular matter he was obligated to follow that advice. Further, the masses were convinced that they did not have the knowledge to decipher the minute details of various laws themselves. Thus, they were completely dependent on the sages. And, since "the people were accustomed to heaping honor on those matters that were concealed from their eyes," the sages purposely concealed

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 43.

information, acting as though they knew hidden secrets, knowing that these actions would lead to greater honor in the community.⁵⁶

Mieses also said that not all the sages were swindlers and deceivers, some were merely fools! He explained that there have always been "fools and men poor in understanding." Even if one were to say that there were sages who believed in demons and spirits, "we are not obligated to listen to them on these matters [because] . . . not everyone who claims to be a real sage is a real sage."⁵⁷

Regarding these men, Mieses added, "A carcass is better than a wise student who has no understanding."⁵⁸

Mieses' account of the historical development of Jewish beliefs and customs was certainly radical, even for his time.

. . . within the camp of the radical Maskilim there were those--and Mieses fell within this camp as well-- who . . . unmistakably rejected the absolute authority of the Talmud as the source of Jewish Law. The majority of Maskilim, however, not only did not tamper with the holiness of the Talmud but also sanctified the very essence of the rabbinic tradition. Most of them did not go beyond expressing opposition to Hasidim, to its faith in zaddikim and to the superstitions that were widespread among the people.⁵⁹

It was not enough that he considered the beliefs and practices which were prevalent among various hasidic and orthodox Jews superstitious and foolish, he sought to debunk the entire religious

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 42-46.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁹Mahler, Hasidism, 41.

development that had taken place since Toraitic times. Miseses was convinced that his radical approach was the only way to change the lot of the entire Galician Jewish community. It was obvious to him that the rise of the Haskalah movement provided an opportunity to change that which had been abused, corrupted, and misused by generations of Rabbis.

Near the end of Kinat Haemet, Miseses alluded to an earlier point in history when the Jews had an opportunity to put Judaism on to its proper course. During the Arabic/Spanish period there were people who engaged in science, but unfortunately, they wrote in a philosophic style that only allowed them to address themselves to a select few. Their knowledge was too complex to be circulated among the masses. Instead, "the ignorant and simpletons, and the fools and the frauds, those who played the role of holy, pious people, and who were regarded by the blind and uncritical masses as scholars and sages," were able to fabricate stories against the philosophers.⁶⁰ Instead of being heralded as great thinkers, scientists, and ones who fought for truth, the philosophers were regarded as heretics and violators of Torah.

While the Jews of the Arabic/Spanish period failed to change the Jewish way of life, Miseses was not about to let his chance to change the Jewish way of life slip away without a fight. Though Kinat Haemet portrayed a rather dark picture of Jewish life and Jewish history, he portrayed some non-Jews positively, particularly

⁶⁰Miseses, Kinat Haemet, 125.

the European nations. These were the people who provided the cultural and social model that he envisioned for the Jews.

A cultural and social model was needed if the masses were to ever overcome their archaic lifestyle. It was clear to Mises that by engaging in meaningless rituals the Jewish masses were hindering their opportunity for success in the larger community.

Most of the customs which [the Jews] follow are negative and very damaging to their success . . . they are mistaken to think with the foolishness in their hearts that man was only created to fulfill endless rituals and to oppress his soul with them and [they are mistaken to think] that [ritual] is the essence of what is placed on a Jew to hold on to.⁶¹

And, he said that "hatred for the Jews exists among some peoples because of [these] customs."⁶² Though Mises recognized that there were wild customs and superstitions among other peoples, he wondered:

Why are Jews more foolish than others? Why do sciences flourish among other peoples? . . . They offer books filled with wisdom, we offer books filled with air.⁶³

Mises pointed to the commitment of non-Jews to secular education. While rabbis were only required to study Talmud, "Christian clergy had to know Greek to read their religious books. Therefore they had to know Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 119.

thinkers who disseminate knowledge."⁶⁴ Also, there were institutes of culture, universities, and kings who "supported scholars and scientists and did not let clerics do harm to those who pursued new knowledge."⁶⁵ And "virtually all Christian scholars and clergy wrote in plain simple language, the language which the masses of the people spoke at the time, so that everyone, both men and women, should readily understand."⁶⁶

In presenting his own program for modernizing Jewish education, Mises stressed the importance of familiarizing young Jews with not only Biblical and Hebrew studies, but also with European languages. He wanted Jews to study natural sciences, ethics, psychology, and history.⁶⁷ Perhaps most important was his desire that "there should be written as many compositions as possible in Hebrew and Yiddish that battle fanaticism, false ideas, and wild custom, so we will no longer be a mockery and laughter in the eyes of scholars and officials of the people."⁶⁸

Further, Mises promoted his belief that every child should be introduced to the Torah in a vernacular translation. Regarding prayer, he also suggested that people pray in the language of the land "because the majority do not understand the meaning of Hebrew prayers at all."⁶⁹ His reference to the German Reform rabbis and

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Mahler, Hasidism, 47.

their success in adapting Hebrew prayers to the German language is particularly significant:

The Jews there did very well in the German lands by altering the prayers to their own language, so they would be understood. If only the rest of the Jews would be so wise as to realize the great advantage to this from the standpoint of ethics. May God inspire the rabbis, whose responsibility is our well being, to follow the enlightened of those places.⁷⁰

Though Mises was not a member of the budding German Reform movement, he was certainly aware of the limited success it achieved in modernizing the German Jewish way of life.

While Mises devoted most of Kinat Haemet to polemical writing, he scattered ideas throughout the book which begin to reflect his vision of enlightened Jewish education as well as of an enlightened Jewish way of life. If he had ideas that were more developed than those presented in Kinat Haemet, he was never able to express them. Unfortunately, three years after his writing Kinat Haemet, Mises died at the young age of thirty three.

Though Mises never had a chance to strengthen the radical views which he presented in Kinat Haemet, his ideas form the foundation for the religious radicalism that was promulgated by the left-wing of the Galician Haskalah as they brought their movement

⁷⁰As translated in Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, 47. Mahler claims that this quote is from Kinat Haemet. However, after searching the text, I am unable to confirm his assertion. Since this quote makes reference to the role of the modern rabbi, it may be that Mahler confused Kinat Haemet with Techumat Harabbanim in his citation.

into the middle years of the nineteenth century. It was during this time that Joshua Heschel Schorr emerged as leader of the left-wing Maskilim.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE REFORM-MINDED IDEAS OF JOSHUA HESCHEL SCHORR

Judah Leib Mises' battle against the obscurantists was only the beginning of a protracted war that was waged by the Galician Maskilim against the hasidic leadership, the Orthodox rabbinate, and the Jewish masses who devoted their lives to traditional teachings. The Maskilim continued their war on two fronts. There were a number of prominent Maskilim who entered the political domain and influenced the Austro-Hungarian rulers against the traditionalists. There are many examples: Herz Homberg campaigned against all hasidic books¹, Joseph Perl pressed for the reestablishment of the German-Jewish state schools so the masses would receive a proper education², Perl also helped the Galician authorities persecute the zaddikim and confiscate the hasidic literature that was smuggled in from Russia³, and Mises complained to the authorities that the Hasidim were an obstacle to the cultural development of the Jews.⁴

The Maskilim also used their literary skills to accomplish two objectives. First, they sought to disparage the traditional

¹Raphael Mahler, Hasidism, 108.

²*Ibid.*, 78-79.

³Ben-Sasson, A History of the Jewish People, 844.

⁴Mahler, Hasidism, 82.

leadership and, second, they endeavored to bring their own enlightened ideology to the Jewish masses. In order to achieve their goals, the Maskilim established a Hebrew literary movement that was intended to provide a forum to attack the beliefs and practices which were espoused by the traditional religious leaders in Galicia. The Maskilim hoped that their books and periodicals would be an effective way to bring the anti-obscurantist message to the ignorant and exploited masses.

While Miseses' Kinat Haemet was on the leading edge of this innovative, early nineteenth century Hebrew Haskalah literature, his writings never achieved the same level of prominence as did many of the writings of the other Maskilim of his day. In addition to the books that were published in the 1820's and 1830's, a number of Hebrew literary magazines became popular among the Maskilim. These new periodicals, such as Kerem Chemed and Bikkure Haitim, were supported by the Maskilim because they provided a forum for a free exchange of enlightened ideas. Though the earliest Haskalah literature which poured out of Germany was filled with "naive stylistic exercises in prose and poetry,"⁵ the newer Hebrew works were filled with original satires, literary criticism, historical studies, and poetical works that were mainly written by young Galician Maskilim.

Among of the most radical of these young Galician contributors was Joshua Heschel Schorr. Schorr was born in the Galician town of Brody to a wealthy merchant family. Schorr's father, Shalom

⁵Dubnov, History of the Jews, 5:135.

Shachanah, was an orthodox Jew who was familiar with Torah, and his mother, Sarah Leah, was from one of the wealthiest families in Brody.⁶ Avigdor Gruenberg and Berish Bernstein, his brothers-in-law, were known to have participated with the circle of Maskilim who gathered around Nachman Krochmal in Brody.

During his childhood years Schorr was known for his inquisitive mind. According to Joseph Klausner, "Schorr entered school when he was three or four years old, and by the time he was five, he knew a number of Torah portions complete with Rashi's commentary. At age six he began to study Gemara, continuing his studies of the Bible until he knew it by heart."⁷ Schorr's studies were not limited to Jewish studies, he also, on his own, read secular books and studied the German language.

As a teenager Schorr already exhibited Maskil-like tendencies. When he was fourteen he accompanied his brother-in-law on a visit to Krochmal. As Gruenberg was speaking with Krochmal, Schorr interrupted the conversation with a philosophical insight taken from his reading of Hegel. Krochmal was so impressed that Schorr was familiar with Hegelian ideas that he asked the boy to read a few pages of his soon to be published work, Moreh Nevuchei Hazman. A number of years later Schorr became a part of Krochmal's circle of Maskilim. And, it was during this period in Schorr's life that he developed a relationship with Krochmal's son, Abraham.⁸ During this

⁶Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," HUCA, 31 (1960): 184.

⁷Klausner, Hahistoria, 2:58-59.

⁸Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," 187.

same period of time Schorr also familiarized himself with the works of Samson Bloch and other prominent Maskilim.

Despite Schorr's early contact with men such as Nachman Krochmal and Bloch, it was Isaac Erter who had the greatest influence on Schorr. Erter himself was born a Hasid, but in the course of his lifetime turned into a staunch opponent of both Hasidism and rabbinism. Erter's attitude towards religious Orthodoxy was certainly influenced by the fact that he was included among the Maskilim who were excommunicated by Rabbi Jacob Ornstein in 1815. As a result of this negative experience, Erter "came to the conclusion that not only Hasidism but the Orthodox rabbinate as well was a pernicious and inimical power which [had to] be fought against, and he decided to fight with the only weapon he had--the power of the word, the lash of satire."⁹

When Schorr was a young boy, he came in contact with Erter, who, from 1818-1823, was a teacher in Brody. In 1831, about the time Schorr matured into a young man, Erter returned to Brody and the two men continued their relationship. "Despite the difference of age between the two men, Schorr soon became his close friend and collaborator. Erter had a profound influence on Schorr."¹⁰ The two men remained friends until Erter's death in 1851.

Shortly before Erter died, he and Schorr, along with Abraham Krochmal and a number of other left wing Galician Maskilim, initiated a new Hebrew periodical called Hehalutz. Because Hehalutz

⁹Israel Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10:94.

¹⁰Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," 188-189.

was established after the revolution in 1848, its creators envisioned a magazine that would serve a different function than the pre-revolution literary works. Unlike the severe attacks against Hasidism which characterized much of the work of the early Galician Maskilim, Schorr and Erter wanted their magazine to address the fact that, despite the revolution, the Orthodox leadership, which operated separately from the hasidic rebbes, discouraged the Jewish masses from accepting the privileges that went along with emancipation.

In the introductory article of the first volume of Hehalutz, "Toldot Hehalutz," Erter, outlined the objectives of the new periodical. He alluded to particular changes in the political realities of the Jews and subsequent changes in the mission of the Haskalah movement after the revolution. He began by referring to "the daily changes which have occurred in our lands . . . after the revolution."¹¹ And continued,

We asserted that from the day on which we received the rights of man and the laws of the kingdom no longer discriminated between us and the rest of the population . . . our authors no longer needed to fight the battle against the enemy without. . . . Now all writers must turn inward to fight the battle within; a battle of knowledge against an ignorance which does not know its own language (i.e. Hebrew) or the plain meaning of our Scriptures and is unaware of Jewish history, the history of its sages and the light which their life story . . . sheds

¹¹ Isaac Erter and Joshua Heschel Schorr, "Toldot Hehalutz," Hehalutz I (1852),

upon their sayings; a battle of science against the boorishness which darkens the fire of faith.¹²

While the first generation Galician Maskilim tried to impress upon the Austro-Hungarian rulers that the aims of the Haskalah were in accord with the government's plan for enlightened absolutism, Erter, Schorr and their fellow contributors to Hehalutz abandoned this tactic. They believed that the privileges which were granted to the Jews as a result of the revolution assured them of their right to integrate themselves into the larger society. Instead, the Maskilim directed their energies towards the traditionalists. They intensified their efforts to sway the Orthodox leadership and their followers from their archaic beliefs and practices and towards the rights and privileges which had been granted to them.

Assisting in the efforts to bring enlightenment to the Galician Jews was Abraham Geiger, the great German Reformer. Geiger was also a major supporter of *Chochmat Yisrael*. However, he did not treat Jewish scholarship as an ideal in and of itself. Rather, he believed that the Reformers could attain emancipation by committing themselves to *Chochmat Yisrael*.

Like the Maskilim, Geiger believed in the supremacy of reason. Isaac Barzilay pointed out that "Geiger was an extreme rationalist, believing that reason alone must be the basis and guide for the reform of Judaism and its adaptation to modern conditions."¹³ Because Geiger and many of the Galician Maskilim held similar

¹²*IBID.*, 3. As translated by Spicehandler. See Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," 504.

¹³Isaac Barzilay, Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport [Shir] (Israel, 1969), 16.

points of view, these men were in constant contact with one another. In the 1990 edition of the Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, Ismar Schorsch refers to the influence that Geiger had on Schorr as well as on the Galician Haskalah movement:

Though Reform as a religious movement fared badly in regions untouched by emancipation, where the native Orthodoxy and insularity of the masses was fortified by the incursion of Hasidism, the new Jewish learning was quickly appropriated by a far-sighted and courageous cluster of young men attuned to the West and in contact with each other.

. . . . Geiger not only inspired much of Schorr's research agenda, but graced the periodical with his own contributions.¹⁴

Schorr served as editor and publisher of the new Hehalutz magazine which was created as a forum to reproach the orthodox rabbinate "for its failure of leadership and its refusal to keep up with the changing times."¹⁵ Schorsch writes that Hehalutz was modelled after Geiger's earlier Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, "the periodical [which] combined scholarship with journalism, dense research into rabbinics with polemical assaults on the present-day rabbinate."¹⁶ In effect, Hehalutz "became a transfer station for the transmission of Reform *Wissenschaft* to Eastern Europe."¹⁷ From 1852 to 1889 thirteen volumes of Hehalutz appeared

¹⁴Ismar Schorsch, "Scholarship in the Service of Reform," Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook (1990): 97-98.

¹⁵Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," 106.

¹⁶Schorsch, "Scholarship in the Service of Reform, 98.

¹⁷*IBID.*

intermittently.¹⁸ Volumes I-V contain many articles by Schorr and his left-wing compatriots. And it is Schorr's writings in these first five volumes that outline the major premises of his radical, yet scientific, religious view. Though Schorr was the sole contributor to volumes VI-XIII, these later volumes are less crucial in this examination of Schorr's radical philosophy.

In evaluating Schorr's volatile personality, Spicehandler points out that Schorr was an "opinionated and authoritarian man [who] lacked the personality to sustain his leadership or to retain, if not expand, his circle of authors. His 'all too honest' criticism quickly alienated even his closest friends."¹⁹ Therefore, in the end, Hehalutz was Schorr's personal forum to continue his battle against the orthodox leadership and the authority of Talmudic law. Additionally, he used Hehalutz to blast the moderate Maskilim who abandoned him in his later years.

In the first article of Hehalutz Schorr made his enlightened intentions clear. Upon Erter's untimely death, Schorr completed the unfinished article. Though he continued Erter's plea to the readers of and contributors to Hehalutz, he also added his own finishing touches to the article. Schorr wrote,

¹⁸See Klausner, Hahistoria, 4:56. Klausner lists the dates of publication as follows: Hehalutz I (1852), II (1853), III (1856), IV (1859), V (1860), VI (1861), VII (1865), VIII (1869), IX (1873), X (1877), XI (1880), XII (1887), XIII (1889). Klausner also reports that, according to Schorr's disciple Hersh Zeidel, there was a fourteenth volume that was ready for printing. Spicehandler says that Schorr mentions this fourteenth volume in a letter to Bernard Felsenthal. Spicehandler also suggests that the unprinted text was preserved until it was lost or destroyed in the holocaust. See Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," HUCA, 40-41, (1970): 527.

¹⁹Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," 508-509.

Lift the banner to the spirit of the times . . . combat every regulation, law or custom which has . . . become obsolete. . . . Let your journal be a precious stone of happiness and wisdom and let it light the way . . . by a critical examination of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings and the Talmud, Midrashim and the earlier and later rabbis. Let (the fire) of criticism burn in the fields of Israel consuming its thorns and thistles. Let the people walk in the light of your fire.²⁰

This introduction provided an outline for the entire philosophy of Schorr and the left-wing Maskilim. While the moderate Maskilim such as Nachman Krochmal and Solomon Judah Rapoport held some regard for the Orthodox leadership and their traditional understanding of the revealed law, Schorr was not nearly as sympathetic. Schorr was eager to subject the Pentateuch to critical examination. As Meyer points out, "Schorr was ready to cast the barbs of modern scholarship even into this most sacred realm."²¹ By applying the critical techniques which were made available by modern scholarship, Schorr was able to challenge the integrity, the authority, and the beliefs and practices of the orthodox Jewish leaders and their followers.

After Schorr presented the aims of Hehalutz in "Toldot Hehalutz," his first task was to lessen the hold of the Galician Orthodox leadership. The initial work in this area is represented by his "Masa Harabanim," and "Davar B'ito"²² articles. Schorr initiated

²⁰Hehalutz I, 18. As translated by Spicehandler. See Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schor-The Mature Years," 505.

²¹Meyer, Response, 197.

²²For "Masa Harabanim" see Hehalutz I, 36-46, Hehalutz II, 28-37. For "Davar B'ito" see Hehalutz I, 47-57, Hehalutz II, 37-58.

his attack of the Orthodox rabbinate in "Masa Harabanim" by engaging in some of the same harsh anti-clerical rhetoric that was used by Mises and other enlighteners:

It is not hidden from any student of history that the love of power . . . , not for the sake of heaven, has caused no little evil . . . and the evil is greater . . . when those who pursue power and seek honor were crafty enough to disguise themselves in hair shirts in order to lie and seduce the people (by saying) that only fear of God and faith is their girdle. This is recorded in the prophets, repeated in our nation's history after the end of prophecy and reiterated again in the history of every nation. There is no difference between a false prophet and a deceitful rabbi.²³

Schorr's anticlericalism is similar to that of his fellow Maskilim. He refers to a long history of clerics who have consistently lied and seduced the masses for the sake of personal gain. "I am Joshua Schorr"²⁴ explains that there has been a significant amount of evil which has been perpetrated so that a few deceitful characters could gain power and control over the masses. Not surprisingly, these are the same people who have resisted any change in their religious structure lest these changes usurp their authority.

When Schorr referred to the "deceitful rabbi," he was referring to the Orthodox rabbis of his own day. It is clear from this and other writings that Schorr placed the Orthodox rabbinate in the the same category as all the "false prophets" who had been willing "to lie and seduce the people [by saying] that only fear of God and faith is their

²³Hehalutz I, 36-37.

²⁴Because Schorr wrote a significant number of articles for each of the *Hehalutz* editions, some of his articles were written under the pseudonym איש (אני יהושע שורר).

girdle." Indeed, he referred to the rabbis as ones who "lack wisdom and science,"²⁵ and claimed that their "only objective [was] to widen their authority."²⁶ The rabbis used their own outdated interpretation of Talmudic law to lead the masses towards their corrupt, Orthodox institution. Instead of blindly following the rabbis' decisions, Schorr suggested that the masses take charge and say to the rabbis, "Lead yourselves from this path of craftiness and trickery for neither your glory nor our glory is on it."²⁷ He urges his readers to

Make it your desire, for the goodness of your children [to overcome] this burden. Activate yourselves, wake yourselves up, do not be lazy, and do not be weak, for this is the time neither for indolence nor idleness. Get up and unite, those who are learned in Torah, those who are enlightened, those who are wise, those who are ignorant, strengthen yourselves so that you will have the strength to fight against the foolish ideas of the rabbis which they create in order to place iron walls around us, (and strengthen yourselves so that you will have the strength to fight against) the denial of our right to choose our own rabbis, which is an inheritance of the Congregation of Jacob.²⁸

One of Schorr's major premises in chastising the Orthodox leadership was his belief that religious authority does not rest exclusively with their established institution. Despite the fact that the the Orthodox leaders claimed that their way of life represented divinely revealed law, Schorr insisted that every

²⁵Hehalutz I, 40.

²⁶*Ibid* .

²⁷Hehalutz II, 34-35.

²⁸Hehalutz I, 40.

educated person had the ultimate right to make his own religious decisions.

This point was emphasized in a number of ways. Schorr tried to discredit the rabbis who did nothing but busy themselves with traditional texts and meaningless practices:

Some [rabbis] waste their days in vain pilpulism and some with meaningless laws, some with abstruse kabbalistic works and some with arid investigations . . . these are your rabbis, teachers, and preachers, O Israel; they are laden with the burden of books, regulations, limitations and severe interpretations "29

It did not make sense to Schorr that the rabbis would base their religious decisions on the same outdated material that was irrelevant to a modern Jewish lifestyle. Rather than rely on the ignorant rabbis, Schorr constantly affirmed his belief that all educated people, that is, people who were versed in both religious and secular sources, could decide their own religious practice:

. . . the rabbis, in whose hands it is to decide that which is permitted or prohibited, matters of defilement or purity . . . even in these matters they have no greater authority than scholars who are not rabbis!³⁰

Schorr's attempt to diminish the role of the rabbi was an integral part of his own program to radically change the face of a Judaism that was misguided by rabbinic texts. It was obvious to Schorr that if Judaism were to ever escape the shackles of the past

²⁹Hehalutz III, 47. As translated by Spicehandler. See Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schor-The Mature Years," 510.

³⁰Hehalutz I, p. 37.

and break the yoke of rabbinism, it was necessary to strike at the core of Rabbinic Judaism. One of Schorr's most convincing arguments against the claims of the Orthodox leadership stemmed from his belief that "the yoke of rabbinism could be broken, and the Jewish religion allowed to develop freely, only if the divine sanction which served as its basis were undermined by critical study."³¹

While Schorr believed that the Mishnah and Talmud contained religious insights which had played an important role in the development of Jewish religious life throughout history, he dismissed the notion that they were part of a revealed document. Rather, he insisted that the Mishnah, Talmud, and all the other Jewish sources were merely human documents that represented the religious struggles of various peoples in their own time and place. Like Geiger who wrote, "We must reject the Talmud . . .,"³² Schorr believed that his generation was not bound by decisions of earlier sages. He believed that every person in every generation possessed the right to determine his own religious practice.

In an essay titled "613,"³³ Schorr chided the earlier rabbis for taking from ensuing generations their right to make their own decisions regarding their own religious practice. In this article Schorr shared the contents of a dream in which he was visited by the *amora* Rabbi Simlai.³⁴ Schorr stated that Judah Hanasi's teaching

³¹Meyer, Response, 196.

³²See note #32 in Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10:181.

³³This article is titled, "תר"יג" See Hehalutz II, 1-12.

³⁴Simlai is the one who is responsible for the dictum, "613 commandments were given to Moses at Sinai."

that "no court may annul the decision of a fellow court unless it is greater in wisdom and number" constituted the beginning of the decline of Judaism. This statement was incongruous with Schorr's belief that the originators of the Talmud were "people who were equal to us in stature and in knowledge, and, just as they had the right to change, cancel and ordain *takkanot* to agree with their own place and their own time, so too the right was given to the wise ones of every generation to change, cancel and ordain *takkanot* in order that they be congruent with their own place and their own time."³⁵ Schorr wondered, "who gave this rabbi the power and the ability to forbid forever every generation [from making their own religious decisions in their own time and place]?"³⁶

Spicehandler summarized the answer to this question when he pointed out that "by studying the career of Judah, Schorr came to the conclusion that he was a very arrogant man, less capable than many of the *tannaim* . Judah's authoritarianism led him to decree this unfortunate ruling."³⁷ Indeed, Schorr placed the Rabbi, Judah Hanasi, in the same category as all the other clerics who have misguided the masses and resisted changes in their own religion so they could achieve some measure of personal gain. Schorr summed up his lack of regard for R. Judah when he wrote,

I have proclaimed that which I discerned after proper investigation of Judah's Mishnah and his character. [This was done] not to diminish his honor but to increase the honor of the Torah . . . I said to myself, even if his honor

³⁵Hehalutz II, 2.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," 512.

would thereby be lowered, he does not matter. Where there is a profanation of God, His Torah, His faith, and His people, one must not concern himself with the honor of a rabbi nor of Rabbi [Rabbi Judah Hanasi].³⁸

Though Schorr showed much contempt for Judah Hanasi, he did not reject rabbinic Judaism entirely. As Klausner pointed out, "anyone who busies himself so diligently in such a large book (the Talmud), it is impossible that he would hate it!"³⁹ In the same issue of Hehalutz in which Schorr blasted Judah Hanasi, he wrote that

The Pharisees, the first sages of the Talmud were the enlightened ones of their own time, the ones who wanted the good of the rabbinic decrees to suit their time and their generation. However, when they saw that some of the laws and statutes which came from the Torah were old, and had no place or purpose in their time, they had the strength to replace them with new regulations and new statutes that fulfilled their needs.⁴⁰

Schorr believed that the actions of "the Pharisees, the first sages of the Talmud," supported his view that every person had the ultimate right to fit his religious practice to his own time and place. Meyer points out that just as these talmudists "had assumed the right to excise, reform, and innovate in accordance with the exigencies of their time and place, so did the sages of every generation, including the present one, possess that same prerogative."⁴¹

³⁸Hehalutz II, 2. As translated by Spicehandler. See Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schor-The Mature Years," 512.

³⁹Klausner, Hahistoria, 4:66.

⁴⁰Hehalutz II, 39-40.

⁴¹Meyer, Response, 197.

Regarding the actions of the Pharisees, Schorr continued, "And they had good sense to support them with verses from the Torah."⁴² Schorr brought this same good sense to his own writing. Like the rabbis of the Talmud who used prooftexts to support their ideas, there are many instances when Schorr cited the Bible, Talmud, and other rabbinic sources to support his own ideas.

Nevertheless, despite his regard for the Pharisees and his usage of traditional sources as prooftexts, Schorr opposed the rabbinic tradition which had been transmitted into his own day. He claimed that the rabbis who followed the Pharisees had become complacent. Meyer explains that Schorr believed that the "Rabbis more and more lost the daring which had characterized their forbears."⁴³ Therefore, as a Maskil, Schorr took it upon himself to reintroduce this sense of daring. Not only did he question the authority of the rabbis who cited traditional texts, he also questioned the authority of the texts themselves. Sooner or later every traditional text, even the Torah itself, was subject to Schorr's radical scientific study and criticism.

As early as 1839 Schorr indicated that though the Torah was a divine document, the oral teachings were products of human beings and, therefore subject to critical analysis:

The holy Torah, as given to us by Moses, lies before us. Who dares criticize it or doubt its veracity? Who would deny its divinity? The purity of its language, the clarity and grandeur of its teachings, the portrayals which leave far behind anything other old nations have to show for in

⁴²Hehalutz II, 40.

⁴³Ibid., 196.

their myths, must convince even the most ordinary mind that God's spirit is revealed therein! Looking at the sources of the so-called oral teachings which are accessible to us and are meant to constitute a supplement to the Mosaic law, any expert who examines them without prejudice will have to realize at once that their expression and wording are merely the work of earthborn humans, and therefore subject to error. Nevertheless, it stands there as an authority, surrounding the pure Torah like an iron wall to keep away any beam of light. However, instead of serving it as a defense and bulwark, the Torah wastes away inwardly because no criticism has been permitted.⁴⁴

Though the Torah itself was a revealed document, Schorr contended that it could only remain relevant if it were to be supplemented by texts that stand up to the scrutiny of critical analysis. During the early rabbinic period the oral teachings represented such work. However, because of decrees like that of Rabbi Judah, Oral teachings became stagnant, irrelevant, and even incorrect.

Schorr's close studies of the Talmudic text generated a number of different articles which were written to point out various inconsistencies as well as other mistakes in the traditional text. In presenting his argument against rabbinic authority and Talmudic exegesis, Schorr followed the lead of Geiger. Concerning Geiger, Zinberg wrote, "He . . . declared with contempt that "the fire of enlightenment has made an end to all these moldy scraps of pages [of the Talmud]" ⁴⁵ Schorr not only considered the Talmud pages moldy but , in his attempt to discredit them he sought to point out

⁴⁴Joshua Heschel Schorr, "Authority and Criticism," The Israelite Annals, 1 (1839), pp. 169 ff., 282 f. In, W. Gunther Plaut, The Rise of Reform Judaism (New York, 1963), 113.

⁴⁵Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10:180.

particular mistakes. In volumes I, II, and V of Hehalutz, he collected some thirty-nine examples of "errors of the Talmud."⁴⁶ In some cases Schorr believed that the stringencies of the Talmud were not justified because, in his own opinion, the *amoraim* did not understand the teachings of the *tannaim*.⁴⁷

To show his contempt for the Galician Orthodox establishment, Schorr wrote many articles that express his willingness to abandon the commonly accepted Babylonian Talmud in favor of the Jerusalem Talmud. In these articles he tried to prove, scientifically, that the Jerusalem Talmud was superior to the Babylonian Talmud.⁴⁸ However, Klausner wrote, "Anyone who thinks that the Jerusalem Talmud, as it exists, is good in Schorr's eyes, is making a great mistake."⁴⁹ Schorr himself noted that though it is stronger than the Babylonian Talmud in a number of matters, it still promulgates false and evil beliefs, superstitions, and other ideas which confuse the heart and soul.⁵⁰ Schorr's reason for promoting the Jerusalem Talmud was merely to emphasize to his fellow Jews the fact that other Jews, in their own time and their own place, were free to make their own religious response without constraints placed on them by the rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud. By making this point Schorr provided a model that he hoped would spur the Jewish masses to accept the principles of reason and science that accompanied the Haskalah.

⁴⁶See Hehalutz I, 56-65; II, 58-60; V, 54-66.

⁴⁷Hehalutz I, 56.

⁴⁸See Hehalutz VI, 47-55; II, 1-7; VIII, 120-126; X, 60-68.

⁴⁹Klausner, Hahistoria, 4:73.

⁵⁰Hehalutz IV, 52.

By the time that Schorr was the editor of and contributor to Hehalutz his ideas were so radical that he was willing to place the Torah under the lens of his scrutiny. Again, Schorr's radical approach corresponded to that of Geiger. Though Geiger believed that "We must . . . reject the Bible as a sacred book . . .,"⁵¹ Geiger did not intend to get rid of the Bible altogether. Rather, he wanted to examine it openly and critically like every other written document. Similarly, Schorr wrote:

Know, dear friends, in researches like these, in the quest for truth in every matter there is no danger that pure faith will fall from its high level and . . . be injured just as it was not harmed by the emendations of the Scribes or the changes made by the elders who translated the Septuagint for Ptolemy or the variants between the first set of the Ten Commandments and the second, although these form the basis of the faith; for in truth the letters and the words are like dead bodies, only the spirit, the spirit of God hovers over scripture It is (the spirit) which keeps the nation alive, raising it as an ensign to the nations⁵²

The entire corpus of Jewish literature was, for Schorr, open to literary criticism simply because the words of the text were not nearly as important to him as the spirit which gave them life. As was the belief among others who were willing to emend the Torah, "The Bible, no less than the Talmud, had to be understood as a product of its time."⁵³

⁵¹See note #32 in Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 10:181.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 98. As translated by Spicehandler. See Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schor-The Mature Years," 520.

⁵³Meyer, Response, 93.

In one article, "Tefilin," Schorr had no problem suggesting that the Rabbis misread the Bible. He pointed out that their literalism "made them find *tefilin* (phylacteries) in the text of the Torah, preventing them from realizing that the commandment 'Bind [God's precepts] as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead' (Deut. 6:8) had to be understood merely as a metaphor for remembering, not as mandating a particular ritual act."⁵⁴

Further, Schorr's affinity for critical analysis led him to suggest certain emendations to the Torah text. Joseph Klausner highlights a few articles in which Schorr promoted specific textual changes.⁵⁵ In "Pashtay D'kara V'derech Ba'alei Hatalmud B'feirush Haketuvim"⁵⁶ Schorr based his changes on the translation that is expressed in Targum Yonatan. In "Sofrim Chadashim"⁵⁷ he suggested emendations based on the translations offered by other *targumim* as well as on his own creative ideas. And, in "Sefer Hatorah"⁵⁸ Schorr attempted to prove that there were a number of different sources represented in the bodies of various stories in the Torah.

It is clear that in order to mount his energetic battle against the Orthodox establishment and the stranglehold which it had on the interpretation of traditional texts, Schorr had to constantly draw from the foundation which his thorough early childhood religious education provided for him. It is not surprising, then, that Schorr, in

⁵⁴Meyer, Response, 196-197.

⁵⁵Klausner, Hahistoria, 68-69.

⁵⁶Hehalutz I, 95-97.

⁵⁷Hehalutz II, 89-118.

⁵⁸Hehalutz VI, 1-13.

the first volume of Hehalutz,⁵⁹ presented his own vision of an enlightened Jewish education. Schorr was a staunch proponent of modern Jewish schools in Galicia and strongly condemned his fellow Maskilim who sent their children to non-Jewish secular schools. He warned that "they [the children] will distance themselves each and every day from the rock of their Creator, and will eventually need to be picked out of a deep hole, on account of their mouths and their hearts forgetting faith, religion, Torah and identity."⁶⁰

Schorr was convinced that the only way a child can learn his religion is by being exposed to it in the course of his everyday life.

If you think that by teaching your children Hebrew one or two hours a day . . . you fulfil your obligation, you are wrong Special Hebrew schools for the instruction of children when they are free from normal school fail to teach them the religion of Torah Religion cannot be acquired by the children . . . unless it is taught in the same place which is devoted to all matters of education.⁶¹

Schorr believed a child's primary education was of the utmost importance. He wrote "primary schools and [Jewish] clubs [for children] are to plant the first seeds of faith and seedlings of tradition"⁶² Only after a proper primary education would a child be prepared to attend a completely secular school and continue his Jewish education on his own.

⁵⁹Hehalutz I, 116-120.

⁶⁰*Ibid* ., 116.

⁶¹*Ibid* ., 118.

⁶²*Ibid* ., 119.

By the time Schorr became an old man he was a recluse. Both his wife and his only son died at an early age, leaving Schorr to live out his life as a depressed and bitter man. Spicehandler shares a "Brody tradition" which says that Schorr "always dressed in the same clothes which he had worn on the day he received the telegram informing him of his son's death, and ate the same diet of buckwheat (kashe) and gizzard every day, because he had been eating that particular dish when the fateful news arrived."⁶³

Whether or not the townspeople of Brody have fond memories of Joshua Heschel Schorr, it is evident that the scientific approach of Schorr which led to his radical view of Judaism contributed greatly to the Galician Haskalah movement. His daring style and his unique understanding of Jewish tradition helped forge the way for Jews in Galicia, Jews in Western Europe, and Jews in the United States to fit into their secular communities without abandoning their Jewish heritage altogether.

⁶³Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," 523.

CHAPTER FOUR:

MIESES, SCHORR, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH RELIGIOUS REFORMS

In the nineteenth century the Jews of Europe were forced to make crucial decisions regarding their national identity and their religious practice. They had to decide if, and to what extent, they were willing to give up the distinctive characteristics of their Jewish tradition so that they might be accepted in the greater society. In Western and Central Europe the desire for emancipation was overwhelming, and as a result, the "Scientific Study of Judaism" and Reform developed into legitimate alternatives to traditional Jewish expressions. However, in Eastern Europe, the traditionalists, particularly the Hasidim and the Orthodox rabbinate, kept the Jewish masses from the liberal ideas that were promoted by the Haskalah movement. In the province of Galicia, the traditionalists had every reason to fear the Haskalah.

The ideals promoted by the Maskilim represented a way of life that was completely opposite to that promoted by Hasidism and Orthodoxy. The Maskilim believed that the Jewish masses would find their salvation in educational and linguistic assimilation, while the traditionalists viewed the diaspora as the "main calamity of the

Jewish people."¹ The Maskilim wanted "to merge with the dominant nationality in language, dress, and external bearing,"² while the traditionalists "zealously resisted even the least cultural influence from the outside."³ "The Maskilim vied with one another in their expression of loyalty toward the Austrian 'fatherland,' toward the 'gracious monarch,' and his rule,"⁴ while the traditionalists viewed Galicia as a foreign land ruled by unbearable rulers. Finally, "the Maskilim made education the central pillar of their program,"⁵ while the traditionalists feared secular education altogether. With all these conflicts, the "Maskilim rightly saw in [the traditionalists] the greatest obstacle to the realization of their program in Jewish life."⁶

In addition to the gap that existed between traditional Judaism and the Haskalah movement, it is also important to realize that there was a gap between different groups of Maskilim. They had differences regarding Jewish nationalism and religious practice. In fact, there was no consensus among the Maskilim regarding the posture that Judaism should take in modern society.

The moderate Maskilim, represented in this work by Solomon Judah Rapoport, believed that "religious tradition [was] a vital force in Jewish history, an indispensable means of preserving the nation and the safe guarantee of its future redemption, and that the

¹ Mahler, Hasidism, 64.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

restoration of the nation to the land of its ancestors [was] an essential element of the Jewish faith."⁷ This stance was evident in an open letter written by Rapoport to the Rabbinic conference in Frankfort-on-the- Main (1845):

The comforting hope for a happy future of the nation is one of the strongholds of Judaism, which have secured through many centuries of the Diaspora the survival of the Jews as individuals and as a national community. The protagonists of the Reform would like to extinguish in the heart of Israel the memories of the great past, as well as the national hope for the future, and leave only the present; yet the present itself has no duration; it will pass and with it will also disappear the destructive work of the Reformers who appear to have no regard for the nation's future.⁸

Other Maskilim, particularly those who were influenced by Abraham Geiger and the German Reform movement, envisioned a new form of Judaism. By reforming Judaism they believed that the essence of Judaism would not only be preserved for their generation, but continued into the next. "They thought that by shedding [Judaism's] nationalistic peculiarities and its fortuitous accretions Judaism would become able to resist successfully the impact of Christian culture and even to exert a stronger spiritual influence on the non-Jewish world; thus the Jews would better be able to fulfill their 'mission' as teachers of monotheism."⁹

⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

⁸Translation of the open letter is as it appears in Joseph Heller's, Founders of the Science of Judaism (London, 1946), 9-10.

⁹Heller, Founders of the Science of Judaism , 3

Though the German Reformers and the reform-minded Galician Maskilim were not institutionally related, they had significant opportunities to directly influence one another. Spicehandler points out,

As early as the thirties and forties of the last century, at the very period when the German movement was crystallizing its ideology, its leading spokesmen were engaged in a lively commerce of ideas with the leaders of the Galician Haskalah. . . . They published in the Galician Hebrew journals and were involved in the same ideological politics. . . . During the second generation of the Galician Haskalah (1835-1860), a particularly close relationship developed between the left-wing Maskilim and their counterparts in Germany.¹⁰

Both Judah Leib Miseses and Joshua Heschel Schorr were associated with the left wing of the Galician Haskalah. These men were influenced by German Reform and, in their own distinctive way, influenced the spread of Reform in Europe and the United States. Though neither man deserves all the credit, each played a role in changing the face of Judaism in the 19th century.

Like other Maskilim of his time, Miseses believed that a modern education was the means to emancipation. However, Miseses was never able to fully articulate or demonstrate the form that enlightened education should take. Aside from saying that young students should devote their time to secular studies--including philosophy and the study of the vernacular--in addition to Jewish

¹⁰Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Reformist," 183.

studies, Mises never provided any other details. Instead, he directed his energies towards writing polemics.

Notably, Mises tried to discredit the *Baal Shem Tov* and his followers. He blasted both hasidic leaders and hasidic practices, accusing the Hasidim of spreading unreasonable beliefs and foolish practices. These falsehoods, he suggested, put a barrier between the Jewish masses and the prospect of emancipation. In Kinat Haemet, Mises tried to show how the abhorrent schemes of the hasidic leaders fit into historical perspective. He suggested that the traditional leaders were part of a long history of pietists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who purposely bamboozled the masses in order to satisfy their personal needs. Though a majority of Jews in Galicia suffered from extreme poverty, Mises accused the Hasidim, the ones who offered the hope of redemption, of robbing, misleading, and cheating the masses in order to gain personal profit and glory.

Schorr's involvement with Reform is more pronounced than that of Mises. The most obvious reason, of course, is that Schorr lived during the most crucial years of the development of German Reform. He was not only familiar with Geiger's work and the "Scientific Study of Judaism," but he also applied Reform ideals and scientific method to his work.

Like Mises, Schorr aimed to discredit the hasidic leadership. However, Schorr was more concerned with the Galician rabbinate than the Hasidim. Schorr believed that the Orthodox rabbis, such as Rabbi Ornstein, were powerful enough to sabotage the efforts of the Maskilim and sway both the Jewish masses and government officials away from enlightened ideals.

While some of his writings contained the same anti-cleric message that was espoused by Mises, Schorr's approach was more scientific than simple polemics. Schorr believed that scientific method was the only way to break the yoke of rabbinism. Certainly, his scientific approach was influenced by *Chochmat Yisrael*--a phenomenon that had not come into Galicia until after Mises' death. As a result of the influence of *Chochmat Yisrael*, Schorr applied scientific method to every issue that came into his purview.

While Schorr addressed some of the same issues as Mises, he did so more systematically and with more detail. Unlike Mises who only published one major work, Schorr presented his ideas in many studies over the course of many decades. Since he was both an accomplished scholar and a man of wealth, he had the where-with-all to create and publish Hehalutz, a periodical in which he could present his radical religious views, views that would have even been foreign to Mises.

Neither Schorr nor Mises was afraid to speak or write what was on his mind, even if their words were sure to lead to controversy. Since they were both radical when it came to their understanding of Judaism and its historical development, they often found themselves in the middle of controversy--particularly Schorr.

Schorr was a brutally honest man. While this honesty served him well in his writing, it did not serve him well socially. His honest criticism of the work of his friends and contemporaries eventually caused his peers to abandon him. Like many of the Maskilim of his day who wanted to break the yoke of rabbinism, Schorr was willing to place the Talmud and other rabbinic texts

under the scope of scientific scrutiny. However, unlike some of his peers, especially the moderate Maskilim, Schorr was willing to critically analyze matters of theological importance, even the Torah itself.

In 1837 Schorr's irreverent attitude was already recognized by his fellow Maskilim. When Schorr showed an article which he was going to publish in Kerem Chemed to Samuel David Luzzato, Luzzato warned him that it would not be in his interest to present such a theological topic:

You must remove from your article everything you said . . . concerning the belief in the immortality of the soul. If you do not, I shall be compelled to answer your remarks without favor (this matter involves the profanation of the Name). . . . I am reluctant to spoil your reputation before your countrymen.¹¹

Spicehandler pointed out that "the article never appeared."¹² He continued,

It is quite possible that Rapoport, the editor of Kerem Chemed, rejected it even after the necessary deletions were made and that Schorr's subsequent hostility to him¹³ dates from this period. Schorr was never able to publish an article in Kerem Chemed until Rapoport disassociated himself from its staff.¹⁴

¹¹Igrot Shada"i (Przemsł, 1882-1894), 386-387. As it appears in Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Reformist," 191.

¹²Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Reformist," 191.

¹³See pages 59-60 of this thesis.

¹⁴Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Reformist," 191.

Schorr had numerous encounters with Rapoport throughout his career. As has already been mentioned, Schorr and Geiger were in close contact, particularly during the first years of Hehalutz.¹⁵ Despite the fact that both Geiger and Rapoport were committed to *Chochmat Yisrael*, Rapoport sought "to unite the progressive principles of the Haskalah with faithful adherence to the Jewish tradition,"¹⁶ while Geiger was willing to apply scientific method and criticism to the sacred texts, regardless of the effect it would have on Jewish tradition.

Schorr brought his differences with Rapoport into the public domain when he published an unfriendly review of Rapoport's Erech Millin. He criticized the work for its digressions, plagiarism, impure language, and verbosity.¹⁷ Further complicating their relationship, another criticism of Rapoport's work appeared in Hehalutz IV. In it Schorr described Rapoport's article, "Yeshurun," as confused, full of contradictions, and based on false assumptions. Schorr concluded, somewhat sarcastically, that future generations would infer that there had to be two different Rapoport, each with his own view and personality.¹⁸

It is worth noting that although reactions to Mieses were limited, his main critic was Rapoport. Rapoport had little regard for Mieses' work.¹⁹ In the introduction to his famous essay on Rabbi

¹⁵Geiger was the last to leave Hehalutz (his last article appeared in Hehalutz VI, 1861) before the publication became Schorr's private domain.

¹⁶Heller, Founders, 9.

¹⁷"Bikkoret Sefer Erech Millin", Hehalutz II, 117-153.

¹⁸Hehalutz IV, 53-65.

¹⁹Barzilai, Shlomo, 31.

Nathan²⁰ Rapoport castigated Mieses, without mentioning him by name, for digging up "the past for the sole purpose of discovering in it evidence that may lend historical support to [his] own extreme views and ideas."²¹

There is no formal evidence that the traditionalists opposed Mieses' work. It may be that since Mieses' writing was limited to one original publication, he was never taken seriously. However, it is more likely that the Hasidim were content in taking their complaints about Kinat Haemet directly to the Austro-Hungarian authorities. Unfortunately, documentation of this sort of verbal complaint does not exist today.

Opposition to the Haskalah in Galicia was so great that, after nearly a century of efforts by the Maskilim, enlightened ideals were never accepted by the Jewish masses. When men such as Herz Homberg and Hartwig Wessely brought the Haskalah to Galicia they envisioned an enlightened European Jewish community. However, after the continued efforts of men such as Mieses and Schorr the Haskalah faded away without its aims ever realized. Aside from the successes of a few individuals, the Galician Jewish masses were never integrated into the general society.

Despite the fact that the enlightenment never really took hold in Galicia, it is incorrect to say that Maskilim such as Mieses and Schorr failed in their task. In Germany, the effect of the enlighteners was clear. Their work paved the way for the

²⁰This article can be found in Bikkure Ha'ittim IX (1829).

²¹Barzilay, Shlomo, 81.

"Scientific Study of Judaism," and eventually Reform. However, in Galicia, the influence of the Maskilim was less obvious. While the radical Maskilim never formally affiliated with the Reform movement in Germany and never established their own movement in Galicia, they were, nevertheless, "Reformists". Though their call for changes in Jewish religious attitudes never directly influenced the lives of the majority of their fellow Galician Jews, their efforts were intended to contribute to the development of Jewish religious reforms.

Though Mises died before German Reform ever blossomed into a vital movement, he was familiar with its early development. Mises included in his writings the experiences of the Reformers who were willing to adapt the traditional prayers into the German language.²² Therefore, it is evident that he saw value in the process that was taking place in Germany. He recognized that the experiences of the Reformers could serve as a model for what his Eastern European Jewish community might some day achieve. Additionally, despite the fact that Mises' Kinat Haemet preceded Geiger's work, many ideas presented in Kinat Haemet were congruent with the reform-minded position that traditionalist leaders and practices inhibited the prospect of emancipation for the Jewish masses.

Regarding Schorr, Spicehandler points out in the end of his article, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature Years," that he corresponded with Bernhard Felsenthal, an American Reform rabbi,

²²See pages 25-26 of this thesis.

between 1875 and 1890. "The correspondence," writes Spicehandler, "indicates that Schorr remained an unshaken religious liberal who expressed his vague hope that the unfulfilled dreams which he had for Reform in Europe might very well be realized in the United States."²³ Today, many scholars of the period of the Haskalah and Reform list Schorr with other contributors to the development of Reform in the nineteenth century.

²³Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr-The Mature years," 527.

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