

<b>8 Nikolsburg</b>	88
<i>Moravia / The Rabbinate / Old School vs. Modernity / Halachah / Communal Improvements / Invitation to Frankfurt</i>	
<b>9 Frankfurt</b>	108
<i>An Illustrious Past / The Rabbinate / Abolition of the Ghetto / Reform Tyranny / Reformfreunde — Circumcision</i>	
<b>10 Kehillath Jeschurun</b>	120
<i>Turning Point / A New Beginning / The IRG / Membership</i>	
<b>Part Four: TORAH NATION</b>	
<b>11 Community</b>	132
<i>A Nation in Microcosm / Community Laws in Germany / The Protest of the Jewish Cobbler / The Obligation to Secede / Kehillah Membership / A Consistent Approach / Secession in Hungary</i>	
<b>12 The Battle for Secession</b>	142
<i>Independent Kehillahs / Government Intervention / Political Developments / Legislative Progress / "The Law of Redemption"</i>	
<b>13 Secession in Frankfurt</b>	153
<i>The Lull Before the Storm / Controversy / Secession from the Community / The Würzburger Rav / Rabbi Bamberger's Position / Outside Interference / Open Letters / Rabbi Hildesheimer's Position</i>	
<b>14 Aftermath</b>	173
<i>An Unhealed Breach / Community Structures / Conclusions</i>	
<b>15 Association with the Non-Observant</b>	180
<i>The Alliance / Distinction Between Heresy and Heretic / Counterproductive Dialogue / Without Anger or Invective</i>	

<b>16 Jewish Unity</b>	189
<i>The "Orthodox Union" / Pogroms in Russia / A Threat to the Talmud</i>	
<b>Part Five: TORAH IM DERECH ERETZ</b>	
<b>17 The Principle</b>	200
<i>Basic Premises / One Truth / Secular Studies / Priorities / Limitations on Societal Participation and Secular Studies</i>	
<b>18 In The Modern Era</b>	209
<i>Traditional Attitudes / Eastern European Opposition / In the Western World / Conclusions</i>	
<b>19 Educator</b>	218
<i>The Realschule / Education of Girls / Secular Curriculum / Headmaster / Unrelenting Pressure / A Utopian Ideal / A Dangerous Edict / Legacy</i>	
<b>Part Six: CONFRONTATION WITH "THE SCIENCE OF JUDAISM"</b>	
<b>20 The Science of Judaism</b>	234
<i>Kulturverein / Rabbi Hirsch's Response / The Breslau Seminary</i>	
<b>21 Graetz's "History of the Jews"</b>	241
<i>Master and Disciple / "The History of the Jews" / Critique / The Hermeneutic Rules</i>	
<b>22 Zachariah Frankel's "Darchei HaMishnah"</b>	251
<i>The Young Frankel / Darchei HaMishnah / A Stormy Response / Truth and Dogma / Orthodox Wissenschaft</i>	
<b>Part Seven: ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS</b>	
<b>23 Emancipation</b>	266
<i>The Threat of Assimilation / The Challenge of Emancipation / Moravian Emancipation</i>	

<b>24 Exile and Redemption</b>	274
<i>Prosperity and Security / Settlement of the Land / Rabbi Kalischer's Efforts / Support for Settlement / A Light to the Nations / A Universal Concern / Anti-Semitism</i>	
<b>Part Eight: A WAY OF LIFE</b>	
<b>25 Halachic Issues</b>	288
<i>Circumcision / Threats to Shechitah / Burial / Other Issues</i>	
<b>26 Bais HaKnesses</b>	297
<i>In Perspective / The Synagogue in Frankfurt / Hiddur Mitzvah / The Services / Nusach HaTefillah</i>	
<b>Part Nine: THE MAN</b>	
<b>27 Personality</b>	310
<i>An Intrepid Fighter / A Willingness to Stand Alone / Uncompromising on Jewish Issues / Truth and Peace / Scrupulous Honesty / A Steadfast Determination / Humility / Physical Attributes / A Son's Description</i>	
<b>28 The Spoken and Written Word</b>	323
<i>Orator / The Power of the Pen / Polemics / Jeschurun / Commentary on the Torah / Commentary on the Psalms / Commentary on the Siddur</i>	
<b>Part Ten: LEGACY</b>	
<b>29 The Setting Sun</b>	338
<i>The Last Drashah / The Funeral / Epilogue</i>	
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
<b>1 A Worthy Lineage</b>	344
<b>2 List of Seceders in Frankfurt</b>	355
Notes	361
Bibliography	403
Index	415

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

*One does not erect monuments for tzadikim —  
their words are their memorial  
(Shekalim 2:5)*

Historically, biographies of Torah luminaries have been rare. When their words were studied in the *Beis HaMidrash* and practiced in daily life, they *were* alive and needed no memorial. It was only with the decline of Torah study that biography has become a medium through which to inspire the study of their works and the emulation of their deeds.

Dwelling on the history of one's people and its heroes, Rabbi Hirsch asserted, is a sign of a spiritually infirm present:

One must examine whether the study of history and of past events is necessary or even useful for men and nations whose present life is completely taken up with vigorous and active devotion to their duty. Only generations in a state of decline feel they must look back to the past in order to be uplifted by the example of long departed heroes. . . . For individuals and nations

that live as they should, the immediate present will always be their focus; they know what they must do *now*. Their minds and energies are so completely and enthusiastically taken up with their immediate duties that they do not feel the need nor have the time to look back for inspiration. Their search for knowledge will center primarily on one question: "Where does our duty lie and what is our task right now?" Such individuals and nations understand that, for them, the answer to these questions will not be provided by a study of the deeds and fortunes of their ancestors. They know that they can find the answer to their questions only in the Law of G-d that has been handed to their own generation, and that will be handed by G-d Himself to all the generations yet to come, in the same ever-new and direct manner that it was given to the very first generation that witnessed the Revelation with its own eyes (*Collected Writings* VII, p. 440).

If a biography of Rabbi Hirsch is to be justified on his own terms, then it must demonstrate that he belongs not to the past but to the present and that his ideals and the manner in which he put them into practice throughout his long and eventful life still illuminate and instruct today. Any account of his life which does not serve as a guide for living is an epitaph of dubious value, not a living testament.

Our position today in Western society is essentially the same as that of German Jewry in Rabbi Hirsch's time. The answers he provided to the challenge of an open society and the course he charted remain equally cogent today, when the conditions which first gave rise to those challenges characterize much of the Jewish world. Thus, a study of his active and influential life can help us respond to practical issues facing the Jew in today's world.

At the same time, no profile of Rabbi Hirsch can ever take the place of serious, sustained study of his voluminous works. This book is an attempt to describe how Rabbi Hirsch put the principles enunciated in his writings into practice.

Nineteenth-century European society opened its doors to the Jew, and the first time since the Karaites, non-observance as an organized movement, complete with leaders, ideology and literature became a reality in Jewish life. Rabbi Hirsch was the first European *Gadol* to set forth a comprehensive Torah response to this institutionalized heresy. He provides formulating both a theoretical and a practical response to the

Reform movement, he discredited the "Science of Judaism," forerunner of today's Conservative movement, with its recasting of Judaism into a cultural experience. With his *Torah Im Derech Eretz* principle, he ensured Torah's absolute domination of every aspect of life, even in modern conditions. The *Kehillah* he built in Frankfurt became a model for Jewish communal life and was the focal point of Torah Judaism in Germany. The school he founded in Frankfurt remains the prototype for much of today's Orthodox education for girls, and his *Nineteen Letters* and *Horeb* were the inspiration for the founding of *Beis Yaakov* by Sarah Schenirer.

His lucid definition of the meaning of exile and the place of *Eretz Yisrael* in our time remain the approach of the bulk of Torah Jewry to these issues. The organization he created to promote and represent Orthodox Jewry in Germany was the direct forerunner of the Agudath Israel movement. His books and writings exert a powerful influence until this day, with new volumes and editions published yearly. His commentaries on the Torah and *Psalms* continue to exercise a powerful sway over the hearts and minds of our people and to draw estranged brethren back into the fold.

Rabbi Hirsch responded to the dangers of assimilation and non-observance not with anathema and imprecation but rather with a reasoned and convincing presentation of the eternal truths of Judaism. His portrayal of the sublime beauty of a sanctity-filled Jewish life and the uplifting power Judaism grants its adherents remains unparalleled. An account of his life, then, is not arid scholarship, but a vital guidebook for life.

Two years before his passing Rabbi Hirsch explained the statement of Chazal: *Do not say of any word that it cannot possibly be heard, for in the end it will be heard* (*Avos* 2:5).

Even if you should be the only person in your community to hold a given view, do not say that you will never be able to gain a hearing from the other members of the community. As long as the view you represent is truly right and aims only at what is good and true, do not refrain from expressing it. Continue your fight, tirelessly and undaunted, for what is good and right, for years if need be; in the end — provided of course that you have fought for your cause solely for its own sake, without ulterior, selfish motives — you will be heard.

He was.

It is with a sense of complete inadequacy that I express praise and thanksgiving to the Almighty for granting me life and the opportunity to study and teach His Torah.

During the preparation of this book for publication the Torah world suffered the loss of the illustrious bearer of Rabbi Hirsch's traditions, Rabbi Shimon Schwab, *zatzal*, Rav of *K'hal Adath Jeshurun* of Washington Heights, N.Y. The author owes an immense debt of gratitude to the Rav, *zatzal*, for his guidance during the last several years, especially with regard to many aspects of Rabbi Hirsch's legacy. In addition, the Rav contributed, unasked, and by his insistent request, unacknowledged, a significant portion of his life's savings to ensure the publication of *Shemesh Marpeh*, a collection of Rabbi Hirsch's *teshuvoos*, *chiddushim*, and letters.

May the Almighty grant strength and good health to my dear grandmother, Mrs. Etta Guggenheim, תרוי, whose life and personality are eloquent testimony to the noble traditions of Ashkenazi Jewry.

Words are inadequate to express my gratitude to my life companion, my wife Rochel, תרוי. As with everything else in our life, without her this book would not have been. May *HaKadosh Boruch Hu* help us raise our dear children, Shoshana, Miriam, Shimshon, Chana Rivka, Moshe, Nechama, Bracha and Tovah שידי to walk in the paths illuminated by our forebear Rav Hirsch, *zatzal*, and to dedicate their lives to being שמים, the ultimate goal of Creation.

*Eliyahu Meir Klugman*  
Jerusalem, 27 Teveth, 5756

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz and Rabbi Nosson Scherman of Artscroll-Mesorah spared no effort or expense to ensure the publication of this work. May it be another page in the book which details their efforts להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה. Special thanks is due to master craftsman Rabbi Sheah Brander for his painstaking attention to detail.

Professor Mordechai Breuer of Jerusalem, the dean of Orthodox Jewish historians, graciously shared the fruits of close to half a century of research, directed me to countless sources, allowed the use of his yet unpublished manuscript *Am V'eidah*, and served as a bottomless mine of information on all aspects of German Jewish history. In addition, he carefully reviewed the entire manuscript and made numerous suggestions. Without his help this book could not have been written.

My dear friend Reb Yonason Rosenblum of Jerusalem, one of the finest writers in the Torah world, employed his considerable talents in masterfully editing this book and ensuring its readability. In a true labor of love, he lavished much time and great effort to ensure that this work would be a credit to its subject.

I would also like to express my thanks to:  
The administration of Yeshiva Neveh Zion where I have had the *zechus* of teaching Torah for close to a decade; Pinchas Asher Rohr for his excellent translation of the original Hebrew biography of Rabbi Hirsch in *Shemesh Marpeh*, which served as the framework for this greatly expanded and extensively revised work; Mr. Jacob Breuer of Jerusalem for consistent support and encouragement; Mr. Yisrael Israel of London-Jerusalem, a bibliophile of note, for invaluable assistance, including the loan of rare books; Machon Moreshet Ashkenaz of Bnei Brak, and its leading spirit, Rabbi Binyamin Hamburger, renowned expert on Minhag Ashkenaz, for assistance in several areas, including the acquisition of rare photographs; Mrs. Karin Paritzky, Mrs. Simcha Breuer and Mrs. Denise Erlanger of Jerusalem for expert translation assistance; Rabbi Eliyahu Berney of Monsey; Reb Avraham Biderman of Artscroll-Mesorah for dedicated and cheerful assistance in the sometimes trying production stages; Mr. Oskar Lehmann of New York for the loan of rare copies of the *Israelit*; and the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem for the use of rare books and photographs.

Rabbi Samson  
Raphael Hirsch

*Part One*

CONTEXT



## *Chapter One*

# HERITAGE

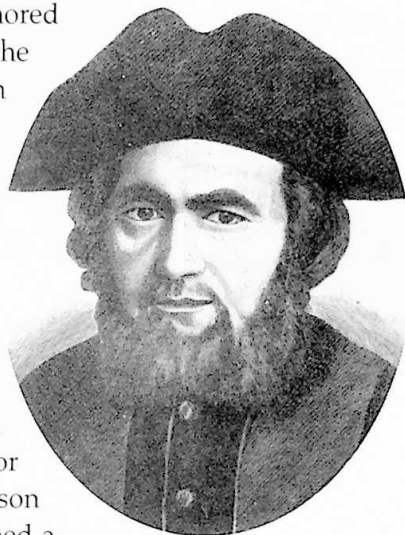
**I**N 1680, MENACHEM MENDEL SPIRO (D. 1716) MOVED FROM Frankfurt to Hamburg, where he took the name Frankfurter after his birthplace.<sup>a</sup> One hundred and seventy years later, Mendel Spiro's descendant, Hamburg-born Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, then Chief Rabbi of 50,000 Moravian Jews, came to Frankfurt to serve as rabbi of a congregation of barely 100 families. His return to Frankfurt would change the face of Western Jewry forever.

MENDEL SPIRO'S SON RABBI SHLOMO SPIRO-FRANKFURTER (D. 1729) served as a *dayan* in Hamburg's neighboring city of Altona, an important Jewish community at the time.<sup>1</sup> Among Rabbi Shlomo's **Forebears** great-grandchildren were two brothers, the sons of his grandson R' Tzvi Hirsch Frankfurter-Spiro. The younger brother, Rabbi

a. Menachem Spiro was a disciple of Rabbi Aharon Shmuel Koidenover of Frankfurt, author of *Tiferes Shmuel* and *Birchas HaZevach*.

Yehudah Leib Frankfurter-Spiro, authored *HaRechasim LeBik'ah*, a commentary on the Torah.<sup>2</sup> The older brother, Menachem Mendel (1742-1823), was named after his great-great-grandfather and was known as Reb Mendel Frankfurter.

Mendel Frankfurter studied as a young man in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yonasan Eibeschitz,<sup>b</sup> then rabbi of the tri-partite community of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck.<sup>c</sup> Reb Mendel taught Talmud in Stuttgart and Berlin, but refused all compensation for teaching Torah, a practice his grandson was to follow. In Berlin he also published a new edition of *Toras HaBayis HaKotzer* of the *Rashba*.<sup>3</sup>



Reb Mendel Frankfurter

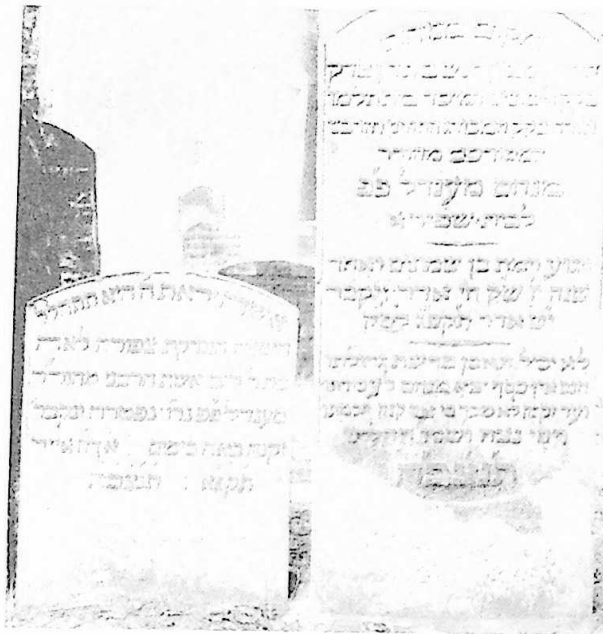
In 1805, at the age of 63, Reb Mendel, in conjunction with two others, established the famous "Talmud Torah" of Hamburg, which continued in existence for 130 years, until the Holocaust. The Talmud Torah's goal was to enable Jewish youth, aged 12 to 17, to continue their education and it was originally intended for students from poor families who could not afford to hire private teachers, as the wealthier ones could. In addition to the burden of directing and funding the school, Reb Mendel also took responsibility for the material needs of his students. The school's stated aim was to train rabbis and educators. Besides the usual Torah subjects, the school also emphasized good character traits, *Derech Eretz* and the minimum requirements for making a living so that if the graduates chose to enter business they would have the rudimentary knowledge needed to do so.

In 1812, with the partition of the three *kehillos*, Reb Mendel was appointed *Rosh Beis Din* (Chief Judge of the Rabbinical Court) of Altona, where his

b. To portray Rabbi Yonasan Eibeschitz's single-minded devotion to learning, Reb Mendel used to tell of the time when late one night Reb Yonasan posed a difficult question on *Tosafos*. He had to leave the room for a few moments and asked his disciples to check whether the commentators were also troubled by this difficulty. The boys quickly found the answer, and proceeded to sit around chatting. For close to three hours Reb Yonasan did not return, and the students wondered where he was. They sent Mendel Frankfurter to check, and to his great surprise he found Rabbi Yonasan standing in the darkness outside under a tree, totally blanketed with snow. Mendel discreetly tugged at his master's coat and his teacher shook himself out of his reverie with a start. "Yes! I found an answer to the question," said Reb Yonasan.<sup>2\*</sup>

c. The three communities were referred to in Hebrew by the acronym — אה"ו — אלטונה, המבורג, וונדסבק.





Tombstones of Reb Mendel Frankfurter and his wife

great-grandfather Rabbi Shlomo Frankfurter had served as a *dayan*. In that capacity, too, he refused to accept financial compensation.

In an ethical will written in 1815, he urged his descendants to adhere to the path of Torah and cautioned them against “modernizers who attempt to divert the hearts of youth away from that which is good and upright towards those who stray after foolish theories that can,

Heaven forbid, remove the fear of Hashem from your hearts . . . Avoid the books of the errant and wicked,” he wrote, even though they may be written in Hebrew and attractively presented.<sup>4</sup>

Reb Mendel also enjoined his children not to talk during prayer, to study Torah every day before breakfast, and to spend at least half an hour a day studying *mussar* (ethics) or *Pirkei Avos* and its commentaries. He exhorted his male descendants to honor their wives and educate their children in the fear of Heaven, and he requested his female descendants to be scrupulous about covering their hair after marriage. He urged them to be faithful and honest in their business dealings and never to deceive anyone, “for the truth endures forever.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1777, a son was born to Reb Mendel, whom he named Raphael Aryeh (d. 1857). Raphael — who changed his family name to Hirsch after his grandfather R’ Zvi Hirsch Frankfurter — was a man of pure spirit, pleasant manner and scrupulous honesty.<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Hirsch said of his father that *Tanach* was like a second soul to him and that he was gifted with a most sensitive perception and clear insight into its beauty and truths.<sup>7</sup>

In 1807, Raphael married Gella Hertz (1786-1860), the daughter of Samson Hertz of Hamburg. Raphael Hirsch had a textile business and later made his living as a lottery agent and currency exchanger.<sup>8</sup> Gella Hirsch was active in communal welfare projects, and in 1815 she established an organization to raise funds for distribution to needy mothers who had just given birth. By 1840, the organization had 400 members.

Raphael and  
Gella Hirsch



On 24 *Sivan*, 5568 (June 20, 1808), the first child of Raphael and Gella was born in Hamburg. His parents named him Shamshon.<sup>d</sup> Shamshon later followed a custom of the period and joined his father's name Raphael to his own. Thus he signed his name: Samson Raphael Hirsch.

Samson Hirsch had a close relationship with his parents whom he described as "the guardians of his childhood, the guides of his youth, and the companions of his mature years."<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Mendel Frankfurter had a profound influence on his grandson and on one occasion presented him with a copy of the *Zohar* as a gift.<sup>10</sup>

The times in which Samson Raphael Hirsch was born were marked by massive upheavals in the established order that had prevailed in Europe for over a thousand years. To understand the stormy world into which he entered and his unique contribution to that world, some knowledge of the rich history of the Jews of Ashkenaz is needed.

RABBI HIRSCH WAS HEIR TO THE RICH LEGACY OF ASHKENAZI JEWRY.

At the time of his birth, a millennium of Jewish life in Ashkenaz — a **Ashkenaz** millennium which had produced some of the greatest Jewish scholars and most righteous men, men whose greatness of character is indelibly stamped into the consciousness of the

<sup>d</sup> In Germany, children were given two names at birth, the *Shem Kodesh* and the *Shem Chol*. The former was given at the *bris milah*, while the latter, usually a Judeo-German translation of the *Shem Kodesh* or a Yiddish name associated with the Hebrew name, was given at a special ceremony called *Chol-Kreish* (*Chol*-secular, *Kreish*-screech or yelling). *Chol-Kreish* took place beside the infant's crib on the first Shabbos the mother went to *shul* after the birth and was attended by the children of the community. The Hebrew name was used for being called up to the Torah and similar occasions, while the *Shem-Chol* was used in day-to-day life. Thus Rabbi Hirsch was known as Samson, Rabbi Yitzchok Dov Bamberger as Seligmann Bär and Rabbi Shlomo Breuer as Salomon.<sup>8\*</sup>



Tombstone of Raphael Hirsch

Hemisphere, as codified by the *Rema* in his glosses to the *Shulchan Aruch*, are known as *Minhag Ashkenaz*. The major formulators of *Minhag Ashkenaz* were *Rashi*,<sup>15</sup> the *Baalei HaTosafos*,<sup>16</sup> and the *Maharil* (1356-1427).<sup>17</sup>

ONE OF THE GREAT LEGACIES OF ASHKENAZI JEWRY WAS A TENACIOUS adherence to a Torah way of life in the face of constant persecution,

### **A Millennium of Persecution**

expulsion and slaughter. During the Crusades, thousands of Ashkenazi Jews were butchered. Over the centuries, Germany's Jews constituted a distinct social and legal caste. Only Christians were considered full-fledged citizens. Any rights or privileges possessed by Jews were by virtue of special edicts and legislation, and the Jews were entirely dependent on the whims of the local ruler for their safety.

The division of the German Empire into numerous principalities was, on the whole, a good thing for the Jews: When they were expelled from one principality they could usually find refuge in another. But this fact only highlights their complete dependence on local despots.

Jewish people — was slowly coming to an end.

Although the Ashkenaz mentioned in the Torah and in the Prophets refers to places in Asia,<sup>11</sup> the region known today as Germany has been called Ashkenaz for over a thousand years.<sup>12</sup> The traditions of the Jews in that area, particularly the Rhineland, where the early Ashkenazi Jews lived for centuries, form the foundation of Ashkenazi law and custom today. The *Rosh*, Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel (1250-1327) of Germany, writes that the Torah has been the legacy of the sages of Ashkenaz since the destruction of the Second Temple. And the *Chasam Sofer* quotes approvingly Rabbi Yaakov Emden's (1698-1776) opinion that "one may surely follow the Ashkenazi tradition, for they have lived uninterruptedly in Germany<sup>13</sup> since the days of the destruction of the Temple."<sup>14</sup> The laws and customs of most Jews in the Western

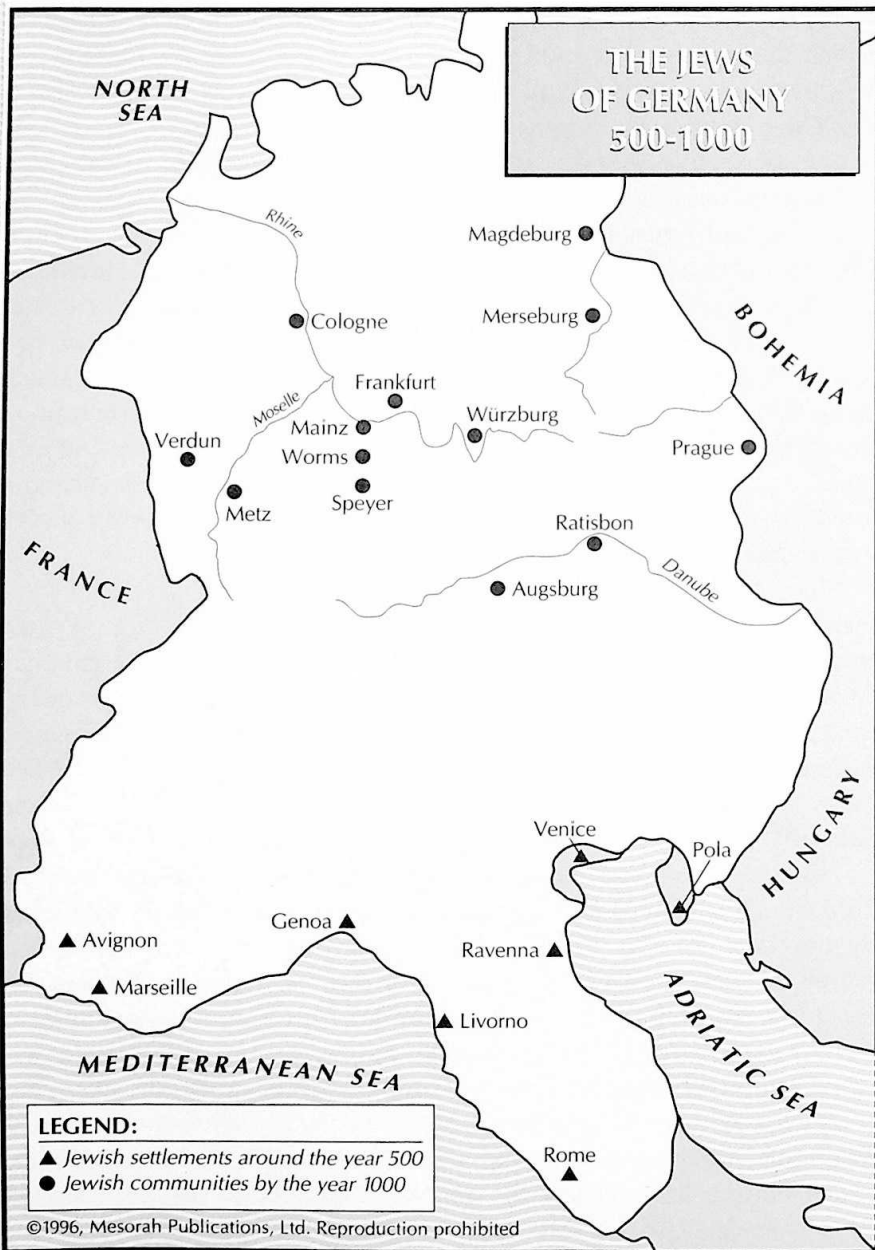
Typical of the attitude towards Jews was the Golden Bull of 1356 in which the right was granted to the Electoral Princes of the Empire "to keep Jews, in addition to exploiting mines of precious and base metals."<sup>18</sup> Traveling between the dozens of principalities, Jews often were required to pay special tolls. At many borders, there were two crossing points, one for "people" and the other for cattle and Jews.

In the First Crusade, in the year ד'תתנ"ו (1096), a frenzied mob of Christian rabble, which had set out from France to "liberate" Jerusalem from Moslem hands, passed through Germany. En route they vented their fury on the hapless Jews. From 8 *Iyar* until mid-*Tammuz* of that year, the Jews in the Rhine River region and in Bohemia were brutally murdered or forcibly baptized by roving bands of marauders. The first communities to be attacked were those in Speyer, Worms and Mainz, many of whose members willingly allowed themselves and their families to be slaughtered *al kiddush Hashem* (to sanctify the Divine name) rather than convert to Christianity.

Much of Ashkenazi Jewry was murdered or exiled as a result of the First Crusade, and the *kiddush Hashem* of that epoch is movingly portrayed in the *Av HaRachamim* prayer composed in memoriam of the First Crusade and recited on Shabbos morning. The tragedy is also commemorated in specially composed *kinnus* (elegies) for *Tishah b'Av*. Though Jews were better prepared for the Second Crusade 50 years later (1146), many still lost their lives and many others were forced to abandon their homes.<sup>19</sup>

The first blood libel took place in Germany in 1235, in the town of Fulda. Such false accusations were to cost thousands of Jewish lives over the next centuries. The Catholic Church played an active role in fostering hatred of Jews. In 1241, a *Judenschlacht* (Jew slaughter) took place in Frankfurt am Main, in which the entire Jewish community was massacred by the frenzied Christian mob after the community attempted to prevent one of their members from converting to Christianity. Already in the early 13th century, the Jews were ordered by the Church to wear a badge distinguishing them as Jews, and, in 1259, a synod of the Mainz archdiocese fixed its color as yellow, the same color adopted by the Nazis almost 700 years later. The similarity was not coincidental.

The Jew-baiter Rindfleisch organized a mob in the last years of the 13th century which destroyed no less than 140 Jewish communities, including Nuremberg, Würzburg and Rothenburg. Here, too, Jews demonstrated an amazing capacity for self-sacrifice *al kiddush Hashem*. From 1336 to 1337, peasant mobs annihilated 110 communities from



Alsace to Bavaria. This bloodbath became known as the *Armleder* massacres after the leather arm bands worn by the mobs. The Black Death plague from 1348 to 1350 led to pogroms in which 300 Jewish communities in Germany were destroyed. No wonder, then, that the theme of

living and dying *al kiddush Hashem* is discussed at length in the responsa of the *Chachmei Ashkenaz*.

The 15th century was marked by numerous blood libels and expulsions. In 1648, the great-grandchildren of the Jews who had found asylum in Poland returned to Germany, driven out by Chmielnicki's hordes.

Mainz typifies the history of Jewish life in Germany.<sup>20</sup> Already during the Roman era Jews arrived in Mainz, and there is concrete evidence of Jews living there in 906. Among the distinguished scholars who graced Mainz with their presence were Rabbeinu Gershom ben Yehudah (ca. 960-1028), known as the *Meor HaGolah* (the Light of the Diaspora), Rabbeinu Yaakov ben Yakar, and the *Maharil*. During the First Crusade, the Jewish quarter of Mainz was destroyed and over 1,000 Jews were massacred. Mainz was not spared during the Second Crusade either. Over the centuries, the Jews of Mainz suffered persecution, blood libels, expulsions of various duration, the Black Death and almost constant harassment on the part of the authorities. In the 15th century alone, the Jews were expelled from Mainz four times.

Despite all these afflictions German Jews did not swerve from their adherence to authentic Judaism, a result of the inner fortitude and spiritual serenity which enabled them to withstand adversity. The Crusades, during which thousands of Jews lost their lives, are hardly mentioned in the writings of the *Baalei HaTosafos*. The persistence of German Jewry in adhering to the religion of their fathers in spite of hatred, scorn and constant massacre — in spite of the ease with which they could have avoided it through conversion to the faith of the Christian aggressor — is lasting testimony to the power that Judaism grants its adherents to overcome physical misery through spiritual serenity.<sup>21</sup> German Jews, Dr. Moshe Auerbach wrote, excelled in their refusal to allow the brutality they suffered, the mass expulsions which were their constant lot, and the slaughters which were a fact of life to adversely affect their spiritual state:

The continued existence of the Jewish people in Christian Europe of that time . . . where they were hated and scorned, slaughtered in their thousands, and in spite of all this, remained constant in their adherence to the faith of their fathers, is one of the enduring miracles of the history of the world. As a result of their suffering, there was, sometimes, some lessening of the spiritual creativity of Ashkenazi Jewry, but their spiritual and moral greatness never diminished, and this phenomena is without comparison any-

where else especially as regards its duration over hundreds of years. This strength of faith in G-d is the secret of the continuity of Ashkenazi Jewry.<sup>22</sup>

The heart-wrenching *tefillos* that German Jews composed in response to those persecutions remain classic expressions of the yearning for G-d and the faith of the Jew in *galus*.

THOUGH POGROMS WERE LARGELY A THING OF THE PAST BY THE END of the 18th century, the German Jew remained a second-class citizen. The courts discriminated against him, bureaucrats demeaned him, he was limited in the occupation he could choose, how he was allowed to practice his religion, and even if he was permitted to marry. Each German state still retained its "Jew Law," limiting the rights of its Jewish inhabitants.

But with the spread of the ideals of equality in the wake of the French Revolution, life was about to change radically for German Jewry. What the gentile had failed to accomplish by persecution, he was able to attain through kindness.<sup>23</sup> As the doors of non-Jewish society swung open for the Jew, the survivors of a millennium of humiliation and slaughter eagerly seized upon the opportunities offered. What began as a trickle away from traditional Judaism soon became a stampede. Only a few were able to stand in the midst of the flood and through the power of persuasion alone turn back the tide. Of these, the most effective was Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

## Chapter Two

# THE WINDS OF CHANGE

**V**ISIONS OF EMANCIPATION GAINED INCREASING CURRENCY throughout the 18th century and peaked with the French Revolution of 1789. Emancipation held out the hope of political and social liberation for long disenfranchised classes of society. The well-known slogan of the French Revolution, *liberté, égalité et fraternité* (liberty, equality and brotherhood), proclaimed the ideal that all human beings are created equal and that fraternity should naturally prevail among nations and among all citizens within each country, without regard to race, creed or national origin. One of the consequences of the French Revolution was that France, as well as other countries, began to grant Jews, at least in principle, the same civil rights as those enjoyed by other citizens.

The new ideology also announced the end of economic and social barriers based on class, race and religion. Previously, Jews were restricted to peddling and money-lending; now, suddenly, all areas of economic pursuit and professional endeavor were opened to them. Housing restric-



tions were relaxed, and the social and economic status of the Jews of Western Europe improved considerably.

The spirit of the revolution soon breached the walls of the ghetto and spread quickly within its confines. While offering Jews expanded economic and social opportunities, emancipation simultaneously subverted long-established patterns of Jewish life. Previously Jews had lived in ghettos, isolated by both external pressure and by their own free will, their existence governed in minute detail by the Talmud and the *Shulchan Aruch*. Once they were admitted into the political, social and cultural life of the outside world, many Jews assumed that the traditional Jewish lifestyle would inhibit their integration into gentile society, and in particular their participation in economic and professional life.

Observance of the Sabbath and *kashruth* suffered especially. The dazzling lights of science and the arts, the diversions of theater and social life, and the liberation of thought and imagination from prior restraints enticed significant portions of Jewry. The separation from the unique Jewish way of life, whose religious hue had granted it unsurpassed power, rocked the Jewish soul to its core and shook its centuries-old balance. The slogan, "Let Israel be a nation like all others," became a guiding principle for many.

In the ghetto, being a Jew was a given. Although, theoretically, one could convert to Christianity, the social pressures militating against this were so strong it was hardly an option. With the tumbling of the walls of the ghetto, suddenly, being Jewish and the way one practiced Judaism became an open question.<sup>1</sup> Judaism was now relegated, for the first time, to only one sphere of life.<sup>2</sup>

For a not inconsiderable number, especially among the wealthy and educated, apostasy and even conversion to Christianity became viable options. The factors motivating such a drastic step were several, but chief among them was almost always the desire to hasten acceptance in gentile society. Although sometimes this motive was baldly admitted, more often it was accompanied by a veneer of philosophical rationalizations about having lost respect for Judaism and seeing the "truth" of Christian values.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT PUT MAN AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE and appointed human reason the ultimate arbiter of truth. Religion was

**The Enlightenment** replaced by belief in the powers of reason and science.<sup>3</sup> Enlightenment thinkers viewed all men as innately good and decent, and deemphasized differences based on nationality, ethnic origin, or religion. A corollary of

this optimistic view of man's inherent goodness was extreme confidence in the power of education to ennoble all men and thus to remove any barriers dividing them. Beginning with Jean Jacques Rousseau, the state, representing the "general will," was viewed as the natural instrument for providing the desired education, and the use of the power of the state to intervene in the private affairs of the unenlightened and to educate them, even against their will, was deemed legitimate. Most of the leaders of the movement to "enlighten" the masses were involved in various endeavors for educational reform. Their goals were the shaping of the character of man with an emphasis on reason, progress, equality and tolerance.<sup>4</sup>

In Germany, the phenomenon of Jewish *Haskalah* ("Enlightenment") first appeared in Berlin in the last quarter of the 18th century. Jews had lived in Berlin since the 13th century, under conditions not unlike those which prevailed in the rest of Germany. Even during those periods in which they were permitted to live in Berlin, there were usually severe limitations on the number of Jews granted residence permits, the sections of the city where Jews could reside, and on the trades and businesses in which they could engage.<sup>5</sup> In short, the Jews of Berlin were second-class citizens or worse.

MOSES MENDELSSOHN (1729-1786) OF BERLIN WAS ONE OF THE FIRST Jews fully conversant with European culture. An observant Jew, he num-

**Moses Mendelssohn** bered among his friends and admirers many of Germany's leading intellectual figures. More importantly for our story, he wished to spread "enlightenment" among his people. To that end he published a German translation of the Torah with a Hebrew commentary, the *Biur*, the appearance of which was fraught with controversy.<sup>6</sup>

a. The *Noda B'Yehudah*, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau of Prague, explained his opposition in a letter: "For the translator . . . [used] an extremely difficult German that presupposes expertise in its grammar . . . [and] the teacher will have to spend most of the time in explaining German grammar. . . . It induces the young to spend their time reading gentile books in order to become sufficiently familiar with refined German, to be able to understand this translation. Our Torah is thereby reduced to the role of a maidservant to the German tongue. . . . The intention of the translator may have been good, as I have said before. We have to assume this, since we must judge every man in the scale of merit, especially one who is famous as a scholar. Yet we cannot rest satisfied with the intention that prompted him, if the result of his action is so devastating."

Although Mendelssohn wrote in his introduction that he had undertaken the translation for the sake of his children, and that it was only on the persistent request of their teacher who wrote the commentary to *Bereishis* that he acquiesced to publish it, the truth was, as he admitted in a letter to his friend August Hennings, and as Rabbi Yechezkel Landau had suspected, that he



Moses Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn deviated from traditional Jewish thought in many ways, and it is not difficult to discern the impact of his deviations on his disciples, or on those who viewed themselves as such, from whose ranks would come many of the early leaders of Reform. Most of his own offspring were eventually baptized. Mendelssohn believed that reason is the sole medium through which man can acquire knowledge fulfillment, and that all men are endowed with an innate knowledge of what is good and true. Thus the revelation at Sinai conveyed to the Jewish people no

understanding denied to other peoples. At most, G-d gave the Jewish people Divine legislation, not revealed religion. The basic tenets of Judaism, in Mendelssohn's view, are shared by all religions. The Reformer Solomon Ludwig Steinheim (1789-1866) captured this neatly in his memorable formulation: "Mendelssohn," he said, "was a heathen in his brain and a Jew in his body."<sup>6</sup> Judaism, Mendelssohn argued, legislates only actions and does not require conformity in matters of doctrine. He also rejected the traditional view of free will, and argued that every action is determined by some prior cause. Thus Divine punishments are understood as designed only to purge the effect of sins, not as retribution for wrongful acts.

More importantly, Mendelssohn was the first Orthodox Jewish thinker to submit Judaism to judgment according to the ideals of the Age of Reason. Despite his personal *mitzvah* observance, the untenability of that observance with his ideas is demonstrated by the lives of his disciples and descendants.<sup>7</sup> In Isaac Breuer's assessment:

Mendelssohn did not in any way question European culture and its vision. He accepted that culture as it was, and had we not known that he was a Jew, we would not have been able to discern his Judaism in any of his philosophic writings. . . . With his translation of the Torah into polished German, he wanted to introduce his people gradually to European culture. And then what? On that question Mendelssohn was silent.<sup>8</sup>

intended it as "the first step toward culture from which my nation is, alas, kept at such a distance that one might almost despair of the possibility of improvement."

The opposition was clearly not because of the German translation *per se*, as the *Noda B'Yehudah* himself granted an approbation to just such a work in 1785.<sup>5\*</sup>

Mendelssohn was instrumental in undermining Judaism by his profound identification of German Jewry with German culture and language.<sup>9</sup> Mendelssohn was the first Jew to participate, as a full-fledged member, in modern European culture. He was, as one writer put aptly, "a reformer of Jewish life but not of Judaism."<sup>10</sup> He embraced the German Enlightenment wholeheartedly, and his ideas led his followers to be among the pioneers and founders of Reform Judaism and enabled others to skip the charade and embrace Christianity without undue difficulty.

Mendelssohn gave European culture and the Jewish tradition equal status. European culture had for him independent validity apart from the truths of Torah, and did not have to be judged in light of those truths. In one of his few direct comments on Mendelssohn, Rabbi Hirsch stressed the tension in Mendelssohn caused by his allegiance to both Judaism and Enlightenment ideals: [He believed] that "it was possible to be an observant Jew *and yet* to shine, highly respected, as a German Plato. This *and yet*," Rabbi Hirsch wrote, "was decisive. His followers contented themselves with eagerly furthering the study of *Tanach* along philosophical and aesthetic lines . . . adding and expanding the study of the humanities. The proper study of Judaism, through *Tanach* and Talmud, was neglected. Even the zealous study of *Tanach* could not lead to an understanding of Judaism, for it was studied not as a source of instruction, conveying values, but as a poetic composition, to feed the imagination."<sup>11</sup>

[Mendelssohn] dwelled in the tents of Shem [a metaphor for adherence to traditional Judaism] out of national loyalty, but was attached to the beauty of Japheth [son of Noah and ancestor of the Greeks, used here as a metaphor for Hellenistic aestheticism]. He dwelled in the tents of Shem, *and yet* was attached to the beauty of Japheth. He was attached to the beauty of Japheth, *and yet* dwelled in the tents of Shem.<sup>12</sup>

The *and yet* implied that the role of Plato could be valid too, even when at variance with the realities of Judaism. Mendelssohn's followers went further. For them, the Torah was reduced to a poetic treasury of thought and philosophy without binding force. As a result of Mendelssohn's influence, Berlin became the center of the *Haskalah* Movement. Initially, the *maskilim* ("enlightened ones") attempted to rid themselves of any restraints that might inhibit their absorption into gentile society, without denying their Judaism. Enlightenment and education were measured by the degree of disregard for Jewish tradition. Moses Hess captured the mood of the time in an anecdote about a Jew who came to Mendelssohn:

and proudly boasted of his son's philosophical abilities. When the philosopher asked of what the son's abilities consisted, the happy man replied, "Why, my son has not put on his *tefillin* for months."<sup>13</sup>

Next, the newly enlightened set out to blur all distinctions and remove any barrier that separated Jews from the rest of society. The literature of the Berlin *Haskalah*, which rejected rabbinic tradition and authority, threatened the entire system of traditional Jewry — its values, structure, and institutions.<sup>14</sup> It is understandable, then, that the leaders of traditional authentic Jewry, the rabbis, and indeed most Orthodox Jews, came to view every manifestation of the *Haskalah* with deep suspicion. Every German word that found its way into the *Judengasse* (Jews' street in the ghetto) was viewed as an enemy incursion.

Rabbi Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg captured the strains placed on traditional Jewish life by the new winds:

The ghetto stood for hundreds of years and produced men of great stature, righteous people, who devoted their energies to Torah study and *mitzvah* observance, men whose entire joy and pleasure in life was to rejoice in the Almighty. They attained lofty spiritual levels and merited a degree of Divine inspiration that raised them high above the bitter darkness of the exile. Such people's words and deeds were suffused with the sanctity of the Torah, and its presence permeated their lives.

Nonetheless, within the ghetto's walls there lived also masses of people who were not privileged to taste the Torah's pleasures and to experience its inspiration. These people thirsted for life, and their inability to attain it made them depressed. They knew only difficulty, and the lives of a significant portion of them were twisted by an ascetic melancholy.

Finally the day came, new winds began to blow and the walls of the ghetto fell before them. Rays of hope, of light and liberty, the prospects of life and creativity, wealth and social position, wafted into the darkest corners of the ghetto, to human beings who had been so long deprived of any place in society. The innate thirst for a healthy and complete life which is so natural to every Jew, a thirst repressed for so many centuries, was reawakened amid sound and fury.

These radical developments brought the Jewish people to a state of crisis. One-dimensional life-denying religiosity simply collapsed, totally unable to restrain its children who strayed from

its framework, rejecting the indignities of oppression, who strove to break free from their constraints.

Confusion reigned in the Jewish community. On the one side stood the elders, preservers of tradition, who defended with all their might the accepted religious way, which was predicated on a rejection of the pleasures and accomplishments of the material world. On the other side were those drunk and dizzy with their new freedom, who lashed out mercilessly at everything that was precious and holy in the traditional order of Jewish life.<sup>15</sup>

The "salons" of Berlin served as a meeting place for Jew and gentile, a bridge which frequently led all the way to the baptismal font. The conversion certificate became the diploma attesting to its holder's enlightened status. Baptism by Jews became epidemic in Berlin until 1810, when the government passed a law which forbade baptism of Jews by Christian pastors without the sanction of the local police. It is ironic that even after the Jews were granted civil rights, the gentile still did not want to have anything to do with him to the point of not allowing him to convert. Of the 3,610 Jews living in Berlin in 1819, over one third converted to Christianity in the course of four years.<sup>16</sup>

WITHOUT A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLUTION OF the Reform Movement in the years prior to Rabbi Hirsch's birth and during his formative years, no assessment of his accomplishments is possible. An understanding of that development is also important because the forces which gave rise to the Reform Movement are still operative today: Jews no longer live in the ghetto and, at least in Western countries, they live and work in close proximity to their non-Jewish neighbors.

The growing numbers who cast off the yoke of Torah for the alluring life of society felt an urgent need to fashion for themselves an ideology to justify their actions and give a sense of meaning to their lives. Not content with merely living non-observant lives, they sought to reform Judaism itself, and to achieve their goals were even willing to employ the power of the government.

What divided Orthodoxy and Reform was the very concept of Judaism. Judaism was never "religion" in the usual sense of the word, but rather an all-encompassing system of belief and practice governing every aspect of the lives of its adherents. Reformers confronted the question: What defines Judaism if no aspect of Jewish belief or practice is inviolate?

What is the supposedly unchanging, yet ever unfolding, idea that constitutes Judaism? The Reform response amounted to little more than monotheism, with some Kantian ethical imperative blended in. Nothing else was permanent in the Reform view.<sup>17</sup>

Rabbi Hirsch captured the animating spirit of Reform many years later in one of his most brilliant polemical pieces, "Religion Allied to Progress." Penned in response to a vicious pamphlet authored in 1854 by Ludwig Stein, rabbi of the Reform-dominated Jewish Community of Frankfurt, Rabbi Hirsch describes how the Reform

distilled the ancient world-ranging spirit of the Torah into one aromatic drop of perfume so fragrant, that in the most elegant party dress they could carry it round with them in their waistcoat pockets without being ashamed. They carved out of the ponderous old Tablets of the Law ornamental figures so tiny, that people gladly found room for them on smart dressing tables in drawing rooms and ballrooms.

[Reform proclaimed to each Jew:] "Be what you are, enjoy what you fancy, aspire to what you will, whatever you may be you are always religious, whatever you may do — all is religion; continue to progress for the more you progress, the further you move from the ancient way, and the more you cast off old Jewish customs the more religious and acceptable to G-d will you be; the more you outshine the ancient fire of Horeb with the brilliance of your own enlightenment, the more you crucify the ancient law by your criticism the happier you will be; for it was for crucifixion and in order to be crucified by its own children that it descended from heaven, and the more a man slaps his old mother in the face the more is she delighted to have given birth to sons with such powerful hands."<sup>18</sup>

In later years, the Reformers Geiger and Holdheim preferred to be known as Germans of the Mosaic faith. The Sadducees and the Karaites had denied the validity of only the Oral Torah; Reform rejected the binding authority of the Written Torah as well. The fundamental internal issue of the Jewish people from the inception of the Reform Movement until the present day has revolved around the question of the acceptance or, Heaven forbid, the rejection of, the Divine nature of the Torah as it was given at Sinai.

Increasing opportunities for Jews in the non-Jewish world were the main, but not only force encouraging the growth of Reform. Sabbateanism and the resultant splits in the Jewish world played its part,

as did the weakening of rabbinic authority in the second half of the 18th century engendered by the bitter dispute between Rabbi Yonasan Eibeschitz and Rabbi Yaakov Emden.<sup>19</sup>

The need of German princes for ready sources of capital, following the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), led them to employ capable Jews in various commercial and financial roles. The court Jew, which virtually no Central European ruler was without in the 17th and 18th centuries, helped finance and obtain money for the royal coffers, supplied the army, helped out in diplomatic difficulties and supplied the ruler with luxury items.<sup>20</sup> A class of "court Jews" developed, who traveled in gentile society and were willing to trade some or all of their *mitzvah* observance for entrance to the salons and dinner tables of the wealthy and influential. These Jews had no ideology, but were rather torn between two incompatible worlds.

First and foremost among these was probably the family of Daniel Itzig of Berlin, who became, in 1791, the first Jews to be granted civil rights in Germany. Although Itzig himself was religious,<sup>b</sup> his assimilation into court life made a shambles of the religious observance of his family. As such, he served as an early example of the potential dangers to Jewish observance in civic equality.

Reformers felt that the more Judaism could be approximated to Christianity, the easier would be their integration into gentile society. In this belief, they were explicitly encouraged by Christian philosophers. Immanuel Kant, the greatest of them, made it clear that Jews and Christians could become brothers only if the Jews would "purify their religious ideas," and cast aside their "outdated ritual." Thus, casting aside traditional observance was seen as a precondition for social acceptance and civic equality.<sup>21</sup> In the effort to mimic Christian concepts of religiosity, it became the vogue to ask whether a *mitzvah* provided "spiritual fulfillment" and if the "service" was "uplifting." The object of religious "ceremonies" became "edification."<sup>22</sup>

Another event which must not be discounted for its effect on internal Jewish life was the convocation by Napoleon, in 1806, of a Jewish Assembly of Notables. Napoleon's purpose in convening the Assembly was to secure Jewish support for his political goals, and the diminution of the Jewish people as a distinct national and ethnic group in the lands he controlled. Napoleon presented the Assembly of Notables with a set of twelve questions, which dealt with the vocational life of Jews, their

b. The *Pri Megadim*, Rabbi Joseph Teomim, authored most of his works while living as an endowed scholar in a study house in Berlin funded entirely by Daniel Itzig.<sup>20\*</sup>



patriotism, the functioning of rabbis and judges, and divorce and intermarriage. One of the questions, for instance, was whether, according to Jewish Law, a Jew may marry a non-Jew. The Assembly of Notables answered evasively. Their responses were carefully designed to prove the Jews' fealty to the new order and to lay to rest Napoleon's doubts over the Jew's loyalty.

Never one to lose a political opportunity, Napoleon decided to attempt to extend these resolutions to apply to Jewry as a whole. To that end, the same year he convened a "Sanhedrin" which consisted of 71 rabbis, drawn from all the "synagogues of Europe," among them the distinguished Rabbi Dovid Sinzheim of Strasbourg and Rabbi Zalman Trier of Frankfurt. The convocation of the "Sanhedrin" in Paris for one month was accompanied with much pomp and circumstance. Special uniforms were even provided for the rabbis.

The "Sanhedrin" set a precedent for modern "rabbinic" conferences to rule on issues of Jewish law, and was cited in later years as a precedent for the most radical departures from *halachah*. In an attempt to mollify Napoleon, the "Sanhedrin" "decided," in response to the question of intermarriage, that from a civil standpoint mixed marriages were valid, while carefully camouflaging the impermissibility of such unions in Jewish Law. Less than four decades later, the Reformers used this "decision" to permit intermarriage, and declared that there was no prohibition on the intermarriage of adherents of monotheistic religions, if the state permits the parents to raise the children according to the Jewish religion.

Reformers were ready to abandon every ritual they saw as irrational or as standing in the way of emancipation. The early reforms were confined to the liturgy and to the synagogue service. Yet the external changes merely reflected a profound internal shift in how one viewed the essence of Judaism. The concerted effort, for instance, to delete any mention of the Messiah and the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* showed that the reforms were not concerned solely with outward forms but rather struck at the essence of Judaism.<sup>23</sup>

One of the pioneers in the area of synagogue reform was Israel Jacobson (1768-1828). Born to religious parents in Halberstadt, he was attracted at a young age to Mendelssohn's writings and the *Haskalah*. Jacobson was not an original thinker, and did not even possess a secular education, but he was wealthy and had boundless energy. In 1808, he convened a gathering of influential Jews in Kassel for the purpose of introducing religious reforms. His aim was to create a synod in Germany

Similar to the "Sanhedrin" convened by Napoleon in Paris. Jacobson also established the first temple in which portions of the services were conducted in German and whose services were modeled after the German Protestant church. The second of these temples was inaugurated in Seesen in 1810, in a ceremony replete with the ringing of bells as in church, and the singing of hymns in German accompanied by organ music. The *bimah* was moved from the center to the front, an organ was installed and the services were conducted by Jacobson dressed in the robes of a Protestant clergyman.

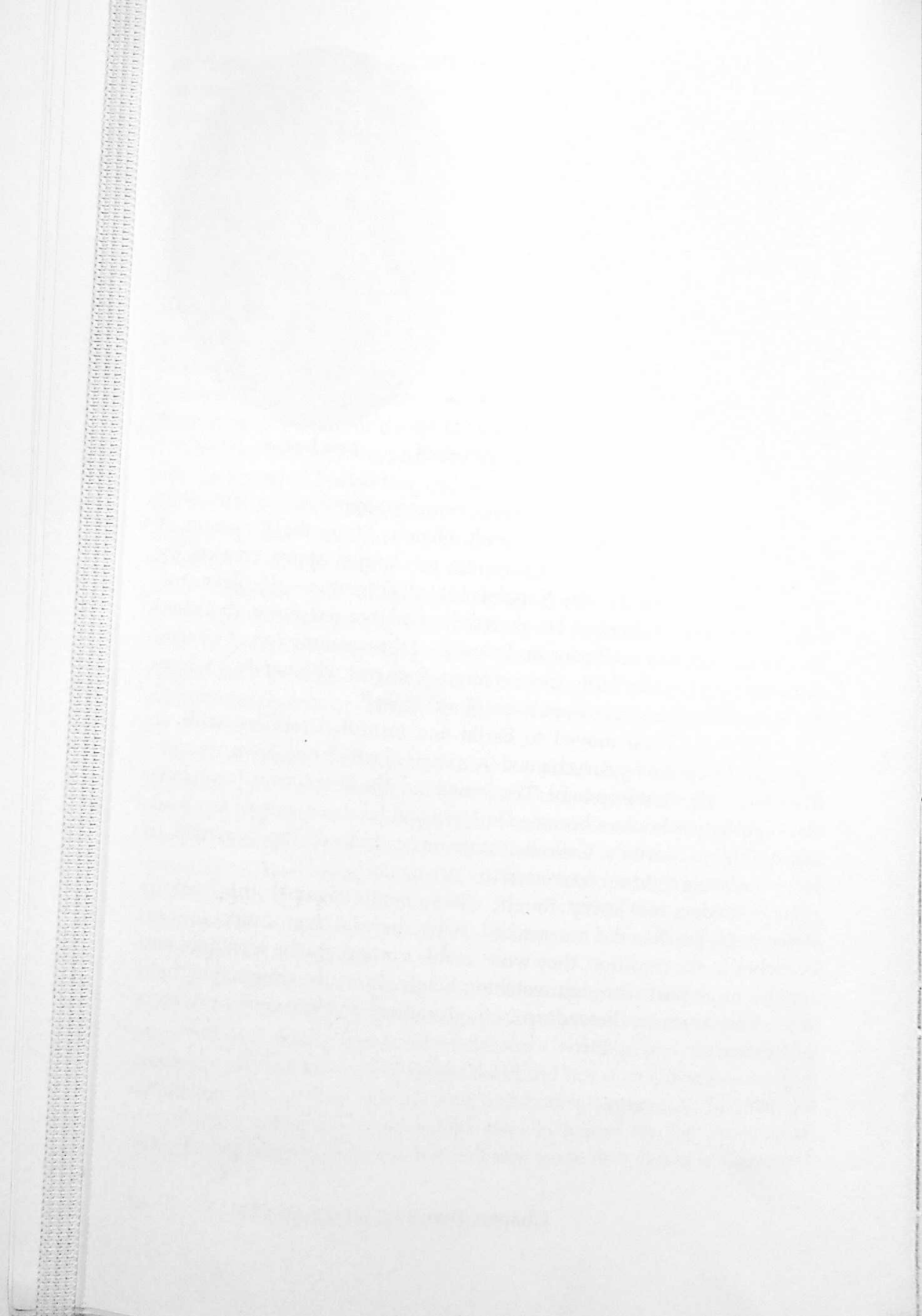


Israel Jacobson

As head of the Consistory — the government-appointed commission charged with the regulation of Jewish religious life in the Kingdom of Westphalia, a short-lived conglomerate of German states created by Napoleon and ruled over by Napoleon's brother Jerome — Jacobson initiated a number of changes. He altered the marriage ceremony, abolished "klapping" Haman on Purim, and permitted the consumption of *kitniyos* (legumes) on Pesach. Sadly, these changes were met with barely a whimper, except for the response of Rabbi Zavel Eiger.<sup>24</sup>

In 1814, Jacobson moved to Berlin and instituted services with an organ and German hymns chanted by a choir in which non-Jews also participated.<sup>25</sup> The first boy to be "confirmed" in this temple was Jacobson's son Naphtali, who later became Dr. Hermann Jacobson, one of the leading lights of Berlin's Catholic community. Indeed, the majority of Jacobson's ten children converted to Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

The leaders of Jewry fought determinedly against the various Reformers. Yet they did not succeed. While they did their utmost to stem breaches in the tradition, they were unable to suppress the rebellion, and for the most part were left watching helplessly as the things they held most holy were swallowed up in the turbulent and fast-moving waters of Reform.



---

*Part Two*

**YOUTH**

---



*Chapter Three*  
**HAMBURG**

**T**HE CITY OF HAMBURG WAS ONE OF THE FOCAL POINTS of social ferment in Germany in the first decades of the 19th century, and the Jewish community there was not spared. The city became one of the cradles of Reform Judaism.

In comparison to the ancient cities along the Rhine, Hamburg's Jewish community was relatively young. Marranos from Spain and Portugal at the end of the 16th century were the first Jews to settle in Hamburg. German Jews were permitted to settle in the adjacent cities of Wandsbeck and Altona in the beginning of the 17th century, both of which were under Danish rule at the time. In 1627, German Jews began to settle in Hamburg as well. Not long after, the three communities of Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck joined together, an arrangement which lasted, with few exceptions, until 1812.<sup>1</sup> Hamburg was one of the diamonds in the crown of Ashkenazi

Jewry, and its rabbis<sup>a</sup> were some of the Jewish people's greatest Torah luminaries.<sup>2</sup>

On December 10, 1810, Hamburg was annexed by France. The tripartite *Kehillah* was divided in 1812, at the order of the French authorities who controlled the city. On February 24, 1813, the citizens of Hamburg rose up against the French occupiers and on May 5, 1814, the French were thrown out of Hamburg never to return. As in other parts of Germany, the conquest of Hamburg by French forces and their subsequent departure caused a massive upheaval in the social order. This was equally true of the city's Jewish inhabitants: The presence of the French authorities, bearers of the Enlightenment and revolutionary values, led to many centuries-old traditions being abandoned and previously unchallenged assumptions being questioned.<sup>3</sup> Even after the French were expelled, the revolutionary vision of liberty, equality and fraternity remained part of the city's intellectual fabric.

AT THE END OF 1817, WHEN SAMSON HIRSCH WAS NINE YEARS OLD, the face of German Jewry changed forever. A substantial group of Jews in

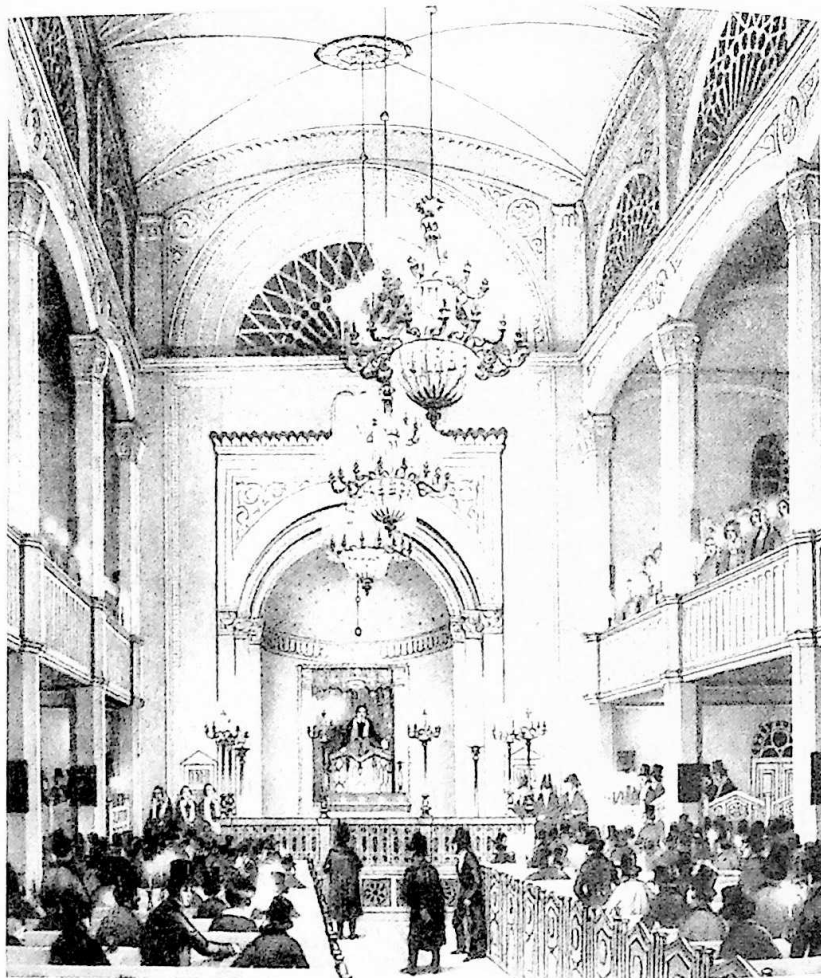
## The Temple

Hamburg joined together to offer an alternative public expression of Judaism. On December 12, 1817, Reformers in Hamburg established the "New Israelite Temple Association in Hamburg," and less than a year later, on October 18, 1818 (18 *Tishrei*, 5579), they erected a house of prayer which they named *Temple*. The *Temple* was the first Jewish house of worship in Germany to use an organ on the Sabbath and a mixed choir in the services. At the dedication festivities, the assembled were treated to a rendition by a choir of young girls.

The Temple Association also published a new prayerbook for Sabbath and holidays, in which many prayers were in German, and various sections added and deleted at will. The prayerbook omitted *Birchas HaShachar*, *Birchas HaTorah*, *Ashrei*, *P'sukei deZimrah*, mutilated *Birchos Krias Shma*, did away with the silent *Shemoneh Esrei*, *Maftir* and *Haftarah* and changed the Torah readings to a triennial cycle. All mention of the

a. The *Chacham Zvi*, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi (1660-1718), served as rabbi from 1707 to 1710, before becoming Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam; Rabbi Yechezkel Katzenellenbogen (1667-1749), author of *Sefer Knesses Yechezkel* (1733), served from 1714 to 1749; Rabbi Yonasan Eibeschutz (1690-1764), author of many works, including *Urim VeTumim* and *Kreisi U'Pleisi*, served from 1750 to 1764; and Rabbi Raphael HaKohen (1722-1804), author of *Toras Yekusiel*, a commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* (1772) and *VeShav HaKohein* — a collection of halachic responsa — was rabbi from 1776, at a time when Hamburg was connected to the other two communities of Altona and Wandsbeck. The latter was known as Rabbi Raphael Hamburger. He was one of the leading public opponents of Mendelssohn, and was subject to severe attack for forcefully criticizing Mendelssohn.

Hamburg  
Reform Temple



future redemption of the Jewish people, the *Beis HaMikdash* and *Mashiach* was expunged, presumably in order to prove their sincere patriotism. The *Temple* was, of course, closed during the week. Within three years, membership stood at approximately 100 families, which still constituted less than 10 percent of Hamburg Jewry.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of the actions of the Hamburg group was that for the first time the reforms were advanced by a unified group from "below." The reforms of Israel Jacobson, by contrast, were essentially those of a single wealthy individual, albeit with a following. Almost 60 years later, Rabbi Hirsch wrote that with the erection of the *Temple* in Hamburg, "the cornerstone was laid for all liturgical reform that was subsequently made in synagogue worship."<sup>5</sup>

The reaction of the Hamburg rabbinate to the establishment of the *Temple* and its prayerbook was swift and uncompromising. On 26 *Tishrei*, the rabbinate, led by the *Rosh Beis Din*, Rabbi Baruch Ozer,<sup>6</sup> issued a prohibition against praying in the *Temple* or using its prayerbook. The

... was hung in all the *shuls* and *klausen* in Hamburg. Rabbi Baruch Ozer also wrote to the leading Torah scholars of Europe to Sephardic rabbis of the Ottoman Empire, requesting a halachic response to the following three questions: 1) May *Nusach HaTefillah* be changed? 2) May the prayers be recited in a foreign language (German)? 3) May a synagogue have an organ, even if it is played on the Sabbath by a non-Jew?

The responses of 18 of the leading rabbis of the time, including Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg,<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Akiva Eiger of Posen, Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lissa,<sup>8</sup> and Rabbi



Rabbi Baruch Ozer

Mordechai Banet of Nikolsburg, were published in a special booklet, *Eileh Divrei HaBris* (Altona, 1819). The work was prefaced by the blanket prohibition of the local rabbinate on the use of the Reform prayerbook, praying in any language other than Hebrew, and the use of an organ on the Sabbath to accompany the services. In the foreword to *Eileh Divrei HaBris*, the Hamburg rabbinate explained that for some time, there had been individuals who had denigrated the Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, and after a while, this attitude led to serious transgressions. They had felt it necessary to request the halachic responsa of leading rabbis because the Reformers, basing themselves on a fictitious account of a ruling of the rabbi of Livorno permitting the use of an organ, had informed the Hamburg authorities that their practices were sanctioned by Jewish Law and prevailed upon the authorities to forbid Rabbi Baruch Ozer from issuing his proclamation.<sup>b</sup>

Less than one year after the establishment of the *Temple*, on August 2, 1819, the anti-Jewish Hep! Hep! riots broke out in Germany. Beginning in Würzburg, they quickly spread throughout Germany, including Hamburg (September 1), Frankfurt, Leipzig, Dresden and Darmstadt. Thus, the attempt to draw closer to the gentile was met with swift rejection. Reform and "Enlightenment" circles attempted to

b. It is interesting to note that the three questions the distinguished group of Torah luminaries was asked to address by the Hamburg rabbinate were the very issues Rabbi Hirsch responded to 36 years later in his reply to Rabbi Yaakov Koppel Bamberger of Worms. [See *Shemesh Marpeh* (New York, 1992), pp. 2-8.] The fact that even three and a half decades later the same three issues were important indicates that the main thrust of Reform, at least in the prayer service, was reflected in these three areas.





Wolf Heidenheim

play down the riots and to suppress details, in the words of the *Haskalah*-oriented periodical *Shulamith*, "so that this knowledge not weaken our co-religionists' love for our Christian fellow citizens." The response of the non-observant to the Hep! Hep! riots was not to reconsider their eager rush into the arms of Christian society, but rather the establishment of the *Verein für Kultur und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Society for the Culture and Science of Judaism), yet another attempt to deepen their ties with Christian neighbors.

At this early stage in the Reform Movement, the lines between Reform and Orthodoxy were still not so clearly drawn, and many did not fully comprehend the deep and unbridgeable chasm which separated the two groups. Many Reformers began their careers with Orthodox leanings, and as such were often given the benefit of the doubt, when in fact they had long since crossed over into the other camp. An understanding of this reality makes it easier to grasp many otherwise incomprehensible occurrences. To take one illuminating example: Wolf Heidenheim (1757-1832) — whose scholarship and accuracy in establishing the proper *Nusach HaTefillah* and commentary on the *Piyutim* were effusively praised by the *Chasam Sofer*,<sup>9</sup> and whose works were graced with the approbation of Rabbi Pinchas Horovitz of Frankfurt — published in 1831 a *siddur* with an introduction on the essence of prayer by none other than Michael Creizenach, one of the leaders of the Reform Movement, who had taught since 1825 in the Reform *Philanthropin* School in Frankfurt. Three out of four of Creizenach's children converted to Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

It was only by the fourth and fifth decades of the 19th century that the differences between Orthodoxy and Reform became clear to all. The Reform "rabbinical conferences," especially in Braunschweig,<sup>11</sup> caused both sides to realize that the gap was unbridgeable.<sup>12</sup>

At the outset, Reform contended that their liturgical changes did not violate the *halachah*. Thus, the rabbinic response included in *Eileh Divrei HaBris* contained halachic epistles which demonstrated that the new prayer service was a flagrant violation of the *halachah*. But the Reformers did not really care, and the arguments fell on deaf ears.<sup>13</sup>

One of the identifying characteristics of Reform Judaism was that the reforms came first and then the *post hoc* justifications. The adherents of synagogue reform in Hamburg and Berlin in the second decade of the century acted primarily for social and personal reasons — chiefly the fear that traditional Judaism would hamper social integration and political equality.<sup>14</sup> Only a generation later did they adapt a philosophy and theology to conform to their practices. In formulating that philosophy, the ends — harmonizing Judaism with modernity — determined the means.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the establishment of the *Temple* and the publication of its prayerbook, the Hirsch home was the venue of meetings and strategy sessions called to combat the threat posed to Torah Judaism by the *Temple*. Young Samson was deeply affected by the gatherings in his parents' home, and in his later years recalled that it was this struggle which first gave him the impetus to pursue his calling in life.<sup>16</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Orthodox community, it must be admitted that the responses to the establishment of the Hamburg *Temple* were of little effect. While the traditionalists cried, sighed, scoffed and threatened, the Reformers just laughed and continued to gain adherents. There was no one on the Orthodox side in Hamburg able to present the tenets of authentic Judaism in a way that would convince anyone but the already committed. There was no one with the courage and the breadth of knowledge to fight the Reformers on their own terms and on their own turf. It was then that the *Kehillah* decided to hire someone who could.<sup>17</sup>

IN 1821, WHEN YOUNG SAMSON REACHED BAR-MITZVAH AGE, RABBI Isaac Bernays (1792-1849) was appointed Rabbi of Hamburg,<sup>18</sup> then the largest Jewish community in Germany.<sup>19</sup> On October 30, 1821, he took up his position.

**Chacham Isaac Bernays** Born in Mainz, Isaac Bernays was a child prodigy, who knew at the age of seven the entire Tractate *Bava Kamma* by heart. In recognition of that feat he received the title *chaver* from the local rabbi, Rabbi Noach Chaim Zvi Berlin.<sup>20</sup> In his youth, he studied under Rabbi Eizik Metz, who later served as a *dayan* in Hamburg and taught in the Hamburg "Talmud Torah."<sup>21</sup> Bernays also studied in the yeshiva of Rabbi Avraham Bing of Würzburg, from whom he received *semichah*. Rabbi Bing appointed him *dayan* in Würzburg at a very young age.<sup>22</sup>

In the University of Würzburg, he became friendly with his fellow student Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, with whom he studied *Yoreh Deah* and *Mo*



Chacham Isaac Bernays

*Nevuchim*, and with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship.<sup>c,23</sup>

After university studies in Munich, Rabbi Bernays returned to Mainz where he served as a private teacher until he was appointed Rabbi of Hamburg. In a concession to the more Reform-minded members of the Hamburg Community Board, his letter of appointment stipulated that he was not permitted to publicly admonish any individuals or groups in the community in connection with any religious acts which they might commit, nor withhold from such people any benefits of the congregation.<sup>d</sup> "Never," said the Chacham when he

assumed the post, "has a rabbi been so dependent in office on a board, as I shall be."<sup>24</sup> As time went on, however, it was the board who hastened to do his bidding, such was the power of his personality.<sup>25</sup>

Upon assuming the Hamburg rabbinate, Rabbi Bernays took for himself the title "Chacham,"<sup>26</sup> as Sephardic rabbis were called, instead of the title "Rabbi," probably as a protest over the use of the title by Reformers, who observed no *mitzvos* and yet called themselves "Rabbi."<sup>e</sup>

Although only 30 years of age, Rabbi Bernays was already an exceptional scholar, noted for his perceptiveness, exceptional memory and honesty. The Chacham possessed a wide-ranging knowledge of many subjects and a pleasant personality.<sup>27</sup> Supremely humble, he spurned personal honor and profit,<sup>28</sup> and devoted himself totally to the study of Torah. His integrity was legendary. At the dedication ceremonies of the synagogue of the Hamburg Jewish hospital, which had been donated by the

c. Neither Rabbi Bernays nor Rabbi Ettlinger ever received a university degree.

d. When Rabbi Akiva Eiger was appointed Rabbi of Posen, he was permitted to maintain, at community expense, no more than six disciples who were not natives of Posen, and he, too, was prohibited from criticizing the religious conduct of any member of the community, either privately or from the pulpit.<sup>24\*</sup>

e. Rabbi Bernays' use of the title "Chacham" has always been something of a puzzle. Yet knowledge of the demographics of Hamburg Jewry makes his choice easier to comprehend. Hamburg possessed a large and influential community of Sephardic Jews, known in Hamburg as the *Portugesim*, who had fled the Iberian peninsula to Holland and from there to Hamburg. The Sephardim had their own community and rabbinate until as late as 1910, when they conferred the title of "Chacham" on the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi A. Spitzer. In this context the choice of the title "Chacham" was not as strange as it might otherwise seem.

ful and affluent Hamburg Jewish  
r Solomon Heine, one of the richest  
n Europe,<sup>29</sup> the Chacham addressed  
sembled guests without mention-  
e name, nor even hinting at the  
ity, of the wealthy and influential  
factor. The public was astound-  
But the Chacham was unyielding.  
as designated to take part in cer-  
onies for the honor of Heaven," he  
ied, "not in functions whose pur-  
e is to flatter human beings."<sup>30</sup>



Solomon Heine

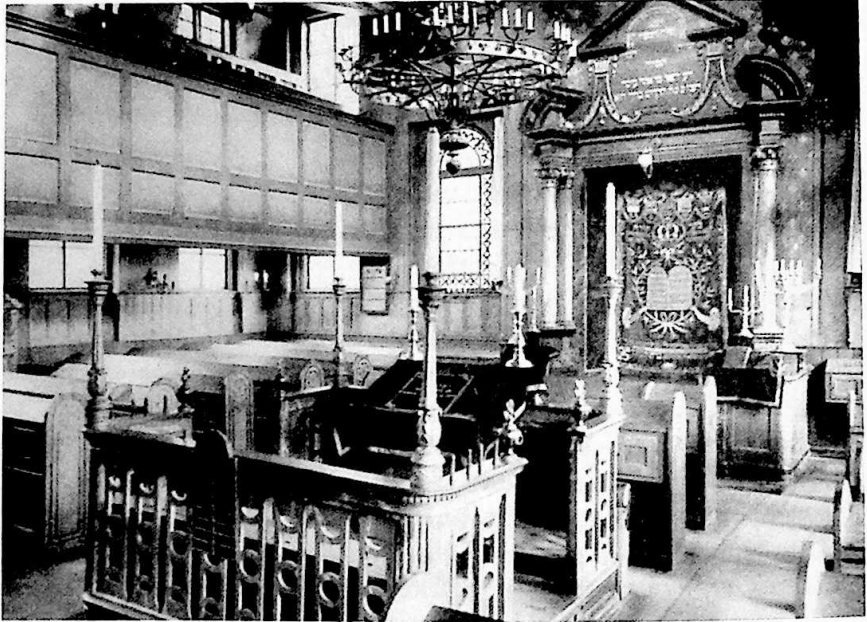
The noted grammarian Wolf Heiden-  
m once enumerated the dimensions of  
Chacham's greatness. "The entire Talmud,  
achah and Midrash was to him an open  
book. As a philosopher he was greater than the worldly ones, as a philol-  
gist he was supreme, as a grammarian he reminded me of Ibn Ezra.  
n halachic matters it was as if the Rambam was talking, in esoteric  
wisdom, like Saadiah Gaon."<sup>31</sup> Rabbi Hirsch's uncle described Rabbi  
Bernays as:

a wise, understanding and humble person, whose kindness and  
love showed on his face, who was able to touch the hearts of his  
listeners with his gracious speech and with the wisdom of the  
Torah . . .

He stood on the *bimah* on Shabbos with volumes of the  
Talmud, *halachah*, and *Midrash* open before him (he was also  
familiar with all areas of *Kabbalah*), standing with closed eyes. A  
powerful speaker, his words penetrated to the inner recesses of  
the hearts of those who understood him, though the masses did  
not comprehend his holy and righteous ways. . . . He spent all his  
money on the needs of the poor, and kept for himself just enough  
to meet the minimum needs of his family.<sup>32</sup>

He was more sage and righteous man than organizer or politician, but  
it was his very selflessness and lack of any artifice that was the cause of  
his great success.

Rabbi Bernays played an important role in shaping the character of  
Orthodox Judaism in 19th-century Germany. His student Rabbi Hirsch  
once told a friend, "He was the greatest shining light of Jewish thought of



The Elbstrasse synagogue in Hamburg where Samson Hirsch prayed as a youth, as it appeared at the time

his time, and were he alive today, the same would still be true."<sup>33</sup>

On the day of the Chacham's arrival in Hamburg, Reb Mendel Frankfurter showed him a difficult passage in the *Rambam*, which none of the local *rabbonim* had been able to explain. The Chacham resolved the difficulty on the spot.<sup>34</sup> The older *talmidei chachamim* of Hamburg initially treated him with suspicion, apprehensive that with his academic training and philosophical knowledge he would introduce reforms, but when they saw the enthusiasm with which he learned *Gemara*, they too became his supporters.<sup>35</sup>

One reason that the elders of the Hamburg community chose Chacham Bernays as their leader was that he possessed a secular education. They hoped that he would be able to understand the young people of the community and save them from the enticements of the Reformers.<sup>36</sup> He fought the Reformers every step of the way, even appropriating some of their methods and thus stealing their thunder. He introduced and perfected the *predigt* or sermon, one of the main selling points of the Reform service.

He was not a writer; he concentrated on quiet and persistent education, and his circle of students and admirers grew steadily. The Chacham knew how to communicate his deep conviction of the truth of Judaism with intelligence and profundity. He was a hard worker and a pedagogue of rare talent, with powerful emotions.<sup>37</sup> In the late 1830s, he began a weekly *shiur* in



Exterior of the Elbstrasse synagogue in Hamburg where  
Chacham Bernays and the Hirsch family prayed

*Kuzari* to a large and enthusiastic audience. As a result of the *shiur*'s popularity, all available copies of the work were sold out. It was reprinted in 1838 by Rabbi Hirsch's younger brother Hirsch (Harry) and another young student. The Reformers, in a desperate attempt to limit the Chacham's influence, entered a complaint in 1839 with the local authorities, alleging that the *Kuzari* is anti-Christian and requested the police to put a stop to his *shiur*. Only after a personal appearance by the Chacham was the matter settled.<sup>38</sup>

As Rabbi, he was officially in charge of the Hamburg "Talmud Torah," on behalf of which he expended much time and effort. The Talmud Torah flourished during his tenure and he exercised a powerful influence on the youth of his *Kehillah*.<sup>39</sup> The Chacham also educated a generation of *baalei batim*, who considered Torah study an integral part of their lives. There

were many small synagogues or *klausen* in Hamburg, and these were frequented by this solid core of learned *baalei batim* whose days were spent at work and whose evenings were dedicated to Torah study. For decades after his death, the Chacham's teachings were still passed down from father to son in Hamburg.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the Chacham's greatest success was that the Hamburg *Kehillah* structure itself stayed Orthodox. This infuriated the Reformers and their sympathizers, who threatened to leave the *Kehillah en masse*. As a result of this threat, the "Hamburg Arrangement" was formulated, a communal framework unlike any other in Germany. Under the "Arrangement," all religious matters were taken out of the hands of the community board and given over to two separate organizations, the *Synagogenverein* for the Orthodox and the *Tempelverein* for the Reform. The rabbi of the Orthodox *Synagogenverein* was always the official Chief Rabbi of Hamburg, and the school and all charitable and humanitarian institutions remained in Orthodox hands. Consequently one of the unique aspects to *Kehillah* life in Hamburg was the fact that there was a minimum of open warfare between the Orthodox and Reform, and all remained members of the Jewish community.<sup>41</sup>

That is not to say that relations were always peaceful. In 1841, the *Temple* asked the government to allocate it more land for expansion purposes. The government passed the request on to the *Kehillah* for an opinion. The Chacham, in his reply to the government, sharply denounced the Reform and their Temple and recommended rejecting the request for more land. The Reformers reacted with unrestrained fury.<sup>42</sup> The battle between the Chacham and the Reformers became even more pitched late that year, with the publication of the second edition of the *Gebetbuch für alle Israeliten*, the prayerbook of the Reform Temple in Hamburg. Chacham Bernays reiterated the prohibition which had been published 23 years earlier by the Hamburg Rabbinate, had the *issur* hung in all the *shuls* in the city, and presented the Hamburg Senate with a request to forbid its dissemination, on the grounds that only he, as Chief Rabbi, had the authority to publish what was purported to be a prayerbook, under the rubric "*Teffiloth Israel*."

The Reformers were outraged and raised a hue and cry. Zachariah Frankel came to the Reformers' defense, publishing a long article<sup>43</sup> in which he criticized the Chacham. Frankel declared that Bernays had erred greatly and had committed a great sin by opposing the prayerbook. The government, at the insistence of the Reformers, ordered that the prohibition notices be removed. Rabbi Bernays circumvented this by issuing an *אוהרה*, a cautionary notice, that one could not fulfill the obligation of *tefillas chovah* (mandatory prayer) with the use of the prayerbook. In the

public uproar that followed, Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, Chief Rabbi of neighboring Altona, came to the defense of his friend and colleague, and as a result was himself subject to attack.<sup>44</sup>

Hamburg appreciated Chacham Bernays immensely, as evidenced by the elaborate festivities on the 25th anniversary of his appointment.<sup>45</sup> When he passed away suddenly on 9 *Iyar* 5609 (May 1, 1849) at the age of 55, the shock and grief at his passing were overwhelming.<sup>46</sup> He was eulogized at his funeral and later also in a memorial ceremony in the synagogue by his study partner from yeshiva days, Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger.<sup>47</sup>

In 1810, Rabbi Mendel Frankfurter brought Rabbi Nosson Nota Ellingen (d. 1827) to Hamburg to open a yeshiva for the more promising youngsters. Among his later disciples was young Samson Hirsch.<sup>48</sup> He also studied in the school of J.A. Isler, a *talmid chacham*, who taught some of the secular subjects as well.<sup>49</sup> At the age of 14, his parents, anticipating that he would enter business, apprenticed him to a merchant in Hamburg, in which position he remained for one year.

In 1824, at the age of 16, Samson Hirsch decided on the rabbinate as his life's vocation,<sup>50</sup> and began to study with the Chacham and attend *shiurim* in the latter's home.<sup>51</sup> Rabbi Hirsch once told his son-in-law Rabbi Salomon Breuer, "Besides his lectures, I learned from Chacham Bernays one *blatt Gemara* and it sufficed."<sup>52</sup> On April 16, 1826, Samson entered a *gymnasium* (the equivalent of today's high school) as a student of theology, where he studied for two years until April, 1828.<sup>53</sup> At the same time he continued studying under Rabbi Bernays, from whom he would later receive *semichah*.<sup>54</sup>

In 1830, Rabbi Bernays, in a letter of recommendation to the Grand Duke of Oldenburg, described his student as one who "dedicated himself with great diligence to the study of Jewish theology, after he acquired a general education at an early age. He participated in the lectures of the undersigned in Talmud and all the classic religious literature over a long period of time. He excelled in his conduct, in his abilities and in his excellent spiritual qualities, and in his diligence and his assiduity in an outstanding manner to such a degree that one can only see in him as an excellent candidate for the rabbinate."<sup>55</sup>

In the summer of 1828, Samson Hirsch set out for Mannheim to study in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, the first step toward becoming the leader of Torah Jewry in Western Europe.



*Chapter Four*  
**MANNHEIM**

**B**Y THE TIME RABBI HIRSCH ARRIVED AT THE YESHIVA IN Mannheim in *Tammuz* 5588 (July 1828) at the age of 20, there had already crystallized in his mind the essence of the world view to which he remained committed for the rest of his life. The following letter, written on August 10 of that year, gives us a glimpse into the sensitivity and idealism of the young man who was destined to have such a profound effect on German Jewry.<sup>a</sup>

So it always goes with me when my inner soul is too full. Then it does not spill over the sides as is common in other people — no, inside there can be stormy, turbulent waves — but on the outside, with pressures and counterpressures — only silence. I am like a clock whose inner components interact with each other constantly

a. The following is a free rendition, in the interest of conveying the unique flavor of the original.

but whose hands are missing, so that on the outside it appears completely still. Superficial people hold a feather to the nose and proclaim it lifeless, but those whose comprehension is deeper sense from the ticking that there is indeed life inside. A wise man knows to attach the missing hands to the face, so that he can read the time. . . .

We were on our way from Darmstadt, riding along the magnificent *Bergstrasse* with its striking scenery. On the right evergreen forests stretched endlessly, and on the left rose a chain of hills, glistening like a string of pearls. All the way to the peaks, vineyards had been planted, and the frail vegetation, totally dependent on human care, climbed up trellises erected for them. Pale young grapes were already peeking out from under green leaves, like a proud young mother showing off her wailing first-born. . . . Mother nature spread out a festive green carpet round about; the rain of the last few days brought it all into the open — burgeoning plants and seeds, poking their heads out into the light.

The landscape was full of mirth, and my soul light and joyful along with it. Suddenly, however, my mood plunged and I groaned inside, saying to myself, "Look at this! Nature is never lazy. Every plant and bush springs to fulfill the task its Creator has set for it. Only man enjoys the prerogative of neglecting his obligations. He is the only one who can disappoint the Divine stamp imprinted in him.<sup>1</sup>

"And what will be of you, Samson? How will you make yourself worthy of the lofty goal to which you aspire in your new path in life? You, who on your native soil neglected more than one of your obligations, and who have now been taken from that soil and are on your own, exposed to every passing wind. How can you hope to remain faithful to your heritage and not be deflected from the narrow path of truth? Where will you find a trellis to support your frail stalk when the storms come?"

Inwardly I grew increasingly depressed, and sat listlessly lost in my thoughts as we passed through the magnificent surroundings. The heat and the monotonous clanking of the wagon wheels had lulled my fellow passengers to sleep, and I too, lost in my ruminations, sank into a semi-daydream in which everything seemed very far away.

Then I felt as if someone was tapping me on the shoulder. I turned around involuntarily and there — never have I seen

anyone of such splendid appearance and at the same time so filled with friendliness as the person who stood before me. I felt shy looking at his tall, resolute stature and serious, heroic forehead. Still, his friendly blue eyes and the smile that spread precisely from the edges of his mouth inspired in me both awe and trust. Already, the white of age and wisdom graced his face, but his head was not bent over by the burden of his years. The more I gazed on him, the more my depression dissipated.

"What were you depressed about?" he asked in a soft warm voice, his manner filled with compassion. When I told him the reason for my somberness, he exclaimed, "For the sake of the Almighty! I would never have thought that someone from your family, and especially you, my dear Samson, would fall prey to despair at such a moment. Many of your forebears have cast a light than can guide you on your way also, and whose support will be yours too. Look around you in your generation, and select a model for yourself, the person who is most faithful to his heritage."

I sighed and said, "Is their lot better than mine? And how will I recognize them and choose among them?"

"Come, let us see," said the old man, and together we floated to the peak of a hill. "Do you see how they live here?" he continued. "Everyone has his support. You see the old ones resting there; they seem to be sleeping, with their walking-sticks quietly in front of them. Theirs is a good sturdy support, one you can put your weight on, that can guide you. But it's sitting there unused, covered with hundreds of years of dust, and you can barely recognize it.

"Now look over there at those light-headed youngsters dancing about so giddily. Each of them also has a stick, but theirs are just thin rods, mere playthings. When they left their homes, these old men gave each of them one of these sturdy canes, but the arrogant youngsters scorned the sticks so that they could dash away with fast free steps. They thought the old men's sticks were just useless heavy encumbrances. 'Come, let's get rid of all that useless dust and weight,' they said, trying to prance lightly and joyfully. Look at their sticks now; they might be pretty, but what use are they to them? When they came to the first obstacle and tried to lean on their sticks, the flimsy things broke in their hands, and they stumbled and fell, those frivolous people.

“Do you see?” he continued. “They are the majority. However, look closely and you will see a third group, who stride boldly with their sticks. Their radiant faces reflect the joy in their hearts and they face their exalted task with calm confidence. They fear no harm. When they were first given their sticks, they set about removing the layers of dust with great care. Now they have uncovered an old luster that they can take pride in, and they have sticks that give them real support in life.

“And you? Do you understand what this stick is, my Samson? Have you made your choice?”

“My choice is firm,” I replied. “But I don’t really know the nature of this stick.” I blushed.

“Then you may examine it for yourself,” he said, handing me one of the sticks. When I grasped it, my heart pounding fiercely, it unfolded in my hand and became a *Sefer Torah*.

“Take it,” he said, “and it will guide you throughout your life. In the midst of life itself, the Torah will reveal its power to you. And if you ever know someone who desires to take the same step you are taking, you can offer him this support also.”<sup>2</sup>

WHEN SAMSON HIRSCH ARRIVED IN MANNHEIM, THE YESHIVA THERE was one of the few in Germany.<sup>3</sup> Until the end of the 18th century there

**Yeshivas in Germany** were yeshivas in almost every city in which Jews dwelled, including Prague, Fürth, Frankfurt am Main, Mainz, Worms, Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Berlin, Breslau, Frankfurt on Oder, Halberstadt and in many smaller cities and towns. Lasting damage to the German yeshivas was inflicted by the aftershocks of the French Revolution and the initial period of emancipation. The inroads of Reform contributed further to the precipitous decline in the number of young men interested in learning Torah. David Friedlaender, a close disciple of Mendelssohn and leading proponent of Reform, predicted in 1799, in a letter to his friend Meir Eiger, that in 20 years there would not be even one yeshiva left in Germany. He was not far off the mark.<sup>4</sup>

One of the few outstanding rabbis of the “old school,” who was still active in Germany in the third decade of the 19th century, was Frankfurt-born Rabbi Avraham Bing (1752-1841). Rabbi Bing studied under Rabbi Nosson Adler and Rabbi Pinchas Horovitz, together with the *Chasam Sofer* who was 12 years his junior, and with whom he maintained a life-long friendship. Rabbi Bing was appointed *Klausrabbiner* of Offenbach in 1769 when he was but 17 years old, and after nine years he returned to

Frankfurt where he served as *dayan* and as an instructor in the yeshiva. In 1796, he was appointed District Rabbi of Würzburg. There he stayed, until he retired in 1839 due to the infirmities of old age.

Rabbi Bing had over 100 communities under his jurisdiction, and the yeshiva which he headed in Würzburg was one of the most prominent centers of Torah learning in Germany. Most of the major rabbinical leaders of Germany of the next generation were his disciples, including: Rabbi Isaac Bernays, Rabbi Yaakov Ettliger, Rabbi Nosson Adler, Chief Rabbi of Hanover and England, and Rabbi Yitzchak Dov Bamberger, who succeeded him as District Rabbi of Würzburg. Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore, one of the first rabbis in the United States who could make any claim to Torah scholarship, was also a pupil of his.

Most of the many manuscripts he left behind at his passing were lost with the passage of time, and only *Zechor LeAvraham* — glosses on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* — was published.<sup>5</sup>

RABBI YAAKOV ETLINGER, THE GREATEST HALACHIC AND TALMUDIC authority in Germany in the middle of the 19th century, was born on 29

**Rabbi Yaakov Ettliger** *Adar I, 5558 (1798)*, in Karlsruhe, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Baden in southwest Germany, to Rabbi Aaron Ettliger, the local *klausrabbiner*.<sup>6</sup> In his youth he studied with the local rabbi, Rabbi Asher Wallerstein (1754-1837), son of the *Shaagas Aryeh*, Rabbi Aryeh Loeb of Metz. Rabbi Ettliger attributed to Rabbi Wallerstein the most powerful influence on his way of learning. At the age of 18, he went to Würzburg where he studied in the yeshiva of Rabbi Avraham Bing, from whom he received ordination.<sup>b</sup>

Rabbi Ettliger also studied philosophy at the University of Würzburg. Together with Rabbi Bernays, he was one of the first of several generations of strictly Orthodox rabbis in Germany who possessed university training.<sup>7</sup> He left Würzburg abruptly as a result of the Hep! Hep! riots of 1819, and went to learn under Rabbi Wolf Hamburg of Fürth. Later he returned to Würzburg.

In 1825, Rabbi Ettliger was appointed *Klausrabbiner* of Mannheim, a city in his home state of Baden with a Jewish population of approximately 1,500.<sup>8</sup> Two years later, he was also appointed District Rabbi of

b. Through his teachers, Rabbi Hirsch was connected to Frankfurt long before he served there as rabbi. Both Chacham Bernays and Rabbi Ettliger were disciples of Rabbi Bing, a Frankfurt native and disciple of two great Frankfurt masters, Rabbi Pinchas Horovitz and Rabbi Nosson Adler. Thus, the halachic exposition which the young Rabbi of Oldenburg sent at the age of 22 to Rabbi Bing, the elder statesman of German *rabbonim*, was in reality a letter to his teacher's teacher.<sup>6\*</sup>

During his tenure in  
he headed a flourishing  
one of the last in Germany  
er 70 *talmidim* from all parts  
ntry. He was, in the words  
grapher, "possessed of great  
charm and warmth, keen  
onsciousness and a strong  
f communal responsibility."  
also a talented orator.<sup>9</sup>

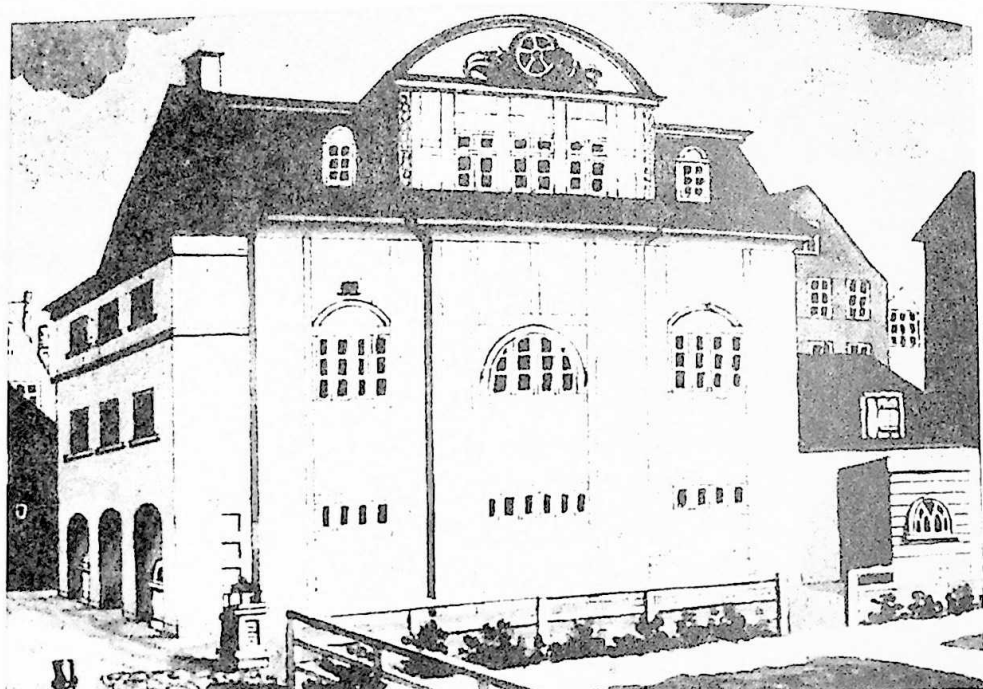
Rabbi Ettliger served in Mann-  
until 1836, when, upon the  
of the incumbent Rabbi Akiva  
imer, he was appointed Chief  
of Altona, a community of 2,500  
ers.<sup>10</sup> As Chief Rabbi of Altona,  
Ettliger's responsibilities also



Rabbi Yaakov Ettliger

ded the rabbinate of nearby Wandsbeck and the principalities of  
esweig and Holstein. The rabbinical court in Altona over which he  
ided was the last of its kind in Western Europe to enjoy official gov-  
ernment recognition, and its decisions in monetary matters had the bind-  
ing power of a civil court and were enforced by the police until 1863.  
Rabbi Yaakov Ettliger served as Rabbi of Altona until his death in 1871.  
The community of Altona was unusual in that none of the *minhagim*  
practices of the *Kehillah* were changed under pressure of the  
reformers, and the Jewish community remained loyal to traditional  
Judaism, even though there were quite a few members who were per-  
sonally non-observant. This was due, no doubt, to the power of the Rav's  
personality. Rabbi Shlomo Eiger, son of Rabbi Akiva Eiger of Posen,  
writes that he was greatly impressed by the spirit of the *davening* in the  
synagogue in Altona — "word for word, and at a much slower pace than all the  
synagogues in Poland."<sup>11</sup>

When Reb Yokeyv, as he was affectionately known throughout  
Germany, moved from Mannheim to Altona, the yeshiva he headed  
moved with him. One of his first students in Altona was Rabbi Ezriel  
Hildesheimer. Thus, the two foremost leaders of Torah Judaism in 19th-  
century Germany, Rabbi Hirsch and Rabbi Hildesheimer, were his disci-  
ples. Among the other distinguished alumni of Rabbi Ettliger's yeshiva  
were Rabbi Zvi Binyamin Auerbach, Rabbi of Darmstadt and Halberstadt  
and author of *Nachal Eshkol*, and Rabbi Gershon Josaphat, Rabbi Hirsch's



Great Synagogue of Altona where Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger prayed

roommate and *chavrusa* in yeshiva, who became *Dayan* and *Klausrabbiner* in Halberstadt. During Rabbi Ettlinger's first 20 years in Altona, the yeshiva was a vigorous institution; it subsequently dissolved for reasons which are unclear.

Rabbi Ettlinger's work, *Aruch LaNer*, on various tractates of the Talmud is a standard text in the yeshiva world. He began to write the *Aruch LaNer* on *Sanhedrin* (Warsaw, 1874), when he was only 23 years old. Though he largely completed the work by the age of 26, he did not publish it in his youth, and continued to add to it and amend it during his lifetime. The *Aruch LaNer* on *Yevamos* (Altona, 1850), one of the most important works on that difficult tractate, was written before he was 30, but published only 20 years later. His *Bikkurei Yaakov* (Altona, 1836), perhaps the most significant work of the last three centuries on the laws of *Lulav* and *Succah*, was written while he was still in his early 30s.<sup>12</sup> So although Rabbi Ettlinger was only 30 years old when Rabbi Hirsch studied under him in Mannheim, he was already a world-class Talmudic authority.<sup>13</sup> In addition to his erudition in Talmud and *halachah*, Reb Yokeyv Ettlinger was unusually proficient in *Kabbalah*.

In 1845, Rabbi Ettlinger commenced the publication of the first of two journals, a weekly in German called *Der Treue Zionswächter*, which dealt with public affairs and served in the forefront of the battle against the Reform. The following year he began publishing a biweekly in Hebrew

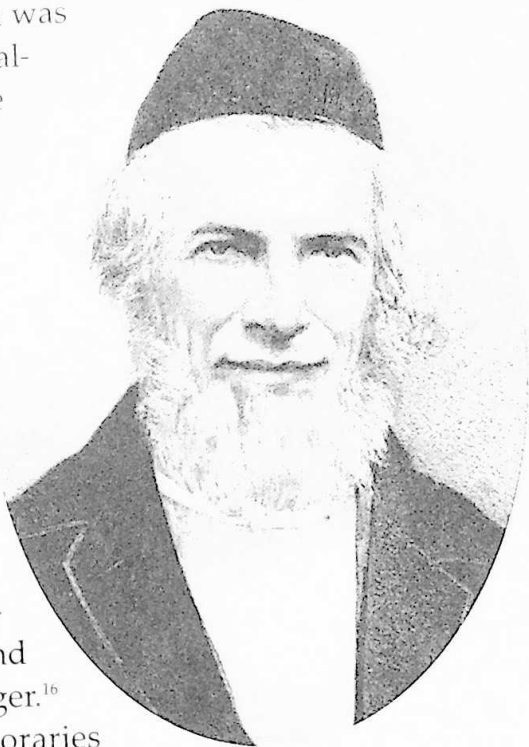
...mer Zion HaNe'eman, which was  
a rabbinic journal, with Tal-  
search, responsa and belle  
Hebrew. The former con-  
publication, with a brief  
until 1854; the latter,  
6.<sup>14</sup>

Yokey Ettlinger was,  
question, the foremost  
ic scholar of his time in  
y, and he was regarded  
during his lifetime. He  
away in Altona on 25  
5632 (December 7, 1871).

Rabbi Hirsch studied in Mann-  
for a year and a quarter,<sup>15</sup> and  
ed *semichah* from Rabbi Ettlinger.<sup>16</sup>

Mannheim, Hirsch's contemporaries  
impressed by his wisdom, humility,  
bility to make do with little and the  
undity of his ideas.<sup>17</sup> Even after he left the yeshiva, he maintained

contact with his *rebbe* and referred halachic questions to him.<sup>18</sup>



Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger

OCTOBER 26, 1829, RABBI HIRSCH ENTERED THE UNIVERSITY OF  
n where he remained for a little more than half a year.<sup>19</sup> Like his teach-  
ers, Rabbi Bernays and Rabbi Ettlinger, he never received any  
degree. Those who called him Dr. Hirsch did so in error.<sup>c</sup>  
Less than two months after entering the university, he established a  
talking society for the Jewish students, which met every *Motzai*  
*Shabbos* and in which the members could hone their rhetorical abilities.  
Rabbi Hirsch's first public address, as a 21-year-old student, already  
exhibits some of the hallmarks for which he was renowned in his later  
years, including his readiness to stand alone in the face of abuse and

Rabbi Hirsch once related that when he came to Oldenburg a government official addressed  
him as Dr. Hirsch. He replied that he had no doctorate, and each time the official called him  
doctor, Rabbi Hirsch again reminded that he was not a doctor. The official asked in amazement,  
"You're really not a doctor?"

"Truly not, your excellency."

"Well then, I am blessed that I have to do with someone who doesn't have this degree. These  
days it's so rare to find someone who isn't a doctor. You can imagine my previous discomfort  
and the pleasant surprise now."<sup>19\*</sup>



ridicule in the service of authentic Judaism.<sup>20</sup>

In Bonn he did not neglect his Torah study. Abraham Geiger, later one of the leading lights of Reform, recorded that the two studied Tractate *Zevachim* together in Bonn. He added, "I learned to recognize and respect his exceptional powers of expression, his penetrating intelligence, and his quick and clear grasp of things. . . . I esteemed his generous character, his strictly ethical behavior, and I loved the goodness of his heart."<sup>d,21</sup>

In March 1830, less than six months after he entered university, Rabbi Hirsch was recommended for the post of Chief Rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. He was only 21.

---

d. The religious differences which would divide them were already apparent, Geiger wrote. Not long after he left Bonn, Geiger became one of the most radical leaders of the Reform Movement.

*Part Three*  
**THE RABBINATE**



ridicule in the service of authentic Judaism.<sup>20</sup>

In Bonn he did not neglect his Torah study. Abraham Geiger, later one of the leading lights of Reform, recorded that the two studied Tractate *Zevachim* together in Bonn. He added, "I learned to recognize and respect his exceptional powers of expression, his penetrating intelligence, and his quick and clear grasp of things. . . . I esteemed his generous character, his strictly ethical behavior, and I loved the goodness of his heart."<sup>d,21</sup>

In March 1830, less than six months after he entered university, Rabbi Hirsch was recommended for the post of Chief Rabbi of the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. He was only 21.

---

d. The religious differences which would divide them were already apparent, Geiger wrote. Not long after he left Bonn, Geiger became one of the most radical leaders of the Reform Movement.

---

*Part Three*

---

**THE RABBINATE**

---

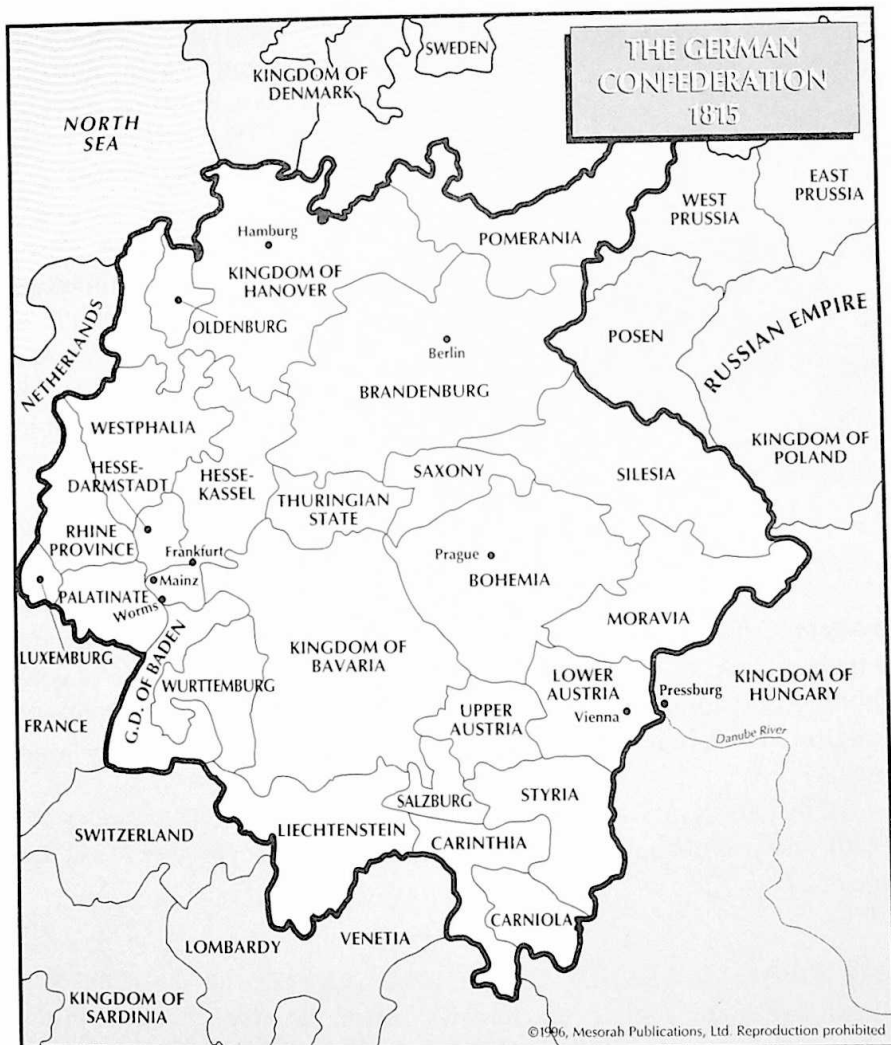


## Chapter Five

# OLDENBURG

**G**ERMANY, IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY, was comprised of a number of independent duchies and principalities each with its own duke or governor, and joined together in very loose confederation. One such principality, located in Lower Saxony in northern Germany, was the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg, named after its capital city. In addition to the town of Oldenburg itself, there were nine or ten other communities, totaling about 700 Jews, under the jurisdiction of the *Landrabbiner*. Although Jews had lived in Oldenburg since the early 14th century, the local Jewish community was very small. By the third decade of the 19th century, there were only 15 Jewish families in the town of Oldenburg itself. Rabbi Adler, the immediate predecessor of Rabbi Hirsch, was forced to impose fines in order to assure the presence of a *minyan* in *shul*.<sup>1</sup>

In 1827, the government of Oldenburg organized Jewish communal affairs, made German names and language compulsory, and created the position of Chief Rabbi whose appointment was contingent on the



approval of the Grand Duke. The first to fill this position was Rabbi Nathan Adler (1803-1890). A great-nephew of Rabbi Nosson Adler of Frankfurt, principal teacher of the *Chasam Sofer*, Rabbi Adler served as Chief Rabbi from 1829 to 1830.<sup>a</sup>

When Rabbi Adler was selected for the position of Chief Rabbi of the neighboring state of Hanover in 1830, he wrote to the Duke of

a. From 1830 to 1844, Rabbi Adler served as Chief Rabbi of the Kingdom of Hanover. From 1844 until his death, Rabbi Adler served as Chief Rabbi of Great Britain. He authored *Nesinah LeGeir* (Vilna, 1875), a commentary on *Targum Onkelos*. (In an 1878 letter to his son-in-law Michael Levy of London, Rabbi Hirsch requested him to ask Rabbi Adler if he knew of an explanation why *Onkelos* always translates זרע as זרעיה.)



Artist's rendering of Rabbi Hirsch in Oldenburg

Oldenburg recommending that young Rabbi Samson Hirsch be appointed his successor.<sup>2</sup> The government of Oldenburg also consulted with and received a warm testimonial from the well-known Orthodox Jewish financier Baron Amschel Rothschild of Frankfurt,<sup>b</sup> who had become acquainted with Rabbi Hirsch when the latter visited him in 1828, on his journey from Hamburg to Mannheim.<sup>3</sup>

On July 8, Rabbi Hirsch went to Oldenburg to be interviewed for the position by Rabbi Adler and by a representative of the Grand Duke. According to a transcript which has recently been published, the interview was a very thorough examination of the young man's views on the fundamentals of Judaism, Revelation at Sinai, *Tanach*, and the commandment of "walking in His ways."<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Hirsch arrived in Oldenburg on 26 *Elul*, 5590 (September 14, 1830), and was officially installed on 4 *Tishrei*, 5591 (September 21), at the age of 22.<sup>5</sup>

THE JEWISH POPULATION OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF OLDENBURG, like that of many similar principalities, was made up primarily of those living in small villages. The village Jews of Germany were, for the most part, extremely scrupulous in their performance of *mitzvoos* and *minhagim*, without seeking leniencies or compromises. On Shabbos and festivals, the villages took on a special atmosphere of holiness, and public fast days were observed with great earnestness as days for self-examination and repentance. Straightforward and unpretentious by nature, the villagers revered Torah scholars. Rarely did the Reform Movement make much of an impression on them.<sup>6</sup>

b. The House of Rothschild made it a policy to back the candidacies of Orthodox nominees for the rabbinate in places where there was a danger of Reform influence.<sup>2\*</sup>

A letter written by Rabbi Hirsch in 1838, during his tenure in Oldenburg, offers valuable insights into Jewish village life in that period:

Concerning religious life in our area, in which you have expressed an interest, there is little exceptional about it, and what is exceptional is not the sort of thing to make one happy. I am referring in particular to the appalling dispersal in which the Jews of northern Germany live. Throughout the region of the Elbe and Moser Rivers, Jews live in scattered tiny villages, most of them with no more than five or ten Jewish homes, and some with as few as two families. Except for the large cities like Hamburg and Altona, there is no community of more than 20 families. . . .

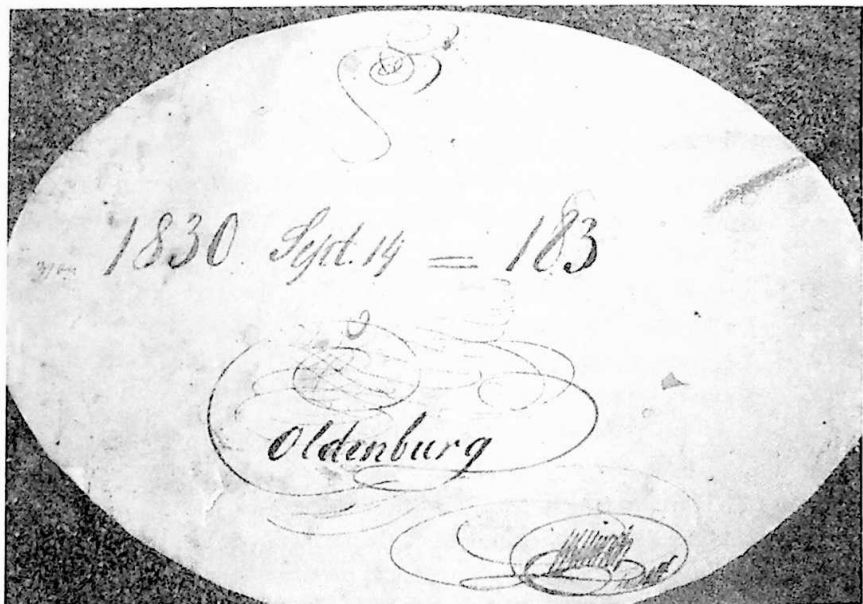
On the other hand, this situation has its positive, and even uplifting, aspects. In spite of the miserable dispersion, the spark of Jewishness is fresh and flourishing in every one of our brethren's homes. Judaism has a particular tenacity in alien conditions, and thus our compatriots preserve their uniqueness, and, in spite of their worries over livelihood, sacrifice themselves to provide a Jewish atmosphere and education for their children and grandchildren. Everything required for a life of Torah, both for adults and children, is available here. When we see this amazing sight we feel only humility before the Divine Presence that dwells within Israel. It gladdens us to reflect that even in such a bitter exile we are still worthy of the title, "the Holy People."<sup>7</sup>

As a result of the small number of congregants, Rabbi Hirsch's rabbinic duties in Oldenburg were relatively light, and he was largely free to throw himself into his studies day and night. He began every day at four with a two-hour *seder* in *Gemara* and *Shulchan Aruch*. Most of his day and a good part of the night were spent learning, and, perhaps, as a result, he suffered attacks of extreme fatigue during which he was so weak that he could not even take anything in his hands.<sup>8</sup> According to Heinrich Graetz, who lived in his home for three years, Rabbi Hirsch was "incapable of anything except learning from his large tomes of the *poskim*."<sup>9</sup>

In the course of his 11 years in Oldenburg, Rabbi Hirsch acquired a broad mastery of the Talmud, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Midrash*, and *Zohar*, as well

c. Elsewhere Graetz wrote: "ואין איש אתו אשר ידבר על אודות לבבו ועל אודות התורה אשר יחגה בה יומם! ולילה כלמרחן פולני בלי דעת את צאת ואת מבוא העם! — He has no one with him to whom he can speak his innermost thoughts and regarding the Torah in which he toils day and night like a Polish *lamdan* without knowing the ways of the people." Although his diary was in German, Graetz had the curious habit of writing in Hebrew whenever he thought the subject was sensitive.<sup>9\*</sup>





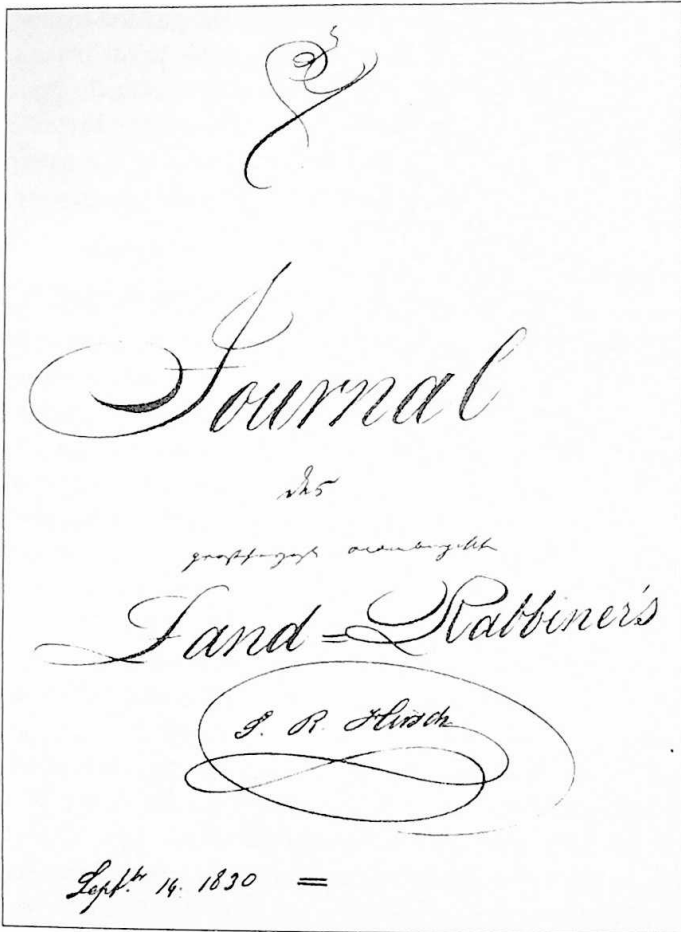
Cover page of Rabbi Hirsch's journal, when he was Landrabbiner in Oldenburg

as a phenomenal command of *Tanach*, as is evident from the notebooks he compiled during this period. Already in his first year in Oldenburg, he carried on a halachic correspondence with Rabbi Avraham Bing, the venerable dean of the German rabbinate, requesting him to induce a husband to either reunite with his wife or to grant her a *get*.<sup>10</sup>

One of the areas in which Rabbi Hirsch expended great effort was in developing schools in the outlying communities and teaching in the local school. In order to furnish instructional materials, he translated entire chapters of the *Mishnah* into German and copied them in adequate quantities for the use of teachers in the outlying communities. All of this he did himself, by hand.<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Hirsch was forced to continually beg the government to help strengthen the Jewish schools and institutions — requests which were often denied. He made periodic visits to all the Oldenburg communities and prepared detailed reports about their institutions, especially the schools. Some of the schools had as few as five children, and his reports frequently discussed each child in detail.<sup>12</sup>

The Oldenburg Jewish community was very poor. Almost from the beginning, Rabbi Hirsch had difficulty obtaining his salary, which was funded by a special Jew Tax, or *Schutzgeld* (protection money). The *Schutzgeld* was also the sole source of funding for various communal institutions. The Oldenburg authorities did not give Rabbi Hirsch their

Title page of  
Rabbi Hirsch's  
journal as  
Landrabbiner  
of Oldenburg



full backing, never raised his salary in spite of his growing family, and added nothing to the funds of the Jew Tax.

As a consequence he lived in poverty and found it very difficult to support his large family.<sup>d</sup> When he wrote to the government that, as a public servant, they should ensure that his salary was paid regularly, they responded brusquely that as far as they were concerned they could do without the whole institution of *Landrabbiner*, and that he was free to leave should he so desire. The officials added that their goal of bringing Jews closer to Christians and diverting them from their peculiar manners would be better fulfilled without a *Landrabbiner*, especially if he was, like

d. Rabbi Adler had been spared similar difficulty and embarrassment during his tenure because the treasurer of the community was a wealthy congregant, who made up any shortfall in the rabbi's salary from his own pocket. That fine gentleman passed away prior to Rabbi Hirsch's arrival.

the present incumbent, a strong adherent of his faith. They added that he was free to write to the Grand Duke himself. In response to the Duke's questions, which were prompted by Rabbi Hirsch's letter to him, the government replied with a not inconsiderable degree of hostility. In 1834, Rabbi Hirsch experienced further financial difficulties due to the parsimoniousness of the officers of the *Kehillah*, but by that time the government's attitude had improved somewhat.<sup>13</sup>

ON OCTOBER 5, 1831, RABBI HIRSCH MARRIED HANNAH JÜDEL (B. March 1805), the only daughter of Marcus (Mordechai) Jüdel, a banker in

**Marriage** Braunschweig, Germany. His father-in-law was an honest and straightforward man, scrupulous in the performance of *mitzvos*, and noted for his kindness and generosity to people from all walks of life. Hannah (Johanna) Jüdel inherited many of her father's qualities, and by the age of 15 her exemplary personality had already earned her the nickname, "the Rebbetzin." As her future husband was later to say, in those days such a title was hardly a compliment.

Nonetheless, the name was not inappropriate, for she was a modest and retiring woman who throughout her long marriage never grew discouraged even in the darkest of times. Her husband said of her, "She was convinced that in the end the truth would emerge victorious in its war with falsehood, and so she accompanied me for over 50 years, wherever our path led, and bore everything together with me. All the stones that were cast at me, all the filth that was actually slung or threatened, all that she bore also." He recalled that in the early years of his public life she would greet him when he returned home as follows, "Have the newspapers been attacking you again? Good! I'll enjoy reading your rejoinder." Rabbi Hirsch once described his family life in the following terms:

If a man cannot bring into his home the same spirit that he proclaims in the outside world, then his work is worthless. If he does not conduct his home life with the same dedication to truth, fear of Heaven, and belief for which he fights and pours out his heart-blood outside the home, then his efforts are in vain. He would be better setting down his torch if he cannot open his home to the world and say, "Here, look and see if there is any contradiction with what I preach in the world." And if it was the case that our home reflected this same earnestness, it was her doing.<sup>14</sup>

While in Oldenburg, Rabbi Hirsch wrote to Rabbi Akiva Eiger of Posen, and the latter apparently proposed him for a rabbinical position.

The community accepted Rabbi Eiger's suggestion, but for some reason nothing ever came of the offer.<sup>15</sup> In 1838, Rabbi Hirsch was offered the rabbinical chair of Amsterdam, but nothing came of that either.<sup>16</sup>

WHILE THE YOUNG CHIEF RABBI OF OLDENBURG SAT IMMERSSED IN Torah study, around him the Reform Movement continued to wreak its devastation. The efforts of the Orthodox leadership to stem the tide were largely in vain. In the rapidly changing times, there was an enormous gap between the older and younger generation, and the chasm was so deep that the older rabbis simply had no idea how to reach the hearts and minds of the younger generation.<sup>17</sup> The older rabbis recognized from the outset the dangers of modern trends and ideologies, yet their attempts to warn their younger compatriots fell on increasingly hostile and scornful ears. Dr. Isaac Breuer summed up the situation:

### **Reform Ascendant**

Over the years, most of that generation was lost. . . . [The Reformers] found a powerful ally in the government, whose concern was to further the cause of social emancipation. . . . In all the large cities of Germany they succeeded in having the *mikvaos* filled in, the schools and *yeshivas* closed, and the production of kosher food shut down. . . . Men who lacked only a few drops of water to make them complete Christians were appointed as leaders of the "communities." . . . Those who remained Orthodox were seen as living in darkness, and it was considered a great *mitzvah* to "enlighten" them.<sup>18</sup>

The Reformers acted in high-handed fashion in many communities, often using the authorities and even the police to enforce their version of Judaism, often in defiance of an Orthodox majority. They considered rabbinic Judaism to be a sickness which must be cured, even against the express wishes of the "patient" if necessary. Writing 20 years later, Rabbi Hirsch described their attitude:

These "progressives" declared that they considered it their mission to save their ignorant, foolish communities and to make them happy, enlightened, cultured and civilized, even against their will. They persuaded the authorities that the state should therefore appoint them as guardians of those poor, old weak-minded communities, with their unfortunate senile habits and attitudes.

And so we have lived to see rabbis and boards of trustees, armed with government edicts, with help from the police and with the authority to deprive their fellow Jews of the right to work, who manipulated synagogues, worship and all the sacred institutions of the Jewish community like so many different puppets delivered into their hands. . . . We have lived to see how, in the face of this despotism, the time-honored prayers and the ancient hopes expressed in them were silenced, how new liturgies were introduced, synagogues were closed, and Torah scrolls were carried off. We have lived to see how the Torah-true members of the community had to take refuge in cellars, in the woods and even abroad in order to be able to worship in accordance with Torah law. We have lived to see how, in the face of this despotism, the traditional schools and their time-honored modes of teaching were silenced, how schoolchildren were forced to flee to attics and barns with their Torah textbooks, weeping as they watched their Torah teachers being driven out of the city. We have seen how this despotism pursued the Torah into the houses of worship and convinced the police to forbid Jews to gather on the Sabbath for readings from the lessons of the Prophets. We have seen how the manipulators of these despotic powers pushed for the repeal of concessions made by the government to help Jewish businessmen observe the Sabbath. We have seen how they. . . enforced the registration of non-Jews as Jews in the records of the Jewish community.<sup>19</sup>

Enlightened society, the Reformers felt, must ensure freedom of conscience to all beliefs, with the exception of "ancient superstitions" which deserved, in their view, no such tolerance. The contradiction between their demands for acceptance of their views on the part of Jew and non-Jews alike and their vehement denunciation of Orthodox Judaism was clear. "Liberal Judaism," writes Professor Mordechai Breuer, "was always liberal only to its friends."<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Hirsch put it in his inimitable fashion:

How is it that people who have that educated character which . . . enables the most diverse persons to meet each other without objection and discord . . . are totally blind towards the most common rules of behavior when this social obligation is to be practiced towards ancient Judaism and its adherents?

If in their presence the Catholic kisses the image of his saint, the Armenian counts his prayer beads, the Turk turns towards the Kaaba, and even if the Huron worships the fetish, they will respectfully and tactfully remain silent to what seems to them incomprehensible, even repugnant. They will accord respectful tolerance and will be wary not to hurt the religious feelings of any person by derision and scorn of his religious and sacred objects. More, they will even overdo that consideration by joining in at the practice of what is strange and meaningless to them, only to avoid giving offense and to dispel the slightest appearance of a denigration.

But let one of their old Jewish brothers acknowledge the eternal, world redeeming Word of the One and Only God, let him in their presence kiss the *mezuzah*, let him in their presence consecrate head and hand and heart with the *tefillin* straps, let him in their presence turn towards Jerusalem in prayer, let him in their presence fulfill any of their, as well as his, duties of their ancestral religion, then our "modern" Jewish brothers will purposely show their non-involvement. They will take pride in . . . no longer practicing and knowing the sacred customs of their fathers, and in 99 out of 100 cases it will not end without a jeering insult.

Tolerance will be expected everywhere. They will practice tolerance towards every man of every color and faith; they will also demand tolerance in their own circle towards their desertion from the ancestral Judaism. Woe to the elderly Jew who permits himself more than a quiet sigh! . . . They praise themselves as the first born son of the "era of tolerance," yet they still blindly, fanatically practice the meanest, most insensitive intolerance towards their own brothers who conscientiously and faithfully continue to acknowledge and practice as duty, and to revere as a high and holy treasure, what their fathers recognized and practiced and what inspired their fathers in life and death.<sup>21</sup>

A telling example of the means employed by the Reformers was their conduct in Fürth in 1830. The yeshiva of Rabbi Wolf Hamburg (1770-1850) in Fürth was then one of the few remaining in Germany. Like Rabbi Bing in Würzburg, Rabbi Hamburg counted among his students many of the future rabbinic leaders of Germany, including Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger, Rabbi S.B. Bamberger and Rabbi Avraham Sutro.<sup>22</sup>

In 1830, the Reformers gained control of the community and had Rabbi Hamburg removed from all his posts (he was also *chazzan* and *mohel*), except for his position as head of the *klaus*, to which he had legal rights as a descendant of one of the founders. That same year his yeshiva was closed at the instigation of the Reformers, who had the police forcibly expel his 100 students from Fürth. Rabbi Hamburg, too, was ultimately driven from the city. His torment can be felt in the anguished appeal he penned in 1830:

Every day we must mourn afresh the lowly state of our people. How insolently have they laid waste what is holy, the brazen ones that destroy and corrupt everything. They wanted to drive me out of the *Beis HaMedrash* and expel the students, those beloved and sincere souls who study the Torah and commandments of the Almighty, until not one remained. Finally only two students were left and these they attacked until one was in great danger, at death's very door, and I had no one left to copy letters concerning legal decisions. . . . Not since the day the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed has such wickedness and such vituperation been perpetrated among us.<sup>23</sup>

NO ONE BETTER TYPIFIES SOME OF THE MAJOR INTELLECTUAL TRENDS within the Reform Movement of Rabbi Hirsch's day than his erstwhile friend and fellow student in Bonn, Abraham Geiger (1810-1874). Geiger was one the "Founding Fathers" of the Reform Movement as we know it today, and in his time was considered the first among his peers. His declared intent was to rid Jewish life of all "obsolete, temporary forms."<sup>24</sup> A brief account of the man and his views can serve as a paradigm of the Reform Movement as a whole, and will help us to gain an understanding of the forces in Jewish life with which Rabbi Hirsch had to contend.

Born in Frankfurt to an old established family, Geiger's maternal grandfather was Rabbi Lazer Wallau, a close disciple of Rabbi Nosson Adler of Frankfurt and later a *dayan* on the Frankfurt *Beis Din*.<sup>25</sup> His principal teacher was his older brother Solomon Geiger (d. 1875), a Torah scholar of no mean standing and author of "*Divrei Kehillos*" on *minhag Frankfurt* (Frankfurt, 1863). As a young man, Geiger studied in Bonn University. His views had not yet changed completely, and although there were already the stirrings of his later impiety, he became friendly with the young Samson Hirsch and was the co-founder with Hirsch of the

speaking society. Geiger wrote in his diary that after Hirsch's first speech they had a long debate, "which did not bring us closer since it touched also on religious matters."<sup>26</sup>

Geiger began his reforms already in 1832 when he became rabbi in Wiesbaden, Germany. In 1837, he was chosen to serve as assistant rabbi in Breslau, where his appointment and further activity was a source of acrimony for years. Geiger was one of the initiators of the *Jüdisch-Theologisches Seminar* of Breslau, which nevertheless refused to hire him because he was too radical. In 1863, he was appointed rabbi of the Reform community in Frankfurt, and from 1870 until his death he was rabbi in Berlin.



Abraham Geiger

In a March 18, 1845 letter to Leopold Zunz, Geiger described *bris milah* as a "barbaric act of bloodletting." Elsewhere he wrote: "The Talmud must go; the Bible, that collection of mostly so beautiful and exalted — perhaps the most exalted of *human* books — as a Divine work must also go."<sup>27</sup>

He declared his opposition to prayer in Hebrew, since the worshipers could not understand what they were saying. In a prayerbook he published in 1854, he omitted any mention of the return to Zion, and although he retained some of the Hebrew, he changed the translation to suit his fancy; for example, rendering *mechayeh hameisim* as "the source of eternal life."<sup>28</sup> His attitude toward the Holy Land was consistent with his disbelief in any future redemption: "Jerusalem is for us an entirely indifferent city. It is nothing more than a veritable ruin — a decayed knight's castle."

Geiger was a firm believer in emancipation, albeit only for "enlightened" Jews. He harbored such a deep hatred for "Talmud Jews" that he seriously suggested that Jews who still abided by its dictates and accepted its authority were not worthy of emancipation.<sup>29</sup> In a letter of November 21, 1837, he wrote that schism would not be such a great misfortune for the Jewish people,<sup>30</sup> and in 1842, he advocated splitting the Jewish communities into two, as the only way to advance the cause of Reform Judaism. The same call was put forth by other Reform leaders at different times. Thus, the later clamoring of Reform leaders for Jewish unity as a reason for opposing secession from Reform-dominated communal structures was more than a little



hypocritical.<sup>31</sup> A radical assimilationist, Geiger opposed Jewish solidarity, to the point of even opposing intervention to help the Jews of Damascus during the 1840 blood libel.<sup>32</sup>

As one community after another fell into the hands of the Reformers, the younger generation abandoned the traditions of their fathers *en masse*. Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer wrote that in the 1830s and 1840s "at least nine-tenths of the youth belonged . . . to the deprecators of religion, . . . to religious traitors, or, at best, to the indifferent. They were ashamed to display their descent or their Jewish faith. . . ." <sup>33</sup> No one stepped forward to stem the tide until, at the age of 28, Rabbi Hirsch authored a small book that was destined to change the face of Germany Jewry.

## Chapter Six

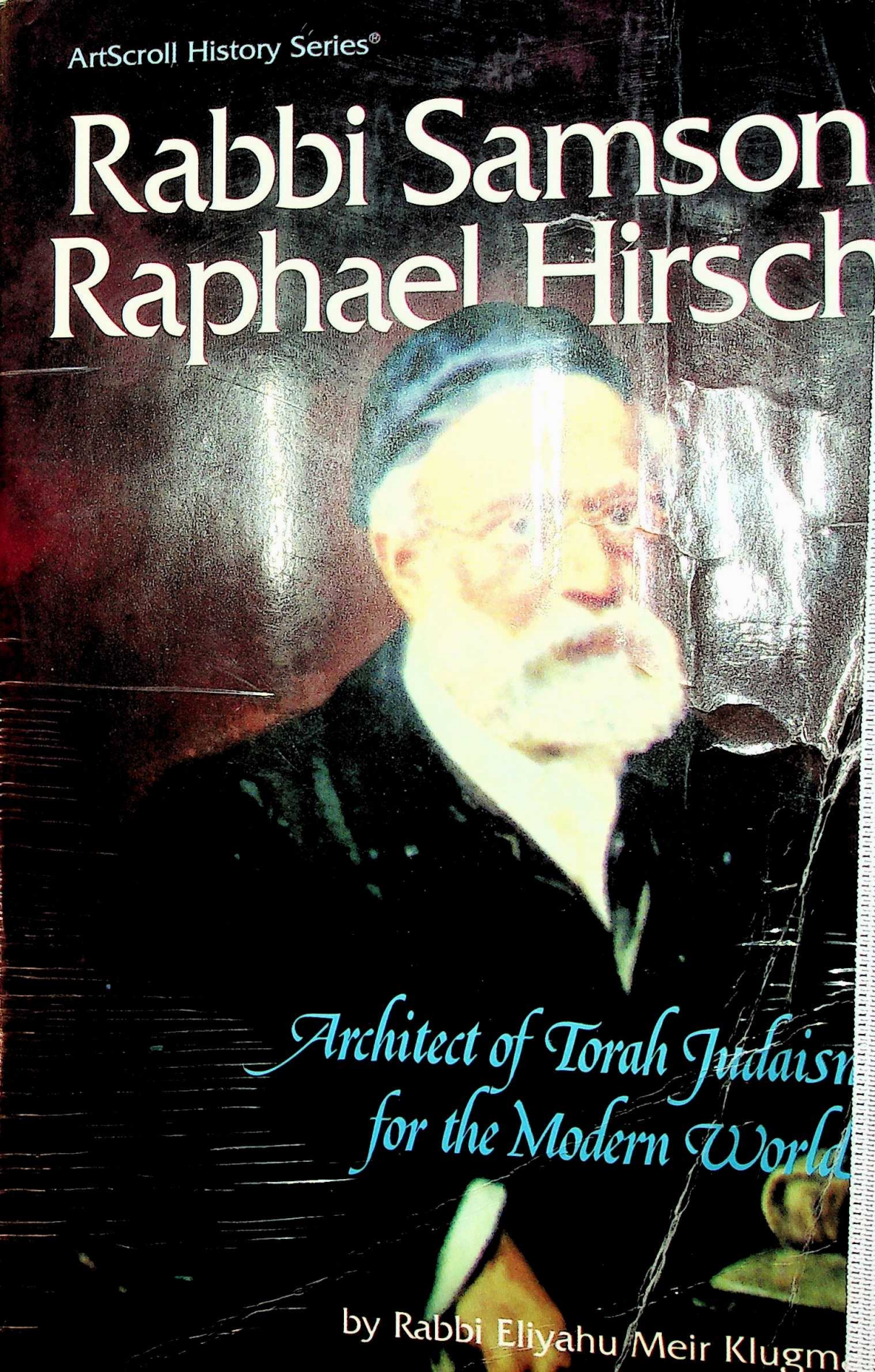
# THE NINETEEN LETTERS

**I**N 1836, THE STILL UNKNOWN 27-YEAR-OLD RABBI OF Oldenburg published a slender volume that electrified the German Jewish world unlike any other book of that era.<sup>a</sup> The enduring influence of *Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum* (*Nineteen Letters about Judaism*) has seldom been matched before or since. It quickly became the definitive work in Germany on the essence of Judaism, and thousands of young Jews in Western Europe drew guidance and inspiration from it.<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Zalman Spitzer, rabbi in Vienna and son-in-law of the *Chasam Sofer*, writing 50 years after the first appearance of *The Nineteen Letters*, captured well the force with which the work hit its

a. Since his name could have neither added nor detracted from the force of his arguments, Rabbi Hirsch originally published *The Nineteen Letters* anonymously under the pen-name "Ben Uziel." "The truth," he wrote, "will make itself known, no matter who says it." Some were convinced that only Chacham Bernays could have written such a book, but before long it became common knowledge that the author was his student, the young *Landrabbiner* of Oldenburg.

ArtScroll History Series®

# Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

A portrait of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, an elderly man with a full white beard and glasses, wearing a dark suit and a dark hat. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is dark and textured, possibly a book cover or a wall. The portrait is the central focus of the cover.

*Architect of Torah Judaism  
for the Modern World*

by Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman