

The Samuel & Althea Stroum Lectures

I N J E W I S H S T U D I E S

The Yiddish Art Song

performed by Leon Lishner, basso,
and Lazar Weiner, piano
(stereophonic record album)

The Holocaust in Historical Perspective

by Yehuda Bauer

Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory

by Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi

Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Ethics

by Joseph Dan

The Invention of Hebrew Prose:

Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism

by Robert Alter

Recent Archaeological Discoveries and Biblical Research

by William G. Dever

Jewish Identity in the Modern World

by Michael A. Meyer

Jewish Identity in the Modern World



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Enlightenment



The Powerful Enticements of Reason and Universalism

AS A PROPER NOUN *Enlightenment* refers to a particular intellectual movement in European history. Its Jewish equivalent became known as the *Haskalah*. Although Enlightenment thinkers were not always friendly to Jews, their movement influenced the Jewish turn to broader horizons. My purpose here, however, is neither to discuss the Enlightenment in relation to the Jews nor to present a historical sketch of the *Haskalah* as it spread from central Europe eastward to Russia. Instead, I shall principally be concerned with enlightenment in a generic sense, as a force operating upon individual Jews and Jewish communities, engendering various responses and reflected in differing forms of Jewish identity. Thus it is the content and effect of enlightenment that matters here, not its representatives or organized forms. That content I take to be composed principally of two interrelated elements: reason and universalism. They are interrelated because reason implies a universal community of rational persons, and universalism, in turn, requires a common, rational basis of discourse. Viewed thus broadly, the influence of enlight-

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enment has been significant in Jewish history for more than two centuries.

Enlightenment has been both an erosive force, undermining Jewish identity in its premodern form, and a constituent element of its modern varieties. On the one hand, it has challenged the Jewish doctrine of supernatural revelation and the Jews' religious or ethnic exclusivism. But on the other, it has become integral in the identities of nearly all modern Jews; few Jews today still seek to exclude it.

In order better to understand the numerous ways in which enlightenment has affected modern Jewish identity, it will be useful to begin with a brief consideration of premodern Jewish identity. Here it seems necessary to note immediately that rationalism and universalism were, of course, not entirely foreign to Jewish consciousness even before modern times. There is a rich tradition of Jewish philosophy extending back to Philo of Alexandria and down through the Middle Ages. Jews never repudiated the universalism of the biblical prophets. But for various reasons, not the least of them exclusion and persecution, Jewish communities before the modern period had largely neglected this heritage, stressing instead their own divinely ordained separation and superiority.

Drawing upon the work of Jacob Katz,¹ we can easily note the elements of exclusiveness that went into the premodern Jewish identity as it was passed on through the generations. At its heart was the firm belief that the Jews were God's chosen people, that they stood in a special relationship to God, that the persecution they suffered in exile was due only to their own sinfulness, and that upon full repentance they would be restored to a glorious existence in their own land. A messiah from their stock would

only in act but in sentiment, with dire divine punishment envisaged for those who failed to live up to the community ideal. The medieval Hasidim were not averse to burning books that conveyed a conflicting message and to encouraging all members of the community to enforce the collective will on each individual. Building fences inside fences, they regarded even non-Hasidic Judaism as threatening religious purity. The gentile world lay yet further away, beyond the outermost barrier.⁵

In some places Jewish exclusivism receded during the late Middle Ages, but only slowly and incompletely. The more tolerant attitude of the late thirteenth-century Provençal rabbi Menahem Ha-Meiri, who distinguished Muslims and Christians from idolaters, did not become dominant for Ashkenazi Jewry during his own time or for centuries thereafter. The new Hasidic movement, born in eighteenth-century eastern Europe and still very much alive today, perpetuated the sharp dichotomy between the Jewish and gentile worlds. One of its most central texts gives that dichotomy metaphysical status when, drawing upon the Jewish mystical tradition, it declares that since the souls of the nations of the world emanate from the realm of evil, they are inherently incapable of doing good for its own sake.⁶ In the nineteenth century, the leading Hungarian rabbi Moses Sofer cautioned his descendants to stay far from would-be modernizers and to read none of their writings. Rather, they should confine their studies to the traditional texts and commentaries, while keeping their names unchanged, their dress traditional, and their language that of the Jews.⁷ Still today a tiny segment of the Jewish community rejects enlightenment as an anti-Jewish intrusion and in the extreme instance crosses the border from religious exclusivism into chauvinism or racism.⁸ The vast majority of Jews, however, have incorporated

rule the nations of the earth. Jewish children were imbued with belief in a sharp dichotomy between Jews and gentiles. The former were deemed pure, children of the covenant, while the latter were called impure and uncircumcised. One was not to regard them highly or imitate their actions.² When rage at their persecutors welled up within them and when censors did not prevent them from writing freely, medieval Jews referred to Christians as idolaters, to their churches as houses of abomination, and to their saviour as the hanged one.³ Seen in purely empirical terms, Judaism had been vanquished by its triumphant daughter religions: Christianity in the West and Islam in the East. But in the superempirical perspective of faith, the Jews remained dearest to God.

Physical segregation, sometimes welcomed by the Jews themselves, and badges imposed by gentiles to mark them as Jews reinforced these feelings of exclusiveness. So did Jewish law, which prohibited Jews from drinking gentile wine and eating gentile food, allowed them to take interest from non-Jews but not from Jews, and valued strict observance of the sabbath above saving the life of a gentile on that day. There was no neutral ideological ground upon which Jew and gentile could meet, no religion of humanity that they shared. Individuals were wholly the one or the other. Conversion was the only pathway out of the ghetto. Within its walls, clear models of Jewish identity were instilled in the home, in the school, in the community. There were no significant discontinuities, no occasions for severe crises of identity.

The medieval Jewish community left little room for individuality. It imposed its norms sternly upon each child growing up and upon each adult. Haym Soloveitchik has shown the extreme form this took among the Hasidim of medieval Germany.⁴ Here conformity was demanded not



enlightenment into their identities, making room for it alongside their Jewish legacy or even harmonizing the two. How did this come about?

It was in seventeenth-century Holland that the first major conflict between community-enforced Jewish identity and modern individuality occurred. The Sephardi Jews of Amsterdam had adopted some of the rigid religious authoritarianism of the Iberian Catholic environment from which they had fled. Like the Inquisition, they possessed little tolerance for dissent. Yet their own identity was uncertain. Some had been Marranos, secretly identifying as Jews but possessing only imperfect knowledge of Judaism and unable to practice it fully. In Amsterdam they asserted their Jewishness without dread of persecution, but out of an apparent lingering insecurity, they feared heresy as a force that could undermine their newly won redefinition as normative Jews.

Uriel Acosta had himself been a Marrano in Portugal before he arrived in Amsterdam in the second decade of the seventeenth century. But his return to Judaism was troubled from the start. A startlingly independent personality, whose Jewish identity was not transmitted naturally in childhood, he came to active Jewish identification out of a growing conviction that Judaism was the true faith. His continued adherence to it depended on whether that conviction could be sustained. Mistakenly, he had come to believe that Judaism was simply the faith of the Hebrew Bible. Once he discovered that biblical laws and tenets had been considerably altered and expanded by the rabbis, he found himself at odds with Amsterdam Jewry. When he persistently rejected rabbinic Judaism in belief and practice, they excommunicated him. Unable to find a way of

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living both within the Jewish community and in harmony with his conscience, he finally committed suicide.⁹

Acosta is of particular interest for the study of Jewish identity. Like the talented intellectuals Erikson has described, who undergo a prolonged identity crisis in the attempt to achieve a consistent worldview, Acosta was a man with little tolerance for contradiction. His inner need for consistency drove him first from the New Testament to the Old and finally to a rejection of all revelation in favor of natural law alone. His last choice was for the coherence provided by untrammelled reason as the sole guide for life. Baruch Spinoza, who lived just after Acosta in Amsterdam, followed a similar path. For him, as well, Jewish identity gave way before a larger attachment to the community of all rational persons, even though that community had as yet no basis in social reality. Spinoza, too, was placed under the ban.

Neither Acosta nor Spinoza left Judaism for another faith community. To their contemporaries they were heretics, men whose convictions pushed them out of a Judaism that could not tolerate their deviation. Yet paradoxically, Acosta—and especially Spinoza—became models of Jewish identity for later Jewish intellectuals.¹⁰ It was precisely their nonconformity that appealed to those Jews of subsequent generations who began to define their own Jewishness in terms of marginality and the insights that it offered. Late in life Freud referred to himself as “an old Jew, but an infidel one”; the philosopher Walter Kaufmann called his religion “the faith of a heretic”; and the Marxist Jewish intellectual Isaac Deutscher chose to identify with a whole chain of Jewish heretical tradition that ran from Elisha ben Abuyah in ancient times through Spinoza, Heine, and Marx, to Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky,



and Freud.¹¹ But Acosta and Spinoza in their day remained socially isolated. They stood alone outside the Jewish consensus. Not until a century later did a movement that enjoyed growing support begin within Jewish communities to broaden identifications, extending them beyond the boundaries of Judaism.

It was the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century that initiated the process undermining Jewish exclusivism.¹² Despite the ambivalence of Enlightenment thinkers toward Jews and their all but unanimous condemnation of Judaism, the universal, rational categories in which they thought drove them to include Jews within the fellowship of humanity. Natural religion, the religion of reason, was a faith underlying both Judaism and Christianity. As the environment became less hostile, and as Jews and Christians came into closer social contact, those Jews most exposed to gentiles and their ways began to identify themselves not only as Jews but also as German or French, as Europeans, or simply as enlightened human beings. Jewish identity contracted to make room for new elements absorbed from the outside world. The result was widening intergenerational and intracommunity conflict. No longer was there a clear consensus. No longer was the transition from generation to generation an easy one. And no longer was it a matter of an occasional “heretic.” Rather, for increasing numbers of Jews then coming of age, Jewish identity ceased to be a natural, unselfconscious framework for their lives. As enlightenment penetrated one class of Jews after another and one community after another, Jewish identity became problematic. Which elements of the self now remained Jewish? Was one principally a Jew and secondarily a European, or vice versa? Identity crisis became a recurrent feature in the genera-

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tional transmission of Jewishness. Wherever enlightenment penetrated, it brought self-consciousness and, especially for intellectuals, the need to achieve self-definition.

The new identifications called into question some of the old ones. For Moses Mendelssohn, who managed to live both as a traditional Jew and as a man of the European Enlightenment, the latter component of his identity sometimes jostled the former. As a rationalist he could not believe that demons attacked Jewish corpses before burial; as a European he could find no value in traditional Jewish dress; and as a Germanophile he found the Yiddish language to be a corrupting influence. But mostly he solved the problem of potential conflict by separating and narrowing his Jewish identity while leaving it basically intact. His Jewishness became a matter of private conscience. Unlike the Sephardi authorities of Amsterdam, he would not impose his own convictions on anyone else. Neither church nor state, he believed, should act coercively in matters of religion. Personally, he could live at peace in two spheres, for Judaism and reason, Judaism and European culture, did not conflict. His religion, as he interpreted it, possessed no superrational dogmas, and it was fully tolerant of divergent faith communities. What set the Jews apart—and constituted their special identity—was for Mendelssohn preeminently the law that God had revealed to them at Sinai. It governed their actions but not their thoughts.

Yet although, unlike the law, rational religion was not for Jews alone, it was in Mendelssohn’s view a particular legacy of Judaism to have propagated it, and its continued advocacy constituted a Jewish vocation. Jews were chosen by Providence “to call wholesome and unadulterated ideas of God and His attributes continuously to the attention of the rest of mankind.”¹³ Mendelssohn thus set forth the



idea of the "mission of Israel," which became one of the principal components of modern Jewish identity in its essentially religious variety. Judaism was the enlightened religion *par excellence*. To be a Jew was therefore not to preserve the fragments of an outworn identity hopelessly at odds with enlightenment. Just the opposite was true: rational religion was the legacy of Judaism, not yet fully absorbed by non-Jews. Jewish identity became focused outward. One was a Jew because one had a mission to the non-Jew, a mission that not only was in harmony with modernity but could help to shape it.

Mendelssohn, and those who followed him, defined Jewish identity primarily in religious terms. To be a Jew now came to mean belonging to a religious denomination, more or less like the Christian ones. Jewish identity was expressed by avowing beliefs and practicing rituals. The unit of Jewish continuity was the community of faith. For the modern Orthodox the Jewish religion was eternal and hence could easily serve as the vehicle of Jewish identity from generation to generation. But religious reformers faced a more difficult situation when they thinned the ethnic strand of continuity, for the Jewish religion, as they conceived it, had changed in the past and would continue to change. Aside from its universalist credo of ethical monotheism, Liberal Judaism offered no permanent mooring to which Jewish identity could be made fast. Its proponents were forced to understand Jewishness in its particularity as ever developing along with the evolution of the Jewish religion.

Mendelssohn served most fully as an identity model for modern Jewish Orthodoxy. Like Mendelssohn, Samson Raphael Hirsch, the progenitor of Neo-Orthodoxy in nineteenth-century Germany, was a man of European culture and broader identifications. For generations of mod-

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ern Orthodox Jews in Germany and elsewhere, Hirsch's writings successfully neutralized the dangers inherent in enlightenment by arguing that Jewish religion and contemporary culture could exist compartmentally side by side. It was simply necessary to insist on the primacy of revelation at every point of theological conflict. Like Mendelssohn, Hirsch remained observant of the law and preached to the Jews their mission of bringing religious truth to the gentiles. But other modern religious Jews deviated from Orthodoxy and thereby withdrew from Mendelssohn's shadow. For them critical historical thought eroded faith that both the Written and Oral Law had been presented to Moses at Sinai. Conservative spirits, like Zacharias Frankel, were able to harmonize historical criticism with revelation by historicizing the rabbinic literature while leaving the Written Torah untouched as the directly revealed word of God. As far as we know, cognitive dissonance never disturbed Frankel's apparently tranquil soul. He was able to see himself and his generation as a link in the chain of halakhic development. Abraham Geiger, the religious reformer, presents a sharply contrasting picture of severe identity crisis. Emerging from an Orthodox home into a German university setting that challenged the traditions which had nurtured him, Geiger long and painfully struggled to achieve a Jewish identity into which he could incorporate commitment to the methods and findings of historical science. Scholarship demanded critical distance, looking at Judaism from the outside. But being a Jew and, in his case, a rabbi required inner identification with the totality of the Jewish experience. Eventually, Geiger was able to integrate both roles into his life and help to create a form of Judaism in which faith did not set bounds to science.¹⁴

For other Jews, especially after Geiger's time, the reli-



gious component of Jewish identity gave way entirely before the scientific ideals of scholarship. Learning, which had been a Jewish value when applied in a traditional manner to religious texts, became an independent characteristic of Jewish identity. Studying remained a form of Jewish expression, even when the method of study was critical and the purpose to test one's acumen or to write a work of scholarship rather than to discern God's will.¹⁵ And finally, learning became Jewish regardless even of its content. For many Jews the serious study of any worthy subject became a way of being Jewish.

But intellectual challenges were not the only ones that assailed Jewish identity. An increasing number of the young felt estranged from their fellow Jews no less than they felt alienated from Jewish tradition. Enlightenment not only made their ancestors' beliefs and practices unacceptable to them, it distanced them from parents and relatives and reduced their sense of oneness with the Jewish people as a whole, most of whom remained as yet unenlightened. In the writings of enlightened German Jews around the turn of the nineteenth century there are at least three instances in which the author undertakes an elaborate classification of the Jews of his time according to degrees of enlightenment.¹⁶ Each author identifies himself with the small group that he regards as the truly enlightened. The remaining Jews, clinging to superstitions or—in extreme reaction—forsaking Judaism for libertinism, are not objects of identification. The range of Jewish social identity narrows as growing differences among Jews make full identification possible only with a smaller group within the Jewish community. For the enlightened Jews it is their fellow enlightened; for the traditionalists it is those who have stood steadfast with them in opposing the intrusion of alien values.

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This fragmentation required the use of new designations. Enlightened Jews who had emancipated themselves from rabbinic law and customs, reducing the textual basis for their identity to the Bible, chose such designations as *Mosists*. A broad spectrum of Jews, including the modern Orthodox, found that they did not want to call themselves Jews, because that term not only was used contemptuously by gentiles but was associated with their exclusivism in the premodern world. They chose *Israélite* or *Hebrew* instead, terms that were used in the title of both Reform and Orthodox Jewish newspapers in various countries. To separate themselves from Reformers, traditional Jews also required a more specific and positive term than Orthodoxy. They chose *Torah-true*, by which they meant loyalty to the full twofold revelation of Written and Oral Law.

Aside from the home, it was the school in which the child made the identifications that were shaped into personal identity. Not surprisingly, education was from the beginning a principal concern of the maskilim, the Jewish enlighteners. In altering the curriculum of the Jewish school to embrace secular as well as Jewish studies, they inculcated values that lay outside Judaism. In giving the students teachers who stood with one foot in the Jewish community and the other in the non-Jewish world, the educators displayed personal models very different from those presented by the conventional teacher of small children, the melamed. The combination of traditional home and modern schooling generated identity conflicts that could not easily be resolved. Only after Jewish homes too began to integrate non-Jewish culture did this gap between parents and children, characterizing the first generation of enlightenment (whenever and wherever enlightenment first made inroads), cease to be so severe.



Perhaps the most insidious value that European culture set against Jewish tradition was not scientific truth but beauty. Mendelssohn himself had developed an interest in aesthetics. His successors carried it further, studying the Bible, for example, as a work of extraordinary literary merit rather than simply as a religious text. But although an appreciation for beauty, especially in relation to a religious purpose, was not entirely absent from any period of Jewish history, its veneration was Greek, not Hebrew. As enlightenment brought Jews to aesthetic awareness, they often saw themselves compelled to choose between Hellenism and the strict moralism of Jewish tradition. The poet Heinrich Heine felt this conflict intensely, and for most of his life chose to emulate the handsome young men of Greece rather than the stern patriarchs of ancient Israel. Later generations of Jews in eastern Europe were similarly attracted by the alien ideal of beauty. The Hebrew poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik described the fatal allure of natural beauty to the yeshiva student; the poet Saul Tchernichovsky imagined himself venerating the statue of Apollo, the Greek god of handsome masculinity. Even if Jewish secular poets and artists could, like Jewish rationalists, find some precedent for their artistic enterprise in the Jewish past, it was far more difficult for them to overcome the conflict with a tradition deeply suspect of art for its own sake and to absorb aesthetic values into Jewish identity.

Not always did modern Jews reach out willingly to acquire enlightenment. Sometimes it was forced on them. Especially in the German states, governments often made political emancipation conditional upon the Jews' giving up various forms of self-exclusion. They would grant equality only once Jews spoke the language of the land, possessed some secular education, and identified themselves fully with their environment. Some Jews, who

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were themselves enlightened, thereupon urged enlightenment on their coreligionists, arguing the value of the political reward. But traditionalists, wary of the assimilation that would follow upon both enlightenment and political integration, could find no merit in the argument. Patriotism, they recognized, represented a diminution of Jewish identity and especially of its powerful messianic component. Indeed, for many Jews in the West, the state and nation soon became the dominant objects of identification. In Germany, the relation between German and Jewish identity elements was tellingly expressed in the title German Jews gave their large defense organization, founded in 1893. They called it the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith.

Even in Tsarist Russia, where onerous restrictions on the Jews were altered from time to time but never removed entirely, some maskilim favored identification with the Russian people and its rulers. Grasping at straws, they urged fellow Jews to believe in the good intentions of the regime and in the willingness of the gentle Russian to call the Jew his brother. But the reality of rejection, which ever and again punctured such illusions, prevented east European Jews from ever being able to consider themselves fully Russians, Poles, or Ukrainians.

Thus the Russian Haskalah was more focused inward than its German predecessor. Rather than defining Jewishness narrowly in religious terms to make room for other identifications, it sought to bring the outside world inside an expanded Jewish sphere. But that enlarged Jewish sphere would look very different. In one of the Russian Haskalah's earliest programmatic statements, *Te'udah be-Yisrael* (A mission in Israel),¹⁷ Isaac Baer Levinsohn urged a transformation whereby Jewish schools would teach the

sciences and the languages of the lands in which Jews lived along with Hebrew presented according to its grammatical rules. Only the few who required professional expertise as rabbis would study Talmud. The new Jew, educated in this manner, Levinsohn showed, would not represent a sharp break with the past but only embody traditions that were well precedented, especially among the Sephardim. The medieval philosophers Saadia and Maimonides, for example, were models of the rationalism that Levinsohn was propagating. Thus enlightenment was not a departure from Judaism but merely the substitution for presently dominant values of others drawn from its past. In retaining attachment to Hebrew, moreover, the more moderate of the east European maskilim sought to preserve an ethnic bond that rapidly disintegrated in the West. Levinsohn and later writers were fully cognizant of its role in uniting Jews everywhere. Unlike the Jewish religious reformers in Germany, they left worship services in Hebrew. They also differed in not copying Christian practices—at least in part because the Russian Orthodox church, unlike the Protestants in Germany, did not present an attractive model of religious modernization. It was only the excessive rigor with which Jewish law was applied and the narrowness of a religious leadership that denounced all secular learning that the Russian maskilim excoriated with bitter sarcasm. Their ideal was *dat im da'at*, religion together with (secular) knowledge, both of them within the Jewish orbit.

Yet in eastern Europe, as well, enlightenment wrought havoc, for secular knowledge not only expanded intellectual horizons, it presented new perspectives from which the beliefs that one held and the customs that one practiced as a Jew looked irrational or ugly. The result was a step-by-step process in which the sancta of Judaism were desac-

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ralized and ultimately rejected. The role model for the Jewish boy had been the *talmid hakham*, the scholar of sacred texts; for the girl the *eshet hayil*, the faithful wife and mother. Enlightenment introduced new models: for men, especially the physician, later also the industrialist; for some Jewish women, the pharmacist. Talmud study was not merely displaced in the curriculum, it became an object of derision along with the manner in which it was taught. The rationalistic scalpel at first cut away only superstitions: belief in demons and the use of amulets. But once the incision was made, there was no holding back the knife. Rabbinic legends, then rabbinic laws, and finally biblical laws were stripped away one by one. As traditional belief waned, the practices that it sanctioned fell into neglect. Once the Haskalah became more radical, its adherents gave up not only the garments that marked them as Jews but also the phylacteries (*tefillin*), strict observance of the sabbath, and finally the dietary laws (*kashrut*). The spread of religious negligence seems to have progressed more rapidly among men than women, the latter preserving traditions within the more pervasively Jewish atmosphere of the home, in which they spent a larger portion of their daily lives. As men visited the synagogue ever more rarely, it ceased to serve them as a source for news of the larger world outside the Jewish community. In place of the conversation on secular topics (*shmues*) conducted there on weekdays and filtered through Jewish concerns, non-Jewish newspapers became the purveyors of information, bringing their own perspective to contemporary events.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the Russian Haskalah was its inherent instability. For many maskilim it was not a destination but only a station on a continuing odyssey. It undermined the old way of life without providing a sat-

isfactory new one. Y. L. Gordon, one of the most prominent of Russian maskilim, came to the sad recognition that the Haskalah was the ideology of a single generation.¹⁸ The children of the maskilim went on to leave the Jewish heritage behind altogether. No longer believers, substituting the Russian language for Hebrew, their Jewish identity became vestigial. In her memoirs Pauline Wengroff well expressed the transitional character of the middle generation by citing premonitions that her mother used to express: "Two things I can say for sure: I and my generation will certainly live and die as Jews; our grandchildren will surely not live and die as Jews. Only what our children will become—that I cannot guess."¹⁹

What happened to that third generation that went beyond the Haskalah's objective of enlightenment within the Jewish sphere? Those Russian and Polish Jews most concerned for their careers often converted to Christianity as their similarly motivated coreligionists had begun to do earlier in the West. Some were drawn to alien ideologies. They became positivists, substituting a universal, antimetaphysical, and practically oriented philosophy for both religion and literary culture. Or they turned to socialism, in which they found a cause demanding the same commitment that traditional Judaism had imposed upon the premodern generations. Only continued persecution of Jews could occasionally revive vestigial sympathies in Jewish radicals like the Menshevik leaders Pavel Axelrod and Julius Martov.²⁰

The most extreme among Jewish socialists regarded socialism as an identity that could not be harmonized with Judaism. Either one identified with the Jewish people and its religion or with the international proletariat and its rejection of all religion as simply a veil masking the privileged status of the wealthy. Jewish socialists of this kind

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rejected their Jewish origins or regarded them as insignificant. Some were even willing to accept the negative stereotypes of Jews promulgated by their fellow socialists. Rosa Luxemburg neither identified as a Jew nor displayed any particular concern for the persecutions suffered by fellow Jews. She was a consistent and uncompromising internationalist. Leon Trotsky too denied any Jewish loyalty, though he at least recognized that Jews were especially vulnerable to their enemies. Perhaps the most extreme in rejecting Jewish identity were the Jewish *narodniki*, Jews who romantically associated themselves with the cause of the Russian country masses. Unlike the Jewish Marxists, they did not flee their particular Jewish identity for a universal one that embraced and superseded all others. They played at being what they patently were not: intimates of the simple, Russian Orthodox peasants. Sometimes they were shocked to discover that although they had forsworn their Jewish identity, the peasants they sought to serve nonetheless regarded them—negatively—as Jews. Later, during the early years of the Soviet Union, the Jewish Sections of the Communist Party had little success in transforming Jewish identity into a religionless, Yiddishist form of proletarian culture. The Bolshevik leadership remained fundamentally unsympathetic to any form of Jewish separatism, and few Russian Jews could wax enthusiastic over a Jewishness whose content was mostly at odds with traditional Jewish values.²¹

In the United States, too, the universalism and rationalism of enlightenment drew Jews to the periphery of Jewish identity and some of them beyond it. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the American Reform movement entered its "classical" phase. Ritual observance in Reform synagogues and homes diminished in accordance with the conviction that advanced religion was



based on ethics, not symbolic acts. Particularizing rituals, which tended to reinforce Jewish identity, such as blowing the ram's horn at the New Year, building booths on the Feast of Tabernacles, and observing dietary laws, were all but abandoned. To be a Jew in the sense of classical Reform Judaism meant to be an adherent of ethical monotheism, a faith that derived from the Hebrew prophets but was not meant for Jews alone. Jewish identity was being part of a community that cherished commitment to the universalistic ideal of a single God worshipped by a united humanity. One remained a Jew to propagate that ideal.

But was a particular identity indeed necessary to advance the universal goal? Felix Adler, the son of a Reform rabbi, thought not. In 1876 he founded the New York Society for Ethical Culture, which soon attracted hundreds of peripheral Jews to its ranks. Adler simply followed the impetus of enlightenment to what he saw as its logical conclusion. His commitment to reason drew him to a Kantianism that left no room for a personal God but only for an impersonal moral Power. His universalism led him to criticize Reform Judaism's adherence to the mission of Israel as a form of chauvinism no better than the ancient chosen people concept. To be sure, Adler did not virulently reject his Jewish identity; he was proud of his ancestry. But its personal meaning was limited to origins. Like the Jewish socialists in Europe, he identified with humanity in general, not the Jews in particular. In the present, Judaism was a vestige, not an active force; it was destined to lose its distinctiveness within the sea of humanity. The future, he believed, lay in an eclectic religion beyond all religious particularisms, those of Christianity and other faiths no less than those of Judaism. And there was no compelling reason to postpone that future. Mixed

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marriages, like those of his own children, were a step in the right direction.²²

Enlightenment thus manifested itself as a force that could draw Jews further and further away from Jewish identity, across the territory where one was a Jew and at the same time something else as well (European, German, Kantian, socialist), to the border where Jewish identity became vestigial or disappeared entirely. Yet in the border regions countervailing forces arose that sometimes reversed the trajectory. In the succeeding lectures we shall analyze the two most important such forces: antisemitism and Jewish nationalism. But often the Jewish religion also played a large role in such processes of reorientation. During the last two generations the American Reform movement has sought to recapture religious traditions that it had earlier rejected as primitive or inappropriate to the West. At least in part this counterthrust in Reform Judaism has been propelled by an awareness that when enlightenment is fully internalized, it leaves so little room for the specifically Jewish that the residue is insufficient for generational transmission. Similarly, some individual Jews who seemed furthest removed from Jewishness have attached themselves to religious Orthodoxy, occasionally turning their backs on enlightenment with a vengeance. These *ba'ale teshuvah* (repentants) have become an ever more common phenomenon both in Israel and in the United States.²³ Not always, however, is return from the border regions easy or complete. The histories of two prominent individuals will illustrate its complexity.

The middle-class parents to whom Vladimir Medem was born in 1879 in Minsk regarded their Jewish origins as a misfortune. They tried as best they could to hide this



inherited stigma, of which they were greatly ashamed. At birth Vladimir was baptized into the Russian Orthodox church. His parents converted from Judaism later—but to Lutheranism. Yet family acquaintances continued to be Jews or ex-Jews, as was often the case among converts from Judaism. Vladimir's closest friends in school were invariably the Jewish students, who found one another more out of a felt affinity than on account of antisemitism, of which they apparently experienced very little in school. When he became a student at the university in Kiev, Medem began to envy the sense of group identity enjoyed by the Jewish students there. They had a "home"; he did not. He soon felt what he later called a "homesickness" or a "nostalgia" for Jewishness. He began an odyssey from the border back to the center. It was accomplished by no sudden leap but gradually, by degrees, almost unconsciously. "I can only identify the two terminal points," he wrote, "my childhood years when I considered myself a Russian; and the later period, the time of adulthood, when I considered myself a Jew. Both points encompassed a whole series of years during which I changed slowly, imperceptibly."²⁴ Medem declared his nationality as Jewish and began to learn Yiddish. He became one of the principal intellectual leaders of the Bund, the socialist association of Jewish workers. Unlike Luxemburg and Trotsky, Medem had intense and special feelings for his fellow Jews that prompted him to identify deeply with the lot of the Jewish workers and to fight for their cause. Yet Medem—and the Bund in general—remained more universal than particular in orientation. And his Jewish sentiments were always in tension with his devotion to the larger aims and strategies of the socialist revolution.

Unlike Medem's, Franz Kafka's family was not seeking to escape the onus of Judaism through conversion. They

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were comfortably established in Prague and, like many German-speaking Jews there, marked their Jewishness by occasional, halfhearted appearances in the synagogue. This attenuated Jewish identity did not transfer from father to son. The young Kafka, deeply resentful of his father in many respects, castigated him also for passing on a religious heritage so insincerely held that "I could not understand how one could do anything better with the stuff of such a faith than to get rid of it as quickly as possible. In fact getting rid of it seemed to me the most respectful thing one could do."²⁵ Kafka's odyssey, which eventually brought him to a much more intense Jewish identity than that of his parents, thus began with rejection. To become an identifying Jew, Kafka was forced to regain territory on his own. His positive relation to Judaism came after adolescence and from outside his home. In a way, gaining a meaningful Jewish identity was a rebellion against his upbringing.²⁶

Kafka found his way to Jewish affirmation by identifying with those Jews least admired by his family and their friends: the *Ostjuden*, the Jews from eastern Europe. He became closely acquainted with a group of Yiddish actors at the Cafe Savoy and once gave a speech introducing a program of readings from Yiddish literature. He visited the home of a Hasidic rabbi. Among these east Europeans he found a spontaneity and genuineness lacking among German Jews. He also joined a circle of Zionist intellectuals whose influence was responsible for his becoming a Zionist and studying Hebrew. Yet like Medem, Kafka remained to some extent an outsider among his fellow Jews. On one occasion he wondered to his diary whether he really had anything in common with them. Interpreters of Kafka's novels have argued that his lonely protagonists reflect the situation of the rootless Jew in the modern

world. But Kafka does not specifically identify them as Jews. For what is significant about his characters is that they bear the universal burden of modernity. That burden of existential loneliness separates the individual from all collective identities. Even as he became a Jew, Kafka remained apart.

The examples of Medem and Kafka, which could easily be multiplied, illustrate how individual motivation could lead to the repossession of Jewish identity, albeit in a new and individualized form, when its transmission through the generations had ceased or been impaired. But they illustrate also the continuing impact of enlightenment upon all those who do not withdraw from it to an intellectual ghetto or to an ideological extreme. Its effect may be to enhance the sense of human solidarity, as in the case of Medem, or of the common lot of individual separation, as was true for Kafka. But it is an ongoing force that persistently draws Jews to look beyond their Jewishness even as they seek to absorb it alongside of or within their particular identity as Jews.

Antisemitism



The Ambiguous Effects of Exclusion and Persecution

AS ENLIGHTENMENT is that force which draws Jews out of their particularism to identifications beyond the boundaries of Judaism, so it is antisemitism which often acts to keep them within the circle or pushes them back into it.¹ As we shall see, antisemitism's influence on individual Jews and on Jewish communities in the modern world is ambiguous, not clearly predictable in each instance. By devaluing Jews in the eyes of non-Jews—and hence some Jews also in their own eyes—antisemitism may produce mild or severe negations of self. Or it may have entirely the opposite effect, resulting in renewed affirmation of Jewish identity. Thus antisemitism sometimes serves to abet the influence of enlightenment by adding negative reasons for abandoning Jewishness to positive ones. But it can also act as a counterforce, undermining the rationalism and universalism upon which enlightenment is built and inducing a newfound identification with fellow victims of discrimination or persecution. As we shall see, antisemitism in given historical situations may work in both ways at once, weakening Jewish identity for some, strengthening it for others.



6. The term is from Uriel Tal, "Jewish Identity" (in Hebrew), *Ha-Aretz*, 12 October 1986, 11.
7. Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962).
8. Erikson's language in his *Childhood and Society*, 270.
9. I have here slightly modified the categorization presented by Michael Oppenheim in his "A 'Fieldguide' to the Study of Modern Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 46 (1984): 215-30.
10. Much work of this type has been done in recent years by Simon N. Herman. See his *Israelis and Jews: The Continuity of an Identity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1971) and his *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977). See also Arnold Dashofsky and Howard M. Shapiro, *Ethnic Identification among American Jews: Socialization and Social Structure* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1974); Arnold Dashofsky, ed., *Ethnic Identity in Society* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976); Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); and Steven M. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity* (New York: Tavistock, 1983). Harold S. Himmelfarb presents a survey of theoretical and field studies relating to American Jewry in his "Research on American Jewish Identity and Identification: Progress, Pitfalls, and Prospects," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *Understanding American Jewry* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1982), 56-95.
11. See, for example, the series of papers published by the American Jewish Committee during the 1970s entitled *Jewish Education and Jewish Identity*. See also Jacob Neusner, *Stranger at Home: "The Holocaust," Zionism, and American Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
12. It might be argued that the Jewish religion is likewise a force determining Jewish identity. While obviously a very large proportion of modern Jews define their Jewish identity at least partially in religious terms, I understand the Jewish religion in the modern world to be an element of continuity, a given that reacts to external forces and is sometimes altered by them but is

not itself an impinging force. Thus Judaism during the last two centuries has been greatly influenced by enlightenment, somewhat affected by antisemitism, and certainly shaped by its response to Zionism. Even the divisions in modern Judaism—Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform—can be explained largely by the degree to which religious Jews of varying kinds have allowed enlightenment to influence their religious beliefs and rituals.

Enlightenment: *The Powerful Enticements of Reason and Universalism*

1. See especially Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961).
2. The most influential medieval Jewish legist, Moses Maimonides, wrote: "It is forbidden to praise them or even to say: How beautiful this idolator is in his appearance. So much the more so [is it forbidden] to speak in praise of his deeds or take to heart any of his words . . . for it causes one to become attached to him and to learn from his evil deeds" (*Mishneh Torah*, Hilkhoh avodat kokhavim [Laws relating to idolatry], 10:4). (All translations here and elsewhere in these lectures are my own except where a published translation is cited in the notes.) That the category of idolatry included Christians (but not Muslims) is apparent from *ibid.*, 9:4.
3. See, for example, the references to things Christian in the Hebrew Crusade chronicles. The original texts are in Adolf Neubauer and Moritz Stern, eds., *Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen während der Kreuzzüge* (Hebrew reports on the persecution of the Jews during the Crusades) (Berlin: L. Simion, 1892). English translations for two chronicles are given in Robert Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 225-97.



4. Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 1 (1976): 311–57.
5. It is important to distinguish here between idea and identity. Even the Hasidic community was not hermetically sealed from the intellectual world of contemporary Christianity. Religious ideas penetrated medieval Jewish communities from the outside, in some instances creating parallel phenomena. But the adoption or adaption of a doctrine or a practice that has its origin outside the Jewish community does not necessarily entail identification with its source.
6. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, *Liqutei amarim—Tanya* (Collected teachings), trans. Nissan Mindel (Brooklyn, 1962), 22–24.
7. For an abbreviated translation of Sofer's will see W. Gunther Plaut, ed., *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), 256–57.
8. A good example of such Jewish chauvinism is Meir Kahane's pamphlet entitled *Numbers 23:9* (Jerusalem, 1974).
9. Uriel Acosta, *A Specimen of Human Life*, trans. Peter M. Bergman (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1967).
10. Peter L. Berger has argued that heresy became the common condition in modernity once the "plausibility structure" of traditional beliefs was called into question and individual choice replaced the unquestioned acceptance of community authority. According to Berger, Jewish emancipation is "perhaps the most important example in the modern Western world" of this process. See his *The Heretical Imperative* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), esp. 29–30. The heretic is also a rebel and as such embodies an enduring characteristic of the culture hero in Western civilization. See O. B. Hardison, *Entering the Maze: Identity and Change in Modern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 52–53. An allied concept to that of the Jew as heretic is the Jew as pariah, which, Hannah Arendt argued, Jewish poets, writers, and artists developed into a universal human type in the modern world. Such individuals were outsiders to both the Jewish community and the political and cultural consensus of the states in which they lived. See her *The Jew as*

Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 67–90.

11. Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1982), 25–27.
12. To be sure, there were underlying objective causes as well. For example, had not western and central European governments, eager to centralize and thereby strengthen their political and economic control, deprived Jews of the legal autonomy they possessed earlier, formidable barriers to outside identifications would have remained in place. But although such centralization drew Jews closer to non-Jews and political emancipation made them fellow citizens, I would argue that it was above all the more accepting attitude, derived from Enlightenment philosophy, that influenced Jews to reciprocate by regarding gentiles and what they stood for in a new and more open manner.
13. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings*, trans. Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), 89.
14. Geiger's early letters reflect what Erik Erikson called "the rage that is aroused wherever identity development loses the promise of a traditionally assured wholeness" and where anxieties are "aggravated by the decay of institutions which had been the historical anchor of an existing ideology" (*International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* [New York: Macmillan, 1968], vol. 7, s.v. "Identity, Psychosocial"). Geiger's letters were printed in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* 60 (1896): 52ff. I have given fuller interpretations of Hirsch, Frankel, and Geiger in my *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 77–99.
15. This was true not only for professional Jewish scholars. Pauline Wengeroff, a Jewish woman who lived in Belorussia during the last half of the nineteenth century, wrote of her no longer religious husband that he continued to study Talmud, "but this Talmud study wholly lost its earlier religious character and for my husband became more a matter of philosophizing, critical examination and investigation, and it no longer played the principal role in his life" (*Memoiren einer Grossmutter: Bilder aus der Kulturgeschichte der Juden Russlands im 19. Jahrhundert*

[Memoirs of a grandmother: Portraits from the cultural history of the Jews of Russia in the nineteenth century] [Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1910], 2:114).

16. Lazarus Bendavid, *Etwas zur Charakteristik der Juden* (Something of the characteristics of the Jews) (Leipzig: J. Stahel, 1793), 45-53; Aaron Wolfsohn, *Jeschurun, oder unparteyische Beleuchtung der dem Judenthume neuerdings gemachten Vorwürfe* (Jeshurun, or an impartial examination of recent reproaches made against the Jews) (Breslau: no publisher, 1804), 111-16; and [Sabattia Joseph Wolff], "Status causae et controversiae in Sachen der Israeliten in Berlin die deutsche Synagoge betreffend" (Status of the cause and controversy in matters of the Israelites in Berlin with regard to the German synagogue), manuscript composed between 1812 and 1823 and published in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 25 (1980): 111-30.

17. Isaac Baer Levinsohn's *Te'udah be-Yisrael* (A mission in Israel) was completed in 1823 but published only in 1828. There is a recent printing with an introduction by I. Etkes (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1977).

18. It could also be only one stage in a single adult life. Moses Leib Lilienblum, a prominent Russian Jewish writer, passed sequentially from darkest Orthodoxy to Haskalah and religious reform, on to positivism and socialism, and finally to Zionism.

19. Wengeroff, *Memoiren einer Grossmutter*, 2:134.

20. Abraham Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 69-78, 339-40; Israel Getzler, *Martov: A Political Biography of a Russian Social Democrat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 27-29, 56-62.

21. See Zvi Y. Gittelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

22. On Adler see Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethnic Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979).

23. During the late seventies there were about 1,200 *ba'ale teshuvah* studying in yeshivas in Jerusalem. Most of them came from the United States. See Janet Aviad, *Return to Judaism: Re-*

ligious Renewal in Israel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

24. *The Life and Soul of a Legendary Socialist: The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem*, trans. Samuel A. Portnoy (New York: Ktav, 1979), 129.

25. Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), 78.

26. Walter Jens, "Ein Jude namens Kafka," in Thilo Koch, ed., *Porträts deutsch-jüdischer Geistesgeschichte* (Portraits of German Jewish intellectual history) (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1961), 179-203.

Antisemitism: The Ambiguous Effects of Exclusion and Persecution

1. This is not, of course, equivalent to Jean Paul Sartre's extreme position that "it is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew" (italics in source) (*Anti-Semite and Jew* [New York: Schocken Books, 1948], 69). The French Jewish sociologist Georges Friedmann, while finding Sartre's position "penetrating but too simple," was nonetheless persuaded that an absence of antisemitism must profoundly alter the historically conditioned Jewish personality (*The End of the Jewish People?* [New York: Doubleday, 1967], 265-71).

2. Cf. Ben Halpern, "Reactions to Antisemitism in Modern Jewish History," in Jehuda Reinharz, ed., *Living with Antisemitism: Modern Jewish Responses* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1987), 4-6.

3. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1961), 1:237-42.

4. Cf. Z. Diesendruck, "Antisemitism and Ourselves," in Koppel S. Pinson, ed., *Essays on Antisemitism* (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1946), 41-48.

5. Jewish jokes are one means of relieving the tension. They enable the teller to gain emotional distance from gentile stereotypes of the Jew through the device of ridicule. For some exam-