

עטרה ליזשנה: המאבק ליצירת יהדות ההשכלה (Atarah Leyoshnah: Restore Judaism to Its Pristine Splendor: The Struggle to Establish Haskalah Judaism). By Moshe Pelli. Pp. 501 + x. Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2012. Paper.

In this book, *Atarah Leyoshnah*, Moshe Pelli goes back to the beginnings, returning to the first generation of the Haskalah. In the first section of the book, Pelli expounds major trends of early enlightenment in Europe and its influence on Jewish thinkers. These thinkers learned from their non-Jewish forerunners but did not become a reflection of them. They sought to introduce enlightenment to the Judengasse by connecting to traditions rather than adopting new modern doctrines. Their goal—as the title of the book indicates—was to “restore Judaism to its pristine splendour”. They definitely wanted to alleviate some religious restrictions, but within the scope of halakah, not against it. Another major objective was the education—reform of the Jewish education. This meant for them moving away from intensive Talmud-study, and turning to the Bible, ethics, and Hebrew as well as acquiring general knowledge in science, languages, and professions. Being religious themselves and deeply rooted in Jewish life, these first Maskilim turned to the Rabbis with their concerns, but found no attentive ear.

In granting European Enlightenment and its influence on Jewish Maskilim a whole section, one might get the impression that the Haskalah was initiated “from outside.” However, Pelli calls our attention to changes within the

Jewish communities, especially in Western Europe, which started as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though they were gradual. In Amsterdam the Marranos had contact with the Jewish communities. These Marranos led a moderately secular life, meaning, choosing not to keep the commandments strictly. Contact with these ex-Spanish Jews, as well as the confusion caused by the movement of Shabbtai Zvi and Jakob Frank, contributed a lot to paving the way for the Haskalah.

From the beginning, the Maskilim polemicized against the newly arisen movement of the Chassidim, seeing them, not unlike the Mithnagdim, as a danger for Judaism. They fought them with cynical pamphlets and books, especially decrying their rampant superstitions. Pelli notes that this literature cannot be taken as a sign of the beginning of secularization. As stated above, abandoning the commandments started much earlier, and the early Maskilim sought to get the consent of the Rabbis for the alleviation of some restrictions. They called for meetings to discuss this matter, calling the Rabbis teachers and wise men. Pelli is not sure whether this was mere lip service. The Maskilim wanted to stress how deeply rooted they were within traditional Judaism. However, the Rabbis apparently did not trust their claims and so they ignored them. The verbal exchange between certain Maskilim and some Rabbis was quite extensive. In *Atarah Leyoshnah* Pelli describes and analyses the works of most of the early prominent Maskilim providing us with a thorough insight into these discussions, thus, enabling us to understand how the Maskilim displayed their profound knowledge to maintain their claim that all the alterations they pleaded for were within the realms of halakah.

Pelli argues that by leaning toward expressions and form of rabbinical way of expression, the early Maskilim were employing effective tactics to attract youngsters who were still indecisive about which way to go. On the other hand, as he states, it was quite natural that the Maskilim would choose and use domains with which they were familiar. He asks further, whether they had a clear plan to follow and claims that most probably they did not. However, their fight for changes shows a clear direction. Pelli mentions these changes: in addition to being knowledgeable in Jewish matters and studies, the Rabbi should also have a thorough secular educational background. Furthermore, Maskilim felt free to show a way in halakah, thus showing their profound knowledge in halakah and demonstrating their ability to decide halakic questions. Hebrew language was another concern of the Haskalah. The Maskilim advocated the use of Hebrew language in accordance with Leibnitz, who argued that language is the mirror of the soul. Rejuvenating Hebrew was their aim, but not the Hebrew used in rabbinic literature, which was a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic and did not comply with the rules of grammar.

Furthermore, one of the main concerns of the Maskilim was to shift the attention from the study of Talmud to that of Torah—Bible. Modern commentaries, such as Mendelsohn's *Be'ur* were preferred to the "old" ones. The modern approach cultivated by the Maskilim was critical and scientific. Talmud, according to their perception, should be taught following topics and not systematically as was done. Pelli shows that even in the first years of *Haskalah*, the changes, which were requested, were not minor.

In this section, the second one, Pelli discusses not only those leading Maskilim, who presented ideas which were different to those prevailing in European Jewry of that time, he also mentions lesser-known people such as Schlomo Pappenheim, a charedi, who we would call a philosopher and linguist of the Hebrew language. Ludwig Geiger, who summed up Pappenheim's ideas, says that he realized that changes were necessary, but claimed that only a conference of Rabbis could decide on such changes.

The last Maskil this section deals with is Shalom Hacohen, who first sided with the more radical Maskilim, but then realized where this would lead to, causing him to back out of it and try to integrate moderate traditions with enlightenment.

In the third section, Pelli discusses the radical Maskilim, those whose goal was "to reorganize our religion." Pelli describes people and theories whose ultimate goal was the integration into German society and abandonment of those obligations that were obstacles to achieve this goal.

Finally, in the fourth and last section, Pelli addresses the actual reform, the Great Paris Sanhedrin, 1807, the Consistorium of Westphalia in 1809, as well as the Temple Reforms in Hamburg, 1818. Enacting these reforms caused a storm within Judaism and though orthodox rabbis fought back, they could no longer stop the reform movement from expanding.

To sum up, Pelli believes that the first, moderate Maskilim did not foresee this development. They wanted to "create a moderate Judaism of *Haskalah*...indicative of modern trends in Judaism, but not of secularism." Pelli hints that the vehement rejections of moderate reforms by the orthodox inspired the more extreme demands of the Maskilim. However, the question about whether the rabbis refused to accept all reforms because they foresaw where they would lead remains unanswered. All in all, this is an interesting and thoroughly researched book.

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