

**Tradition and Transition: Mendel Lefin of Satanów and the Beginnings
of the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe, 1749-1826**

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ABSTRACT

Tradition and Transition: Mendel Lefin of Satanów and the Beginnings of the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe, 1749-1826

Nancy Beth Sinkoff

This dissertation reexamines the beginnings of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) in Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by focusing on its preeminent figure, Mendel Lefin of Satanów (1749-1826). Unlike the standard historiography on the Jewish Enlightenment, which stressed the influence of external factors upon the emergence of Haskalah and emphasized the rupture in traditional Jewish society created by the maskilim, this dissertation underscores the internal causes for Lefin's turn to the Haskalah and its moderation. Lefin defined the Haskalah in opposition to what he believed was a radicalizing trend among his Berlin peers and to Hasidism, the mystical movement which emerged and flourished in eighteenth-century Podolia and Volhynia. Lefin's conception of the Haskalah was a form of "religious Enlightenment;" he believed there was no contradiction between religion and Enlightenment, no disjunction between the desire to explore Western cultural creativity and fidelity to traditional rabbinic culture.

This study illustrates how Lefin's distinctive conception of the Haskalah was due to his Polish identity and thus underlines the importance of regional variations in the Jewish encounter with modernity. Unlike his Western peers, whose identity and conception of the Jewish Enlightenment were formed in the context of the emerging enlightened absolutist state, Lefin's formulation of the Haskalah was shaped by the Polish variety of the

"royal alliance." Moreover, the struggle for political emancipation, which so fundamentally defined the cultural response of enlightened Jews in the West, was absent in eighteenth-century Poland. Terms like "religious accommodation," "emancipation," "assimilation," and "crisis" used to define Jewish modernization in Western Europe do not fit Lefin's world-view, which was characterized by transition and not crisis. As conceived by Mendel Lefin, the Haskalah was a moderate, even conservative effort to ensure the future of an intellectually vibrant, yet traditional, Jewish way of life.

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In Memory

Roslyn Sinkoff

(October 29, 1991 -- April 10, 1994)

Introduction

It has been a truism of modern Jewish history until recently that the trajectory of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) followed a linear, monodirectional path from its center in Germany to Austrian Galicia and then to Russia,¹ or more specifically, from Berlin to Eastern Galicia to Ukraine to Podolia and, finally, to "new" Russia.² In both scenarios, Brody, the border city between Austrian Galicia and the Russian lands of the former Polish Commonwealth, loomed large as the new center in the East whence the Haskalah radiated.³ Brody's significance lay in two factors. First, located centrally on the trade routes of Jewish merchants travelling to and from Galicia to fairs in Leipzig, Frankfurt-on-the-Oder, Breslau, and Königsberg, the city was host to the growth of a wealthy class of Jews interested in the works of the Enlightenment. Second, after 1808, Brody was home to Mendel Lefin of Satanów (1749-1826), a Polish-born maskil who had lived in Berlin and internalized the teachings of the Berlin Haskalah.⁴ Depicting Lefin as the living link between the Haskalah in Germany

¹ Raphael Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, 1:4, (Rehavia, 1956), pp. 71-72. Bernhard Wachstein, Die Hebräische Publizistik in Wien, (Wien, 1930), p. xvii.

² Israel Weiniös, "Mendel Lefin-Satanower: A Biographical Study from Manuscript Material," (Yiddish), YIVO Bleter, I, 1931, p. 335.

³ Arim ve-Imahot be-Yisra'el, N.M. Gelber, ed., 6, "Brody," (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 9-11.

⁴ Raphael Mahler states that Lefin settled in Brody between 1808-1817 and all other accounts of Lefin's life have followed his dating for Lefin's arrival in Galicia. See Mahler, p. 73, and Raphael Mahler, A History of Modern Jewry, 1780-1815, (New York, 1971), p. 589. Yet, I have found documentary evidence proving that Lefin was still in Mikolajów, Podolia, in 1808, and have found no other evidence to substantiate Mahler's dating of an 1808 arrival in Galicia. See the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers, and the appendix of Lefin's unpublished works compiled by Philip Koffler in

and Galicia, historians crowned Lefin with the title, "Father of the Galician Haskalah."⁵

Important caveats to both the economic centrality of Brody and the equivalence between the German model of Haskalah and its Eastern European variants have been offered by Michael Stanislawski and Israel Bartal, respectively.⁶ Moreover, the volume Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model made an important contribution to analyzing the specific ways in which the German-Jewish model of Haskalah and modernity affected the Jews of Galicia, Hungary, Italy, and Russia.⁷ But it is still assumed that the Haskalah movement in Eastern Europe began in the second decade of the nineteenth century and the emphasis has been on the Galician, and thus

the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA. See footnote 89 in Chapter One below for the most up-to-date documentary evidence of Lefin's itinerary.

⁵ Lucy Dawidowicz, The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe, (New York, 1984), p. 24; Samuel Joseph Fuenn, Kiryah Ne'emanah, (Vilna, 1860), pp. 271-273; N. M. Gelber, Aus Zwei Jahrhunderten, (Wien, 1924), p. 51; Yosef Klausner, Historyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah, I, (Jerusalem, 1930), pp. 201-222; Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, pp. 71-72 and History of Modern Jewry, p. 588; Emmanuel Ringelblum, "Hasidism and the Haskalah in Warsaw in the Eighteenth Century," (Yiddish), YIVO Bleter, 13, (Vilna, 1938), p. 126; Israel Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin Satanower," pp. 334-357 and "Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów," (Hebrew), Ha-Olam, 13, #39-42, 1925, pp. 778-779, 799-800, 819-820, 839-840; Israel Zinberg, A History of Jewish Literature, 6, (New York, 1975), p. 275.

⁶ Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, (Philadelphia, PA, 1983), pp. 56-57; Israel Bartal, "'The Heavenly City of Germany,' and Absolutism à la Mode d'Autriche: The Rise of the Haskalah in Galicia," in Toward Modernity, Jacob Katz, ed., (New York, 1987), p. 33; "'The Second Model,' -- France as a Source of Influence in the Processes of Modernization of the Jews of Eastern Europe (1772-1863)," (Hebrew), in Ha-Mahpeikhah ha-Zarfatit ve-Rishumah, Richard Cohen, ed., (Jerusalem, 1991), p. 271; "The Image of Germany and German Jewry in East European Jewish Society During the Nineteenth Century," in Danzig: Between East and West, Isadore Twersky, ed., (Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 7.

⁷ See note 6.

Austrian, context of its emergence. Particular attention has been paid to the flourishing Hebrew periodical literature which rolled off the press of the Christian Hebraist, Anton von Schmid, in Vienna.⁸ The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was rarely, if ever, mentioned, and scholars tended to dismiss the Polish context of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Yet, how can we explain Mendel Lefin's suggestion that Polish Jews study Polish, not German, in the new schools to be created by the National Education Commission or his commitment to composing his Yiddish (which he called "the Polish-Jewish language") translation of Psalms in the dialect specific to the Jews of Podolia?⁹ Although Lefin was greatly influenced by the German cultural sphere which enveloped the Habsburg territories neighboring Poland and permeated the lives of the new Jewish intelligentsia, the maskilim, he did not uncritically cloak himself in the ideological mantle of the Berlin Haskalah. Not only was Lefin acutely aware of the fact that the Jews living under Austrian, Prussian, and Russian rule after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were still Polish Jews, but his conception of the Haskalah was shaped by the cultural context in which he emerged. As Gerson Hundert has argued, there was an "undeniable Polish self-identification"

⁸ See Wachstein, introduction.

⁹ [Mendel Lefin], Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses moeurs, (Warsaw, 1791), paragraphs 64, 71 and 75. The full text has been reprinted in Materialy do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego, vol. 6, Arthur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, Janusz Wolinski, eds., (Wroclaw/Warsaw/Kraków, 1969), pp. 409-421. On dating the pamphlet, see Alexander Guterman, "Polish Jewry's Suggestions Reforms of Their Legal, Economic, Social and Cultural Status," (Hebrew), M.A. thesis, Jerusalem, 1975, p. 70. For Lefin's introduction to the Yiddish translation of Psalms, see Simha Katz, "Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów's Bible Translations," (Hebrew), Kiryat Sefer, 16, 1939-40, p. 129. On Lefin's use of the term "Polish-Jewish language" for Yiddish, see the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 67 and 134a, p. 3b.

among the intellectual and economic elite of Polish Jewry, who shared connections of marriage, education, and occupation among themselves, as well as a sense of permanence in the Commonwealth. Non-Jews, too, perceived Polish Jewry as a distinct group within Polish society.¹⁰ Moreover, it is crucial to emphasize that the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth claimed by Maria Theresa after the first partition of Poland in 1772, and then called "The Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria," included the former Polish palatinates of Rus' (also called "Red Rus'"), Belz, but only that part of Podolia that lay west of the Zbrucz River. Lefin's birthplace, Satanów, and the town where he settled after his trip to Berlin, Mikolajów (also called Nikolajów), lay east of the Zbrucz River in Podolia, which, absorbed by the Russian Empire only in 1793, was still considered Polish territory until the Polish uprising of 1863.¹¹ Ruled by the Habsburgs after 1772, "the Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria" and its Jewish inhabitants were subject to the administrative, economic, and cultural pressures of the enlightened Austrian absolutist state. The Jews residing east of the Zbrucz River, as we shall demonstrate below, remained under the jurisdiction -- and subject to the cultural influences -- of the partitioned Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as its patriots struggled to prevent its total dismemberment.

This study challenges the standard depiction of the course taken by the Haskalah and reevaluates the geographic and chronological beginnings of its Eastern European incarnation by focusing on the life of its central figure,

¹⁰ Gerson Hundert, The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century, (Baltimore and London, 1992), pp. 36-37.

¹¹ The final fixing of the boundaries of Austrian Galicia did not take place until 1809. See Paul Robert Magocsi, Galicia: A Historical Survey and Bibliographic Guide, (Toronto, 1983), p. 92 and Magocsi, Historical Atlas of East Central Europe, (Seattle, 1993), p. 21.

Mendel Lefin of Satanów. Understanding Lefin as a Podolian maskil who had great influence in both Austrian Galicia and Russia is not merely a play on words. The geographic and historical distinction between Podolia and Galicia is significant, even merely on the level of association: Podolia connotes Polish/Ukrainian territory and Polish/Ukrainian society, while Galicia connotes Austrian territory and Austrian society. Lefin matured in Podolia, an eastern region of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with a history distinct from the rest of the country. Dominated by the private latifundia and private towns of Poland's elite magnate class -- in contrast to the royally-chartered cities in Western Poland -- Podolia was also the place where Jacob Frank (1726-1791) and his followers first challenged the traditional Jewish community and the region where Hasidism emerged. Born in 1749, Lefin was a child of the eighteenth century. Even if Raphael Mahler is correct in dating Lefin's settlement in Brody at the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, then Lefin was already 59 years old when he left Podolia, the region in which he had spent his entire life, except for two important excursions to Berlin and St. Petersburg.¹² Lefin's ideological commitment to the Jewish Enlightenment must be seen in light of his maturation in the eighteenth rather than the nineteenth century, and with particular attention to his critique of eighteenth-century Polish Jewry. When a Podolian maskil such as Lefin turned to the German model of Haskalah, he had to interpret and reformulate it to suit the needs of the society in which

¹² Mahler, no doubt basing his account on Meir Letteris's discussion of Lefin's life, states that Lefin made two trips to Berlin in the 1780s, the first between the years 1780-1784, the second in the latter part of the decade. Max Erik repeats this assertion. See Meir Letteris, Zikaron ba-Sefer, (Vienna, 1868-9), p. 38; Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, p. 72 and A History of Modern Jewry, pp. 588-589; Max Erik, Etiuden zu der geshikhte fun der haskole, 1789-1881, (Minsk, 1934), p. 136.

he lived.

Lefin's significance lies in his mediation between the Berlin Haskalah and the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Yet, his mediation should not be seen as one-sided. Lefin did not journey to Germany in an intellectual and spiritual vacuum to receive uncritically the "authentic" Enlightenment from the sages of Berlin. He purposefully made a trip to the center of the Haskalah, bringing his experience of living in Podolian Jewish society with him. Lefin's years in Berlin and his extensive contact with the Mendelssohnian circle clearly influenced and inspired him. Returning to Podolia, Lefin remained in active contact with his Berlin friends and embarked on a number of literary projects which shared features with those undertaken in the West. Yet, despite the influence of the Berlin Haskalah, Lefin shaped a conception of the Jewish Enlightenment which he believed was appropriate for and specific to East European Jewry. This formulation included a sharp critique of both Polish Hasidism and of the radicalization of the Berlin Haskalah, which followed the death of Moses Mendelssohn in 1786.

Lefin conceived of the Haskalah as a form of "religious Enlightenment" (1689-1789). Rejecting the implacable hostility of the French Enlightenment to religion and clericalism, Lefin saw no incongruity between religion and Enlightenment, no inconsistency between the intellectual exploration of Western, non-Jewish ideas and fidelity to traditional rabbinic culture. Lefin's conviction that religious and Enlightenment values were compatible was similar to that of eighteenth-century Reform Catholics who criticized their religious tradition in order to renew it.¹³

¹³ David Sorkin, "The Case for Comparison: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment," Modern Judaism, 14, 1994, pp. 121-38 and "From Context to Comparison: The German Haskalah and Reform Catholicism," Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte, XX, 1991, pp. 23-58.

To these ends, Lefin published a collection of popular essays on natural science, Moda le-Binah (Insight to Understanding) (1789), written in easy mishnaic Hebrew which included sections from Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am (The Book of Popular Healing) (1794), his translation of the Swiss physician Tissot's popular medical book, and from Iggerot ha-Hokhmah (Letters of Wisdom), as a means of introducing scientific subjects to the Jewish community. In 1791, his French pamphlet, Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne & de redresser par là ses mœurs, was published. Written for the National Education Commission of the last autonomous Polish parliament, it outlined the creation of a state-appointed rabbinate, the obligatory study of Polish in Jewish schools and proposed the occupational restructuring, or "productivization," of the Jewish community of Poland. In 1808, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh (Moral Stocktaking), a guide to character improvement modelled, in part, after the thirteen principles of conduct Benjamin Franklin had outlined in his Autobiography, appeared. In 1814, Lefin published his Yiddish translation of Proverbs with a short Hebrew commentary, and in 1818, Masa'ot ha-Yam (Journeys by Sea), a Hebrew translation of a German children's travelogue. Three of Lefin's works were published posthumously. In 1829, two of Lefin's disciples, Mordecai Suchostober (1790-1880) and Jacob Samuel Bik (1770-1831), published his translation into mishnaic Hebrew of Moreh Nevukhim (The Guide for the Perplexed), Moses Maimonides' classic work of medieval rationalist philosophy, and in 1863, an introduction to that work, entitled Elon Moreh, was published by Alexander Zederboim as a sup-

plement to Ha-Meliz.¹⁴ In 1873, Yehudah Kari and Hirsch Reich issued Lefin's Yiddish translation of Ecclesiastes with a short Hebrew commentary.

Numerous texts authored by Lefin remained in manuscript in the library of his disciple, the Galician maskil Joseph Perl (1774-1839), and were either lost or scattered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Nonetheless, many tantalizing fragments of Lefin's literary productivity which have not been previously examined are still extant, including pieces of his philosophic opus, Nachlaß eines Sonderlings zu Abdera, sections of his Yiddish translations of Psalms, Job, and Lamentations, Yiddish and Hebrew essays on the nature of the soul, additions and corrections to Moral Stocktaking, a German letter on the benefits of using Yiddish as the language of Enlightenment for Polish Jewry, an introduction to Journeys by Sea, his private journal from the last years of his life, a German proposal for the rationalization of the rabbinate, a poem to Izabela Czartoryska, a German essay on the perils of overbearing maternal love, and philosophic essays about humanity and psychology written for Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734-1823). These texts, as well as references to Lefin and letters written to him by his disciples, comprise the primary sources for this study of the beginnings of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe and particularly of Mendel Lefin's role in its emergence.¹⁶

¹⁴ An example of Lefin's translation of Moreh Nevukhim was published in Bik-kurei ha-Ittim, 1824, pp. 3-9.

¹⁵ Shmuel Werses, "The Joseph Perl Archives in Jerusalem and Their Peregrinations," (Hebrew), Ha-Universitah, 19, March 1974, pp. 38-52.

¹⁶ As will be evident from the footnotes which accompany the text, there have been many piecemeal studies of Lefin scattered in various journals and books. One full-length study was concerned with sociological, rather than historical, questions. See Hillel Levine, "Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1974.

Lefin's view of the Haskalah as a moderate alternative to Hasidism and atheistic rationalism calls into question Jacob Katz's rigid bifurcation of the two forces, Hasidism in the East and Haskalah in the West, which led to the dissolution of traditional Ashkenazic Jewish society.¹⁷ In Katz's argument, the Haskalah with its vision of social integration foreshadowed the political emancipation of the Jewish community and the maskil represented a Jewish counterpart of the new, independent middle class that had emerged in the absolutist state. Aligned with the new state rather than the Jewish estate, the maskilim are described as loyal to themselves and their new social group, rejecting all aspects of traditional authority and Jewish communal life. While Lefin might have agreed with Katz regarding the crisis facing traditional Jewish life in the late eighteenth century, he would not have cast blame on the Haskalah itself. Rather, he would have proffered his own version of a moderate, religious Enlightenment as a bulwark against the forces (areligious rationalism and Hasidism) which threatened to undermine traditional Jewish society. For Lefin -- and later for his disciple, Nachman Krochmal, and other East European maskilim, such as RaSHi Fin¹⁸ -- the moderate Haskalah provided the means by which traditional Jews could make a crisis-free transition into the modern world.

¹⁷ Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis, (New York, 1993), pp. 3-4, 9, 195-236. Lucy Dawidowicz argued that the Haskalah in Eastern Europe fought two opponents, Hasidism and traditional Judaism, missing completely that a maskil of Lefin's moderate cast believed that his program would invigorate traditional Jewish culture and life. See Dawidowicz, p. 23.

¹⁸ Shmuel Feiner, Me-ha-Haskalah Lohemet le-Haskalah Mishmeret: Mivhar Mikhtevei RaSHi Fin, (Jerusalem, 1993); Feiner, Review of Jay M. Harris, Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age, in Studies in Contemporary Jewry, X, 1994, pp. 386-388.

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter discusses the Polish context of the emergence of the Haskalah. It focuses on the general history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and on the region of Podolia in particular, which was home not only to Mendel Lefin but to the beginnings of Hasidism. The chapter chronicles the history of Frankism and Hasidism in the region because Lefin's program of Haskalah, which was deeply rooted in his concern for the continuity of the Ashkenazic Jewish past, was informed by the specific ideational links that he drew between Sabbatianism, Frankism, and Hasidism. It also outlines Lefin's biography -- what little is known about his early years -- and traces his journey to Berlin and back to Poland. The chapter highlights the varied influences on Lefin's individual turn to the Jewish Enlightenment and asserts that the beginnings of the moderate Haskalah need not be conjoined with the emergence of the centralized absolutist state. Lefin's "Polishness," it is argued, was an essential component in his conception of a moderate Haskalah.

Chapter Two turns to the specific relationship between Mendel Lefin and his Polish patron, Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski. Czartoryski's enthusiastic participation in the Polish Enlightenment was an important factor in his lifelong support of Lefin. The chapter underscores the centrality of this patronage for Lefin's productivity as a maskil, but analyzes how his program of Haskalah differed from that of his sponsor. Lefin's participation in the Four-Year Sejm, the last independent Polish parliament before the final partition in 1795, his suggestions for the reform of the rabbinate on Czartoryski's estates, and his involvement with Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770-1861), Kazimierz's son, in the Russian legislation of 1804 are all examined. The analysis of Lefin's political writings demonstrates that his

commitment to a moderate Haskalah was consistent, whether or not he was addressing the cultural or political reform of the Jewish community.

The third chapter focuses specifically on Lefin's psychological battle against Hasidism through a detailed analysis of two of his writings, Moral Stocktaking and Journeys by Sea. Aware that Hasidism was particularly attractive to East European Jewish youths in the vulnerable stage of their adolescence, Lefin endeavored to keep these young men within the traditional rabbinic Jewish community by presenting them with an equally enticing, alternative system of morality and religiosity. The method outlined in Moral Stocktaking, based almost entirely on Benjamin Franklin's program for ethical self-reform, anchored moral behavior in the individual, and was a response to Hasidic techniques for controlling the evil inclination and to the Hasidic institution of the charismatic zaddik (rebbe, religious leader). Journeys by Sea, a Hebrew translation of a German travelogue, is examined both as a quintessential Haskalah text designed to broaden the geographic knowledge of Polish Jewry and as a subtle anti-Hasidic work. The chapter thus emphasizes how Lefin selectively used non-Jewish Enlightenment writings to further his moderate -- meaning, rabbinic and anti-Hasidic -- program of Haskalah through skillful literary artifice.

Chapter Four argues for viewing Lefin as an eighteenth-century natural philosopher, but underscores his dependence upon Maimonides' justifications for the study of natural science and definition of the appropriate boundaries of human epistemology. Using archival materials, as well as tracing the West European influences on Lefin's published works, the chapter explores Lefin's interest in natural science, contemporary psychological theory and philosophy (particularly the work of English sensationalists and

Immanuel Kant), and his participation in the eighteenth-century debate over the immortality of the soul. Lefin's writings on these subjects illustrate that similar to other eighteenth-century natural philosophers, Lefin viewed science as a stimulus to traditional piety. Lefin's philosophic works, like his translations and adaptations of European and Jewish literature, represent an intrinsic component of his effort to safeguard traditional rabbinic Judaism.

Chapter Five discusses the language question, which was central to both the European Enlightenment and the Haskalah, by focusing on the specific polemic that erupted among maskilim over Mendel Lefin's Yiddish translation of Proverbs. New archival documents are brought to bear on Lefin's use of Yiddish, a turn which marked both his fidelity to and departure from the Mendelssohnian path of translation. The chapter demonstrates that Lefin's use of the East European vernacular in his Bible translations was a utilitarian adaptation of the Berlin translation model. Fundamental to his choice was an awareness of his Polish-Jewish audience and a commitment to their spiritual transformation through whatever linguistic means would be most effective. Unlike his maskilic peers in Berlin, Lefin's vision of the Haskalah was not inexorably Hebraist.

The conclusion summarizes the major themes of the dissertation and raises the question if the concept "secularization" is appropriate for understanding the Jewish Enlightenment in general, and the moderate, religious Haskalah of Mendel Lefin in particular.

Chapter One

The Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe: The Polish Context

Lefin's identity as a Polish Jew informed all of his efforts, political and cultural, to create a moderate Haskalah which would appeal to traditional East European Jewry. While it would be absurd to speak of a completely indigenous Haskalah in Eastern Europe or to rename Mendel Lefin "Father of the Podolian/Ukrainian Haskalah," the beginnings of the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe as embodied by Lefin lie not in the second decade of the nineteenth century in Galicia, but in mid-eighteenth century Podolia.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

The eighteenth-century Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth was one of the largest states in Continental Europe, stretching from the Dvina in the north to the Black Sea in the south and from beyond the Dnieper in the east to Silesia and West Prussia in the West. Known as the "Noble Republic," the Commonwealth boasted one of the biggest noble classes in Europe. Free from taxation, with almost unrestrained power in the Polish Sejm (Parliament) to enact legislation and to elect the King, the Polish szlachta (nobility) enjoyed a high level of political rights compared to their noble peers in the rest of Europe. Economically, the nobility was similarly empowered, although the greatest wealth was concentrated in the hands of

about twenty magnate families, and not distributed equally among the szlachta. For example, in the 1770s, 1.9 per cent of the szlachta controlled 75 per cent of the nobles' wealth in Lithuania. The eastern lands of the Commonwealth, in Podolia, Volhynia and Ukraine, were dominated by the huge latifundia of a few magnate families. These great manors were worked by enserfed peasants who, from the sixteenth century onward, were legally bound to the land and to weekly labor duties (corvée).¹

Characteristic of the Commonwealth was its ethnic and religious heterogeneity. In the eighteenth century, it was home to Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Belorussians, Ruthenians, Letts, Estonians, Turks, Armenians, Italians, Scots and Jews. Moreover, the Commonwealth tolerated Protestantism, "Greek" and Armenian Orthodoxy, Ukrainian Catholicism, Islam and Judaism.² The descendents of Jewish migrants fleeing the persecutions and expulsions in western Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries provided the bulk of the new Jewish community in Poland. Originally under the direct authority of the king, Jewish residents had become the subjects of local lords by 1549. After the formation of the Union of Lublin in 1569, Poland acquired vast territories in Ukraine (including Podolia and Volhynia) and Rus', the area that came to be called East Galicia, which the szlachta subsequently organized into huge latifundia. The Polish nobility regarded itself as descendents of a race of "heroic Sarmatians" who had defeated Rome. Invested in a self-definition that assumed their uniqueness from other European nobilities, the Polish szlachta

¹ Jerzy Lukowski, Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795, (New York, 1991), pp. 10-15.

² Frank E. Sysyn, Between Poland and the Ukraine: The Dilemma of Adam Kysil, 1600-1653, (Cambridge, MA, 1985), p. 6.

mythologized their liberties, privileges, religion, culture and economic structure. They gave pride of place to their independence from the Polish king. Because the "Sarmatian" ideology of the Polish nobility regarded urbanism and commercial affairs with hostility and suspicion, the szlachta encouraged Jewish settlement in their towns and turned to Jewish intermediaries to run their financial affairs. Concentrated in the private towns of the Polish nobility, the Jews were legally free, neither juridically bound by the authority of the Christian magistrates nor subject to municipal taxes. This singular status of Polish Jewry, which by the mid-eighteenth century constituted at least half of the Polish urban population and was the principle component of the middle class, engendered deep animosity on the part of the beleaguered native burgher class. In private Polish towns the Jewish community enjoyed a special economic relationship with the local lord, in contrast to the native townsmen, who were stymied in their efforts to encourage urban industry. For example, native burghers were forbidden to export any of Poland's raw materials down the Vistula, except for cattle and oxen, while Jewish middlemen virtually dominated all other commercial activity.³

Poland suffered numerous foreign incursions and wars during the seventeenth century, including a series of Cossack rebellions (beginning in 1591 and culminating with the notorious Chmielnicki revolt in 1648-1649), the Northern War (1655-60), the invasion of Muscovy in 1654, the Turkish invasion of 1671, which resulted in the Ottoman acquisition of almost one-third of Commonwealth territory, and the wars with Sweden (1655, 1700-

³ Lukowski, pp. 20-22, 77; Gerson Hundert, "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland," Polin I, (1986), p. 31; M.J. Rosman, The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century, (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 39-40.

1721). One Polish historian has argued that the ruin resulting from the wars of the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century was "as devastating to Poland as the Black Death, which missed Poland, was for western Europe."⁴ The unremitting assault on Poland's sovereignty continued in the eighteenth century, culminating in the three partitions in 1772, 1792 and 1795 by Austria, Russia and Prussia.

The Jews of Podolia, Sabbatianism, and Frankism in the Eighteenth Century

The region of Podolia, originally part of medieval Rus' but annexed to Poland in the fifteenth century, and "Right Bank" Ukraine (the provinces of Kiev and Bratslav) fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1672 according to the terms of the Treaty of Buczacz. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth recovered Podolia, however, by the Treaty of Karlowitz in 1699. Prior to the treaty, the regional rabbinic center of Podolia was in Lwów. After the conclusion of the Turkish wars, the Podolian Jewish community gained its own independent regional administration, and in 1713 a regional rabbi was appointed in Satanów.⁵ Podolia's capital city was Kamieniec Podolski, but Jews living there were subject to frequent expulsions; settlement thus grew in the neighboring towns of Miedzybóz and Satanów, private holdings of the Sieniawski-Czartoryski families. In a new work, M. J. Rosman points to the unique ability of Podolia's magnates to reconstitute their estates after the devastating effects of the constant warfare of the seventeenth century. He

⁴ Lukowski, p. 14.

⁵ Majer Balaban, Le-Toldot ha-Tenu'at ha-Frankit, (Tel Aviv, 1934), pp. 116-7.

argues that Podolia was on a different trajectory than the rest of the country, and that the magnates' profitable export of grain was not interrupted by the Northern War in the first two decades of the eighteenth century.⁶ The head tax calculated in 1577 for the Podolian Jewish communities show Miedzybóz and Satanów among the top kehillot (communities) in southeastern Poland, with the former paying 230 zloty and the latter 90 zloty.⁷ By 1774, Miedzybóz could be counted among one of the fifteen largest Jewish communities in the Commonwealth, and at the time of the census in 1764, the Jewish population in Podolia totalled 40,000, constituting six per cent of the Jewish population of the Commonwealth, a figure which contradicts the regnant view of the severe depression characterizing Podolia's kehillot in the eighteenth century.⁸ In that same year, the poll tax for Satanów was 1,369 zloty.

Podolia's distinctiveness also lay in its affinity for a certain popular culture, in which its denizens, whether Polish, Ruthenian or Jewish, all shared a belief in the existence and power of the supernatural world. Miracle workers were not unique to the Jewish population, but considered part of the general fabric of Podolian life.⁹ Majer Balaban cites a Stephen Bonczewski who noted, "There is no people in which magicians and witches have so multiplied as they have here, in Poland, particularly in the mountains and in Rus' and in Lithuania, Ukraine, [and] in the heart of Wal-

⁶ Moshe Rosman, Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov, (Berkeley, CA, 1996), p. 53 and 61.

⁷ Balaban, Le-Toldot, p. 20.

⁸ Rosman, "Miedzybóz," p. 181, and Founder of Hasidism, p. 61.

⁹ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p. 56.

lachia."¹⁰ Sectarianism and mysticism of all kinds flourished in eighteenth-century Podolia, including the sect of Old Believers, a schismatic Russian-Orthodox group, and the Starchy sect, an offshoot of the Old Believers.¹¹ Moreover, eighteenth-century Podolia was fertile ground for both Sabbatianism and Frankism, a heretical sectarian offshoot of the former which combined Christian, Muslim and Jewish beliefs. Their legacy in Podolia had an enormous impact on the perceptions by maskilim and mitnaggedim (rabbinic opponents of Hasidism) of the dangers of mysticism.

A voluminous amount of scholarship has been devoted to describing and explaining the relationship between Sabbatianism and Hasidism, focusing on geographic, chronological, personal, literary, doctrinal, and sociological similarities between the two movements.¹² Yet, what concerns us here is not whether or not there are Sabbatian foundations within Hasidism, or even whether there are individuals who might be linked with the two movements, but rather how the Podolian legacy of Sabbatianism, and of Frankism in particular, affected the ways in which maskilim like Mendel Lefin perceived Hasidism.

¹⁰ Balaban, Le-Toldot, p. 90.

¹¹ Rosman, Founder of Hasidism, p. 58.

¹² The classic accounts are Balaban, Le-Toldot, pp. 67-68; Ben-Zion Dinur, "The Origins of Hasidism and Its Social and Messianic Foundations" in Dinur, Be-Mifneh ha-Dorot, (Jerusalem, 1955); Jacob Katz, "Regarding the Connection of Sabbatianism, Haskalah and Reform," (Hebrew), in Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History, Siegfried Stein and Raphael Loewe, eds., (University, AL, 1979), pp. 83-101; Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, pp. 24-34; Heinrich Graetz, Geschichte der Juden, (Leipzig, 1900), 2nd edition, II, pp. 95, 97-98; Yehudah Liebes, "New Light on the Matter of the Besht and Shabbetai Zevi," (Hebrew), Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought, (1983), pp. 564-569; Gershom G. Scholem, "Hasidism: The Latest Phase," in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, Gershom G. Scholem, ed., (New York, 1941), pp. 327-334; Scholem, "The Sabbatian Movement in Poland," (Hebrew), in Mehkarim u-Mekorot le-Toldot ha-Shabta'ut ve-Gilguleihah, Gershom Scholem, ed., (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 68-140.

In the years 1725-1726, itinerant Sabbatians disseminated their views in southeastern Poland and Ukraine. At the same time, radical Sabbatian followers of Barukhya Russo, the leader of the Dönme sect in Salonika and Constantinople, created links with Sabbatians in Podolia, and sent emissaries to Prague, Fürth, Berlin and Mannheim.¹³ Moses Hagiz (1671-1751), the most important protagonist in the eighteenth-century rabbinic anti-Sabbatian controversies, devoted his energies to gathering testimony against these itinerant Sabbatians and, in 1725, tried to convince the Council of Four Lands, the most prestigious rabbinic body in Poland, to enact a ban against them. This effort failed, but Hagiz did not waver in his pursuit of the suspected heretics, and in the 1730s turned his attention to the vilification of Moses Hayim Luzzatto, a brilliant Italian kabbalist whom he suspected of harboring and teaching Sabbatian doctrine. In this later effort, Hagiz solicited the aid of Jacob Emden, whose father, Hakham Zevi, had supported Hagiz in his first controversy against Nehemiah Hayon in Amsterdam. Emden endorsed Hagiz's bans against Luzzatto's writings and then included the young Italian in his list of Sabbatian precursors in his anti-Sabbatian tract, Torat ha-Kena'ot (Scroll of Zeal). Emden went on to become the central figure in the Sabbatian controversy with Jonathan Eybeschütz in 1750, an event which shook all of European Jewry and resulted in the further undermining of the status of the traditional rabbinate. Emden became a tireless anti-Sabbatian polemicist, publishing numerous

¹³ Gershom Scholem, "The Sabbatian Movement in Poland," pp. 102-105 and "The Crypto-Jewish Sect of the Dönme," in The Messianic Idea in Judaism, (New York, 1971), pp. 142-166.

tracts, many on his own printing press, to expose the dangers of the illicit sect.¹⁴

Coupled with the anti-Sabbatian controversies of the early eighteenth century was the eruption in mid-century of the public disputation between Judaism and Frankism. Born in Koroluvka in 1726, the founder of the latter movement, Jacob Frank (1726-1791), attracted the attention of the Jewish authorities on January 17, 1756, when he, along with a group of Jews in Lanskrone (Landskron), were arrested for crimes of a sexual and heretical nature. The rabbi of Lanskrone turned to the rabbi in Satanów, who was the chief religious authority of the region of Podolia at that time, to investigate the charges. Due to the illness of the rabbinic head in Satanów, Eleazar Lipmann of Smoszczic, the son-in-law of the rabbi from Lanskrone, carried out the investigation and forwarded the results to the regional rabbinic seat. Like many Podolian cities, Lanskrone was under the authority of the Catholic bishop in Kamieniec Podolski, Nikolai Dembowski. On February 5, 1757, Dembowski demanded a full report of what had occurred in Lanskrone and set March 31, 1756 as the date to hear the evidence. The case was never heard because none of the rabbinic authorities appeared. The Jewish super-communal organization, the Va'ad of the Region of Lwów, meeting on May 10, 1756, then ordered the chief rabbi in Satanów to investigate the incident again. Only some of the participants appeared at the

¹⁴ Elisheva Carlebach, The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies, (New York, 1990), pp. 172, 191, 245-251. Emden's anti-Sabbatian oeuvre includes Torat ha-Kena'ot (1752); Sefat Emet u-Lashon Zehorit (1752); Akizat Akray (1753); Edut be-Ya'akov (1756); Shevirat Luhav ha-Even (1756); Petah Einayim (1756); Kizur Zivat Novel Zevi (1757); Sefer ha-Shimush (1758-1762); Sefer Hitavkut (1762-69) Mitpahat Sefarim (1768); Megillat Sefer (first published only in 1896). See Jacob Joseph Schacter, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: Life and Major Works," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1988.

investigation, but the results spurred the members of the regional Va'ad meeting in Brody and Konstantinów, which included Hayim ha-Cohen Rappoport (1700-1771), who would later be involved in a disputation with the Frankists, to excommunicate the accused.¹⁵ The writ of excommunication was sent throughout Poland and affirmed in Lwów, Busk, Luck, Lanskroun, Jezerni and Ofoczna. Frank, who was considered a citizen of the Ottoman Empire, was never tried, but the other participants were sentenced to hard labor.¹⁶

Because Frankism was an admixture of Judaism and Christianity, and because Lanskroun fell under the jurisdiction of Bishop Dembowski, who was particularly hostile to rabbinic Judaism, the Jewish community was compelled to debate the Frankists in a theological disputation in Kamieniec Podolski in June 1757. All of the leaders of Podolian Jewry were invited to participate, including individuals from Miedzybóz, Bar, Satanów, Lanskroun, Grinding, Balin, Jerzeran, Husiatyn and Jagiellnica. The Frankists hailed from Satanów and Zbaraz, as well as from Busk. At the Satanów investigation, the Frankists had enumerated nine principles of their faith. Their third core belief directly attacked the authority of the Oral Law, stating that the Talmud was full of lies and fundamentally opposed to Scripture. This

¹⁵ Hayim ha-Cohen Rappoport established a study house in Slutz in his youth and was appointed to the rabbinate in Zitel in 1729. From 1730, he was the head of the rabbinical court in Slutz, and from 1740, head of the rabbinical court in Lwów; from the year 1763, he was head of the rabbinical court of all of Medinat Rusia, meaning Rus', the region which would later be called eastern Galicia. In 1761, he signed a ban against Jonathan Eybeschütz, but later repented of his action and refused involvement in the Eybeschütz affair. Head of the "suppressors" in Poland who pursued the followers of Shabbetai Zevi, Rappoport was one of the three rabbis who was selected by the rabbinate in Poland to participate in the disputation with the Frankists in Lwów in 1759. See Meir Wunder, Enziklopediyah le-Hokhmei Galizyah, IV, (Jerusalem, 1986-1990), pp. 991-4.

¹⁶ Balaban, Le-Toldot, pp. 68, p. 118, 119, 127.

charge struck a painful chord among the Jews present at the disputation because Polish hostility to the Talmud had been well attested in the previous century. The Talmud of the Jewish Belief, which was first published in 1610 in Kraków, became the source for the entry in the first Polish encyclopedia on the Jewish need for Christian blood during Passover. A string of blood libels (1728, Lwow; 1722 and 1738, Gnesen; 1736-40, Poznan; 1747, Zaswów; 1748, Dunaigrod; 1753, Zhitomir; 1756, Jampol) in eighteenth-century Poland made the traditional Jewish community particularly sensitive to charges of the hostility of the Talmud to Christians.¹⁷ Therefore, the rabbinic participants of the investigation went to great lengths to show that the Talmudic category of akum (idolaters) only applied to the pagans of antiquity and not to eighteenth-century believers in the three monotheistic faiths. As they argued, the [monotheistic] gentiles "believe in the creation of the world, in the exodus from Egypt, and in the power of divine words and believe in God, the creator of the Heavens and the Earth. Thus, not only is it not forbidden to save them, but we must pray to God for their wellbeing, etc."¹⁸ Nonetheless, the disputation resulted in a full exoneration of the Frankists and in a condemnation of the Talmud. The bishop's sentence demanded that the Jewish community turn over all Jewish books forbidden by the Church, sentenced individual Jews to corporal punishment, and required that the rabbinic Jewish community compensate the exculpated Jews of Satanów and Lanskrout. Worried about the implications of this decision, the Jewish community notified Hayim ha-Cohen Rappoport of Lwów and Jacob Emden and inquired regard-

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁸ Cited in Balaban, Le-Toldot, p. 144.

ing the possibility of interceding on their behalf in Warsaw and Amsterdam. Dembowski's sudden death temporarily stayed the escalation of the crisis.¹⁹

On June 16, 1758, Jacob Frank, who had fled to Turkey after the disputation, received a letter from the Polish King, August III, permitting him and his group to return to Poland. Soon thereafter, a group of these Frankists approached the Archbishop in Lwów with a request to convert to Christianity. Another public disputation in which the Frankists accused the Jewish community of requiring Christian blood for the fulfillment of the commandments on Passover was held in Lwów in the late summer of 1759. Seven public meetings were held in which over thirty rabbinic Jews and ten Frankists participated. The leading voice on the side of the traditional Jewish community was Hayim ha-Cohen Rappoport, who gave the concluding argument against the Frankist charge on August 28, 1759. In his closing words, Rappoport, who knew German, relied on the evidence adduced in a recent Catholic work surveying Scripture and the Talmud, Alt und Neu Testament in einer Connexion mit der Juden und benachbarten Völker (1716), which found no proof for the blood libel in Jewish sources. Rappoport's testimony conclusively refuted the blood libel charge, but this victory was soon forgotten with the mass conversion to Christianity of Frank and one thousand of his followers.²⁰

What had started as a sectarian offshoot of radical Sabbatianism ultimately resulted in a huge public renunciation of Judaism in the context of a Christian-Jewish polemic over the veracity of the Talmud. Despite Polish Jewry's material security, it still harbored deep fears and insecurities about

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 190-191.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 209-276.

its place in Polish Christian society.²¹ The Frankists' public embrace of Christianity and disparagement of Judaism, which was wrapped in the mystical vocabulary of heretical Sabbatianism, confirmed the worst fears of the traditional Jewish community still reeling from the Sabbatian controversies of the earlier part of the century. It is not surprising, therefore, that the traditional Jewish community in Podolia responded with swift denunciations of new forms of Jewish worship which appeared later in the century. As Elisheva Carlebach has argued, the rabbinic campaigns against crypto-Sabbatianism in the early eighteenth century, which embodied the effort to bolster the authority of the crisis-ridden traditional rabbinate, created the ideological framework, tactics, and vocabulary for the rabbinic polemics against Hasidism in the later part of the century. The mitnaggedim drew a direct analogy between Sabbatianism and Hasidism, perceiving both as fundamental threats to traditional sources of authority in the Jewish community. Their anti-Hasidic tactics included writs of excommunication, gathering evidence, and efforts to prohibit the publication of kabbalistic works.²²

By 1850 Hasidism was triumphant throughout most of Eastern Europe (save a small pocket in Lithuania) and had thoroughly transformed Polish-Jewish society, but its success was by no means assured in the eighteenth century.²³ Although there were sporadic attempts to combat Hasidism in

²¹ M. J. Rosman, "Jewish Perceptions of Insecurity and Powerlessness in 16th-18th Century Poland," Polin, 1, pp. 19-27.

²² Carlebach, pp. 277-278.

²³ Raphael Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, (Philadelphia, PA), p. 25.

the early part of the century, it was not until Hasidism had begun to infiltrate the northern regions of Poland in the 1770s that a more concrete, centralized opposition took shape. The years 1772-1815 are marked by the struggle between mitnaggedim and Hasidim.

The first official published record of the opponents of Hasidism was the publication of Zemir Arizim ve-Haravot Zurim (The Song of Tyrants and Flint Knives) in 1772.²⁴ Throughout the seven documents that comprise The Song of Tyrants charges recur against Hasidic practices, such as changing the time of established prayers, using polished knives for kosher slaughtering and praying in small, separate prayer groups, which threatened the communal fabric of traditional Jewish society. Opponents of Hasidism were afraid that the renewal movement would cause an irreparable fissure in the Jewish community, as had the Karaites, or worse, could lead to the heresies of Shabbetai Zevi and Jacob Frank. This connection appears in the herem (ban) issued by the community of Kraków in 1786: "And who knows whereto these things [Hasidic customs] will lead, or of the magnitude of the obstacle that is likely to derive from this, as has already happened in the world; many did as these people did, who by their own mouths were called hasidim [righteous], and in the end they performed a deed like that of [the biblical figure] Zimri and became idolaters."²⁵ A symmetrical analogy between Sabbatianism and Hasidism is likewise reflected in the edicts of the community of Mogilev, Lithuania, against the Hasidim, which were promulgated roughly around 1778. A direct connection, not merely a metaphoric

²⁴ A combination of Isaiah 25:5 and Joshua 5:2.

²⁵ Cited in Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim: Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus she-Beineihem ba-Shanim 1772-1795, I, (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 138. On Zimri, see Kings I, 17:9-20.

one, appears in a document composed in 1800 by Avigdor of Pinsk and presented to Tsar Paul I, in which the author named three heirs of Sabbatianism: Israel of Miedzybóz, Dov Ber of Mezeritch, and Jacob of Polnoye. Even German rabbis, such as Joseph Steinhart, the rabbi of Fürth, saw a direct connection between Hasidism and Sabbatianism after receiving the anti-Hasidic pamphlet, Zemir Arizim. David Makov (1741?-1814/5), the zealous anti-Hasidic publicist, saw Hasidism as another link in the chain of a heretical past leading back to the Zadokites of the Second Temple period.²⁶

An itinerary of Mendel Lefin's life shows that he lived in proximity to the important centers of Hasidism in Podolia.²⁷ His knowledge of Hasidism was borne of close contact with the new form of spirituality, rather than of rumor or second-hand accounts. Acutely aware of both the Frankist debacle and of the efflorescence of Hasidism, Lefin's self-understanding as a maskil was a product of the region in which he matured and lived for most of his life. As we shall see, Lefin, too, believed that there was a direct link between Hasidism, Sabbatianism, and Frankism.

The Beginnings of Hasidism and Mendel Lefin's Maturation in Podolia

From its beginnings, Podolia was the hub of Hasidism, with Miedzybóz as its epicenter. Born in 1700 in Okopy, a small town in Podolia, Israel ben

²⁶ Shmuel Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut, (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 99-102; Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim, II, pp. 34, 44-46, 67 footnote 32, 241; Mordecai Wilensky, "Hasidic-Mitnaggedic Polemics in the Jewish Communities of Eastern Europe: The Hostile Phase," in Tolerance and Movements of Religious Dissent in Eastern Europe, Béla K. Kiraly, ed., (New York, 1975), pp. 103-104.

²⁷ See footnote 89 below.

Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov, the man later called the "Besht," moved to Miedzybów, Podolia in 1740, and remained there until his death in 1760. In Miedzybów, the Ba'al Shem Tov attracted a group of followers, including Jacob Joseph of Nemirov (later called Jacob Joseph of Polnoye), Judah Leib, the mokhiah (preacher) of Polnoye, Nahman Kosover, Isaac of Drohobycz, Wolf Kozis, David Forkis, and Dov Ber of Mezeritch. Miedzybów was one of the largest cities in Ukraine, more than half the size of neighboring Bar, and an important connection on the trade routes leading to Volhynia and Kiev. The Polish magnate family, the Czartoryskis, built a castle in the city. There was also a garrison of soldiers stationed there, helping to ensure the security of men doing business between the West and East. One of the fifteen wealthiest Jewish communities in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Miedzybów did not suffer under the burden of enormous communal debt in the 1730s and 1740s. It appears that the Ba'al Shem Tov moved to Miedzybów precisely because of its prosperity, lived in a house owned by the Jewish communal administration next to the synagogue, and was thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the communal life of the city.²⁸ After the Besht's death, Miedzybów declined both economically and as a Hasidic center, and the movement shifted to new centers in Volhynia, which influenced Reisen (the region of Shklov) and Lithuania.²⁹ Later in the eight-

²⁸ Rosman, "Miedzybów," pp. 177-189.

²⁹ Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, p. 77. On Miedzybów's economic health, see Rosman, "Miedzybów," p. 180. In the spring of 1772, the gaon of Vilna signed a ban against the Hasidim under pressure from the community of Shklov, which felt under siege both by the penetration of Hasidism and by the first partition of Poland, which severed the community from the central Jewish institutions in Poland. In 1787, a regional meeting of communal leaders and rabbis was held in Shklov and a series of edicts were passed against the Hasidim. See David Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov, (New York, 1994), pp. 11-15. Lefin attested to the influence of the Hasidim in Lithuania in his French pamphlet, "They have already totally inundated the Ukraine....They have resolutely taken hold in Podolia, which is their motherland, the same in Volhynia and Lithuania." See

eenth century, Miedzybóz would regain some of its original importance under the domineering personality of the Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson, Barukh of Miedzybóz.³⁰

When Simon Dubnow, the great Russian-Jewish historian, periodized the history of Hasidism into four chronological stages, he characterized the years 1740-1781 as the beginning of the movement, emphasizing the activity of the Ba'al Shem Tov and that of his preeminent students, the Maggid of Mezeritch and Jacob Joseph of Polnoye, and of their first conflicts with the traditional rabbinate.³¹ His first stage coincides with the first period of Mendel Lefin's life, from his birth in Satanów, a town in Podolia on the banks of the Zbrucz River, in 1749, to his trip to Berlin in 1780. Unfortunately, we have almost no documentary evidence to shed light on these formative years, but Lefin's father, about whom we also know very little, was born in Zbaraz, a town to the northwest of Satanów.³² As mentioned above, both Zbaraz and Satanów were involved in the Frankist controversies of the 1750s. I assume that Lefin remained in Satanów prior to his trip to Berlin, and came of age simultaneously with the efflorescence of Hasidism in Podolia.³³

Materialy, paragraphs 31 and 33.

³⁰ See Chapter Two below.

³¹ Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, p. 37.

³² Jacob Samuel Bik, one of Lefin's disciples, remarked in an outline for his biography of Lefin: "His father was a learned man, fluent in gemara (Talmud), and his mother was very chaste and they educated him with their knowledge until he became an expert." Cited in A. M. Haberman, "Towards a History of Mendel Lefin," (Hebrew), in Sefer Klausner, (Tel Aviv, 1937), p. 461.

³³ Mahler reports that Lefin moved to Mikolajów after his marriage and prior to his trip to Berlin. Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I, p. 72.

Until his trip to Berlin in 1780, we hear nothing of Lefin, and in his numerous writings he provides little personal information about those years. Even A. B. Gottlober, the Russian maskil who is the source of most of the biographical information that we have about Lefin, complained about the difficulty in correctly assessing his date of birth.³⁴ In his memoirs, Gottlober does not provide any substantial biographical information about Lefin's early years, but describes him, in classic maskilic fashion, as a Talmudic protégé who fortuitously discovered the world beyond traditional Jewish study through a classic work of seventeenth-century Jewish science, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo's Sefer Elim. In Gottlober's view, Lefin was so intoxicated with this new world that he devoured whatever secular books he could find in the study house and, in the process, damaged his eyes. Lefin's ostensible curative journey to Berlin, the center of the Jewish Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century, is thus cast as a happy coincidence born of illness. This reading of Lefin's life, however, is not plausible.

The centrality of the medieval rationalist tradition, both in its scientific and philosophic substance and in its authoritative power, cannot be minimized in discussing the emergence of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. This tradition provided internal justifications for the exploration of non-Jewish writings for Lefin and other early maskilim, including Yehezkiel Feivel of Palanga, Israel Zamosc, and Barukh Schick. Immanuel Etkes has defined these figures -- all of whom turned to and used the medieval rationalist tradition as a precedent for their own work -- as representatives of an intermediate phase between traditional Jewish life and the mature Haskalah

³⁴ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, 17, #38, 1873, p. 348.

movement.³⁵ As mentioned above, A. B. Gottlober cited Delmedigo's Sefer Elim as one of the late medieval texts that inspired Lefin to explore "external" (non-Jewish) knowledge.³⁶ The profound influence of Sefer Elim on Lefin may have also been a result of the fact that Delmedigo was highly critical of the culture of Polish Jewry and its all-embracing commitment to Talmudic casuistry. Living in Poland from 1620-1624/5, Delmedigo considered Polish Jews the "enemies of rational learning....God, they say, has no need of...grammarians, rhetoricians and logicians, nor of mathematicians or astronomers...all [of] their wisdom...[is] foreign and drawn from impure sources."³⁷ A maskil like Lefin may have used both the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition and the critique levelled at his own society by early figures like Delmedigo as justification for his own turn to secular learning. In Lefin's mind, Polish Jewry lived in a circumscribed world, one in which external, non-Jewish learning had become suspect of heresy. He complained in his unpublished Likkutei Kelalim (Selections of Rules) that "the study of wisdom and science and the rest of the sciences is considered apostasy [among the Jews of Poland]."³⁸

³⁵ Immanuel Etkes, "The Question of the Precursors of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe (Hebrew)," in Ha-Dat ve-ha-Hayim: Tenu'at ha-Haskalah be-Mizrah Eiropa, Immanuel Etkes, ed., (Jerusalem, 1993), p. 29. See, too, his "Immanent Factors and External Influences in the Development of the Haskalah Movement in Russia," in Toward Modernity, Jacob Katz, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987), pp. 13-32.

³⁶ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, 17, #38, 1873, p. 348. See, too, the influence of Sefer Elim on the Russian maskil, Mordecai Aharon Günsberg, in Israel Bartal, "Mordecai Aaron Günsberg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity," in From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., (New York, 1990), pp. 126-47.

³⁷ Cited in Isaac Barzilay, Yoseph Shlomo Delmedigo, (Leiden, 1974), p. 67.

³⁸ Lefin's comment was published by N.M. Gelber in his "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788-1792)," (Hebrew) in The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume, (New York, 1964), p. 300.

Yet, as Israel Bartal has correctly emphasized, the internal, immanent factor is not sufficient to account for the emergence of the Haskalah among Eastern European Jews.³⁹ Indeed, Lefin's decision to journey to Berlin was the result of his attraction to the European Enlightenment, elements of which had already permeated a thin stratum of Polish-Jewish society. Contrary to the standard image of Podolia, not all of its towns were tiny, parochial enclaves impenetrable to the influence of new ideas. Although Miedzybóz was the largest kehillah (Jewish community) in the region, with approximately 2039 Jews in 1766, Satanów's population of 1625 Jews in that same year was not insignificant. Satanów was an important economic center in eighteenth century Podolia, and served, as did other border towns, as a point of contact for merchants travelling between the West and the East as well as a vehicle for the spread of ideas.⁴⁰ Merchants in Satanów exported lumber, grain and water to Danzig and had contact with their counterparts bringing goods from the fairs in Leipzig and Frankfurt-on-the-Oder.⁴¹ Satanów's centrality also lay, as mentioned above, in its having served as the seat of the regional rabbinate of Podolia since 1713, and by the end of the eighteenth century it was not impervious to Western influences.⁴²

³⁹ Bartal, "'The Second Model,' -- France as a Source of Influence in the Processes of Modernization of the Jews of Eastern Europe (1772-1863)," (Hebrew), Ha-Mahpeikhah ha-Zarfatit ve-Rishumah. Richard Cohen, ed., (Jerusalem, 1991), p. 275.

⁴⁰ On the significance of border towns, see Stanislawski, p. 56.

⁴¹ Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin-Satanower," p. 335.

⁴² Balaban, Le-Toldot, pp. 116-7 and Rosman, The Lords' Jews, pp. 213-214.

Isaac Satanów (1732-1804), the maskil whose patronymic derived from his place of birth, preceded Lefin's journey to Berlin by nine years. Settling in the Prussian capital in 1771 or 1772, Isaac Satanów wrote numerous maskilic works and was director of the printing press of the Berlin Freischule (Society for the Education of the Youth) from its founding in 1783 until 1788. An important institution for the dissemination of Enlightenment publications, the press issued Lefin's first publication, the pamphlet Moda le-Binah (Insight to Understanding),⁴³ which contained examples from his Iggerot ha-Hokhmah (Letters of Wisdom) and Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am (The Book of Popular Healing).⁴⁴ Lefin clearly believed that there was an audience among the traditional Jews in Satanów and other towns in Podolia for his Enlightenment works, for he informed the readers of Moda le-Binah that to assure receipt of his new works they could send advance subscriptions to Lesznów, "where there are merchants from Mezeritch," to Satanów, or to Miedzybóz and Berditchev, "where there are merchants from Miedzybóz and Satanów."⁴⁵ Lefin also suggested to those readers who wanted to purchase Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am to contact a Meir of Satanów. Later in the century, there were three subscribers for Besamim Rosh (The Best Spices), two for Sefer ha-Midot (Ethics), one for Malekhet Mahshevet ha-Hodesh (Tool for Calculating the Cycles of the Moon), three

⁴³ The title is from Proverbs 7:4. Mendel Lefin, Moda le-Binah, (Berlin, 1789).

⁴⁴ The two maskilim from Satanów must have known each other, sharing both Berlin as a destination and David Friedländer as a friend. On Isaac Satanów and the Freischule press, see Alexander Altmann, Moses Mendelssohn, (University, AL, 1983), pp. 351-354.

⁴⁵ Mendel Lefin, Moda le-Binah, (Berlin, 1789).

for Mishlei Asaf (Collected Fables) and one for Te'udah be-Yisra'el (Testimony in Israel) from Satanów.⁴⁶

The rabbinical establishment in Satanów, too, was not entirely hostile to the ideals of the early Haskalah. In 1789 Lefin received an approbation from Alexander Sender Margoliot (1720-1802), the head of the rabbinical court in Satanów and the former head of the rabbinical court in Zbaraz, for his Insight to Understanding; Margoliot also gave an approbation for Lefin's 1794 publication of The Book of Popular Healing and wrote his approval for the maskil's Yiddish translation of Ecclesiastes as early as 1788, although the work was only published in 1873.⁴⁷ Lefin also turned to members of the rabbinical establishment in Satanów, such as Mordecai Margoliot (1752/8-1818), Alexander Sender Margoliot's son, who had replaced his father as the head of the rabbinical court, and to Joshua Zelig Bloch, the dayan (judge) of the community, when he sought an approbation in 1808 for his book, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh (Moral Stocktaking). Mordecai Margoliot also gave his approval to Lefin's Yiddish translation of Proverbs, which appeared in 1814.

Traditional rabbinic Jews living in eighteenth-century Satanów who were interested in the literary products of the European Enlightenment could acquire books and Enlightenment writings at fairs or through other mercantile routes, and at the same time garner intellectual nourishment from the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition. The "reciprocal influence," as Immanuel Etkes has called it, of the external European factor and of the

⁴⁶ Berl Kagan, Sefer ha-Prenumeranten, (New York, 1975), p. 191.

⁴⁷ Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am was published only in 1794, but the approbation was written earlier, in 1788. See Mendel Lefin, trans., Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am, (Zolkiew, 1794).

internal Jewish factor upon a small intellectual elite within the Jewish community provides a compelling model for the emergence of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe.⁴⁸ Missing from this explanatory model, however, is a specific historical explanation of what events or trends in late eighteenth-century Polish-Jewish life spurred individuals to look towards the West and to justify their appetite for its ideas in the medieval rationalist tradition. Two additional factors specific to Podolian Jewish society in the eighteenth century, the Frankist legacy and its link with Jacob Emden's anti-Sabbatian polemics as well as the social reality of Hasidism, helped to create a spiritual crisis for a small group of traditional rabbinic Polish Jews and provided the impetus for their turn to the Haskalah.

If the Frankist legacy and the efflorescence of Hasidism did not necessarily propel Lefin toward the Haskalah, these forces certainly made a decisive stamp on the moderate shading of his program. The geographic and historical proximity of the Frankist disputations, the burning of the Talmud, and the mass conversion of Frank's followers planted profound doubts in the mind of a Podolian maskil like Mendel Lefin regarding the nature of Hasidism. As a contemporary of the mitnaggedim, Lefin also imbibed the anti-Sabbatian polemics of Moses Hagiz and Jacob Emden and drew an analogy between the perils of Sabbatianism, Frankism and Hasidism.⁴⁹ The Hasidic custom of celebrating the third meal of the Sabbath with extended

⁴⁸ Etkes, "Immanent," p. 26.

⁴⁹ It is not surprising that Emden's works were seen as authoritative by Polish Jews. He had intimate family ties to Poland in general, and to Podolia in particular. Two of his sons lived in Poland. The first, Meir, was the head of the rabbinical court in Old Konstantine from 1759-1780, and the younger, Meshullam Zalman, was the head of the rabbinical court in Podheiz, and then in Brody. His daughters, too, were well-connected to Polish rabbinical families. See Dinur, p. 85, footnote 10.

singing and eating, for example, struck Lefin as full of dangerous, heretical potential. As he wrote in an unpublished manuscript:

Also, Frank, may his name be blotted out, began his sect with joyous events, dancing, and songs at the third meal of the Sabbath, which led to their culmination in acts of carnality according to the secret (sod) (perhaps he revealed the meaning of the phrase "in her foundation" that is in the song, "I Will Sing With Praises," for the Sabbath eve to them).⁵⁰ We are all obligated to thank and praise God, may He be blessed, that their dough quickly and clearly became hamez (prohibited leavening) (so that they only spiced their lies with that which [actually] demonstrated the truth) and the sages of the generation became agitated against them to get rid of them quickly, and to burn the evil from Israel with as little damage from that same Shabbetai Zevi. God, may He be blessed, will blot him out again. And they hurried again (through the agitation of our teacher, the great Rabbi Moses Hagiz) to subdue the sect of R. Moses Hayim Luzzatto, which began to spread through his new works of Kabbalah and Zohar (The Book of Splendor) and had already led many astray, even his teacher, R. Isaiah Bassan,⁵¹ because in his time the destruction of Shabbetai Zevi was not yet forgotten.⁵²

Mendel Lefin was well acquainted with anti-Sabbatian rabbinic writings and frequently mentioned Emden's work as a source for his own perspective

⁵⁰ Although Lefin does not mention the Hasidim by name in this section of the manuscript, he used the example of the Frankists' licentiousness, activities which he believed they had justified based on the phrase וביסודא דילה of the kabbalistic song אומר בשבחין (I Will Sing With Praises), in which the union between God and the Divine Presence (shekhinah) is described with sexual imagery, as proof of the dangers inherent in the popularization and spread of kabbalistic teachings. His disciple, Joseph Perl, knowingly translated this line in a coarse, explicit manner devoid of symbolism in his German anti-Hasidic pamphlet, Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim, in an effort to discredit the Hasidim. See [Joseph Perl], Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim, Avraham Rubinstein, ed., (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 44 and footnote 50 on that page.

⁵¹ Isaiah ben Israel Hezekiah Bassan (died 1739), one of eighteenth-century Italy's most eminent rabbinic figures, instructed Moses Hayim Luzzatto in his youth and ardently defended him against Moses Hagiz's accusations of the kabbalist's alleged Sabbatianism. Lefin may have read about Hagiz's pursuit and Bassan's defense of Luzzatto in Jacob Emden's Torat ha-Kena'ot, in which Luzzatto was listed as one of the most significant forerunners of Jonathan Eybeschütz's Sabbatianism. See Carlebach, pp. 217-251.

⁵² The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 1b.

on the links between the dating of the Zohar, the spread of Sabbatianism, the eruption of Frankism, and the emergence of Hasidism.⁵³ In the same manuscript, he wrote:

God chose us due to the merit of our holy ancestors and distinguished us from those who err. He gave us this holy Torah with an explicit revelation, as it is written: "From the beginning, I have not spoken in secret,"⁵⁴ a revealed Torah with a clear explanation "which is not in the Heavens, [it is] explained for all who seek it." And the secrets and their allusions were not transmitted...except with great secrecy to select men of the generation. Therefore, several hundred years passed in which they stored the Zohar, (although, they hid it and sealed it with two seals so that the eye of a man would not see it, in any case, there is also great danger in the spread of its secrets, as stated above) and they forbade showing it even to the great men of Israel of antiquity, may their memories be as a blessing. Thus, we saw the experience of what happened afterwards when the Zohar returned and the manuscript was revealed in the time of R. Isaac of Acco,⁵⁵ and after R.

⁵³ Emden's Sefer ha-Shimush, for example, was the main source of information about the allegations against Frank in the community of Satanów. See Scholem, "The Sabbatian Movement in Poland," p. 122. For Lefin's references to Emden, see the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 5, folder 72, pp. 1b and 2a, folder 130, p. 71; Mendel Lefin, Elon Moreh, published in a special edition of Ha-Meliz, 1867, pp. 6-8; [Mendel Lefin], Essai, paragraph 18, p. 411 in Maturity. On the dating of the Zohar, see Isaiah Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, I, (Oxford, 1989), p. 40, and on the debate about its authority among East European maskilim, see Shmuel Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut: Toldotav shel Ma'avak, (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 103-106; Shmuel Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of the Literature of the Haskalah: From the Polemic of the Maskilim of Galicia and Werses, "In the Tracks of the Pamphlet, 'Making Wise the Simple,'" in Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 97 and pp. 319-323, respectively. Werses rightly criticizes Hillel Levine who dismissed Lefin's fear of the Sabbatian underpinnings to Hasidism in his discussion of the anti-Hasidic polemic embedded in Lefin's Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh. See Hillel Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah: On a Disguised anti-Hasidic Polemic," (Hebrew), in Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit bimeit ha-Beinayim uve-Et ha-Hadashah, I. Etkes and J. Salmon, eds., (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 190, and Werses's comment in Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut, p. 103, footnote 22. In his unpublished dissertation on Lefin, Levine made little of the Frankist legacy in Podolia, except to say that Lefin, "at the tender age of seven," was aware of the controversy in Lwów. See Hillel Levine, "Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization," p. 11.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 48:16.

⁵⁵ The only evidence of the publication of the Zohar comes from the diary of R. Isaac of Acco which was printed in R. Abraham Zacuto's Sefer Yuhasin. A kabbalist and author of Me'irat Einayim, a commentary on Nahmanides, Isaac of Acco tells of seeing the Zohar in Spain at the beginning of the fourteenth century. See Tishby, pp. 13-17.

[Isaac] Delattes was permitted to print it,⁵⁶ there were barely a few years until, due to our many sins, the actions of Satan succeeded in making several thousands in Israel deviate [from the Law] and in capturing them in the webs of secrets with which the evil doers of Israel, Shabbetai Zevi and Hayon, etc. ambushed them to steep them in their poisonous venom. Indeed, now in our generation, they have overflowed and flooded the country and the dissemination of their books has greatly spread. They have filled the houses in the villages and of the common people and they have renounced the secret of God to those who fear Him,⁵⁷ disclosing them [the books] to the gentiles on the main road. I, myself, have seen the books of Ez Hayim (Tree of Life),⁵⁸ Pardes Rimonim (Orchard of Pomegranates),⁵⁹ Berit Menuhah (Covenant of Repose),⁶⁰ Zohar, etc. in gentile homes, some of whom study them with the tyrants of Israel, due to our many sins, and they seek the matters of the secrets of their faith in them, and connect them, too, to the abominations of the secrets of idolatry of the Persians and of the Greeks, etc....And R. Jacob Emden did a wonderful job of investigating this, that then (in the time of R. Shimon bar Yochai) no book was attributed to its author by name, (moreover, [never] the introductions and the forewords, which were only innovated in the time...after the RIF,⁶¹ may his memory be for a blessing), except books that originated many generations after the Talmud....[But] his [Emden's] proof regarding the profligacy of the generation in publishing many copies of these secrets for money, and his other comments on the style of the concretization of the secrets of the Kabbalah, they make no difference....We only have the light of the revealed Torah and the light of clear reason as Law, and when they steal this torch from our hands, we are as fools walking in the darkness, getting lost on the

⁵⁶ Isaac Delattes supervised the printing of one part of the Zohar, to which he appended an introduction, in Mantua in 1558.

⁵⁷ Psalms 25:24.

⁵⁸ Ez Hayim was one of the most important kabbalistic works of the great kabbalist, Hayim b. Joseph Vital (1542-1620); it contained most of his writings elaborating on the teachings of Isaac Luria and circulated in manuscript form until the late eighteenth century.

⁵⁹ Pardes Rimonim was written by Moses b. Jacob Cordovero (1522-1570), the most important kabbalist in Safed prior to Isaac Luria.

⁶⁰ Attributed to Abraham Sephardi of the fourteenth century, Berit Menuhah was first published in 1648.

⁶¹ Isaac b. Jacob ha-Kohen of Fez (1013-1103), known by the acronym RIF, was the author of the most important code of Jewish law, Sefer ha-Halakhot, prior to Maimonides' Mishneh Torah.

way.⁶²

Lefin relied on Emden's research in Mitpahat Sefarim (Covering of the Scrolls of the Law), which attacked the antiquity of the Zohar, for his own purposes. Unlike Emden, who challenged the authority of the Zohar because of his war on Sabbatianism, Lefin discredited the mystical work because of his campaign against mysticism in general. Lefin also believed it provided dangerous fodder for contemporary mystical movements (the Hasidim) and for anti-Jewish polemics.⁶³ In the manuscript cited above, as well as in his anonymously published French pamphlet, Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne & de redresser par là ses moeurs [1791], Lefin turned to censorship of kabbalistic works in general and of the Zohar in particular as a means of stemming the spread of Hasidism. Together with Lefin, other maskilim, including Solomon Maimon and Jacques Kalmansohn, and mitnaggedim, such as Israel Löbl, documented the spread of Beshtian Hasidism in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Their writings served future maskilim as primary evidence in the raging literary battle against Hasidism that erupted in nineteenth-century Galicia.⁶⁴

⁶² The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, pp. 1a, 2a.

⁶³ Emden's attack on the Zohar was unwitting. His zealous pursuit of Sabbatianism forced him to go tooth and nail against a book in whose sanctity -- as well as that of the kabbalistic tradition as a whole -- he affirmed. On Emden's contribution to critical scholarship on the Zohar, see Tishby, pp. 41-43. Mendelssohn, perhaps misreading Emden's attack on the Zohar as consonant with his own distrustful views of the Kabbalah, praised him for unmasking the dangers inherent in the influence of the kabbalistic tradition on Sabbatianism. See Katz, "Regarding the Connection," p. 95.

⁶⁴ Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut, pp. 103-106; Shmuel Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of the Literature of the Haskalah: From the Polemic of the Maskilim of Galicia," p. 320; Shmuel Feiner, Haskalah ve-Historyah: Toldotav shel Hakarat-Ever Yehudit Modernit, (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 130-132.

Lefin's silence for the first forty years of his life (the pre-Berlin years and those immediately after) poses a difficult problem. Surely, the maskil's lifelong struggle with eye disease, which gave special meaning to the well-worn Enlightenment metaphor of bringing the light of reason to the darkness of fanaticism and irrationality, was, in part, the impetus for his pilgrimage in Berlin in 1780. Yet knowledge of the intellectual openness of Berlin must have provided an equally strong magnet for an individual of Lefin's temperament. Lefin may also have known of Isaac Satanów's resettlement in the Prussian capital. But, just as Lefin chose to seek a cure in the West for his physical near-blindness, is it not possible that he also made the journey to Berlin to address what he believed was the obscurity of the spiritual condition of Podolian Jewry? Taken together, the Frankist legacy, the impact of Emden's anti-Sabbatian polemics, and the direct contact with Beshtian Hasidism may have helped to create the context for a response of a small group of traditional rabbinic Jews in Podolia to seek solutions to what they perceived to be pernicious and dangerous changes occurring in Polish Jewish society. Mendel Lefin was not the only one among his generation to feel that Hasidism would lead Polish Jewry down the inexorable path of heresy and conversion.⁶⁵ The letters of Lefin's correspondents, including Israel Bodek, Meir ha-Cohen Reich, a maskil and friend of Lefin who was also born in Satanów, and Hayim Malaga, served as a forum for the discussion of

⁶⁵ Certainly Lefin's mitnaggedic contemporaries held such suspicions. Even bearing in mind the polemical context of his words and, thus, their hyperbole, David Makov, citing the Gaon of Vilna, argued that the Maggid of Koznitz's custom of mediating the prayers of his Hasidim was "complete idolatry." Cited in Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim, II, pp. 44-45.

each other's writing and always revolved around the subject of Hasidism and its dangers.⁶⁶ Lefin, however, was the most important figure of his generation, and served as a mentor and teacher for the next generation of maskilim in Eastern Europe, including Joseph Perl, Jacob Samuel Bik, Nachman Krochmal, Nachman and Sheindel Pineles, Bezalel Stern, Benjamin Reich, Mordecai Suchostober, Yehudah Leib ben Zevi Hirsch Segal, Eliezer Zweifel and Isaac Ber Levinsohn.

We are left with two historical options. Either Lefin's early years in Podolia had no bearing on his negative assessment of Hasidism and formulation of a moderate Haskalah, which were only conceived during his Berlin years and were entirely the product of Western influence. Or Lefin's childhood and maturation in Podolia prior to 1780 informed his response to the Berlin Haskalah and this response, in turn, helped to shape the parameters of his maskilic program that he brought back to Podolia and then to Galicia. In either case, the specific historical reality of Polish-Jewish life from 1784 onward provided the context for Lefin's commitment to a moderate program of Haskalah. Adaptation of the West European Enlightenment and Berlin Haskalah for Polish Jewry became Lefin's lifework.

⁶⁶ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 8, 70, 129, 130, 135. Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, JNULA, Mendel Lefin papers. See, too, Meir Reich's letter to his son, Benjamin Reich, in the personal diary of Samuel Jacob Bik, p. 39b. This manuscript belongs to the municipal library in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, Bibliotheca Merzbacheriana Monacensis, 64, Ms. Hebrew folio 11; a microfilm is available in the Department of Microfilmed Manuscripts, JNULA, film number 26448. Lefin was, however, acutely aware that he and his maskilic friends were a tiny minority among Eastern European Jewry. Writing from Galicia in the second decade of the nineteenth century, he remarked, "A small group of enlightened men still lives here. [They are] definitely scorned and hated by the mob, yet tolerated as writers and copyists for all legal [matters], for the promissory and settlement notes presented to all the German authorities." Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 5b.

Mendel Lefin's Encounter with the Berlin Haskalah

For a period of two to four years, Lefin lived in Berlin where he befriended Moses Mendelssohn, David Friedländer (1750-1834) and Simon Veit, Mendelssohn's son-in-law, and was welcomed by a broad circle of maskilim. In Gottlober's words:

When Mendelssohn heard about him [Lefin], he welcomed him with open arms and was his dear friend for the entire time [Lefin] stayed in Berlin. Lefin stayed in Berlin for two years and his soul, too, cleaved to that of Mendelssohn, until he [Lefin] felt that he [Mendelssohn] had become his rabbi and teacher.⁶⁷

Unlike Isaac Satanów and Solomon Maimon, two other Polish Jews who had made the pilgrimage to Berlin, Lefin did not settle there permanently. He returned to his native land, bringing with him a singular program of Haskalah which was a product not only of what he had encountered in Berlin, but a creation of his own views of the best way to enlighten traditional Polish Jewry.

Lefin never explained precisely his reasons for leaving Berlin when he did -- and the first written evidence of Lefin's return to Polish soil is the 1791 publication of his French pamphlet in Warsaw -- but his disciples clearly believed that the rapid pace of change occurring in the Prussian capital may have had something to do with Lefin's departure.⁶⁸ Gottlober's

⁶⁷ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, #38, 1873, p. 348. Other accounts of Lefin's life mention his staying in Berlin for three or four years, until 1783 or 1784, but we have no evidence to corroborate fully when he left German lands. See Gelber, Aus Zwei Jahrhunderten, p. 41, who says that Lefin returned to Poland in 1783 and Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, p. 72, for the four-year account.

⁶⁸ On the rapid changes of Jewish life in Berlin at the end of the eighteenth century, see Steven M. Lowenstein, The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770-1830, (New York, 1994).

gloss on Lefin's leaving is as follows:

Mendel Lefin also settled in Berlin and his soul was sated with wisdom, reason and pleasant thoughts, which he heard from the noble mouth of Mendelssohn, but the great and strong spirit that split mountains and turned everything upside down did not damage him. Lefin left Berlin as whole as he had been when he came, whole in Torah, whole in faith, and his soul was sufficiently satisfied with the brightness of wisdom.⁶⁹

Jacob Samuel Bik, one of Lefin's disciples who turned his back on the Haskalah later in his life, began an outline for a biography of Lefin, in which he, too, emphasized Lefin's fear of being damaged by the radicalism of the Berlin Haskalah:

His [Lefin's] conduct among his fellow men, the great and the small, was neither to lord it over them nor to flatter any man, and all who saw him understood his strength, and thus the men of Berlin honored him and wanted him to sit among them but he was afraid that he would be damaged among them....The day of his departure from Berlin was a day of mourning for all those who honored him; the tears on their cheeks indicated the anguish of their souls.⁷⁰

The problem with both Gottlober's and Bik's accounts is that the manifestation of the radicalization of the Berlin Haskalah, which expressed itself in the campaign for political emancipation and the beginnings of overt criticism of traditional Jewish institutions and practices, began after Lefin's departure, in 1786, the years of Mendelssohn and Frederick II's deaths.⁷¹ In the late 1780s, Lefin continued to contribute to Ha-Me'asef (The Gatherer), published Insight to Understanding under the auspices of the "Society for the

⁶⁹ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, #39, p. 355. The emphasis is mine.

⁷⁰ Cited in Haberman, p. 462. The emphasis is mine.

⁷¹ Lowenstein, p. 6. David Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison: The German Haskalah and Reform Catholicism," Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte, XX, 1991, pp. 34-37.

Education of Youth" and The Book of Popular Healing with approbations from Mendelssohn and Dr. Markus Herz, and even maintained personal ties with David Friedländer.⁷² In fact, Lefin did not publically criticize the Berlin Haskalah until 1791. But, perhaps Gottlober and Bik -- the latter from personal contact -- knew that Lefin was already privately dismayed with behavior he had witnessed in Berlin upon his departure, even though he may have been reluctant to put his grievances into print. In an unpublished poem which Lefin sent to David Friedländer accompanying the publication of the former's Insight to Understanding in 1789, he attested both to his continued loyalty to Friedländer and to the hostility that erupted after Friedländer's anonymous publication, in that same year, of The Best Spices by Saul Berlin, attacking Raphael Cohen of Altona:

Today men of renown have multiplied, indeed, precious honorable men,
 Many are the lovers of wealth who will sing his praise in silver,
 His bitter enemies will flatter him to praise a powerful man,
 But in their mouths are trumpets, hatred and insult reside in their
 midsts,
 Indeed, their leaders are like they are, distinguished only on the sur-
 face,
 Shining like fireflies in the evening, [hatred and insult] hiding within
 them,
 Trustworthy Friedländer! All the hearts thank you
 Although they curse you in their mouths, the lockets of their hearts are
 jealous of you,
 You encountered greater difficulties than they did, they will not seek
 nothingness in you,
 You deserve honor for your actions and the beauty of your wisdom
 You deserve renown for your humility
 If not, too, in your writings.⁷³

Lefin enjoyed his years in the center of the Haskalah as long as it was shaped by the towering figure of Mendelssohn. Moreover, he was

⁷² Ha-Me'asef, vol. 5, 1789, Kislev, pp. 81-92, Shevat, pp. 136-144.

⁷³ Published by Haberman, p. 463.

optimistic about bringing the Haskalah to Eastern Europe; upon his return to Poland, he maintained his contacts with maskilim in the Prussian capital. Lefin may have brought a distrust and distaste for religious extremism to Berlin with him, but he began to express his disenchantment with the Berlin Haskalah only in 1791. Between 1790-1794, Ha-Me'asef published Aaron Wolffsohn-Halle's Sihah be-Erez ha-Hayim, a merciless attack on traditional rabbinic Judaism which so alienated its readership that the journal completely lost its audience and stopped publishing. In the French pamphlet which he wrote for the Four-Year Sejm, Lefin remarked on the radicalization of Ha-Me'asef:

Mendelssohn marked an era in Berlin. He cleared the path indicated by Maimonides, and trained children according to the ideas that [Maimonides] had of the ceremonial law in order to educate them to be enlightened and honest men. He published a beautiful translation of the five Books of Moses and of the Psalms for their use. He soon found imitators who put him in fashion; soon, other translations were issued, even of the prayerbook. They began to work on useful journals, but those who continued them believed that they were more enlightened [than their predecessors, yet they] were deficient in their own personal conduct, publically attacking the backwardness of the rabbis in their journal (This journal finally degenerated altogether...); through this [behavior] they soon incurred the general contempt of the people and in the end became more intolerant than the ordinary devoted people whom they vilified.⁷⁴

In an unpublished manuscript on the language question and the dissemination of the Haskalah written some time in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Lefin reflected on the rapidity of change that occurred in Jewish Berlin once ignorance of German no longer posed a barrier to acculturation:

Now, however, since this past [prejudice] has been pierced, everything proceeds very quickly. Advance subscribers and helpful hands in the

⁷⁴ See [Lefin], Essai, paragraphs 43-47, published in Materialy, p. 413.

group [of maskilim] were immediately found for everything that they wanted to undertake, solely for the benefit of the Enlightenment. No wonder that they soon became dizzy from this haste. A general mania for innovation took hold. Soon the majority of the people scorned the esteemed Orthodox,⁷⁵ the Sages of the Talmud and of the religion, whom were mocked by shabby esthetes, who, meanwhile, despised a former evil, the former national pride. Now they have become completely enlightened toward meanness. They are ashamed of their origin, ashamed of their brethren, and, finally, ashamed of their Jewish names.⁷⁶ Hirsch was transformed into Herman and into Heinrich; Malkah was transformed into Amalie and into Maiblume. Moses's prescriptions were examined and found no longer suitable for the spirit of the age. They switched to Deism, to indifference.⁷⁷

Despite his critique of the radicalization of the Berlin Haskalah, Lefin never wavered in his commitment to a moderate Jewish Enlightenment as an antidote to the extreme poles of Hasidism on the one hand and to the radical acculturation, the "false enlightenment," taken up by a segment of Berlin Jewry, on the other.⁷⁸ In a letter to Israel Bodek, Lefin admitted that "the illness of the imagination of an all-too-enlightened friend here, together with the untimely efforts of petty opportunities to prepare eulogies for the former [the Enlightenment] there, could have easily compelled a bitterness in me,"

⁷⁵ Lefin's use of the term "Orthodox" (Orthodoxen) anticipates the mid-century use of the term in the debates between Reform Judaism and Neo-Orthodoxy.

⁷⁶ Name changing became a commonplace among acculturated Berlin Jews in the early nineteenth century. Heinrich Heine's mocked this practice in his poem, "Jehudah ben Halevy:" "So I straightway/Took a droshky and rushed to the/Court Investigator Hitzig,/Who was formerly called Itzig./Back when he'd been still an Itzig,/He had dreamed a dream in which he/Saw his name inscribed on heaven/With the letter H in front./What did this H mean? he wondered --/Did it mean perhaps Herr Itzig, Holy Itzig (for Saint Itzig)?/Holy's a fine title -- but not/Suited for Berlin." Cited in Steven M. Lowenstein, p. 227, note 32.

⁷⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, pp. 4b-5a.

⁷⁸ See Lowenstein, p. 72, on the radicalization of the Berlin Haskalah after 1796 and on the concern among some maskilim about what they called the "superficial" or "false" Enlightenment among their fellow Berliners who "'misinterpreted' the liberation of new thinking to mean personal license."

but in fact had not.⁷⁹ Lefin believed that a moderate Haskalah could eradicate mysticism, balance extremism, and steer Polish Jewry back to the rational tradition embodied by the work of the medieval Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides.⁸⁰ As we will see, in his Moral Stocktaking, the Podolian maskil explicitly appropriated into his program of moral self-improvement the concept of the "golden mean" outlined in Maimonides' Shemoneh Perakim (Eight Chapters), a commentary on the mishnaic tractate Avot in the form of a treatise on the soul. Maimonides' famous harmonization of the Aristotelian "golden mean" with a life lived by the dictates of the Torah served as the primary proof-text for Lefin's conception of a moderate, authentic Jewish Enlightenment. By harmonizing the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition with the new ideas of the West European Enlightenment and the Berlin Haskalah, Lefin played a critical role in mediating between West and East.

Lefin's Return to Podolia

Lefin left Berlin sometime in 1784, returned to Podolia, and soon settled in Mikolajów, a private town between Miedzybóz and Satanów which was under the authority of Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski (1734-

⁷⁹ Unsigned and undated letter to (Friend) Bodek, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 6, p. 1a. I attribute it to Lefin both because of its explicit moderation and its citing of Claude-Adrien Helvétius, the French psychologist whom Lefin quoted in several other writings. See Chapters Four and Five.

⁸⁰ Lefin's identification with Maimonides will be explored in a subsequent chapter. For an analysis of the early Haskalah's use of the Maimonidean example, see James H. Lehmann, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and Me'asfim: Philosophy and Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah," LBIY, (1975), pp. 87-108 and Shmuel Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of the Literature of the Haskalah: From the Polemic of Galician Maskilim," (Hebrew), in Megamot ve-Zurot, p. 106.

1823), the patriarch of one of Poland's most important magnate families.⁸¹ Czartoryski was not only one of the wealthiest magnates in Poland, holding estates in Central Poland, Lithuania, Przemysl and Podolia, and the General of Podolia, but also a leading supporter of the Polish Enlightenment which had begun to flourish under the reign of King Stanislaw Poniatowski, Czartoryski's cousin.⁸² At some point soon after Lefin's settlement in Mikolajów, he met Czartoryski. Gottlober's version of their meeting relates that Czartoryski, whose permanent home was in the family castle in Miedzybóz, was touring his estates and fortuitously chanced upon a small shop which happened to be run by Lefin's wife. Once in the shop, Czartoryski noticed on the counter a mathematical text by Christian Wolff, the German Enlightenment philosopher and mathematician known for his belief in the compatibility of reason and revelation.⁸³ Startled to see such a learned book in a small Jewish shop, he inquired after the proprietor, and thus began the friendship between the Polish magnate and the enlightened Jew. In Gottlober's words:

The prince was shocked [to see Wolff's book] and asked the Jewish woman: 'Whose book is this?' And she answered, 'My husband

⁸¹ Lefin signed his 1789 contribution to Ha-Me'asef "Mendel of Satanów," which may indicate either that he had returned to his place of birth or that he was already living in Mikolajów, but referring to himself by his place of birth.

⁸² When Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski's father, August Aleksander Czartoryski, married Maria Zofia Sieniawska Denhoffow in 1731, he acquired the Sieniawski estates, which were the second largest in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and ensured his family's prominence in Polish politics for the next two centuries. See W. H. Zawadzki, A Man of Honour: Adam [Jerzy] Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland, 1795-1831, (Oxford, 1993), p. 8.

⁸³ For Lefin's interest in mathematics see the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, pp. 21-22, pp. 44-46, and the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers; on Christian Wolff and the Haskalah see Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison," p. 25 and Michael A. Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew, (Detroit, MI, 1979), pp. 18-19 and 52.

investigates it night and day, and sometimes when he comes here he cannot separate from it and brings it with him to the store, too.' And R. Mendel Lefin came and stood before the prince....Now Mendel Lefin was neither attractive nor fit, and his face was filled with pimples. However, when he opened his mouth to speak, his words [were compared with] grandeur and glory; wisdom, understanding, and reason hovered upon his lips, which were filled with grace. When the prince spoke with him and heard his vast wisdom, and when it became known to him that he was also a friend of the great sage who had already left his mark on the world among the honored sages of Germany, meaning [Moses] Mendelssohn, and that he [Lefin] honored and exalted him, from that time forward, he [Czartoryski] gave R. Mendel Lefin all of the needs for maintaining a house for his entire life from the treasury of the Czartoryski family. [Czartoryski] also [gave Lefin] brandy, which was more than sufficient, and a monthly stipend, and his wife sold the excess spirits. Czartoryski gave him a red zloty in cash from his [the Prince's] treasury, and Lefin saved and stored all of this money in order to give it to a poor man when he [Lefin] died and to aid the poor in their time of need.⁸⁴

The apocryphal quality of Gottlober's account notwithstanding, Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski became Lefin's patron sometime around 1790, first hiring him to tutor his sons in mathematics and philosophy and later helping to publish his political and literary works. Czartoryski provided Lefin with a stipend for his entire life and made great efforts to ensure that his beneficiary found comfortable lodgings in which to work, as is attested in the following deposition written by Czartoryski to Feliks Bernatowicz, his secretary for French and German correspondence:

Honorable Gentleman Bernatowicz, Stolnik⁸⁵ of Lithuania: Disburse five red zloty to the Jew, Mendel Lefin, each month beginning from March 1, 1797 until I give you different orders. Second, I stipulate that he be given a house in which to stay (if there is something in reserve) and if, unfortunately, there is nothing, that it [a house] be built for him quickly in proportion to his needs, but comfortable enough for

⁸⁴ Gottlober, Ha-Magid, 17, #39, 1873, pp. 355-6. Gottlober, who never met Lefin personally, received the physical description of Lefin from Mordecai Suchostober, Lefin's disciple who helped edit his translation of the Guide for the Perplexed and taught in the rabbinical seminary in Zhitomir.

⁸⁵ A title denoting a mid-level bureaucrat or steward.

him to live in during the winter. While the erection of such a building is taking place, I am obliged to consider accomodating him in Mikolajów.

Submitted in Sieniawa, March 10, 1797.

Adam X Czartoryski.⁸⁶

Just as the historiography on the Haskalah in Eastern Europe has skipped over the Podolian stage of its development, historians have assumed that the Polish environment offered no stimulus to the Haskalah.⁸⁷ As a generalization, the decisive influence of the German cultural sphere on the Haskalah in Eastern Europe cannot be denied, but Czartoryski's patronage of Lefin suggests that in individual cases the Polish nobility was interested in connections with enlightened Jews and that elements of enlightened Polish noble culture influenced certain maskilim.⁸⁸ The extent of the relationship between Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski and Mendel Lefin, as well as the influence of French Enlightenment thought on the Polish Enlightenment and consequently on Mendel Lefin's version of the Haskalah will be explored in a subsequent chapter. Here it is important to emphasize that Lefin continued

⁸⁶ Published in Majer Balaban, "Mendel Lewin i książe Adam Czartoryski," Chwila, niedziela, 7 stycznia 1934, nr. 5313, p. 10. On Feliks Aleksander Geisztowt Bernatowicz (1786-1836), see Polski Słownik Biograficzny, zeszyt 1 (Kraków, 1935), p. 463.

⁸⁷ Michael A. Meyer, Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism, (New York, 1988), p. 155.

⁸⁸ Bartal, "'The Heavenly City of Germany,' and Absolutism à la Mode d'Autriche," in Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model, Jacob Katz, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987), pp. 36-40. See, too, Bartal, "The Second Model," p. 275, for Lefin's and Solomon Polonius' unusual and exceptional contact with the Polish nobility. Born in Poland, Polonius spent time in Amsterdam, where he was trained as a physician, and later practiced medicine in Vilna. Concerned with the fate of the Jews during the period of the French Revolution and the partitions of Poland, he translated material for the Four-Year Sejm from French into Polish. On Polonius' contribution to the debates on the Jewish Question, see Guterman, pp. 46-54.

to live in Podolia with Czartoryski's support, spending time in Miedzybóz and Mikolajów, until the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. He visited the Prince on his estates in Pulawy and Sieniawa, areas under Austrian rule after the first partition, and was in Warsaw during the Four-Year Sejm (1788-1792) at Czartoryski's bequest. Lefin also travelled to St. Petersburg with the young Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski in the early years of the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁸⁹ When Lefin left Podolia for Galicia -- sometime in the second decade of the nineteenth century -- he was still supported by the Polish magnate. The distinctive role that Polish Jews played in the economy of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth meant that they could not be hermetically sealed off from the environment in which

⁸⁹ Documentary evidence corroborates Lefin's itinerary as follows: 1791, Miedzybóz, see Gottlober, Zikhronot u-Masa'ot, 1, Reuben Goldberg, ed., (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 174-175 and Israel Heilprin, "R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev and the Decrees of the Government in His Time," in Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Eiropa ha-Mizrahit, Israel Heilprin, ed., (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 344-345; 1788-1792, Warsaw, see Materialy; 1794, Sieniawa, see manuscript 2253, the Czartoryski Library, Kraków, and Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin Satanower," p. 348; 1797, Sieniawa, see Majer Balaban, "Mendel Lewin i Książe Adam Czartoryski," Chwila, nr. 5313, 7-8 stycznia 1934, pg. 11-12; 1803-4, St. Petersburg, see Czartoryski MS EW 3267, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski to Adam Kazimierz, 10 August 1803, the Czartoryski Library, Kraków; 1805, Mikolajów, see the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 8; 1806-8, Mikolajów, with a trip to Annopol, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection, and the Joseph Perl Archive, appendix; 1815, Sieniawa, see the Joseph Perl Archive, appendix; 1817, Tarnopol, see Franz Kobler, Jüdische Geschichte in Briefen aus Ost und West, (Vienna, 1938), pp. 147-148 and the Joseph Perl Archive, folder 129; 1818, Tarnopol, the Joseph Perl Archive, folders 2 and 6; 1821-1825, Tarnopol, N. M. Gelber Archive, letters from Sheindel Pineles to Moses Inländer, July 17, 1821, July 21, 1822, February 19, 1824, September 30, 1824, February 3 and March 3, 1825, The Central Archives of the Jewish People. I am indebted to Tamar Schechter, who is writing a master's essay at Bar-Ilan University on Sheindel Pineles, Joseph Perl's daughter and the wife of Nachman Pineles, for sharing these letters, which mention Mendel Lefin, with me. The only evidence for Lefin's stay on the estate of Joshua Zeitlin is S. J. Fuenn's account in Kiryah Ne'emanah; see Fuenn, p. 272. As mentioned above, Meir Letteris reported that Lefin made two trips to Berlin, first in 1780 and then at the end of the decade; see Letteris, p. 38. In 1808, Lefin was still in Podolia; it is not clear when he settled in Brody.

they lived.⁹⁰ The Czartoryski-Lefin friendship suggests that a small group of Jews and Christians had common cultural and intellectual concerns and interests, at least for a brief period of time, in the last years of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Beginnings of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe

No single historical cause led to the beginning of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Rather, several causes, including the influence of the West European Enlightenment, the valorization of the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition with its attendant negative assessment of the "baroque" culture of Polish Jewry, the legacy of the Frankist debacle in Podolia, the authority of Jacob Emden's anti-Sabbatian polemic, and the social reality of Hasidism, all combined to influence Mendel Lefin's turn to the Haskalah.⁹¹ Born in the mid-eighteenth century, Lefin's commitment to the Jewish Enlightenment

⁹⁰ Hundert, The Jews in a Polish Private Town, pp. 38-39.

⁹¹ For the term "baroque Judaism" as a description of the culture of early modern Ashkenazic Jewry, see Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison," pp. 26-27. Jacob Katz systematically disproved Scholem's contention that there were essential (geographic, personal, ideational) Sabbatian influences upon the Haskalah and Reform Judaism, pointing out, instead, that the contemporaneity of Sabbatianism and the Haskalah could not but have meant that there would be some contact between the two movements. Katz emphasized the reciprocity of their influence, noting that Sabbatianism's justification of a heretical mystical tradition was an important component in the Haskalah's retreat from the Kabbalah. See Gershom G. Scholem, "Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy," in Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, p. 304, and Katz, "Regarding the Connection," pp. 84-95. Scholem's belief in the fundamental similarity between the antinomianism inherent in Sabbatianism and the radical Haskalah does not obtain, in any case, for the religious Enlightenment of a maskil like Mendel Lefin. Lefin was, as we have seen and will be elaborated further below, anti-Hasidic, not anti-rabbinic, and critical of maskilim who believed that "Moses's prescriptions [were]...no longer suitable for the spirit of the age." See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 4b.

was deeply affected by the political events rocking Poland and Europe at the end of the century, but it was not inexorably dependent solely upon the emergence of the centralized, enlightened absolutist state.⁹² Lefin's lifelong relationship with the magnate Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, one of the most powerful representatives of the pre-partitioned Polish state, was a crucial influence upon both Lefin's specific suggestions for reforming the Jews of Poland and his practical ability to write and publish works of the Haskalah. The multivalent impact of this formative relationship in Lefin's life underscores the importance of analyzing rigorously the specific historical circumstances in which the Haskalah emerged and the way in which those circumstances shaped its development. While depictions of Lefin as an important "forerunner" of the Haskalah movement in Russia, or as the "Father of the Galician Haskalah" may be historically true, these ex post facto evaluations of Lefin's contribution to the dissemination of the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe disregard the specific historical context in which his commit-

⁹² Raphael Mahler, a Galician-born historian and devotee of Ber Borochov's Marxist Zionism advanced the most extensive argument for the intrinsic link between absolutism and Haskalah. Mahler believed that Hasidism and Haskalah were dialectical opposites, representing fundamental contradictions in the socio-economic foundations of Polish-Jewish society. Hasidism was the ideological manifestation of the disenfranchised, Jewish petty bourgeoisie that was still dependent upon the feudal economy. In contrast, the Haskalah movement, "in its political view and Weltanschauung, adhered to the ruling absolutism," and its "progressiveness...[could be] measured by the degree of progressiveness of the bourgeoisie, the class that carried on the struggle against social and political feudalism." Because Mahler's materialism was also shaped by his commitment to Zionism, he interpreted Hasidism's hostility to the absolutist state as an expression of a necessary stage in the development of modern Jewish nationalism. Mahler therefore excoriated the loyalty of the maskilim to the non-Jewish state, whether Polish, Russian, Austrian or German, because their fidelity to the ruling authorities contradicted what he believed was the teleological impulse of Jewish history towards auto-emancipation. Yet, he understood this loyalty as a historical necessity in the battle against feudal society and culture. See Raphael Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, pp. xiv, xv, 8. For a more contemporary version of the argument, see David Biale, Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History (New York, 1986), pp. 87-117.

ment to the Haskalah developed.

Immanuel Etkes has stressed Lefin's singularity in late eighteenth-century Poland and the Polish lands under Russian rule. Despite Lefin's isolation, however, he did have a small peer group in Podolia prior to his settlement in Galicia, as evidenced by his friendship with Hayim Malaga and Meir ha-Cohen Reich. Likewise, there were eleven Jewish participants in the debates over the Jewish Question in the Four-Year Sejm, nine of whom were sympathetic to instituting some changes in Jewish life, which suggests a greater penetration of European ideas into late eighteenth century Poland than Etkes assumes. These men may not have formed a cohesive movement of maskilim, but their contacts with one another, as well as with maskilim in Berlin, mitigated against their feeling completely detached from any sense of group identity.⁹³

Lefin devoted his long life to reforming the civil status and spiritual direction of the Jews of Poland and to producing literary works for the didactic purpose of encouraging Polish Jewry to study non-Jewish "sciences," such as mathematics, grammar, ethics and geography, as a means of reducing the appeal and thus preventing the spread of Hasidism. He hoped that his program of the Haskalah would reinvigorate study of the Talmud away from pilpul (casuistry) toward a more direct interpretation of the Oral tradition and heightened observance of Jewish law. In an

⁹³ Thus, my disagreement with Etkes is that by focusing on what he calls the mature Haskalah movement of the 1820s and 1830s, he disregards the early, Polish/Podolian influences on Mendel Lefin's individual turn to and conception of a moderate Haskalah. See Immanuel Etkes, "Immanent," p. 19-25. See, too, Guterman, p. 29 and Bartal, "The Second Model," p. 275 for research that emphasizes the importance of the work of late eighteenth-century Polish-Jewish maskilim, and Chapter Two on the debates in the Polish Sejm on the reform of Jewish life.

unpublished reform plan that Lefin prepared for the Jewish communities living in estates under Czartoryski's supervision, he summed up his vision of the Haskalah:

We need to restore to the religion of the holy Torah all the special qualities that were forgotten by them [Polish Jews], to sanctify the name of Heaven through them, to recover those very wonderful parables that the masses have forgotten, [which we have] received from the Sages, may their memories be as a blessing, [for] the Name of the Holy One, blessed is He, is peace, His covenant is truth, and the tools of the Creator's faith is wisdom, [we need] to restore them to their former state and to spread them as a custom throughout the community of Israel -- and to wipe out the errors that have surrounded them like the smoke of clouds -- through [the means] of rational ethics. Thus, we need to write books of wisdom which address the needs of this world and of the world to come and to publish them in our language [Yiddish], to teach [Polish Jews how] to recognize the greatness of God, may He be blessed, by His deeds, through the study of natural sciences, [how to recognize] His wonders and exaltedness by knowledge of the quality and variety of the creations through every branch of the other sciences and to show how they are very useful and helpful towards service to God, may He be blessed, through the laws of our Holy Torah. Regarding the wisdom of the Talmud, [we] need to teach the teachers and students the [correct] method [of study], how to teach the truth and the Law through a direct and clear path. And, finally, to show them allusions to the Kabbalah in the brightness of the precious, fine science of psychology.⁹⁴

Mendel Lefin's conception of the Haskalah belongs to the category of "religious Enlightenment" recently elucidated by David Sorkin.⁹⁵ In Lefin's view, there was no contradiction between religion and Enlightenment, no disjunction between the desire to pursue secular forms of cultural creativity

⁹⁴ Published by Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals," paragraph 69, p. 301. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁵ Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison" and "The Case for Comparison: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment," Modern Judaism, 14, 1994, pp. 121-38. In the classic survey of modern Hebrew literature, Joseph Klausner depicts the reconciliation of the Haskalah and religion as a product of the Galician and Italian period of Hebrew letters in the years 1830-1850. His periodization and categorization of the Haskalah into rigid "Rationalist" and "Romantic" categories, slights, if not ignores, the phenomenon of the religious enlightenment in German lands and its influence on the Haskalah. See Klausner, II, pp. 289-90.

and total commitment to traditional rabbinic culture. Rabbinic sayings frequently punctuate Lefin's work, particularly the famous adage, "Who is wise? The one who learns from every man,"⁹⁶ to which Lefin appended a second saying, "And they said: 'whether from a non-Jew or from Israel or from a slave or from a handmaid, the Holy Spirit rests upon him according to his deeds.'"⁹⁷ Lefin's frequent references to rabbinic sayings was not only a maskilic strategy meant to bestow upon his work the imprimatur of tradition. It also reflected his sincere conviction that a rational form of Judaism could be open to the universal values inherent in enlightened experience and knowledge even if they issued from a non-Jewish source.

In his analysis of the Haskalah, Sorkin described Jewish "precursors" to the Haskalah proper of the 1770s and 1780s, and delineated an ideational shift between the generation of maskilim born in the first quarter of the eighteenth century and those born at the mid-century. Moses Mendelssohn and Naftali Herz Wessely, born in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, represented the category of "Orthodox maskilim," many of whom were autodidacts, tutors, and physicians, or held rabbinic posts. Using the medieval Jewish rational tradition as a precedent, they attempted to renew Judaism from within the acceptable parameters of traditional Jewish culture. Contact with the West European Enlightenment radicalized the early "Orthodox Haskalah" and gave it a social agenda. The young maskilim of Mendelssohn's period (Marcus Herz, b. 1747; Herz Homberg, b. 1749; David Friedländer, b. 1750; Solomon Maimon, b. 1754; Aaron

⁹⁶ Mishnah Avot, 4:1.

⁹⁷ Tana De-Beit Elijah Rabbah, parashah 10, chapter 1. Cited in Lefin's unpublished introduction to Masa'ot ha-Yam, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 124. See, too, folder 134a, p. 4b.

Wolffsohn-Halle, b. 1754; Isaac Euchel, b. 1756; Mendel Breslau, b. 1760; and Joel Brill, b. 1762), spoke not only of renewing Judaism, but of reforming the Jews. No longer isolated, they formed associations, such as the "Society for the Education of the Youth," and looked toward their non-Jewish peers, the Gebildeten, as models. The Haskalah became radicalized and politicized in the context of the enlightened absolutist state.⁹⁸

Both Lefin's Podolian origins and his age challenge the rigid application of Sorkin's categories to the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. On the one hand, Lefin was an autodidact and a tutor, who, like the early exponents of the "Orthodox Haskalah," criticized the "baroque Judaism" of his Polish-Jewish contemporaries, who he believed had strayed from the Jewish tradition of medieval rationalism and sunk into the quicksand of mysticism and cultural parochialism. His program of Haskalah, which was based on traditional conceptions of God's creative power and rooted in traditional Jewish observance, emerged from this internal critique and sought to renew Jewish life by ensuring the continuity of the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition. Lefin believed that such an approach offered the ideal means for fortifying Jewish life against the onslaught of Hasidism and rapid acculturation. Yet, unlike the early figures of the "Orthodox Haskalah," Lefin had direct contact with the Haskalah proper of the 1780s. Born in 1749, a contemporary of men like Herz Homberg and David Friedländer, Lefin was not a proponent, but a critic, of the radicalization of the Haskalah which he witnessed personally. But, while other East European maskilim, like Joshua Zeitlin and Samuel Jacob Bik, abandoned the Haskalah when they drew the conclusion that an

⁹⁸ See the generational chart of maskilim in Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison," p. 33, footnote 26.

openness to new ideas led inexorably to baptism and sexual license, Lefin remained steadfast in his commitment to his conception of a moderate Haskalah.⁹⁹ Although he censured his Berlin counterparts on account of their radicalization, he did not repudiate the Haskalah movement. As late as 1819, Lefin wondered whether it would be possible to resettle in Berlin on the income provided by Czartoryski. Writing to Simon Veit, Lefin queried:

What concerns me now is that the condition of my health has truly improved (I am a man of 70 years). I became a widower several years ago. I am worth 3000 Thaler. I am still supported by my good prince and I am, thank God, still alert, with good wages, and still working. Therefore, as you see, I do not have to lament over my [material] circumstances....If I were able with some five rubles a week to have enough for my sustenance, then I would be delighted to carry out my life among my few, still noble friends there [Berlin].¹⁰⁰

Lefin's Podolian origins and his Polish identity distinguish him from both the later generation of maskilim (Markus Herz, Herz Homberg, etc.), to which he belongs chronologically, and from the earlier generation (Moses Mendelssohn, Naftali Herz Wessely, etc.), to which he belongs ideologically. The strength and spread of Polish Hasidism and Lefin's belief that it represented a radical and dangerous deviation from traditional rabbinic Judaism account for his consistent support of the Haskalah throughout his life.

⁹⁹ Lowenstein, pp. 101-102. Joshua Zeitlin, the maskilic patron of an estate in the region of Shklov, abandoned the Haskalah when his son-in-law, Avraham Peretz, converted to Christianity and Jacob Samuel Bik, one of Lefin's disciples, not only rejected the Haskalah, but embraced the Hasidic movement he had formerly condemned. On Zeitlin, see Fishman, pp. 57-59, 91, 93, 117, 126; on Bik, see Shmuel Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot, pp. 107-159 and Gelber, "Brody," pp. 192-193.

¹⁰⁰ Published in Israel Weinklös, "R. Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów," (Hebrew), Ha-Olam, 13, #40, 1925, p. 800.

The unique relationship of the Polish magnate class to the Jews who lived on its estates, the decentralized political authority in Poland, the patronage of Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, and the final dismemberment of Poland oriented Lefin's political self-understanding towards the Polish variety of the traditional conception of the "royal alliance," rather than that which was shaped by the enlightened absolutism of the West.¹⁰¹ The territories of Podolia and western Ukraine ruled by Russia after the third partition were unequivocally Polish, a status recognized by Poles and Russians alike, the latter referring to those areas as "gubernii acquired from Poland." Unwilling or unready to deal with the social consequences of expropriating the ruling elite, the Russian tsars maintained the socio-economic status quo and the dominance of the Polish nobility.¹⁰² These regions, together with the former Polish lands ruled by the Austrians and Prussians, retained their feudal character until the mid-nineteenth century. The relationship of the Polish nobility to "its" Jews and serfs likewise persisted into the new century, a relationship that was predicated on the traditional feudal economic and

¹⁰¹ Jewish political strategy in Poland aimed at forging alliances with the nobility, in particular with the great magnate families who gained political power as it decentralized. See Gerson Hundert, "Jews, Money and Society in the Seventeenth-Century Polish Commonwealth: The Case of Krakow," JSS, p. 261. Raphael Mahler's critique of the Haskalah as being etatist is only partly incorrect; the maskilim of Galicia in the generation after Lefin were oriented towards Vienna and the absolutist Austrian state. But, Lefin's orientation was generically Polish and directed, in particular, towards his magnate patron. See Chapter Two. On modern Jewish politics and the maskilim, see Eli Lederhendler, The Road to Modern Jewish Politics, (New York, 1989); for the classic discussion of the "royal alliance," see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah, HUCA Supplements, No. 1., (Cincinnati, OH, 1976).

¹⁰² Zawadzki, p. 86.

political structure of the Commonwealth.¹⁰³ Lefin looked to Czartoryski, not to the Russian or Austrian state, as a source of political authority. Despite his interest in the cultural program of the Toleranzpatent (Edict of Toleration), Lefin expressed reservations about Joseph II's political agenda.¹⁰⁴ Although he participated in the debates over the reform of the Jews, first in the Four-Year Sejm in Warsaw and later as a behind-the-scene advisor to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, who was on the "Unofficial Committee" involved with Imperial Russian legislation on the Jewish question, the issue of the reciprocity between internal Jewish reform and emancipation which characterized the Haskalah in German lands is completely absent from his writings.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the next generation of maskilim in Galicia, exemplified by Joseph Perl, whose identity and programs of the Haskalah were intimately shaped by their relationship to the absolutist state, Mendel Lefin was a maskil whose identity was bound to the late eighteenth-century Polish-

¹⁰³ See Andrei S. Markovits, "Introduction: Empire and Province," in Andrei S. Markovits and Frank E. Sysyn, eds. Nationbuilding and the Politics of Nationalism: Essays on Austrian Galicia, (Cambridge, MA, 1982), p. 2. For a discussion of the emancipation of the Jews of Poland in the context of the disintegrating social system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and under the rule of the three partitioning powers, see Artur Eisenbach, The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870, Antony Polonsky, ed., Janina Dorosz, trans., (London, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ Lefin wrote, "One should even distrust Emperor Joseph II, and say that he intended to subdue the sons of Israel and beat them down with rods to make them into soldiers for his own benefit." Cited in Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanower's Proposals for the Reform of the Jews of Poland," p. 287.

¹⁰⁵ Lucy Dawidowicz erroneously assumes that Lefin adopted wholesale the Berlin quid-pro-quo of internal reform for political emancipation. See Dawidowicz, p. 17. On the quid-pro-quo of political emancipation and Jewish self-reform in German lands, see David Sorkin, The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840, (New York, 1987), pp. 86-89.

Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹⁰⁶ His experiences as a Polish Jew and the specific regional history of Podolia informed his response to the Berlin Haskalah and his conception of the Haskalah as a solution to the condition of East European Jewry. The young maskilim of Brody and Tarnopol who inherited the mantle of the Haskalah in the second decade of the nineteenth century owed a great deal to their Podolian mentor. They did not encounter the message of the Haskalah directly from Berlin, but through Mendel Lefin's critical mediation.

¹⁰⁶ The variegated world-views of Galician maskilim in the first quarter of the nineteenth century deserves further research and exploration. Not all Galician maskilim accepted the cultural and political changes demanded by the centralizing absolutist state. Nachman Krochmal, one of Lefin's most eminent disciples, was committed to a harmonization between modern critical thinking and traditional Judaism. See Jay Harris, Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age, (New York, 1991), pp. 313-314. Solomon Judah Rappoport (Shir), also believed in traditional Judaism's tenacity to withstand the pressures of modernity. See Isaac Barzilay, Shlomo Yehudah Rappoport [Shir] (1790-1867) and His Contemporaries. (Tel Aviv, 1969). For the identification of the later generation of Galician maskilim with the Austrian state, see Bartal, "'The Heavenly City of Germany,' and Absolutism à la Mode d'Autriche, p. 40, and Ezra Spicehandler, "Joshua Heschel Schorr: Maskil and Eastern European Reformist," HUCA, 31, 1960, pp. 181-222.

Chapter Two

The Maskil and the Prince: Patronage and the Dissemination of the Jewish Enlightenment in Poland

The "Polishness" of Mendel Lefin's Podolian background shaped his vision of the Jewish Enlightenment, which he proffered as a remedy to eighteenth-century Polish Jewry's deepening spiritual malaise. Encouraged and challenged by his trip to Berlin, Lefin returned to Podolia in the 1780s, hoping to continue his participation in the Haskalah as it developed in German lands and to formulate an ideological and educational program suitable for his Polish brethren. At the same time, Lefin's success as a maskil and his lifelong devotion to writing and publishing maskilic literature reflected the specific historical context of eighteenth-century Podolian Jewry. Although many Jews may have had only fleeting contact with the Polish landowner occasionally visiting his lands, Lefin's meeting with Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski proved to be of enduring consequence for both parties in the relationship. Czartoryski's active and personal patronage of Lefin enabled the latter to become a major figure in the emergence of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Moreover, Lefin's writings and opinions -- as well as his image as the very embodiment of an "enlightened" Polish Jew -- profoundly influenced Adam Kazimierz's view of the Jews in general. This impact continued to resonate well into the nineteenth century in the involvement of his son, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, with the "Jewish question" in Russia and in the "Congress" Kingdom of Poland.

This chapter will explore the relationship between Mendel Lefin and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski and analyze the way in which it shaped the beginnings of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Although the Lefin-Czartoryski relationship evokes the famous friendship between the Berlin maskil, Moses Mendelssohn, and the German Aufklärer, Gottfried Ephraim Lessing, there were substantive differences between them. The Lessing-Mendelssohn relationship was one between intellectual peers on the "neutral" ground of a new society in the making.¹ The Czartoryski-Lefin connection was one between patron and protégé, bound by the mutual dependence between the Polish magnates and the Jews living on their private lands.² There was no economic parity between Lefin and Czartoryski and no broad societal consequences of their friendship.³ Yet, the relationship served the interests of both men. Czartoryski's interest in Lefin was part of the prince's extensive commitment to the cultivation and dissemination of the Enlightenment while his connection to Czartoryski allowed Lefin to gain access to the arena in which Polish reformers debated reform programs for the Jewish community. The two men shared a common

¹ Alexander Altmann, Moses Mendelssohn, (University, AL, 1983), pp. 36-50; Michael A. Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew, (Detroit, MI, 1979), p. 18, 54-55; on the term "neutral society," see Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis, 2nd ed. (New York, 1993), pp. 214-226, (originally published as Masoret u-Mashber, 1958). For a qualification of the term as "semineutral," see Jacob Katz, Out of the Ghetto, (Cambridge, MA, 1973), pp. 42-56, particularly page 54.

² M.J. Rosman, The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century, (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

³ The Czartoryski-Lefin relationship also invites comparison with the Court Jews and their royal patrons. But, Lefin provided no financial expertise to the Czartoryskis. The only "service" he provided for the prince was tutoring his sons and setting an example of an "enlightened" Jew among his cultural circle. On the Court Jews, see Katz, "Out of the Ghetto," p. 218 and F.L. Carsten, "The Court Jews: Prelude to Emancipation," LBIY, III, 1958, pp. 140-156.

vocabulary of "rationality," "Enlightenment," and the "rights of Man" as well as a commitment to reforming the Jewish community in Poland.

But, their motivations for reform were not always consonant. As a maskil, Lefin was preeminently concerned with the internal transformation and spiritual reorientation of Polish Jewry. Czartoryski, on the other hand, was preoccupied with reforming Polish society in order to protect both its liberties and sovereignty from the assaults of the partitioning powers. His fundamental concern regarding the Jews reflected the need to reform the Jewish community in order to strengthen the Polish-Lithuanian polity. Mendel Lefin was well aware that the goals of the Polish Enlightenment and of the Haskalah were distinct and he formulated his reform proposals with those distinctions in mind. Lefin's published suggestions for the Four-Year Sejm (Parliament), as well as manuscript material treating the debates, his proposals for the rationalization of the rabbinate on Czartoryski's estates, and his influence upon the Russian legislation of 1804 all reveal the maskil's deep-rooted commitment to moderate, self-generated reform from within the Jewish community, a position which reflects his role as both critic and defender of the Jewish community of Poland.

"The Family," Pre-Partition Reform and the First Partition of Poland

The Czartoryski princes traced their lineage back to Gedymin, the Grand Duke of Lithuania. The marriage of Prince Kazimierz Czartoryski (1674-1741), the Vice-Chancellor of Lithuania, to Izabela Morsztyn (1671-1758) marked the beginning of the Polish nobility's intoxication with French culture. Their daughter, Konstancja (1696-1759) married Stanislaw

Poniatowski (1676-1762); one of the sons of that union would become King Stanislaw Augustus Poniatowski (1734-98), Poland's last sovereign. When Prince Kazimierz and Izabela's son August Alexander wed Maria Zofia Denhoffow in 1731, he acquired the Sieniawski estates, the second largest landed fortune in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski was their first son; his wealth was so great that when he divided his estates in 1812, they included twenty-five towns and townships and 450 villages, which were valued at almost 50 million zlotys. These unions of money, power and culture ensured the dominance of the Czartoryskis, who were known simply as "The Family," in Polish politics for two centuries.⁴

"The Family" had been associated with political reform since the 1720s, advocating various programs to modernize Poland, such as remedying the constitutional imbalance by abolishing legislation by consensus (the notorious liberum veto) and strengthening the crown, ensuring longer, more regular meetings of the Sejm, prohibiting Confederacies (the nobility's well-protected right of armed rebellion) and reducing the power of the military office of Hetman. But other magnate interests, particularly that of the Potocki family, stymied such reform efforts, no doubt because they suspected that a reformed Poland modelled after the Czartoryski plan would secure the political hegemony of "the Family." Attempting to interest a strong foreign power in their reform efforts, the Czartoryskis sent Adam Kazimierz to St. Petersburg in 1762 to ask Catherine II for help.

⁴ The Cambridge History of Poland, II, W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski, eds., (New York, 1971), p. 21.

This turn toward Russia, inspired by a real desire for reform but coupled with a bid for power, proved to be the first step in the slow and steady Russian subjugation of Poland from mid-century until the first partition in 1772. Catherine II rejected "the Family's" choice of Adam Kazimierz as the next king of Poland, choosing instead Stanislaw Poniatowski, her former lover. Poniatowski was elected to the Polish throne, which he ascended at the Coronation Sejm of December 1764. The Czartoryskis' reform efforts were further thwarted by Catherine in 1768, when she forced the Polish Parliament to accept a Russian guarantee of Polish liberties, and to extend rights to non-Catholic, Christian dissenters. The Polish nobility, always zealous in the defense of its privileges and liberties, organized against Russia in the Confederation of Bar (1768-1772). Although Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski had supported earlier reform initiatives, he could not fail to sympathize with the Confederates who sought to throw off the Russian yoke; Kazimierz secretly supported the Confederation of Bar, as did his father and uncle. His support for the Confederates is an example of the way in which Polish republicanism could be wed with resistance to political reform.⁵ The rebellion alarmed Poland's powerful neighbors, Turkey, Austria and Prussia, and resulted in the First Partition, with Poland being stripped of almost one-third of its territory and over one-third of its population.⁶ Prussia received 5 per cent of the territory and approximately 580,000 people; Rus-

⁵ Andrzej Walicki, The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood: Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kosciuszko, (Notre Dame, IN, 1989), p. 10; Jean Fabre, Stanislaw-Auguste Poniatowski et L'Europe des Lumières, (Strasbourg, 1952), p. 148.

⁶ Jerzy Lukowski, Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795, (New York, 1991), pp. 189-203; W. H. Zawadzki, A Man of Honour: Adam Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland, 1795-1831, (Oxford, 1993), pp. 14-16.

sia took 12.7 per cent of the territory and 1,300,000 people; Austria acquired 11.8 per cent of the territory and 2,130,000 people. The treaty of partition was signed on July 25/August 5 (Julian/Gregorian), 1772.⁷

The Polish Enlightenment and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski

The partition of 1772 served as an ominous warning to both reform-minded Poles and to their opponents, underscoring that if Poland did not begin to address its political problems, its belligerent neighbors would be only too happy to carve it up among themselves. The wave of political activity set in motion by the First Partition resulted in the unusually long session of the Sejm from 1788-1792 (which became known as the "Great" or "Four-Year" Sejm), culminating in the promulgation of the Constitution of 3 May, 1791. The impetus and sense of urgency to transform Poland's moribund political structures was obviously the consequence of the harsh immediate reality of the lost lands. But, the ideological underpinnings to many of the proposed reforms reflected the influence of the Enlightenment -- in its most generic European-wide meaning -- on Poland and the growth of an indigenous Polish Enlightenment since 1764. Contemporaneous with its Western European counterparts, the Polish Enlightenment drew on the writings of the German Aufklärer and the French lumières while addressing specific Polish problems, such as the ill-famed liberum veto which held a virtual stranglehold over Poland's parliamentary process. Unlike the West European movements, the Polish Enlightenment was borne by the nobility

⁷ Norman Davies, God's Playground: A History of Poland, I, (New York, 1984), p. 521.

and the king, not by the educated middle classes.⁸ King Stanislaw August Poniatowski and Prince Adam Czartoryski were two of the most important patrons of the movement.

Stanislaw August's election in 1764 marked the beginning of a new cultural era in Poland. Drawing on the influence of new ideas -- such as Wolffian philosophy -- spread by Poles educated in foreign universities during the reign of his predecessor, August III, the new king set about creating a center in the royal court for the cultivation of Enlightenment ideas with specific emphasis on the criticism and rejection of the old, antiquated myths and ways of life that had led to the country's stagnation.⁹ He also helped to found a school and a school commission, and promoted the journal, Monitor (1765-1785), all of which became institutional expressions of the new, "enlightened" spirit.

In 1765, Poniatowski helped to establish the Knights' School (also called the Cadet Corps) to educate qualified officers and public servants along the lines of the best innovations of the Piarist educator, Stanislaw Konarski. In 1740, Konarski had started the Collegium Nobilium, a high school for the sons of gentlemen, as a direct challenge to Jesuit domination of education. His school's curriculum focused on modern languages, mathematics and science, and introduced riding, outdoor games and French drama as part of the curriculum. Konarski's pamphlet, "On the Means to Successful Government" (Warsaw, 1760-1763), fixed on the liberum veto, as well

⁸ Mieczyslaw Klimowicz, "Polnische Literatur und Kunst im Zeitalter der Aufklärung," in Polen und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Aufklärung, band 22/IV, Rainer Riemenschneider, ed., (Braunschweig, 1981), p. 97.

⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

as the selfishness of the nobility, as the root of Poland's problems.¹⁰ Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski was a generous benefactor of the new Cadet Corps and served as the school's first commandant. He supplied the library with its core 10,000 volumes and was instrumental in bringing John Lind from England to be the school's first director. The Knights' School taught classical and modern literature, geography, history and law. No formal religious instruction was provided, although mass was performed. Secular morality was the guiding principle of the school, underscored by the Enlightenment trio of reason, utility and obligation to the state and to one's fellow man. Polish was the language of instruction. The Knights' School's explicit emphasis on the duty to the state over personal -- in this case, noble -- interest found its most famous representative in Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817), the insurrectionist who attempted to defy Poland's third, and final, partition.¹¹

Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski also fostered his commitment to the Enlightenment through the important role he played in the National Education Commission (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej), which, founded in 1773 with monies from the recently dissolved Jesuit order, was Europe's first modern ministry of education.¹² The Commission created a network of secular middle schools with the goal of instilling Enlightenment values into

¹⁰ Cambridge History of Poland, pp. 82-86.

¹¹ Lukowski, pp. 222-223.

¹² School reform in the Habsburg Monarchy and in Prussia was also galvanized by the dissolution of the Jesuit order. In Austria, Pope Clement XIV ceded all of the Jesuit schools, colleges, houses and other property -- which equalled over 13 million florins -- to Maria Theresa, who established a commission to reform the Austrian education system. See James Van Horn Melton, Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria, (New York, 1988), p. 210.

the next generation and was responsible for overseeing Poland's two great universities in Wilno/Vilna and Kraków. With Czartoryski's help and financial assistance, some of Europe's most distinguished intellectuals, such as the physiocrat Samuel Dupont de Nemours and the Swiss mathematician, Simon L'Huillier, were brought to Poland to advise the Commission, as well as to tutor the young Czartoryski sons.¹³

Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski's interest in the Enlightenment extended to the literary realm, which he nurtured both through patronage and in his own writings. In 1763, he co-founded (with Poniatowski's help) the moral weekly, Monitor, which, modelled after Britain's Spectator, published essays, letters, articles and reportage in a semi-scholarly vein. Its objective, like that of its English exemplar (and of Moses Mendelssohn's Hebrew moral weekly, Kohelet Musar), was popular education: to bring new ideas to the literate public. The Monitor was renewed in 1765 with the support of his cousin, the king, and, in fact, became the main voice of royal support for reform. Appearing twice weekly until December 1785, the Monitor's articles aimed their moralistic barbs at irresponsible and uncivil szlachta behavior (drunkenness, arrogance, deceit). The weekly also reflected Stanislaw August and Czartoryski's interest in physiocracy and published numerous articles on agriculture and new methods of cultivation. A few issues even boldly suggested that serfdom be abolished. The moralistic essays still left room for articles on translation theory, the refinement of the Polish language, and reviews of contemporary theater.¹⁴ Czartoryski himself published theater criticism and theory under the pseudonym Teatralski. The

¹³ Zawadzki, p. 17; Klimowicz, p. 100; Lukowski, p. 220.

¹⁴ Lukowski, p. 220.

Monitor cultivated a new spirit of intellectual creativity and restlessness which advanced Polish culture and literature.¹⁵

Unfettered by the demands of the crown (a political position that he did not want) and blessed with a huge personal fortune, Czartoryski spent his life actively cultivating all kinds of knowledge, both for his own edification and for the advancement of Poland. An accomplished linguist, Czartoryski boasted knowing eighteen languages, with a specialty in oriental languages, both ancient and modern, and was interested in literature, history, the arts, natural sciences, chemistry, political economy, and military strategy. He travelled extensively, particularly in England, and nourished his own private "republic of letters" with the works of many of Europe's greatest eighteenth-century luminaries. Pulawy, the Czartoryski estate on the Vistula about 110 kilometers south of Warsaw, became one of Poland's most vital cultural and intellectual centers in the late eighteenth century under the direction of both Adam Kazimierz and his wife, Izabela Czartoryska, even competing with Stanislaw August Poniatowski's royal court. Drawing some of Europe's greatest minds to their estate in order to tutor their sons, the Czartoryskis transformed Pulawy into a rural, noble "salon."¹⁶

¹⁵ Klimowicz, pp. 99-100.

¹⁶ Adam Jerzy Czartoryski's tutors included Colonel Stanislaw Ciesielski and Jozef Koblanski for history, Franciszek Kniaznin for Polish literature, Grzegorz Piramowicz, co-founder of the National Education Commission, Jozef Szymanowski, a poet, lawyer and an official in the government Treasury Commission, and Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, a poet, novelist and translator as religious tutors. The French physiocrat, Dupont de Nemours, and French artist, Louis Norblin, were also invited to Pulawy. There were ten professors per month hired for the two Czartoryski boys. See Zawadzki, p. 19; Fabre, pp. 146-7; Daniel Stone, Polish Politics and National Reform, 1775-1788, (New York, 1976), p. 64.

Deriving great satisfaction from his role as patron, Czartoryski surrounded himself with talented and brilliant men, such as François Sapiéha, Dominique Radziwiłł, Józef Szymanowski, Edward Dembowski, Jan Jawornicki, a liberal estate commissioner, and Feliks Bernatowicz, a novelist and playwright. When his protégés left Pulawy, Czartoryski's patronage did not cease. Instead, the prince sent them on European study journeys, which he generously financed. As one historian has written: "His [Czartoryski's] solicitousness followed them [the protégés] from destination to destination, making provision at each of them for a sojourn at a boarding house, such as at the lovely Parisian residence and greenhouse of the engraver, Wille, where so many young Poles, like Kosciuszko, spent happy years, offering thanks to Prince Adam, the protective god of these places."¹⁷ Bernatowicz is a case in point. After studying in Wilno/Vilna, he was sent by his uncle, the stolnik in Witebsk, to a lyceum in Krzemienic, where he rigorously studied Latin, French and Polish literature, knowledge which proved indispensable for securing a position as Czartoryski's secretary for French and Polish correspondence. In residence at Czartoryski's estate in Sieniawa, Galicia, Bernatowicz made frequent trips abroad -- to Vienna, Munich and Dresden -- in order to expand his intellectual interests, all at the prince's recommendation and expense. He began to write in Sieniawa, turning first to translations and then to his own comedies and novels, becoming a significant cultural figure in his own right.¹⁸

Czartoryski's devoted patronage of Mendel Lefin was likewise an aspect of his broad engagement with the Polish Enlightenment. Czartoryski

¹⁷ Fabre, p. 148. See, too, Zawadzki, p. 17.

¹⁸ Polski Słownik Biograficzny, zeszyt 1, (Krakow, 1935), p. 463.

actively cultivated a variety of unknown writers and intellectuals, whose ability to create and thus to gain artistic renown was entirely due to his beneficence. Czartoryski's interest in Lefin as a Jew is also not surprising. By 1765, more than half of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's Jewish population (750,000) lived in private, noble-owned towns and slightly more than 30,000 lived on Czartoryski holdings, playing an essential role in the latifundia economy.¹⁹ Any change in Poland's political and economic structure would have an enormous impact on this large "estate" and Czartoryski was, of course, aware of this potential. Czartoryski's relationship with Lefin gave him direct access to the Jewish community, whose opinions he was interested in hearing as he formulated reform plans for Poland. As well, the prince's support of Lefin's "enlightened" activities helped to show more skeptical -- even anti-Semitic -- Poles involved in reform that, indeed, there were members of the Jewish community interested in making changes in Jewish life in Poland.

Czartoryski attempted to cultivate other enlightened Jews besides Lefin, although the latter was his most successful and consistent Jewish protégé. On April 23, 1800, Heinrich Gotfried Bertschneider, the librarian of the University of Lwów/Lemberg, wrote to Friedrich Nikolai at Czartoryski's request. The prince, wrote Bertschneider, "inquires after Solomon Maimon, whose autobiography was published by [Karl Phillip] Moritz. I believe that the Prince has philanthropic intentions regarding this man. If you yourself were willing to write to the Prince through me, he would be very satisfied to

¹⁹ Rosman, pp. 39 and 214.

correspond with you at this opportunity."²⁰ Czartoryski may also have supported the Enlightenment efforts of another Polish Jew, Dr. Eliaz Ackord. A complex figure who, like Lefin, was involved with the Four-Year Sejm, Ackord earned his degree in medicine in Berlin in 1783 and then returned to Poland. Fitting in neither in the West nor in the East, Ackord translated the anonymous pamphlet, "The Need for Reform Among Polish Jews" (Warsaw, 1786), from Polish into German, and dedicated it to King Stanislaw Poniatowski. The pamphlet took a liberal, sympathetic position toward the Jewish question.²¹ Czartoryski's connection to Ackord is speculative, but suggestive. Recounting the prince's fortuitous meeting with Lefin in Mikolajów, A. B. Gottlober mentioned a Dr. Ankelschmidt who accompanied Czartoryski on his tour of the Jewish communities in his lands. Jacob Shatzky argued that there was no doctor by that name in Poland at the time and that Gottlober, notoriously sloppy with names and times, confused the name of Ankelschmidt with that of Eliaz Ackord.²² If Shatzky is correct, then Czartoryski had befriended Ackord, a Polish Jew who had travelled the cultural and geographic distance to the West, prior to his relationship with Lefin, and was no stranger to this "new" kind of Westernized, "enlightened" Jew. Jacques Kalmansohn, another Jewish petitioner during the Four-Year Sejm, also had ties to the Czartoryskis. Kalmansohn published his Essai sur l'état actual des Juifs de Pologne et leur perfectibilité in 1786 but later

²⁰ The emphasis is mine. The letter to Nikolai is cited in Raphael Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I, (Rehavia, 1956), p. 72. It is not clear if Czartoryski ever successfully contacted Maimon.

²¹ Alexander Guterman, "The Suggestions of the Jews of Poland for the Reforms of Their Legal, Economic, Social and Cultural Status," (Hebrew), M.A. thesis, (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 33-35.

²² Jacob Shatzky, Pinkas, I, (New York, 1927-1928), p. 165.

translated it into Polish and dedicated it to Tsar Alexander I, who, in gratitude, sent Kalmansohn a gift of cigarettes through the mediation of Adam Jerzy Czartoryski.²³ Adam Kazimierz's interest in Lefin was part and parcel of his extensive interest in the Jews and in the Polish-Jewish question, and underscores the tie between the Polish magnate class and "their" Jews on the eve of Poland's last chance for internal reform.²⁴

Czartoryski's interest in the Jews, and in Lefin in particular, was an indispensable component of the beginnings of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe. As in Berlin and Shklov, the existence either of a group of wealthy benefactors or even of a single well-endowed patron made all the difference in whether or not a Jewish Enlightenment could take root. Members of the Jewish community who directed their literary aspirations toward a transformation of Jewish life needed a livelihood to support their cultural work, particularly because their writings fell beyond the purview of traditional Jewish literary creativity. Thus, maskilim like Maimon, Joel Brill Loewe, Salomon Dubno, Herz Homberg and Israel Zamosc all became private tutors, increasingly in demand among eighteenth-century upper-class households,

²³ Guterman, p. 39.

²⁴ The first instance of magnate support for the publication of a Jewish book was the Polish prince Michael Babrawski Kraliwski's underwriting of Dr. Moses Markuse's Yiddish translation, Sefer refues (The Book of Remedies), of Tissot's work on popular medicine in 1790, which had already been translated into Polish in 1773. Lefin himself, encouraged by Moses Mendelssohn, had begun a Hebrew translation of Tissot's work in the 1780s, but was unable to secure enough pre-subscribers for its publication. A few sections of Lefin's Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am (Popular Healing) appeared in 1789 with his Moda le-Binah (Insight to Understanding); the full translation was issued only in 1794 with Czartoryski's financial support. Neither work would have been possible without the aid of the Polish magnates. See Chone Shmeruk, "Moses Markuse from Slonim and the Source of His Book, Ezer Yisroyel," in Sifrut Yiddish be-Folin: Mehkarim ve-Iyunim Historiyim, (Jerusalem, 1981), p. 192.

particularly for the children of wealthy Berlin Jews.²⁵ Joshua Zeitlin's estate of Ustia in Mogilev, near Shklov, which he transformed into kind of westernized rural "salon," became an oasis for a variety of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century Jewish intellectuals, including Barukh Schick and Lefin himself.²⁶ Spending time at the Czartoryski estate in Sieniawa, Lefin became acquainted with Bernatowicz, and probably knew other members of the Czartoryski cultural circle. Lefin held Izabela Czartoryska, Kazimierz's wife, in special regard, attested by this poetic paean he wrote to her from Mikolajów in 1805:

Words of Thanks

Many days and years have passed in which we have lived and been sustained by the generosity of your hands. Far away, you have been hidden from our eyes, while we have thanked only your name and your remembrance; behold, we have been jealous even of those who only see your image on a tablet, an inchoate mass that it is impossible to awaken [even] with all the rams of Nevayot [Isaiah 60:7].

Come please, now, our Highness, be worthy and accept all of these yearning hearts, which bring words of good will before you. Accept now the recompense of your justice before Israel, from the Lord their God. Take delight in these eyes, which regard you and are filled with love, issuing honor and flashing song, gladness, and joy for you. Regard these whispering tongues and their silent lips and see us standing, all of us, mute statues, desolate and silenced now, from our abundant joy in you.

Remember these servants among the myriads of our brethren, the House of Israel, who are close to you, so they will be able to appear before you, worthy to be your favored and merciful ones. But we in this misguided hour, we only have the need to quench the thirst of our eyes in the glory of your face in order to engrave the likeness of your

²⁵ Steven M. Lowenstein, The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770-1830, (New York, 1994), pp. 39 and 209, footnote 26. See, too, Melton, p. 18.

²⁶ David Fishman, Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov, (New York, 1994), p. 58; S. J. Fuenn, Kiryah Ne'emanah, (Vilna, 1860), pp. 271-273.

image on the walls of our hearts as a memorial for all the days of our lives.²⁷

In this regard, the Polish context for the emergence of the Haskalah does not differ from its Berlin and Shklov settings: in all cases, the existence of a willing and generous patron made the significant difference as far as the production of Enlightenment works is concerned.

Czartoryski, Lefin and the Reform of the Jews of Poland at the Four-Year Sejm

The social organization of Polish society, its tenaciously feudal socio-economic structure, the reluctance of its noble class either to cede any of its power to the crown or to the other estates or to cultivate a native burgher class, and the unique relationship between the magnate class and the Jewish population defined the parameters of the Enlightenment proposals offered by enlightened Poles and Jews alike. Mendel Lefin wrote a variety of works, both published and unpublished, which bear on the reform of the Jews. Linguistically diverse (French, Hebrew and German), all of the materials are informed by Lefin's relationship to the Czartoryskis, a personal bond which underscored the paradox of the early Haskalah in Eastern Europe. Supported by the nobility, the Polish Enlightenment and its smaller Jewish counterpart was inherently limited by the intransigence of this class, which manifested itself in economic and political selfishness and historical

²⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 8.

myopia.²⁸ Linking his people's future to the Polish nobility meant that Lefin's reform proposals would come to share the fate of the short-sighted class upon which their public expression depended. While the Polish nobility may have been able to retain most of its economic power until the mid-nineteenth century, the successful partitions of Poland in 1772, 1792 and 1795 rendered the szlachta's proud liberty -- especially since that liberty bore an explicit connection to national sovereignty -- meaningless.

While Lefin's reform proposals were influenced by the Haskalah in Berlin, as well as by the French Enlightenment, his clear connection to Poland -- his relationship to the Czartoryskis, his sensitivity to age-old Polish hostility to Judaism, and his perception of Polish Jewry's spiritual crisis -- shaped Lefin's proposals at all times. As was the case for all of his work, Lefin's suggestions for reform were not merely reactive proposals, but constructive suggestions for the renewal of a rational, but traditional, Jewish life in Poland.

The Czartoryskis' clandestine support of the Confederation of Bar led them to become the mainstay of the opposition party to the king after 1775. This party (alternatively called the Opposition, the Magnate Party and the Ministerial Party) was a heterogeneous group of progressive enlighteners and traditional magnate republicans; the latter were hostile to any kind of political reform. What bound them together was their hostility to Russia's control of Poland, which at the Partition Sejm of 1775-1776 had expressed itself in the king's attempt to introduce some constitutional reform in the

²⁸ Shmuel A. Cygielman, "About the Suggestions of a Representative of the Great Sejm, Mateus Butrymowicz, for the Reform of the Jews of Poland and Lithuania at the end of 1780s and the Response of the Rabbi of Chelm, Hershel Josefowicz, To That Matter," (Hebrew), in Israel and the Nations: Festschrift for Shmuel Ettinger, (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 87-88.

creation of an independent Permanent Council, a decision which Poniatowski could only effect with Catherine II's permission. By 1788, the Opposition had organized sufficiently to win over 40 per cent of the deputies to the Sejm. Hostile to the Permanent Council and to the king, their leadership, including Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha, Ignacy Potocki, Michal Oginski and Karol Radziwill, turned to the new Prussian king, Frederick William II, who was eager to challenge Russia's control of Poland, and convinced other members of the Diet to undo the Russian system which had ruled Poland since 1775. Flexing their muscles, the Opposition demanded full Russian withdrawal from southeastern Poland and in January, 1789 voted for the abolition of the Permanent Council in favor of a Parliamentary Committee.²⁹ What had begun as a regular, six-week meeting of the Sejm stretched into the Four-Year Sejm.

The triumph of Opposition led to the municipalities' demand for political participation in the life of the Republic. Because at least two-thirds of the Republic's town dwellers were Jews, any discussion of the extension of political rights to the burgher estate could not but provoke a debate regarding the Jews, their place (or lack thereof) in the estate system and their inner reform. It is not surprising, therefore, that discussion of the Jewish question emerged with the opening of the Four-Year Sejm on October 6, 1788.

The debates at the Four-Year Sejm regarding the Jewish question were conducted in the context of a European-wide discussion about the civic emancipation of the Jews. Reformers and conservatives alike were well aware of the Prussian Jewry Ordinance (April 17, 1750) and Austrian

²⁹ Stone, pp. 13-79.

Toleranzpatent (January 2, 1782). Christian Wilhelm Dohm's influential pamphlet, Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden, the very title of which implied that the condition of Jewish life needed improvement, appeared in a Polish adaptation in Warsaw in 1783.³⁰ As well, the debates over reform of the Jews took place in the midst of rising tensions between Christian burghers and their Jewish competitors in Poland's royal towns. The 1768 Sejm's decision to restrict Jewish privileges and rights to earn a living through trade had led to mass Jewish migrations from Lublin, Wilno/Vilna, Warsaw, Kraków, Posen, Przemyśl, Opatów, Torn, and Bidgosc. Although the animosity between burghers and Jews was not new, it escalated after the 1768 Sejm. In Warsaw, these tensions culminated in a riot in May, 1790.³¹ Initially focused on the issue of municipal citizenship, the Four-Year Sejm debates grew to encompass discussion of Jewish attire, taxation, lease holding on breweries and taverns, and communal autonomy. Although many of the proposals written by Christian Poles for the Sejm about the reform of Jewish communal life shared the generic Enlightenment assumption that citizenship for the Jews was contingent on the quid-pro-quo of their inner transformation into "useful" citizens, there was no con-

³⁰ Part of Dohm's work appears in English translation in The Jew in the Modern World, Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., (New York, 1980), pp. 27-34.

³¹ Cygielman, pp. 92-93. On the Warsaw riot, see Krystyna Zienkowska, "The Jews Have Killed a Tailor: The Socio-political Background of a Pogrom in Warsaw in 1790," Polin, 3 (1988): pp. 78-102. An earlier conflict in Warsaw erupted between Jewish and Christian burghers in 1775 when the former, given permission by August Sulkowski, Marshal of the Permanent Council, established a settlement ("New Jerusalem") on the outskirts of the city. Another marshal, Lubomirski, ordered the razing of the settlement which, he argued, was in violation of the sixteenth-century statute prohibiting Jewish settlement in Warsaw. See Stone, p. 18.

sensus of opinion about how to effect this transformation.³²

Andrzej Zamoyski, a conservative nobleman, brought a petition to the Sejm in 1778 about the burghers and peasants which touched on the Jewish question. Seeking to limit Jewish and Polish contact and to reduce economic competition between Poles and Jews, Zamoyski felt that the right of residence for Jews in Polish cities should be curtailed. The Jews, he argued, should be forbidden to employ Christian domestics and any individual Jew who could not show that he was either a tradesman with property valued at at least 1,000 zloty or an arendar (leesee), artisan, or farmer should leave Poland. His proposals garnered the support of the conservative clergy, but were rejected by the Sejm.³³ Other conservative voices in the Sejm vigorously defended the feudal system and noble prerogative and either ignored or anathematized the Jews.³⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, Father Stanislaw Staszic, an important Enlightenment ideologue who was critical of noble republicanism and a champion of the burgher estate, advocated in his Warnings for Poland that Jews be subjected to the general law of the municipalities. His conclusions regarding the civic integration of the Jews, however, were predicated on a virulent anti-Semitic view of Jewish economic behavior. Ignoring the nobility's involvement in distillery and brewing, Staszic offered an alarmist argument to the effect

³² On the quid-pro-quo of political emancipation and Jewish self-reform in German lands, see David Sorkin, The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840, (London, 1987), pp. 86-89.

³³ Guterman, p. 22 and S.M. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland, (Philadelphia, PN, 1916), pp. 271, 281-282.

³⁴ Artur Eisenbach, The Emancipation of the Jews of Poland, 1785-1870. Anthony Polonsky, editor, Janina Dorosz, translator, (London, 1991), p. 76.

that peasant drunkenness was due entirely to Jewish dominance of the liquor trade, referring to the Jews as "locusts."³⁵

Hugo Kollataj was an advocate of the burgher movement and an active exponent of the standardization and homogenization of national life in Poland. In his Anonymous Letters, he wrote, "O nation! If merciful Providence permits you to stand on the threshold of true liberty...be bold to write one code for all men and one legal procedure for all provinces."³⁶ He displayed a tolerant attitude toward the Jews, arguing in Political Right of the Polish Nation that "the human rights of Jews are to be respected no less than the rights of any other human beings."³⁷ Kollataj was particularly sensitive to the anomalies of Jewish economic life in Poland (the perennial competition with the burghers and the Jews' unenviable role of being the middlemen between the peasants and the nobility) which fueled anti-Jewish resentment. It was Kollataj, then Vice Chancellor of the Sejm, who intervened on behalf of the Jews during the May riot and expressed to Stanislaw Malachowski, the speaker of the Sejm, that the perpetually seething tension between Jews and Poles would erupt if reforms were not promulgated. Yet, despite Kollataj's open-minded attitude toward expanding the civil rights of the Jews, his commitment to the French model of emancipation meant that he favored abolition of the kahal (the administrative body of the Jewish

³⁵ On Staszic's political thought, see Walicki, pp. 38-62. See, too, Jacob Goldberg, "The Changes in the Attitude of Polish Society toward the Jews in the 18th century," Polin, I, 1986, p. 41.

³⁶ Cited by Walicki, p. 72.

³⁷ Cited in Goldberg, p. 44.

community) and the compulsory prohibition of traditional Jewish garb as the means to further the rapprochement between Jews and Poles.³⁸

In 1789, Mateusz Butrymowicz reissued, in revised form, an anonymous 1785 pamphlet entitled How to turn Polish Jews into Citizens Useful for the Country, which did not go as far as Kollataj's suggestions for incorporation of the Jews into the burgher estate. Butrymowicz advocated a change in the legal and residential status of the Jews, arguing for their inclusion into a "state citizenship," but he remained unprepared to support the abolition of the feudal structure. His pamphlet discussed the "condition" of the Jews sociologically, implying their potential for change if the social forces of their oppression were relieved. He advocated Polonization of the Jews through the abolition of the kahal, abandonment of Yiddish, prohibition of the importation of Hebrew books and of Jewish traditional dress, and "productivization" through the redirection of Jewish economic activity away from trade and commerce toward handicrafts and agriculture. Recognizing the Jews' human rights, Butrymowicz argued against the state's interference in Jewish religious life, but implicitly called for the transformation of Judaism, with its cultural-national foundations, into a "confession." Thus, despite his good intentions, Butrymowicz, too, felt that an almost complete vitiation of Jewish cultural and religious distinctiveness had to precede integration into Polish life.³⁹

There was an occasional voice, like that of Jozef Pawlikowski, which argued for the preservation of Jewish culture with integration of the minor-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42 and Eisenbach, pp. 74-75.

³⁹ Cygielman, pp. 90-91; Eisenbach, p. 77; Dubnow, pp. 279-281.

ity into the life of the state. Pawlikowski argued:

We have agreed to be tolerant of their religion. By what logic, then, shall we now interfere with it, with its holidays, with its fasts? Why should we be towards them like the Spaniards of old?⁴⁰ Let us not force them to change their garb! Let us instead act towards them so as to make them feel not aggrieved but happy with being Poles.⁴¹

Pawlikowski's position was singular also in that he blamed the impoverishment of the towns on peasant misery, rather than on Jewish exploitation, and focused on the nobility's role in the subjugation of the serfs.⁴² On the whole, however, the main current of Polish discussion regarding reform of the Jews called for a state-initiated limitation of Jewish communal autonomy and culture, an effort which could not but be perceived by the majority of Poland's Jews as a threat to the very existence of Jewish life.

Although the issue of how to reform Jewish life had been raised as early as 1775, it was the 1790 Warsaw riot mentioned above which forced the question of the Jews onto the agenda of the Great Sejm. On May 19, 1790 Jacek Jezierski (Castellan of Lukow) suggested that a "Commission for Jewish Reform" be appointed. The Commission was composed of three Senators and six members of the Sejm, including Kollataj and Tadeusz Czacki, a liberal reformer who recognized the civic rights of the Jews. Kehillah (community) representatives, as well as enlightened Jews like Lefin, had been involved from the beginning with the Sejm debates on the relation-

⁴⁰ Pawlikowski is referring to the notorious Spanish Inquisition of the fifteenth century which "offered" the Jews a choice between conversion or death as a means to "integrate" them into Spanish society. Lefin, too, will hold up the Spanish experience as a model of the harshest repression imaginable. See below.

⁴¹ Goldberg, p. 42.

⁴² Eisenbach, p. 79.

ship of the Jews to the burgher estate, the right of Jewish domicile in Polish cities and the level of Jewish taxes. The Commission itself felt obligated to pay attention to current Jewish opinion and eleven Jews [Dr. Elias Ackord, Dr. Jacques Kalmansohn, Zalkind Hourwitz (via a Polish adaptation of his French Apologie), Dr. Solomon Polonius, Dr. Moshe Markuse, Mendel Lefin, Avraham Hirshowitz, Pesach Haymowicz, Shimon Wolfowicz, Joshua Heschel ben Joseph (Josefowicz), Zevi Hirsch ben Shaul (Shaulowicz)] presented petitions to the Commission. Lefin's participation was assured by his relationship to Prince Adam Czartoryski.⁴³

The eleven petitions ranged in opinion among those which championed the full integration of the Jews into Polish society (Ackord, Kalmansohn, Hourwitz), urged the civic emancipation of the Jews, but resisted the complete dissolution of Jewish communal autonomy (Polonius, Lefin, Markuse), argued for a government-directed series of reforms influenced by the French model of Emancipation (Hirschowitz, Haymowicz, Wolfowicz), and rejected any reform of Jewish life (Josefowicz and Shaulowicz).⁴⁴

Lefin's contribution to the debate, Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses moeurs, appeared in Warsaw anonymously in 1791.⁴⁵ Written for the

⁴³ N.M. Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788-1792)," (Hebrew) in The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume, (New York, 1964), p. 275.

⁴⁴ For a synopsis of the eleven positions, see Guterman.

⁴⁵ [Mendel Lefin], Essai d'un plan de Réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la nation juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses moeurs, Warsaw, [1791]. The full text has been reprinted in Materialy do Dziejow Sejmu Czteroletniego, vol. 6, Arthur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, Janusz Wolinski, eds., (Wroclaw/Warsaw/Krakow, 1969), pp. 409-421. On dating the pamphlet, see Guterman, p. 70.

National Education Commission on which Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski served, the Essai reflected Lefin's moderate conception of the Haskalah, as well as illustrated his sensitivity to the external pressures bearing upon the Jewish community of Poland. Although the Essai was written with Czartoryski's patronage, Lefin had his own reasons for writing the French pamphlet. Acutely aware of the hostility towards the Jews that informed many of the debates on the "Jewish question" among the Polish reformers, as well as of the historic hostility of the Polish Church to the Talmud, Lefin penned the Essai both as an apologia and a proposal for the reform of the Jewish community.⁴⁶ As he explained in a later, unpublished manuscript entitled "Teshuvah," Lefin composed the French pamphlet in response to deputy Hugo Kollataj's order and the National Education Committee's agreement (later slightly modified by Father Piattoli) for all Jewish men to shave their beards.⁴⁷ No matter how well-intentioned non-Jewish reformers might be, Lefin wrote, they did not know what was good for the Jewish com-

⁴⁶ Literary hostility to the Talmud was well attested in Poland already by the seventeenth century. Authors such as Mojecki (Jewish Cruelties), Hobicki, Mitzinski and Szleskobski published tracts criticizing the Oral Law. The Talmud of the Jewish Faith (1610, Krakow) became the source for the first Polish encyclopedia's (1745) entry "proving" the commonplace belief that the Talmud required Jews to use Christian blood on Passover. An auto-da-fé against the Talmud was one of the results of the Frankist disputation in Kamieniec Podolski in 1757. Majer Balaban, Le-Toldot ha-Tenu'at ha-Frankit, (Tel Aviv, 1934), pp. 160-161; Goldberg, p. 41; John Doyle Klier, Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the 'Jewish Question' in Russia, 1772-1825, (Dekalb, IL, 1986), pp. 175-177. One of the central anti-Talmud texts employed by Polish writers of the eighteenth century was Johann Andreas Eisenmenger's Entdecktes Judenthum, which cited the Talmud as the source for the Jews' poisoning community wells. See Chapter One, and Cygielman on the anti-Jewish stereotypes employed by Mateusz Butrymowicz in his pamphlet, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁷ Kollataj's order read: "All the Jews living or domiciled in the States of the Republic, with no exception, must shave off their beards and stop wearing the Jewish dress; they should dress as the Christians in the States of the Republic do." Quoted in Eisenbach, p. 96.

munity. In his words:

Even though the ministers of the "Deputation" themselves, and so much more so the advisers themselves, are men of truth and justice in their hearts and sit to legislate laws for the betterment of the world, to inculcate love and peace in our country, to banish injustice, and to enlighten the people with knowledge beneficial for a man's life, in any case, the wise men of the gentiles do not know what is good for us, and they can err after the delusions of ill-intended writings that are in their possession, as they will, God forbid.⁴⁸

Many Polish reformers saw rabbinic Judaism, and particularly the Talmud, as an obstacle to the integration of the Jews into Polish life, and the pamphlet literature circulating in Warsaw at the time of the Great Sejm was full of these attitudes. Lefin countered this assault upon Jewish religious life with a discussion of the historical development of Judaism and its fundamental compatibility with an enlightened Polish state. He began the Essai with a bold assertion of the centrality of religion in Jewish life and an equally bold claim of the Talmud's universalism:

Religion is the most powerful and the most active motive of the Jewish nation such that one can draw essential advantages even from its prejudices; that is why it is very important for every political reformer to know them [the prejudices] thoroughly. The Talmud, which places the love of one's fellow man at the foundation of its entire system, is its [the Jewish nation's] principal code of law.⁴⁹

Acknowledging that much of the Talmud was concerned with fine legal discussions about how to fulfill Jewish ceremonial law, and acutely aware that

⁴⁸ "Teshuvah," Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3a and cited in Gelber, p. 276. Gelber refers to this document as Teshuvot be-Inyanei ha-Dat, (Responsa to Religious Matters), but the manuscript itself carries no such title. See Gelber, p. 300. On the top of the first page is simply the word, teshuvah (responsum). See folder 72, page 1a. Avraham Rubinstein noted Gelber's inaccuracy, too. See his comment in [Joseph Perl], Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim, Avraham Rubinstein, ed., (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 7, footnote 38.

⁴⁹ [Lefin], Essai, p. 410.

Christian polemical literature had historically viewed the Talmud as the source of Jewish separatism and alleged misanthropy, Lefin insisted that its many "sound maxims" touched upon Jewish morals, and that "even the ceremonial laws have a relationship to morals and are only different aspects of the love of one's fellow man."⁵⁰ Lefin's words reflected the eighteenth-century's preoccupation with universal morality and his own commitment to the defense of traditional rabbinic Judaism and its main text, the Talmud, against charges of immorality and religious parochialism.

Throughout the Essai Lefin described Judaism in ways that he believed would be palatable to his Polish readers, but his words also reflected his perception of the way in which rational rabbinic Judaism inherent in the Talmud had been diverted and debased by mysticism and irrationality. Although Lefin acknowledged that a legitimate esoteric tradition existed within the Talmud, he insisted that the internal censoring mechanism of the tradition protected this elite teaching from abuse by the ignorant. He wrote:

It [the Talmud] was very reserved about the choice of those that it believed worthy of being initiates; it demanded very pure morals, a penetrating mind, an immense erudition, and an advanced age, etc. and even most of those men who penetrated it often retreated from its initiations with a fearful respect; one still finds it [the prohibition against entering the PaRDeS (the "paradise" of the esoteric tradition)] repeated many times in the Talmud.⁵¹

In Lefin's view, Moses Maimonides was the next link in the great chain of tradition after the Talmud; but the Maimonides he presented to his readers

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, note 1, p. 418.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, note 2, p. 419. On the dangers of teaching the "secret of Creation" and the "secret of the Chariot of Ezekiel," see Mishnah Hagigah 2:1 and BT Hagigah 14b. In the Talmudic account, of the four individuals who entered the PaRDeS, only Rabbi Akiva emerged unscathed.

was not the codifier of the Mishneh Torah but the philosopher of The Guide for the Perplexed. Lefin argued that Maimonides understood correctly that metaphysics was equivalent to the esoteric tradition of the Talmud. Using his great erudition, the philosopher was able to develop systematic, concrete and "reasonable" foundations for most of the ceremonial law. Moving on to a discussion of the subsequent perversion of the true spirit of the Talmud, Lefin pointed to the philosophic sectarians of the post-Maimonidean period who "took infinitely more from Greek scholars than from Jewish scholars, started to allegorize everything, denied the resurrection of the dead and ended up becoming atheists."⁵² The extremism of these sectarians made Maimonides' philosophic work -- and the interest in non-Jewish sciences -- suspect among the Jewish community as a whole.

In Lefin's view, the rejection of philosophy and of non-Jewish learning proved disastrous to the course of Polish Jewish history. Vulnerable in the wake of the Maimonidean controversy, the Jews found comfort and refuge in the "pious ignorance" of Talmudic casuistry and mysticism. These religious streams -- excessive Talmudism and fatuous mysticism -- were the extreme foils to Lefin's conception of a moderate, rational Talmudic Judaism purged of its kabbalistic element. Both resulted in a kind of collective irrationality. Decrying Polish Jewry's overzealous attention to the minutiae of the ceremonial law and its belief in the miraculous at the expense of "rational" behavior, Lefin wrote:

⁵² Ibid., p. 410. In his own lifetime, Maimonides was compelled to defend his belief in resurrection of the dead. See his "The Essay on Resurrection" in Moses Maimonides, Crisis and Leadership: The Epistles of Maimonides, Abraham Halkin, trans. and David Hartman, eds. (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), pp. 220-235. On the Maimonidean controversy, see Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, I, (Philadelphia, PA, 1978), pp. 96-110.

The most perverse men, those who perform several ceremonial laws with fervor, pass for just and honest [men]; whereas men with integrity are regarded as impious if they fail [to fulfill the ceremonial law] one time. [For example,] during a winter night, two young men were thrown into a granary filled with hay. The house caught on fire, the wind blew very severely and terribly, and [these young men] battled the fire in the midst of continuous flames and suffocating smoke for a long time...until they saved the village from certain destruction; these two generous men, I say, were forgotten the next day, during which some one was discovered who piously took a secret bath in cold water and whose devotion is believed to have saved the city.⁵³

Lefin placed the greater part of the blame for the irrationality of his brethren on the influence of the mystical tradition, which he believed had been revitalized with the appearance of the kabbalistic text, the Zohar, and had spawned the Hasidic movement of his own day. He argued that the staunch conservatism and low cultural level of Polish Jewry was due to the hegemony of misguided kabbalistic influence. Lefin did not mince words when criticizing Hasidism to a non-Jewish audience, believing that the Polish reformers shared his contempt for mysticism.⁵⁴ The Essai derided Hasidic enthusiasm and its embrace of simple faith and mocked its hermeneutic techniques.⁵⁵ Lefin disparaged the Hasidic preoccupation with miracles,⁵⁶

⁵³ [Lefin], Essai, note 1, p. 418.

⁵⁴ To that end, Lefin recommended in the second part of the Essai that the National Commission of Education should confer a prize upon the individual who wrote the best practical treatise analyzing mystical writings, including the Zohar, the Zenda Vesta (hymns from Zarathustra) and the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), in order to expose their irrationality, thus drawing their "credulous readers" away from these works "after having lit the torch of their reason in the magical lantern of their imagination." *Ibid.*, p. 417.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, sections 20 and 79, pp. 411 and 415.

⁵⁶ The rejection of Hasidic miracles, particularly of miraculous births, became an important feature in the later Galician and Russian Haskalahs. Benjamin Rivlin's takanah (communal edict) in Shklov from 1787, which concluded that miracles were a contradiction to natural science, was an exceptional early example of a mitigated critique of Hasidic miracles. See Fishman, pp. 120-121.

but reserved his greatest contempt for the leaders of contemporary Hasidism, the zaddikim, and their aura of putative sanctity. Citing Jean La Bruyère, the French essayist whose Les Dialogues Sur Le Quietism had attacked religious enthusiasm and extreme pietism, Lefin wrote:

They [the Hasidim] believe prophecy and donation effect miracles, which they attribute to the leaders of their sect like an article of faith. 'A man of the people, by virtue of his assuring that he has seen a marvel, falsely persuades that he has seen a marvel.' (La Bruyère). It is actually [considered] a meritorious deed [among their disciples] if one contributes to their [the zaddikim] amusement in such a manner as to give them the right disposition in which to receive inspiration from [their] higher knowledge, or at least if one takes an interest in praising them as much as is possible to ensure their reputation....Making even the increase of their fame an object of religion, and above all making belief in them an article of faith, is an ingenious expedient which serves the great Lamas of this sect....This is why they [the zaddikim] pretend to serve their proselytes, and are enriched considerably by their donations. These faithful disciples have frequent occasions to convince themselves of the great merit of their leaders, by contemplating their numerous courts composed of rich pilgrims who visit them from many places, as well as by the elegance of their tables laden with silver dishes and with the most exquisite foods; just as these great men know how to ennoble themselves through these earthly pleasures, they are believed to obtain the remission of sins more surely than the ancient laws which command tears and lamentations.⁵⁷

The charismatic power of the zaddikim, Lefin believed, was ill-deserved and he was particularly bothered by their claim to an exclusive, even prophetic, relationship with God. Recoiling from what he believed was Hasidic contempt for traditional rabbinic Jews, Lefin wrote:

These ones [the zaddikim] care even less in their distribution of souls [than Shimon bar Yochai did].⁵⁸ They regard the knowledge of

⁵⁷ [Lefin], Essai, sections 22-24 and notes 5 and 6 to those sections, pp. 409-410, p. 419. On La Bruyère's influence on Lefin, see Hillel Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah: On a Disguised anti-Hasidic Polemic," (Hebrew), in Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit bimei ha-Beinayim uve-Et ha-Hadashah, I. Etkes and J. Salmon, eds., (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 186.

⁵⁸ In section 16, Lefin asserted that Shimon bar Yochai, the putative author of the Zohar, had denied a soul to non-Jews. See, too, sections 14-15, *ibid.*, p. 411.

ceremonies, which motivated the Rabbis, as a base account worthy of a peasant; instead, the real proprietors of the souls, [who have] secret qualities and are above ordinary conceptions, have the good fortune to be regarded as God's confidants....The true souls consist in a web of instantaneous feelings of truth and exalted senses, which is infinitely above the twaddle, called investigations and reasons of the other, false souls....[They believe that] these noble souls [of the zaddikim], like portions of the divine essence, have a very active influence in everything that is meant by creation. In their opinion, even miracles, which they perform daily, are but a natural consequence of the process of their ideas.⁵⁹

Compared to the zaddikim, whose claims to leadership and power were based solely on false charisma and manipulation of the Jewish public, particularly of its youth, "baroque" Talmudic casuistry belabored by Poland's rabbinic elite should be "deeply blessed."⁶⁰

For Lefin, who believed not only in the permissibility of studying gentile sciences, but in their efficacy in renewing Jewish faith, the most deplorable aspect of contemporary Hasidism was its scorn for non-Jews and non-Jewish knowledge. In his reading of Jewish history, Lefin argued that the suspicion of philosophy after the Maimonidean controversy had caused the Jewish community to reject all gentile knowledge as heresy and to find refuge in the Zoharic view that no non-Jew deserved to be called a human being.⁶¹ The cultivation on the part of the Hasidim of a sense of superiority and exclusivity through their rejection of non-Jewish learning struck Lefin as a contradiction of the universalism inherent in creation itself. He wrote:

⁵⁹ Ibid, section 25, pp. 411-412. Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁰ Ibid., section 26, p. 412.

⁶¹ The Zoharic belief in the divine origin of the human soul implicitly excluded gentiles as recipients of the Godhead's emanation. The Zohar stated that non-Jews only had a nefesh hayah (a temporal, animal soul) and not a neshamah, a supernal soul. On the theory of the soul in the Zohar, see Isaiah Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, II, (London, 1989), pp. 677-807, particularly pp. 725, 727.

"Man is particularly beloved by God, He created him after His divine image, He proceeded all of mankind from Adam alone so that no one could derive from a particular origin, etc."⁶² Later in the Essai, in the section detailing specific reforms for the Jewish community, Lefin urged translation of Holy Scripture into Polish, which he argued would enable the Polish Jews to appreciate the "sublime poetry of their ancestors, which they [the Jews] never perceived." Reading Hebrew through Polish would force the Jewish community to admit that they owed the discovery of the beauty of their own religious poetry to a non-Jewish language.⁶³

As mentioned above, Lefin's version of the historical development of Judasim outlined in the Essai served as an apologia for traditional rabbinic Judaism and its central text, the Talmud. It also lay the foundation for his detailed reform proposals, which comprised the second half of the Essai. Specifically, Lefin's reform proposals focused on the creation of a state-appointed rabbinate, the establishment of a Polish Normal School, and the cultivation of literary works that would expose the folly of Hasidism. The

⁶² Ibid, section 88, p. 415. Lefin's Hasidic contemporary, Shneur Zalman of Lyady, took the mystical tradition's demonization of gentiles to an extreme. In his Tanya, Shneur Zalman equated gentiles with the sitra ahra, the demonic, evil force in life. Chapter Eight of the Tanya reads: "Therefore, also the evil impulse and the force that strains after forbidden things is a demon of non-Jewish demons, which is the evil impulse of the [gentile] nations whose souls are derived from the three unclean kelipot [thought, speech and action]." See Shneur Zalman, Likkutei Imrim/Tanya, (London, 1973), pp. 31-32 and Dubnow, II, p. 236. Lefin's recoiling at Hasidism's denigration of non-Jews found fulsome expression in the anonymous anti-Hasidic tract, Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim by his disciple, Joseph Perl. See [Joseph Perl], Über das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim, pp. 46-48.

Lefin defended rabbinic writings which used the word "man" to mean Jew, not gentile, by arguing that such writings only applied to commandments which were obligatory for Jews alone. Joseph Perl mentioned Lefin's opinion in one of the former's unpublished writings on the Talmud. See Heb. 38.7075, "Notes to Joseph Perl's Literary Work," JNULA. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3b.

⁶³ Ibid., sections 71-74, p. 414.

most characteristic feature of Lefin's proposals are their emphasis on moderation and the use of positive incentives for change rather than on external compulsion.⁶⁴ Lefin wrote, "In general, one needs, as much as possible, to use attractive resorts for engaging the people in the observation of the [state's] law...It is appropriate to blend the repugnant, but salutary, medications furtively with the exquisite tidbits for it [the Jewish people]."⁶⁵

Lefin's commitment to moderation was both ideological and tactical. In fact, the theme of moderating between two extremes was a leitmotif of all of Lefin's work -- it appears most starkly in his Moral Stocktaking -- and is reiterated in his efforts in the Essai to propose specific ways through which to redirect the Polish Jewish community away from the poles of mysticism and rote Talmudic casuistry towards the rational rabbinic path paved by Maimonides. But, Lefin also penned his proposals with tactical considerations in mind. He was fully aware that the traditional Polish Jewish community under Austrian rule had responded with fear and suspicion to Joseph II's decrees in the Toleranzpatent (Edict of Toleration) requiring Jewish children to be educated in German-Jewish schools (May 7, 1798) and Jewish men to be conscripted into the Austrian army (February 18, 1788).⁶⁶ More-

⁶⁴ Mahler, I, p. 79 and Gelber, pp. 273-274.

⁶⁵ [Lefin], Essai, section 97, p. 416.

⁶⁶ Emperor Joseph II promulgated the Toleranzpatent on January 2, 1782, which promised religious tolerance in return for the abolition of Jewish communal autonomy. Most Jews perceived the series of edicts, which outlawed the use of Hebrew and Yiddish for commercial records, abolished the autonomy of the rabbinical courts, and imposed conscription as well as Germanic surnames upon the Jewish community, as an attack on their traditional way of life. On Herz Homberg, the creation of the German-Jewish schools and the Jewish community's hostility to them, see Raphael Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), pp. 3-6 and Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I, pp. 69-71.

over, he distrusted the "well-intentioned" proposals of most Polish reformers. Lefin thus wrote the French pamphlet, emphasizing the centrality of religion for the Jewish community of Poland, as a means of urging the Polish authorities to refrain from interfering in internal Jewish affairs and to design reforms to support traditional Jewish rabbinic culture.

Lefin's view of the power that should be bestowed on the state-rabbinate underscored the specific East European context of his proposals. He believed that the rabbinate, reformed and appointed by the state, should retain its power to excommunicate; this illustrates that Lefin, unlike many of his maskilic peers in Berlin, did not advocate the disbanding of the Jewish community's medieval corporate status as part of a reform program bound up with the assumption of all local prerogatives by the centralized absolutist state in its monopoly on power. Because the political emancipation of the Jews, as opposed to the alleviation of their civic status, was never on the agenda of the Polish reformers, Lefin never felt pressured to argue for the political dismemberment of Jewish communal autonomy. In an earlier Hebrew work which remained in manuscript, Likkutei Kelalim (Selections of Rules), Lefin recalled a dispute he had had with Moses Mendelssohn over the appropriate degree of the non-Jewish authorities' involvement in the internal life of the Jewish community.⁶⁷ According to Lefin, Mendelssohn believed the selection of Jewish communal representatives should be shouldered by the ruling authorities. This reflected a transfer of power to

⁶⁷ The historian N. M. Gelber published Likkutei Kelalim (Selections of Rules) in 1964 as an appendix to his article on Mendel Lefin's reform proposals for the Great Sejm. Lefin apparently did not finish the work. Only one chapter with 69 sections (sections 6 and 65 are missing) is extant in manuscript. See Gelber, Appendix 2, pp. 271-301. All subsequent references to Likkutei Kelalim will be marked by the author's name, the number of the section cited, and the page of the appendix. See Mendel Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, paragraph #2, p. 287.

non-Jews that Lefin could not brook. In contrast to Mendelssohn and to the Polish reformers who advocated abolition of the kahal, Lefin sought to reform what he perceived was the community's rotten core in order to preserve its internal autonomy and cultural integrity. He believed that the Jewish community should select its communal supervisors and base all its reforms on the internal edicts (takanot) culled from the communal registers of "upright" Jewish communities, "those renowned for their reason and justice (such as the reforms of the kehillot of Vilna and Grodno, etc.)."⁶⁸ Lefin's defense of communal autonomy was not only a response to gentile intervention into internal Jewish life, but a strategy to protect the kahal from the alternative form of Jewish leadership represented by the Hasidim.⁶⁹ In fact, throughout the Essaj, Lefin emphasized the need to engage the traditional Polish-Jewish rabbinate in the struggle against Hasidism and considered it, despite its obvious failings, a necessary ally against the new mystical group. For example, a strong, traditional rabbinate supported by the state and secure in its power could even encourage productive work among the followers of the Hasidim by rewarding those who cultivated wheat for matzah (unleavened bread for Passover) and kosher hemp for

⁶⁸ Mendel Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, paragraphs #4 and #34, pp. 287, 292. Wilno/Vilna, the capital city of Lithuania, was the home to the gaon, Elijah, around whom the rabbinite struggle against Hasidism in the eighteenth century centered. Lefin considered Vilna a center of rationalist traditional Judaism. See Immanuel Etkes, "The Vilna Gaon and the Haskalah -- Image and Reality," (Hebrew), in Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit bimei ha-Beinayim uve-Et ha-Hadashah, I. Etkes and J. Salmon, eds., (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 192-217.

⁶⁹ Shmuel Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut: Toldotav shel Ma'avak, (Jerusalem, 1988), p. 105.

clothes.⁷⁰

While Lefin championed moderate reform of the Jewish community, the authority he wished to confer upon the state-appointed rabbinate was immoderate, even authoritarian. Lefin believed that the state-appointed rabbinate should exercise complete control in the realm of culture. He argued that the rabbinate should have the power to censor books. The primary goal of the state rabbis' censorship campaign should be the suppression of the Zohar and all its commentaries. This rabbinate should also distribute copies of Jacob Emden's Mitpahat Sefarim (Covering of the Scrolls of the Law), which challenged the antiquity of the Zohar, and issue a new edition of The Guide for the Perplexed that could "be understood by the simplest people."⁷¹ Lefin also suggested that the National Education Commission should establish a Jewish Normal School in Warsaw, in which Polish would be the language of instruction, and the graduates of which would be allowed -- to the exclusion of all others -- to receive approbations from the state-rabbinate for their publications. The texts at this school would include Polish translations of Scripture. Last, Lefin proposed that satires and comedies be written about the Hasidim to expose the foolishness of their commentaries, advice which he later followed by writing Making Wise the Simple and The First Hasid (anti-Hasidic satires which are no longer extant). He hoped that these critical works of comedy would challenge the Hasidim

⁷⁰ [Lefin], Essaj, section 99, p. 417. Lefin's reference to "kosher" hemp pertains to the biblical prohibition of wearing a garment made of a wool and linen mixture (sha'atnez). See his concern with this in Likkutei Kelalim, paragraphs 56 and 62.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, section 60, p. 414. Lefin himself embarked on such a translation, which was only published posthumously. See Moses Maimonides, Moreh Nevukhim, Mendel Lefin, trans., (Zolkiew, 1829.)

to defend themselves in writing, an activity which would spiral into the creation of "reasonable and eloquent writings, which the nation absolutely lacks."⁷²

As noted above, Lefin had a clear sense of his audience when composing the Essai. In his later work, "Teshuvah," Lefin not only clarified the ideological reasons which compelled him to write the Essai, but also explicitly mentioned why he wrote it in French and published it anonymously.⁷³ Apparently the deputies of the Education Commission wanted to hear Lefin's opinion on the reform of Jewish life in Poland and wanted it to be presented in a way that would be received by the deputies of the Sejm as a group. In Lefin's account, they ordered him to write the pamphlet and to:

Conceal the name of the writer, not even to use the language spoken by him as one of our nation so that the words of this publication would not be suspected as the opinion of one who is affected by the matter, causing [its readers] to shut their ears to the reasonableness of his words. Rather [I should] organize the words according to the tradition of the [gentile] states alone, and direct the legislators' opinions so they would thank themselves for the truthful uprightness of these edicts.⁷⁴

⁷² *Ibid.*, sections 82-83, p. 415.

⁷³ The Essai was not Lefin's only anonymous work. His Yiddish translation of Proverbs was published anonymously in 1814 and an anonymous anti-Hasidic Yiddish comedy, Di genarte velt (The Duped World), which probably appeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century, relied on Yiddish translations of Proverbs that are very close to those innovated by Mendel Lefin. Meir Wiener believed that Lefin himself had written the book. See Meir Wiener, Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur in 19tn yorhundert, (Kiev, 1940), p. 38.

⁷⁴ Lefin, Joseph Perl Archive, folder 72, p. 3a. Gelber argued that Lefin was referring here to an anonymous French work, "Pensées sur la Reforme des Juifs de Pologne," which was translated from the Hebrew and found in Hugo Kollataj's library. This assessment does not make sense, as will be shown below. Hillel Levine, too, noted the inaccuracy of Gelber's attribution and concluded that "Lefin's comments in "Teshuvah" better fit the anonymous Essai...[than "Pensées"]," yet he did not fully prove his conviction. See Hillel Levine, "Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1974, p. 176.

Lefin went on to say that he composed his French pamphlet in such a manner so that it would not appear to be biased in favor of the Jews. If selecting a non-Jewish language in order to conceal the origin of its author was the idea of the members of the Education Commission, then Lefin made sure that the pamphlet's content would not unmask the ruse. He stated that he learned this strategy from a Talmudic story in Tractate Me'ilah.⁷⁵ The Talmud relates that Reuben, the son of Istroboli, responded to the Roman government's three anti-Jewish decrees (i.e. violating the Sabbath, proscribing circumcision, and compelling transgression of the laws governing sexual relations) by disguising himself as a Roman. Sitting unrecognized among them, Reuben posed three carefully orchestrated questions to the Romans so that each response would necessitate the lifting of the respective hostile edict. Reuben's strategy was successful until, as the Talmud notes, "they came to know that he was a Jew, and [the decrees] were reinstated."⁷⁶ Taking the Talmudic account as a paradigm for addressing a hostile, non-Jewish audience, Lefin tried to pose as a gentile by writing his proposal in French and publishing it anonymously. In addition, he penned his text in as "objective" a manner as possible, lest its author be suspected of being a Jew. His strategy was based on his fear that should the Polish ministers debating the fate of the Jews realize the

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 3a. Gelber incorrectly transcribes the manuscript here, citing Tractate Sota instead of Tractate Me'ilah. See Gelber, p. 277.

⁷⁶ BT Tractate Me'ilah, page 17a.

pamphlet's origins, they would dismiss its arguments and reinstate the heinous decree mandating compulsory shaving against his people.⁷⁷

Lefin's unpublished "Teshuvah" reveals more about his strategy in addressing a non-Jewish audience. Striving to deceive his readers even further, Lefin remarked that he quoted "as much as possible from their great writers on this [political] science, moreover, even from the books of the writers who are haters of Israel, so they would be obligated to say 'yes' to the rightness of my words."⁷⁸ A cursory glance at Lefin's French work reveals one of those "haters of Israel": on the last page of the essay Lefin cited Voltaire, arguably the eighteenth century's most dominant intellectual figure and a man known by his contemporaries, including the maskilim, as an enemy of the Jews.⁷⁹ In fact, the very title of Lefin's essay may have been a deliberate allusion to Voltaire's own Essai sur les Moeurs, in which

⁷⁷ Given Lefin's own testimony as to why he deliberately disguised his origin and published the Essai anonymously, Alexander Guterman's conclusion that "one should not suggest that the intention was to blur the Jewish identity of the author [of the Essai], the opposite is true," is quite surprising, particularly because Guterman had access to both Gelber's article and folder 72 in the Joseph Perl Archive. See Guterman, p. 71.

⁷⁸ Lefin, folder 72, p. 3a.

⁷⁹ This is conclusive evidence that the Essai is the referent of the comment in "Teshuvah" about his anonymous pamphlet. Lefin apparently thought his pamphlet was successful in amending some of the deputies' more destructive proposals. As he wrote regarding his tactics of concealment and ruse: "And it stood me in good stead, thank God, that through the words of explanation in this part, the slanderous mouths were closed shut, one by one, as they read it." Ibid. On Voltaire's attitudes towards the Jews, see Arthur Hertzberg, The French Enlightenment and the Jews, (New York and Philadelphia, PA, 1968), pp. 10, 286-287, 290, 297, and Frank E. Manuel, The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes, (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 193-201. On Voltaire as the blemish in the image of the Revolution for enlightened Jews who advocated political emancipation, see Shmuel Feiner, "'The Rebellion of the French and the Freedom of the Jews,' -- The French Revolution in the Image of the Past of the East European Jewish Enlightenment," (Hebrew) in Ha-Mahpeikhah ha-Zarfait ve-Rishumah, Richard Cohen, ed., (Jerusalem, 1991), p. 240.

the French philosophe caviled against alleged Jewish greed, misanthropy and fanaticism. Although he quoted from Voltaire in the Essai as part of his subtle strategy to persuade his gentile audience that the pamphlet was written by a non-Jew, Lefin's argument in the essay repudiated the Voltairian belief in the fundamental incompatibility between Judaism and the modern state.

Thus, as a counterpoise to Voltaire's views, Lefin gave prominent space to the words of Montesquieu, the eighteenth-century French enlightener perceived as Voltaire's ideological opposite on the Jewish question. Lefin cited Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws in two places to stress his conviction that reform of the Jewish community of Poland could only be successful if the Jews themselves wanted to change. Lefin selected the following quote, "One must pay great attention to the disputes of theologians, but it is necessary to conceal it [that attention] as much as possible....Religion is always the best guarantee that one can have of men's morals," for the Essai's title page to inform the Polish reformers that an externally-imposed plan of reform in disregard of Jewish religious tradition would be an unmitigated disaster. Later in the Essai Lefin quoted Montesquieu's famous condemnation of Tsar Peter I's compulsory shortening of the Muscovites' beards and clothing, a citation which barely veiled his conviction that the contemporary Polish decree ordering Jewish men to shave their beards was similarly despotic.⁸⁰ While Lefin cited Voltaire as part of a strategy to veil his authorship of the Essai, his use of Montesquieu revealed his true beliefs about reforming the Jewish community of Poland. If the educational changes initiated by the National Education Commission

⁸⁰ [Lefin] Essai, note 14 to section 96, p. 420.

were implemented with respect for traditional rabbinic Judaism, then the "Jewish nation will fulfill its obligation or, rather, effect, its wellbeing -- that it has yet to understand -- on its own."⁸¹ A moderate plan of reform based on "attractive resorts" would be the only means to assure success.

Lefin penned another document dealing with the reform of the Jews which likewise underscored his commitment to a moderate process of change initiated internally by the Jewish community. Just as the Essai was informed by Lefin's relationship with Czartoryski, Selections of Rules, the Hebrew work under discussion here, was written by Lefin specifically for the Jewish communities within the Czartoryski lands.⁸² In Selections of Rules, Lefin made suggestions for the reform of the kahal following extensive analysis of the causes of its corruption, such as abuse in the election of communal representatives, corruption in the administration of the public treasury, and concentration of economic life in trade and leasing. Writing in Hebrew, Lefin did not restrain his criticism, which was pointed, even bitter. Many of his words echoed those of non-Jewish critics. But, unlike Polish reformers who advocated abolition of the kahal, Lefin sought to maintain and reform Jewish communal autonomy. Discussing the inner decay of the Polish-Jewish community, Lefin began with a plea for moderation:

The method of an expert specialist physician who wishes to supervise the care of old wounds that have been rooted in the sick body for a long time is to be very cautious and extremely careful about making use of aggressive medications to close the wound and heal it quickly because of the [illness'] danger. So, too, when the leader of the community needs to make fences and restrictions before the breaches of

⁸¹ Ibid., section 69, p. 414. Emphasis in the original.

⁸² Gelber, p. 276, footnote 17.

the age, he should be forbidden to make use of sharp edicts or to rule harshly through them. On the contrary, he should guide it [the community] through very gentle reforms and convince it to cleave to them [the reforms] through conciliations.⁸³

Echoing the comment in "Teshuvah" that the non-Jewish authorities did not know what was ultimately beneficial for the Jewish community, Lefin negatively compared the techniques of "integration" of medieval Christian Spain with the enlightened agenda of Emperor Joseph II:

The kings of Spain were just and righteous in their own eyes, [believing that] due to their abundant humility they were filled with mercy. They tortured Israel with great afflictions in order to admit them [the Jews] against their will through the edict of conversion into the Christian paradise. Even Emperor Joseph II should be distrusted; he wanted to subdue the Sons of Israel and to beat them down with rods to make them into tradesmen for his own benefit.⁸⁴

Lefin's emphasis on moderate solutions, however, did not prevent him from vigorously attacking the causes of corruption and decadence that he believed had weakened the Jewish community. The first part of Selections of Rules excoriates kahal elections and the management of the public treasury. In Lefin's view, the election process was inherently biased in favor of the upper classes, who controlled the candidate selection process and engaged in nepotism.⁸⁵ Other forms of corruption included buying influence and increasing local taxes to pander to the gentile authorities.⁸⁶ The deficiencies in the management of the public treasury included haste, hap-

⁸³ Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, section #1, p. 287.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, section #3, p. 287.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, sections 10-11, p. 288. Historians concur. See A History of the Jewish People, H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed., (Cambridge, MA, 1976), p. 767.

⁸⁶ Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, section #18, p. 288.

hazardness and arbitrariness, in short, irrationality. Showing his maskilic concern for language, Lefin attributed the rashness with which his brethren conducted their business affairs to their preference for oral agreements over written contracts. He wrote:

It is...a special trait of the people of our faith in Poland, may God protect it [Poland], that they are, in most cases, hasty in their affairs. Thus, they are accustomed to hurrying and being as curt [in their business affairs] as they are among themselves. [The manner of conversation in] their casual conversations, the winking of their eyes and swinging gesticulations of their heads, hands, or bodies, and the like, encourages brevity. Because of this we find that most of them are very sluggish regarding writing and they only employ it under duress. Thus, the majority of their letters begin with once accepted variant [of salutation], such as 'May abundant peace [be with you], etc.' and conclude with a similarly accepted closing, 'On account of urgent matters, I must conclude...etc.,' and they mention the essence of their request at the top of the words in the middle.⁸⁷

In lieu of a careful accounting of revenues and expenditures, vague estimates fell prey to intimidation and nepotism, and led to an unfair allocation of the taxes necessary for running the communal institutions.⁸⁸ This internal corruption caused numerous disputes and, in turn, exacerbated the already existing class divisions within the Jewish community, in which the poor were victims to the whims of the wealthy.⁸⁹

Lefin outlined several ways to root out corruption in the systems of communal representation and taxation. The rationalization (i.e. the organization, standardization, and formalization) of the process of legislating takanot (traditional, communal reforms), of raising money, and of distributing funds from the communal treasury, Lefin believed, would result in

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, section 20, p. 289.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, section 21, p. 289.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, section 24, p. 290.

greater accountability of communal representatives, greater representation in the communal institutions, and a more upright way of life among his brethren.

The first step for improving the accountability of the communal representatives in their adjudication of public needs, Lefin concluded, was the creation of a permanent communal register, "a special book [in which] all of the details of the public events, appointments, decisions, accounts, taxes [would be enumerated]...[This record] will show the later generations how their ancestors acquitted themselves in every difficult matter; even the lists of small taxes for immediate needs will be listed and saved in the public book."⁹⁰

Second, the group of communal representatives, to be called the "committee", would meet at least once a week to supervise the needs of the community. Their meetings would take place in a special, closed chamber, opened only for the purpose of their meetings, and in which "the public account registers and account books would be stored." Before a representative could enter the inner sanctum of the committee's chamber he would have to take two oaths, "an oath of public trust" that he would not be biased [in his adjudication of law] and "an oath of secrecy" that he would not disclose any information about the process taking place inside the chamber. In contrast to what Lefin perceived to be the raucous and chaotic manner in which communal reforms of the past had been legislated, the atmosphere in the committee's chamber would be one of "permanent calm and quiet." He wrote: "It should be forbidden to speak of impertinent matters or of any individual or secret discussions. If someone transgresses this law,

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, section #28, p. 291.

the guards at the door will drag him outside in shame, in addition to [the other representatives' imposing] a financial fine towards the charitable confederate [upon him]."⁹¹

Third, although the public was forbidden entry into the committee's chamber, Lefin hoped to democratize the running of the Jewish community by making at least a symbolic overture to public participation in the process. The closed committee chamber, therefore, would have one small window through which "any common man" could "extend his request on a letter." This window would be the avenue of communication between the Jewish public and their representatives during the discussion, voting, and signing into law of the reforms. Moreover, "one whose suggestion letter was accepted in the public register three times, even if he was not from among the nominees [to the committee from his occupational group, would be] nominated immediately and welcomed into the committee without hesitation," provided he was at least 25 years old and literate. Lefin stressed the importance of formalizing and standardizing this procedure.⁹² After a fixed amount of time for discussion, a secret vote would be taken on color-coded ballots indicating support or rejection of the proposed measure. Majority rule would decide the outcome. Lefin hoped that secrecy, a careful counting of ballots, and a formal, collective oath taking by the representatives renouncing any prior predilections or commitments would guard against "guile and deceit." The entire process would be transcribed into the public

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, section #30, p. 291.

⁹² *Ibid.*, section #31, pp. 291-2.

register by the speaker of the kahal, the law stamped into the book with the committee's seal.⁹³

The second series of suggestions for reform Lefin outlined were devoted to reform of the management of the communal treasury. He directed his comments to rooting out corruption in the kahal's economic life by making the tax burden on all segments of the Jewish community more equitable. His comments were completely theoretical because the autonomous collection of taxes by the elders of the Jewish community had been annulled by the Sejm of 1764. The 1764 Parliament had "reformed" the structure of taxation of the Jewish community by swelling the obligatory head tax to two zloty for both sexes (thereby limiting the discretion of the kahal elders who in the past had allotted the tax burden according to the various communities' ability to pay) and forbidding the regular conventions of the Council of the Four Lands, the national, super-kahal of Poland-Lithuania.⁹⁴ "If the collection of taxes were still transmitted to us," wrote Lefin:

Then we [would be] obligated to simplify the collection even more because we [unlike the non-Jewish authorities] know the status of our brethren through additional, private information....When we find the poor oppressed due to [their requirement to] pay a large sum in one fell swoop, then we could extend the head tax to meat or to bread, [or] to the money required for wood, [and extend] the house tax to the candle tax, without changing the government's commands. Nevertheless we will have lightened the burden of our poor brethren and protected ourselves from the complaints and the grumbling deriving from this [the burdensome taxes].⁹⁵

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Dubnow, pp. 109-111, 180, 194, 198.

⁹⁵ Ibid., section #37, p. 293.

Taxation from within the community was necessary to protect against abuse by the gentile authorities. An equitable allocation of taxes within the community required, in Lefin's view, a rationalization and standardization of the allocation procedure. Ridding the process of the imposition of taxes for an unexpected need (i.e. the fortification of the walls of a synagogue or the creation of a new charity fund for the disabled poor) of the haste and arbitrariness that characterized the process in the past would place the new tax structure on a fair and just basis. Moreover, the need for the new taxes and their apportionment should be made public by the reformed administrative committee detailed above.⁹⁶

Lefin extended the need for rationalization and standardization to all elements in the Jewish community, even to the rabbinate. He suggested that the provincial rabbis keep meticulous records of their revenues (e.g. from writing writs of divorce) and expenses which would be evaluated collectively with the state rabbinate every three years. As individuals they would be taxed appropriately and without bias, and any transgressor would be fined accordingly.⁹⁷ Taking aim at those rabbis who might be disposed toward the Hasidic practice of having large meals with their disciples, Lefin suggested that "every kind of expenditure by the havurot [groups of craftsmen] and by the gatherings [of the official, non-Hasidic rabbinate with the State Rabbi] which is not for the general good should be canceled and all group meals and feasts should be forbidden on public disbursements."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., section #39, p. 294.

⁹⁷ Ibid., section #44, p. 295.

⁹⁸ Ibid, section #45, p. 295. Emphasis in the original.

As attested in Lefin's recounting of his dispute with Moses Mendelssohn, the East European maskil maintained the importance of the kahal and traditional rabbinic prerogative against suggestions by Polish reformers and other maskilim for their abolition. Yet, the decentralized political situation of pre-partition Poland, in which the nobility -- particularly the magnate aristocrats -- held enormous political and economic power, created a two-tiered (and competitive) system of political authority for Poland's Jews. Thus, when Lefin argued for the protection of the kahal, he was doing so against the combined assault of the king, the national Sejm, and the Sejm's representatives, whose political authority extended to royal (free) towns. But the relationship of the Jewish community in private noble towns to "their" lords was far less "autonomous" than Lefin's words to the Sejm suggest. His proposals for the reform of the Jewish community, both in Selections of Rules and in Entwurf eines Rabinersystems in den Gutern Ihrer Durchlaucht des Fursten Adam Czartoryski, General von Podolien,⁹⁹ an unpublished German manuscript on the rationalization of the rabbinate, reflect a much more dependent, symbiotic relationship with the magnate class. Lefin wrote Selections of Rules and Entwurf in the general context of that relationship and within the particular parameters of his personal relationship with Czartoryski.

In the private towns of the Polish nobility, both the kahal and the Christian municipality were subject to the magnate, who had the authority to review their respective operating budgets and courts. Thus, the "autonomous" Jewish courts in the estates of the Czartoryskis were an integral part of the owner's court system. Even criminal matters and

⁹⁹ Mss. 2253, Czartoryski Archive, Kraków.

appeals between Jews were directed to his court.¹⁰⁰ While the kahal represented autonomy and the abiding power of Jewish tradition for the Jews, it merely served as a convenient institution for the collection of taxes, the preservation of order, and the administration of one group of subjects for the magnate. Because the magnate class generally viewed the Sejm-imposed Jewish head tax as siphoning off the limited resources of the Jewish community living under its jurisdiction, "every magnate had an interest in reducing the kahal-imposed tax burden on his Jewish subjects."¹⁰¹ The magnates, therefore, viewed the kahal as competitor for their personal authority and strove to have absolute control over it. The lord either intervened directly and dictated kahal affairs or rendered the kahal powerless by bypassing its authority and dealing instead with individual Jews. Typically, the non-Jewish authority confirmed kahal election results and supervised Jewish communal authorities.¹⁰²

Even the venerable institution of the kahal rabbi was dependent upon and subject to the magnate's authority. The kahal rabbi fulfilled a number of functions: adjudicating Jewish law, chairing the rabbinical court, officiating at weddings and divorces, and providing religious instruction to the community in the form of sermons and classes. He was on the kahal payroll, but augmented his earnings through gifts and fees charged for specific functions. Although the privileges extended to the Jews of Poland-Lithuania by the magnates included the right to select a rabbi, the nobles sought to control these appointments by turning the rabbinic office into an arenda, a lease

¹⁰⁰ Rosman, p. 56.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 70, 188, 191.

held by the highest bidder. The individual who won the nobles' konsens (license) was granted the rabbinic office and the right to accept the kahal's salary and the additional gifts and commissions. In M. J. Rosman's words, "by the eighteenth century...the rabbi was not a salaried employce of the kehillah, who owed them his livelihood and hence his loyalty. He was a les-see whose lease was the magnate's to give and to enforce."¹⁰³

Throughout Selections of Rules, Lefin referred to the "Prince" and his support for reform of the Jewish community.¹⁰⁴ For example, if an accused party wanted to appeal the adjudication of the Jewish court, his only recourse should be to appeal to the state rabbi, whose authority derived from the "Prince's [Czartoryski's]" appointment. Final arbitration of such a dispute, therefore, rested with a rabbinical figure both part of but separate from the community. Furthermore, Lefin wrote: "The kahal's register must be brought to the "Prince's court, may His Honor be blessed, once a year and read in its entirety there. Any upright and just words suggested by the court, may His Honor be blessed, should be attached to it, affixed permanently to it as a law for posterity and sealed with the [Prince's] court's ring as validation."¹⁰⁵

The dependent nature of Jewish communal authority is even more starkly evident in Lefin's treatise to Czartoryski on the reform of the rabbinate. Entwurf was Lefin's direct appeal to Czartoryski for help in reforming the corrupt rabbinate on his estates. Lefin bestowed the essay upon

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁰⁴ Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, see sections 33, 34, 37, 40, 44, 54, 55 and 63, pp. 293-5, 297-300.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., section 34, p. 292. Emphasis is in the original.

Czartoryski on April 4, 1794 as a parting gift to the prince when Czartoryski left Sieniawa to fight in the Kosciuszko Insurrection.

The degenerate condition of the rabbinate, in Lefin's view, was due to the election process, the uncertainty of rabbinic income, the sad state of the judiciary, and the widespread custom of rabbinic gifts. Lefin believed that Czartoryski's appointment of "virtuous" chief rabbis, who would in turn select righteous subordinate rabbis, was the first necessary step to the reform of the rabbinate. Next, reiterating his proposal in Selections of Rules, Lefin suggested that a formal rabbinic fees book be prepared to prevent arbitrary fluctuations in rabbinic salaries. All of the subordinate rabbis should be required to keep a careful book of receipts. Any transgression should be immediately punished by the chief rabbi. "If he [the subordinate rabbi] has taken [either] a bribe or, even only a receipt unmentioned in his regulations, this rabbi is to pay [a fourfold fine to the fund for the sick] immediately."¹⁰⁶ This procedure for meting out fines, as well as that for hearing appeals, should be a permanent part of the konsens (rabbinic license). The authority of the district rabbis, who should be men of impeachable integrity, should be strengthened by awarding them a ten-year license, and their "rent" to the Prince should be reduced for their travel expenses. The "rent" of the subordinate rabbis could be reduced "as a pure gift of princely kindness" if they proved their honesty by passing an examination.¹⁰⁷

The suggestions in Entwurf presuppose a commonality of interests between Lefin and his Polish patron, but they also exhibit the same aware-

¹⁰⁶ Entwurf, Mss. 2533, p. 30.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

ness of audience that characterized Lefin's suggestions in the Essai. In Entwurf, Lefin assumed that Czartoryski would support his proposals for the rationalization of rabbinic selection, the standardization of rabbinic salaries and fees, and the selection of district rabbis. Why? Lefin knew that as men of the Enlightenment, both he and Czartoryski shared a commitment towards rationalizing state and estate institutions. Second, Lefin believed that Czartoryski could not but accept suggestions which would make life on his estates more orderly, and a standardization of rabbinic fees would ensure that the magnate receive as high a fee for the rabbinic konsens as he could. Cleaning up the rabbinic house and resolving a source of internal Jewish communal discord could only be in Czartoryski's interest, and Lefin cleverly addressed those concerns in the first part of Entwurf.

Yet Lefin's preoccupation with Hasidism and his profound distrust of the movement remained central to all of his writings, including these specific proposals for reform. Assuming that enlightened members of the Polish magnate class such as Czartoryski shared his negative view of mysticism, Lefin used Entwurf to advance his anti-Hasidic agenda, but only in a "note" at the end of the pamphlet. Lefin not only made specific suggestions to Czartoryski about individuals suitable for the position of district rabbi but urged the prince to empower his administrator, Feliks Bernatowicz, to support the new rabbis against the Hasidim:

From heretofore necessary acquaintance with an honest district rabbi, I have a small stock [of possible district rabbis], such as Rabbi Beerisch Rappeport, the former Miedziboz Rabbi; and also, as it is said, the current Klewan and Mendzirez Rabbi. The first is to be particularly recommended on account of his mature age, overall valued moral conduct, and venerable origin. In addition, his considerable assets of several 1000 # [a kind of currency] can guarantee his incorruptibility in the future.

Meanwhile, moreover, a masterpiece of skill of Sir Herr von Bernatowitz will be required to patronize Rabbi Rapoport against the settled Miedziboz nest of zealots, and particularly [against] that place's cunning General of the group.¹⁰⁸

This "note" from Entwurf reveals that Lefin's choice of district rabbi had to be an individual with good anti-mystical credentials. Rabbi [Dov] Beerish Rappoport (1737-1803) was married to Jacob Emden's granddaughter, Miriam, and his paternal grandfather was Hayim ha-Cohen Rappoport, the head of the rabbinical court in Lwów who had been involved with the Frankist disputation. Dov Beerish Rappoport became head of the rabbinical court in Miedzybóz in 1771 and Lefin undoubtedly knew him from the time he spent living in the Czartoryski castle in Miedzybóz. The two jointly participated in a meeting held in Berditchev in 1809 after the Russian order expelling the Jews from Russian villages.¹⁰⁹ Lefin hoped that a rabbi of the character of Dov Beerish Rappoport supported by the Prince's administrator would be a match against the "cunning General" of the Miedzybóz Hasidim, who could be none other than Barukh of Miedzybóz, the grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov and a central figure in Podolian and Volhynian Hasidism between 1780-1811. Barukh was known for his awe inspiring and arrogant bearing by Hasidim and anti-Hasidim alike.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 32. I have retained Lefin's spellings of the Polish towns and of Dov Beerish Rappoport's and Felix Bernatowicz's names.

¹⁰⁹ Meir Wunder, Enziklopediyah le-Hokhmei Galizyah, (Jerusalem, 1986-1990), pp. 984-989; M. M. Biber's Mazkeret le-Gedolei Ostrahah, (Berditchev, 1907), pp. 295-296; Israel Heilprin, "R. Levi Isaac of Berditchev and the Decrees of the Government in His Time," (Hebrew), in Heilprin, ed., Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Eiropa ha-Mizrahit, (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 344.

¹¹⁰ Arthur Green, Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, (University, AL, 1979), pp. 95-98 and Simon Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, 2, (Tel Aviv, 1930), pp. 208-213, particularly p. 312 where Dubnow calls Barukh the "general of the army of Hasidim in Podolia" with regard to the latter's conflict with Shneur Zalman of Lyady over the collection of money for Jews expelled from Russian villages in 1808.

The "note" also demonstrates, albeit obliquely, Lefin's belief that Hasidism, particularly the leadership of the zaddik, whose position of authority rested on the support of his followers and not upon his being awarded the konsens by the Polish lord, posed a threat to Czartoryski's control of the Jews on his lands. Lefin hoped that by appealing to Czartoryski's interest in maintaining the magnates' control of the traditional rabbinate he had found a strong ally in his maskilic battle with the Hasidim. As he had articulated in "Teshuvah," Lefin believed that the Hasidim welcomed the efforts of those Polish reformers who wanted to weaken the traditional rabbinate: "Thus they [the Polish reformers] really wanted to annul the power of excommunication...(and the sectarians already rejoiced about this and agreed with this opinion with their whole heart)."¹¹¹ Lefin's comments in the Essai and Entwurf showed how defensive and defenseless the traditional rabbinate had become by the 1790s against the charismatic power of the Hasidim. In the Essai, he stated that the Hasidim had "shattered" and "humiliated" the traditional rabbis who, "formerly intolerant, have become gentle as lambs and only hope for a refuge from their adversaries' [the Hasidim's] persecution."¹¹²

Thus, while M. J. Rosman has argued that the magnates' systematic intervention into the kahal may have been one of the forces which led to the disintegration of the Polish-Jewish community in the eighteenth century and have "indirectly encouraged the development of Hasidism, which was based on a charismatic leadership operating independently of the autonomy struc-

¹¹¹ Lefin, Joseph Perl Archive, folder 72, p. 3a. See footnote 69 above.

¹¹² [Lefin], Essai, sections 31 and 39, p. 413.

tures,"¹¹³ Lefin's comments in Entwurf suggest that certain members of the Jewish community hoped the magnates' intervention into the kahal at the end of the eighteenth century would protect it from the onslaught of Hasidism.

While Lefin believed that he and Czartoryski shared certain Enlightenment beliefs, the maskil no doubt understood that their motives for reforming the rabbinate derived from different sources. Hoping to persuade Czartoryski of the rightness of his cause, Lefin did not expand on these differences and closed the pamphlet with a flowery coda which invoked their shared interests:

Your Highness, keep this document as a memento of Your worthy convictions (for never yet has a great man in Poland affirmed the right of mankind so truthfully and with deeds, as well as [has affirmed the rights] of the Jewish nation): May the God of the oppressed increase Your noble pleasures -- soon in this war, Your Highness -- with a renewed brilliance of fortune and honor, as well as with the implementation of this plan in its place.¹¹⁴

Lefin's determined commitment to reforming the Jewish community in Poland was not dependent upon the national debate on the Jewish question. His appeal to Czartoryski for help in reforming the rabbinate showed no sign of despair at the disappointing declarations of the Constitution of 3 May, which, hindered by the magnates' unwillingness to challenge Poland's feudal structure, offered no new solutions for the problems facing the Jews. The Constitution's declaration of principles established a hereditary monarchy, made the ministers of state accountable to the Sejm, abolished the liberum veto and proclaimed all armed associations (the Confederacies)

¹¹³ Rosman, pp. 205-206.

¹¹⁴ Entwurf, Mss. 2533, p. 36.

illegal. It made no real steps towards the emancipation of the serfs.¹¹⁵ Despite its limitations, the Constitution was greeted with euphoria, even by the Jews, but had little chance to be implemented. Catherine II supported the Targowica Confederates who opposed the Constitution and attacked Poland in late May 1791, quickly forcing the ill-equipped Polish army to surrender. Adam Kazimierz and Adam Jerzy Czartoryski manifested unequivocal support for Poland's "gentle revolution" of 1791, a phrase coined by Kollataj to distinguish support for moderate change using Poland's existing institutions from the violence of the French Revolution.¹¹⁶ Although Poniatowski acceded to the Confederates, Adam Kazimierz refused to join the conservatives and Adam Jerzy, who had played an important role in the military campaigns, left Poland for England.¹¹⁷ The territorial concessions of the Second Partition were ratified with Russia on July 22, 1793 and with Prussia on September 26, 1793.

Soon thereafter followed the eruption of the Kosciuszko Insurrection, led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a graduate of the Knights' School and friend of Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski. Lefin penned Entwurf at the beginning of the rebellion, hoping it would be successful, restore order to Poland, and allow Czartoryski to effect his reform plan. The Insurrection reached almost all of the sections of Poland that were left after the Second Partition, but the rebels were no match for the partitioning powers. The Polish troops capitulated on November 9, 1794 and the final agreements marking the end of independent Poland were completed from January to March 1797 with Rus-

¹¹⁵ Stone, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ Lukowski, p. 233 and Klimowicz, p. 105.

¹¹⁷ Stone, p. 30.

sia and Austria gaining the most new territory.¹¹⁸ The political dismemberment of Poland, however, did not spell the end of the feudal estate structure of the Commonwealth. Although the Russian Tsar and not the Polish king now embodied the highest political authority in the lives of the Jews of the former eastern lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the absolutist Russian Empire had as little interest as the Poles had had in radically transforming the socio-economic structure of society. For the Jews of Poland living in private, noble towns, Poland's magnates still represented gentile political authority under whose protection they lived. Lefin's views of how to effect reform within the Jewish community did not shift dramatically within the new political reality. He continued to advocate moderate civic reform of his people through his relationship with the Czartoryskis and their involvement with the new Russian legislation on the Jewish question.

Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, Lefin and the Russian Legislation of 1804

Historians interested in Mendel Lefin have generally viewed the Constitution of 3 May's disappointing treatment of the Jewish question as the end of the maskil's involvement with the civic reform of the Jews.¹¹⁹ Yet, Lefin's long-term relationship with the Czartoryskis allowed him indirect influence on the Russian Legislation of 1804. Lefin attempted, through Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, to infuse the legislation with the spirit of modera-

¹¹⁸ Lukowski, pp. 256-263.

¹¹⁹ N.M. Gelber, Aus Zwei Jahrhunderten, (Wien und Leipzig, 1924), pp. 56-57.

tion which characterized his earlier reform writings (the Essai, Selections of Rules, "Teshuvah", and Entwurf).

Catherine II had seized most of the Czartoryski's estates in the third partition and threatened to sell them if Prince Adam Kazimierz would not take an oath of loyalty to her. The treaty of January 26, 1797 marking the end of Poland's existence required the former Polish nobility to choose one of the partitioning rulers as their sovereign. Because of his extensive holdings in Galicia, Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski became an Austrian Feldmarschall, but he did not want to lose his eastern lands. Kazimierz sent his sons to St. Petersburg in 1795 with the hope of appeasing Catherine's demands. This mission was successful: the trip ensured that the Czartoryski estates would not be expropriated, as were the lands of other Polish nobles in August 1795, and the Czartoryski sons became Gentlemen of the Russian Court.

The ascension of Tsar Alexander I to the Russian throne in 1801 marked the possibility of introducing enlightened reforms into the Empire. Alexander I formed his "Unofficial Committee," comprised of Nicholas Nivosiltsev, Count Paul Stroganov, Count Victor Kochubey, the minister of internal affairs, and Prince Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, in June of that year to advise him on administrative, peasant, legal, educational, and Jewish reform. The young advisers shared a conservative commitment to reform that looked to rationalization, not democratization, as the cure for Russia's ills, and they never seriously addressed restructuring or abolishing serfdom.¹²⁰ Becoming a close friend of Alexander I, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski

¹²⁰ Nicholas Riasanovsky, A Parting of the Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855, (London, 1976), pp. 67-71.

attempted to work within the context of Russian control of Poland to maintain some of pre-partition Poland's liberty throughout the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Between 1802-1806, he was appointed foreign minister; in October 1802, he became curator of the University of Wilno/Vilna; between 1813-1815, he played a prominent role in Russian-Polish affairs in the "Congress" Kingdom of Poland. Czartoryski's presence on the committee was a link between the Polish Enlightenment and the debates of the Great Sejm and the reforming impulse of Alexander I's reign. Concern for improving the legal status of Russia's new Jewish population, all of whom lived on former Polish territory, was a hallmark of Adam Jerzy's efforts in Russia.¹²¹

On November 9, 1802, Alexander I convened a special committee for the "Amelioration of the Jews" with Gabriel Derzhavin (the minister of justice who had suggested in 1800 that the Jews be expelled from villages in western Russia and resettled in southern Ukraine), Kochubey, Count V. A. Zubov, Mikhail Speransky, and two Polish nobles, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski and Seweryn Potocki. The committee consulted with several Poles, including Tadeusz Czacki who was known for his liberal attitude toward the Jews, and with the Jews themselves. Abraham Peretz, Nota Notkin and Judah Leib Nevakhovich of Shklov (the author of the The Lament of the Daughter of Judah), enlightened Jewish businessmen living in St. Petersburg, appealed to the committee for enlightened and liberal reforms for the Jews of the Russian Empire.¹²² Representatives from several kehillot also travelled to St. Petersburg, suspicious of the intentions of the committee.

¹²¹ Zawadzki, pp. 2-3, 46, 59.

¹²² Sometime in the second decade of the nineteenth century -- the exact date is unclear -- Abraham Peretz and Judah Leib Nevakhovich converted to Lutheranism, a move prompted, in part, by their disappointment with the edicts of 1804. See

Mendel Lefin, too, was in St. Petersburg at the time of the deliberations of the Committee for the Amelioration of the Jews. He was there both as a friend of the Czartoryskis and as a tutor to Zevi Hirsch Peretz, the grandson of Joshua Zeitlin, on whose estate in Shklov he wrote Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh (published later in 1814). Lefin had been recommended to Zevi Hirsch's father, Abraham Peretz, by David Friedländer.¹²³ Lefin contributed to the Committee as a behind-the-scene adviser to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski. His deep-seated commitment to reforming and transforming his people through moderate reforms generated from within the Jewish community surely affected his patron's son. As Adam Jerzy wrote to his father, Adam Kazimierz, in August 1803:

Soon a translation of this ukase [about the creation of an advanced seminary for the catholic priesthood attached to the University of Vilna] will come to you, my dear father. Soon, too, I expect that the new arrangements regarding the Jews will be successful. Mendel is already here. As much as possible we are trying to let moderation, justice and the good of the Jews themselves influence these arrangements.¹²⁴

Adam Jerzy was in regular correspondence with his father about the subject of the Jews and received materials from the Great Sejm's debates on the Jewish question from him. To his mother in March, 1804, Adam Jerzy wrote:

I have also spoken [to my father] about the Committee of the Jews, a subject about which I have received the papers which you have sent,

Fishman, pp. 124-128.

¹²³ Yehuda Leib Gordon, Voskhod, "K Istorii Poselenia Evreev V Peterburge," 1881, volume 1, number 2, pp. 29-47. I would like to thank Olga Litwak for reading this Russian article for me.

¹²⁴ Adam Jerzy Czartoryski to Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, August 10, 1803. Czart. MS EW 3267. Emphasis is mine.

my dear mother, on my father's behalf. I will profit from them and as a member of the Committee I will endeavor to do as much as possible for this class of men and make them as useful as they can be for society.¹²⁵

A long project entitled "Thoughts on improving the civic position of the Jews" found in the Czartoryski family archive may have been written by Adam Jerzy Czartoryski. The content of the pamphlet echoes many of Lefin's reforms. For example, the project suggests that the Jews themselves be consulted on the reform of their community and that unemployed Jews be placed in workhouses. The pamphlet in the Czartoryski archive also urged that Jews attend schools with either Russian or German as the language of instruction, but that the state should not tamper with any aspect of their religious instruction.¹²⁶ In Selections of Rules, Lefin had emphasized that any reform of the Jewish community should come from its internal edicts (takanot) and in the Essai he made the specific suggestion that the district rabbis should be empowered "to forbid the support of (through a misunderstood commiseration with) the idle poor who are capable of working; and even to use their power of excommunication to oblige them to yield to the workhouses which have been established."¹²⁷

Moderation, or acculturation through positive incentives, was a central feature of the committee's deliberations. A journal entry from September 20, 1803 read:

¹²⁵ Adam Jerzy Czartoryski to Izabela Czartoryska, March 2, 1804. Czart. MS EW 3267.

¹²⁶ Zawadzki, p. 59.

¹²⁷ Lefin, Likkutei Kelalim, section 34, p. 292; [Lefin], Essai, section 106, p. 417.

Transformations brought about by governmental force will generally not be stable and will be especially unreliable in those cases where this force struggles against centuries-old habits, with ingrained errors, and with unyielding superstition; it would be better and more opportune to direct the Jews toward improvement, to open the path to their own benefit, overseeing their progress from afar and removing anything that might lead them astray, not employing any force, not setting up any particular institution, not acting in their place, but enabling their own activity. As few restrictions as possible, as much freedom as possible. This is a simple formula for any organization of society!

In the calculation of the variables determining human action, the basic foundation ought always to rest on private gain, the internal principle which never stops anywhere, and which evades all laws that are inconvenient....Everywhere that governments thought merely to command, there appeared only the phantom of success, which was maintained for awhile in the air, and then disappeared together with the principles that gave birth to it. In contrast to every undertaking carried out insensitively are those generated by private gain, freely maintained, and only patronized by the government, which were shown to be maintained by an internal force, a firm basis established by time and by personal benefit.

In every respect the Jews should be encouraged toward education, preferably by means of quiet encouragement, organized by their own activity, and only those things should be suppressed which depend directly on the government and which they themselves are unable to suppress.¹²⁸

Although Lefin's influence on the committee cannot be directly traced, the journal's emphasis on moderation resounds with the tone of the Essai, Selections of Rules, and Entwurf. In fact, Shmuel Ettinger has argued that the entry cited above was nothing more than a translation from Montesquieu's The Spirit of the Laws, Book 19, chapter 14.¹²⁹ Lefin had cited the very same chapter and verse in his Essai. It is certainly highly possible that Lefin's use of Montesquieu (through Adam Jerzy Czartoryski's

¹²⁸ Cited in John Doyle Klier, Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772-1825, (Dekalb, IL, 1986), pp. 129-130.

¹²⁹ Shmuel Ettinger, "The Edicts of 1804," (Hebrew), He-Avar, 22, 1977, p. 101, footnote 51.

intercession) influenced the Committee to cite the French philosophe and stress moderate reform of the Jews through positive incentives.

Although the Russian state was ultimately ambivalent about how much it really wanted to integrate the Jews into the Empire, the Imperial Statute Concerning the Jews, which was promulgated on December 9, 1804, was liberal and enlightened compared to the legislation of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855). The decrees maintained the existence of the kahal and its responsibilities for raising taxes; limited the terms of kahal elders and required that they learn either Russian, German or Polish; admitted Jews to municipal councils and general courts of justice; allowed the Jewish community to maintain its own network of elementary schools provided they incorporate the use of general languages; and did not mandate the compulsory resettling of the Jews.¹³⁰ The most punitive aspect of the decrees was article #34, which prohibited the Jews from holding the leases on taverns, drinking houses and inns, and forbade them from selling liquor. The Polish landlords who tried to circumvent the law were to be subject to fines, but, in fact, it was in the interest of both the Jews and their Polish lords to retain these traditional Jewish occupations.¹³¹ There was no structural change in the Jewish community living in Russian lands until 1825.

For Lefin, the 1804 legislation had two effects. First, the decrees momentarily served to unite conflicting groups within the Jewish community because their practical effect was the beginning of the expulsion of Jews from Russian villages, which was formalized in February 15, 1807. Some-

¹³⁰ Salo W. Baron, The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets, (New York, 1987), p. 20 and Ettinger, p. 100.

¹³¹ Klier, pp. 141-147.

time in 1809, a diverse group of Jews, including Barukh of Miedzybóz, Levi Isaac of Berdichev and other Ukrainian Hasidim, Dov Beerish Rappoport, Joshua Josefowicz, Mendel Lefin and Tobias Feder (a maskil who would later attack Lefin's Yiddish writings), all met in Berdichev to discuss ways to contravene the expulsion edict.¹³² Second, the edicts of 1804 ended the involvement of non-Jewish authorities in the public dispute between Hasidim and mitnaggedim in Eastern Europe by allowing the establishment of separate, Hasidic prayer groups. Lefin's involvement with the Four-Year Polish Sejm and later with the 1804 legislation reflected his commitment to transforming the Jewish community from within on the basis of his "enlightened" maskilic program. The dismemberment of Poland and the 1804 legislation in particular sanctioned in law what had occurred in practice: the triumph of Hasidism in most of Eastern Europe. Yet, in spite of the official disinterest of the Russian government in the internal cultural wars of its new subjects, Lefin continued his literary campaign against the Hasidim. In his perspective, the work of changing the spiritual course of Polish Jewry had yet to be accomplished. He endeavored to effect that change by adapting and translating West European and American Enlightenment works -- and infusing them with his anti-Hasidic agenda -- for East European Jewish youths.

¹³² Heilprin, pp. 343-344. On Feder, see Chapter Five.

Chapter Three

Mendel Lefin's Battle Against Hasidism: The Struggle for the Adolescent Soul

Hasidism did not strive to reform the principles of religion or its customs, but [strove for] a deeper reform, for reform of the soul. Through the means of powerful psychological influence, Hasidism created a type of believer for whom emotion was more important than external custom, communion with God [devekut] and religious ardor [hitlahavut] more important than inquiry into and study of Torah.¹

Simon Dubnow's insight into the attraction of Hasidism, penned in 1930 in the context of a generic European-wide interest in psychology, may or may not represent an accurate description of the reasons behind the success of the movement. But Dubnow's words could have been written over one hundred years earlier by Mendel Lefin, whose lifelong battle with Hasidism was, in great part, an effort to protect the souls of contemporary Eastern European youths from falling victim to the spiritual and psychological snares of the new movement. Lefin's critique of Hasidism was based on an insistence upon the autonomy of the human soul, its independence from the metaphysical forces of the divine realm, the "upper world" of kabbalistic and Hasidic thought. Moral behavior, in Lefin's view, could be controlled by the individual through proper education and training because the human soul had an independent essence. His belief in the inherent autonomy of the

¹ Dubnow, Toldot ha-Hasidut, I, (Tel Aviv, 1930), p. 35. Emphasis in the original.

soul led to a pronounced insistence on individual autonomy in his writings, although always within the scope of a traditional commitment to divinely-commanded religious obligations. Central to Lefin's battle with Hasidism was his belief that the deification of charismatic individuals in the institutionalization of the zaddik (Hasidic leader) resulted in a complete surrender of individual autonomy. He also directed his critique at Hasidic exegesis, particularly its emphasis on esotericism (sod) as a mode of textual interpretation. For Lefin, the Hasidic insistence upon sod as the "real" meaning of texts restricted the access of the average individual Jew to the meaning of Scripture and Oral Torah. Finally, Lefin aimed his barbs at Hasidic prayer; its lengthy preambles struck him as unnecessary deviations from traditional rabbinic prayer formulae, its emphasis upon ecstasy an emotional trap for highly impassioned adolescents.

Lefin's writings exhibit great interest in the developmental stages of life and particular concern with the vulnerability of the adolescent.² In an unpublished German manuscript on love, Lefin was explicit about the generic dangers of puberty:

The beauty of young people is a dangerous cliff against which their innocence is very often wrecked. The beauty of the weaker sex excites men; the stronger spirits among them take advantage [of the weaker sex] and modesty is vanquished. Handsome young men, on

² See, for example, the manuscript fragment of Lefin's Nachlaß eines Sonderlings zu Abdera (The Literary Estate of a Crank from Abdera), in which the maskil discussed "the tender childhood of man [as] an almost completely animal condition....During the development of the powers of reason and free will, all of his animalistic fallacies ["paralogisms" in Kant's terminology] remain subject to his parents' judgment; his impulses submit to their superiority for correction. This superiority actually dwindles very quickly, but is maintained by the habit of obedience for a fairly long time until the one who has grown-up finally completely escapes from the tutelage of his parents, and trusts the tutelage of his very own mind in the abovementioned way." Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128e, paragraph #7.

the other hand, influence the woman and blackmail the perception of the most sensitive among them. The handsome one senses his advantage and is thrilled. Generally, therefore, innocence should not always be looked for among handsome, excitable heroes.³

Sheindel Perl, Joseph Perl's daughter, an "enlightened" young woman in her own right who looked to Lefin as a mentor when he lived in Tarnopol, echoed his sentiments in a letter to her dear friend, Moses Inländer, a maskil in Brody, "[Your daughter Henna] is indeed a sweet girl, and she now is at the age where she is changing from a girl into a young woman, and this is the most dangerous age for our female children!....There are two things that protect her from the foolishness of the age of adolescence. The first is her extraordinary intelligence and the second is my love for her!"⁴ Adolescents, Lefin believed, were especially susceptible to the lures of mysticism and thus defenseless against the attractions of Hasidism. As he wrote in the Essai:

[The repeated printing of the Zohar] vitalized the new sect [Hasidism] which makes enthusiasm and faith the fundamental principle of religion and which has become almost universal in Poland because it always recruits young people, who, in view of their credulity and their passionate age easily fall into their traps....[Youth], which has not learned either to economize or to earn, is usually inclined toward prodigality, which suits their [the Hasidim's] views.⁵

³ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134b, p. 1a. See, too, folder 123, p. 1b.

⁴ Letter of Sheindel Pineles to Moses Inländer, February 19, 1824, N. M. Gelber Archive, Central Archives of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, RP83/66. Emphasis is mine. I wish to express my thanks to Tamar Shechter, who is writing a master's essay at Bar-Ilan University on Sheindel Pineles, for use of these letters.

⁵ [Mendel Lefin], Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses moeurs, (Warsaw, 1791), paragraphs 19-22 and note 4, pp. 411 and 419. Emphasis is mine, although Lefin underlined the words "enthusiasm and faith" in the original.

Lefin's awareness that Hasidism had an exceptional appeal for young people was shared by his maskilic contemporaries, including Hayim Malaga in his Yiddish satire, Gedules reb volf me-tscharne ostrahah (R. Wolf of Czarny Ostróg's Glories), as well as by later generations of maskilim in Galicia.⁶

Lefin's preoccupation with the perils of adolescence had both a demographic and philosophical basis. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth experienced a significant growth in its Jewish population in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; between 1648 and 1765, the Jewish population increased threefold to more than half a million.⁷ Coupled with this population explosion was a decrease in viable economic opportunities for Jewish youths. Jewish communal authorities were well aware of the swelling of the ranks of unemployed Jewish teens and called for the establishment of more institutions for higher learning (yeshivot) as a means of coping with their great numbers. Already in 1662, the supra-communal administrative body of Lithuania in an appeal for the creation of new schools commented that "boys and youths turn to idleness."⁸

Lefin was likewise influenced by the eighteenth-century fixation with the education of youth.⁹ In Émile, the classic of eighteenth-century peda-

⁶ Shmuel Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of Haskalah Literature: From the Polemic of Galician Maskilim," (Hebrew), in Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 103.

⁷ David Biale, "Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment," in The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality, Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman, eds., (New York, 1986), p. 46.

⁸ Cited in Gerson Hundert, "Approaches to the History of the Jewish Family in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania," in *ibid.*, p. 19.

⁹ On the French Enlightenment's preoccupation with education, see Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, II, (New York, 1969), pp. 497-552. See, too, Ernst A. Simon, "Pedagogic Philanthropism and Jewish Education," (Hebrew), Sefer Yovel Likhvod M. M. Kaplan, Moshe Davis, ed., (New York, 1953), pp. 149-186.

gogy, Rousseau posited that formal education should begin only in puberty, when the child's emotional, moral, and aesthetic faculties were mature and the "natural" essence of the child could not be corrupted.¹⁰ Other maskiim like Naftali Herz Wessely and the Me'asfim were also inspired by Émile and other Enlightenment educational writings. The personal journal of Lefin's disciple, Jacob Samuel Bik, contained a Hebrew translation of the first eight paragraphs of Plutarch's "The Education of Children."¹¹

The most important text in Lefin's war against Hasidism was his Moral Stocktaking (Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh), a detailed, behaviorist guide to moral education and self-improvement modelled after the thirteen principles of conduct outlined by Benjamin Franklin in his Autobiography.¹² As in his other writings, including the Yiddish translation of Proverbs and Masa'ot ha-Yam (Journeys By Sea), a Hebrew translation of a German travelogue,

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile, trans. Barbara Foxley, (London, 1993), pp. xxix-xxx, 207. See Gay, II, pp. 531-544. Even Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who disagreed with the timing of Rousseau's educational program, felt that adolescence was a unique stage in human development. See Mordecai Grossman, The Philosophy of Helvétius, (New York, 1926), pp. 137-138.

¹¹ For Bik's journal, see Merzbacher manuscript, found in the municipal library of Frankfurt-on-the-Main, 64, Ms. hebr. fol. 11; microfilm held in the Department of Photographed Manuscripts and Archives, JNULA, pp. 47a-48a. See, too, Werses, "Between Two Worlds: Jacob Samuel Bik between Haskalah and Hasidism -- A Re-examination," (Hebrew), in Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, p. 128.

¹² These principles were outlined by Franklin in the second part of his memoirs. See Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text, J. A. Leo Lemany and P. M. Zall, eds., (Knoxville, TN, 1981), pp. xix and xlvii, footnote #69. A complete French translation of Franklin's work was made in 1791 by Louis Guillaume Le Veillard, Franklin's close friend, but the second section was only published in 1798. See Arthur A. Chiel, "Benjamin Franklin and Menachem Mendel Lefin," Conservative Judaism (Summer 1979), pp. 50-55, although Chiel believes that Lefin had access to all of Franklin's memoirs in 1791.

Lefin's anti-Hasidism was never explicit.¹³ Published first in 1808, and then reissued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Moral Stocktaking locates the ethical arena within the human soul.¹⁴ Lefin directed his guide toward adolescent Jewish boys, who, he felt, were at a psychologically perilous age when it was unclear whether or not they could withstand the seductive power of Hasidism. Rousseau's developmental model of education made a noticeable impact on the maskil's work; in Moral Stocktaking, Lefin took for granted Rousseau's description of the heightened passions of adolescence:

As the roaring of the waves precedes the tempest, so the murmur of rising passions announces this tumultuous change; a suppressed excitement warns us of the approaching danger. A change of temper, frequent outbursts of anger, a perpetual stirring of the mind, make the child almost ungovernable. He becomes deaf to the voice he used to obey; he is a lion in a fever, he distrusts his keeper and refuses to be controlled.¹⁵

Because adolescents, Lefin believed, were likely to delay improving their behavior, it was the duty of their rabbi to spur them toward the process of self-reflection and self-control. The mature adult should begin to observe his young charges at the age of thirteen, taking notes on their individual

¹³ See Hillel Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah: On a Disguised anti-Hasidic Polemic," (Hebrew), in Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit bimeit ha-Beinayim uve-Et ha-Hadashah, I. Etkes and J. Salmon, eds., (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 182-191 and Chone Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles of Mendel Lefin's Translation of Proverbs," (Hebrew), in Chone Schmeruk, Sifrut Yidish be-Folin: Mehkarim ve-lyunim Historiyim, (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 165-183. An analysis of Journeys By Sea will follow below.

¹⁴ Mendel Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, Lemberg, 1808; Vilna, 1845; Warsaw, 1852 and 1894; Bardiov, 1925; Kaidan, 1937; New York, 1950 and 1972; Jerusalem, 1973, 1976, 1988.

¹⁵ Rousseau, p. 206. For Lefin's interest in Rousseau, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, papers of Mendel Lefin (1749-1826), and the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128d.

moral blemishes for five years and then instructing them in musar tikun ha-midot (the ethics of character improvement).¹⁶ At the end of the five-year period, the eighteen-year old would be ready for self-examination and a program of behavior modification. In Moral Stocktaking, Lefin hoped to present a method of moral reform based completely in the efforts of the individual Jew which would prove more attractive to East European adolescents than Hasidic methods and techniques for expiating sin.

The Method of Moral Stocktaking

Moral Stocktaking presents a program of individual self-improvement based on a developmental understanding of the human being. Indebted to the medieval Jewish tradition which divided the human soul into animal (nefesh ha-behamit) and rational (nefesh ha-sikhli) constituent parts, Lefin presented a carefully structured plan for teaching an individual to control his animal soul, to strengthen his moral virtues, and to lead a rational life devoted to God. Lefin compared the animal soul to a reed or a bullrush standing in the wind without internal means of support, subject to the direction of the wind. On its own, the animal soul had no connection to divine commandment, either positive or negative; it was driven by instinct, experience and habit.¹⁷ In an unpublished German manuscript fragment, Lefin compared the animal will (der animalische Willen) to the rational will (der rationale Willen): "The animal will is always instantaneously propelled by a

¹⁶ Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, (Lemberg, 1808), paragraphs 39, 40 and 46.

¹⁷ Ibid., paragraphs 7, 8 and 90.

sensation, but the rational will stops the action until considering the motives or deliberating."¹⁸ Essentially inert, the animal soul could be disciplined and controlled by the rational soul if an individual followed the method outlined in Moral Stocktaking.¹⁹

Lefin believed that the human soul was comprised of three faculties: sensual, imaginative (also called "pictorial") and rational. The imaginative faculty was strongest among children, who could respond physiologically to external stimuli, but were not capable of organizing those stimuli into clear thoughts when they were very young.²⁰ In a German fragment from Lefin's Nachlaß, the maskil also used the word sensuousness to describe the capacity of a child's nervous system to perceive external stimuli, but hastened to explain that this meant only ("fundamentally and not more") "the ability to understand several connected component sensations...and that which produces several connected component movements of the muscles."²¹ The sensual and imaginative faculties could only respond to impressions and record them; they were not capable of judgment. The rational soul, on the other hand, could arrange impressions according to a set order.²² Summing up the distinctions between the three faculties, Lefin wrote:

¹⁸ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 133.

¹⁹ Lefin, paragraphs 2, 3, and 96.

²⁰ The Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, papers of Mendel Lefin (1749-1826), JNULA.

²¹ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128b, paragraph 2. See, too, Israel Weinklös, "Menachem Mendel from Satanów," (Hebrew), in Ha-Olam, 13, no. #40, 1925, p. 800 for an outline of the chapters of Nachlaß; the fourth chapter of the first section was entitled "Sinnlicht, Animalität und Verstand (Sensuous[ness], Animalness and Reason)."

²² Lefin, paragraph 79.

The conceptions which unceasingly preoccupy the consciousness of our soul are either 1) Sensual. This means they originate directly from the physical world. For example, I just get a glimpse of the aeolic harp to hear its voice or to feel the sting of an electric spark: all through the means of a vibration of the nerves. 2) Pictorial, drawn from the inner memory reservoir of former impressions; I remember having seen, heard or felt this or that. Or, finally, 3) Rational, meaning, [conceptions] which are neither impressions from objects of the physical world, nor mere copies from [the impressions of the objects of physical world], but which represent copies conceptualized by the mind. The mind itself selects several pictorial conceptions for material (e.g. abstraction, combination, conclusion or simple hypothesis) in order to fashion a kind of conception (or instrument for its own use) completely dissimilar to them.²³

The rational faculty corresponded to the rational soul, capable of reigning in the passions of the animal soul and changing its course.²⁴ It "can distinguish and examine how thoughts are connected; its strength of will means that it is not subservient to the external images; it can connect ideas to feelings, or separate those that are conjoined from its own knowledge for another purpose....It can instruct the animal soul through study and habit."²⁵ Lefin compared the training of human behavior to animal husbandry, citing the example of teaching a sharp-eyed bird to hunt, and commenting that a conscientious owner treated his animals well. So, too, should the initiate in Lefin's method treat his animal soul well.²⁶ The rational soul capable of controlling the impetuous, lustful instincts of the animal soul blossomed only in adolescence.²⁷ With age came not only the

²³ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 71a, p. 1a.

²⁴ Lefin, paragraph 15.

²⁵ Ibid., footnote to paragraph 97.

²⁶ Ibid., paragraphs 3 and 4.

²⁷ Ibid., paragraphs 9, 10 and 82.

ability to train one's animal soul, but an "ennobling" of one's tastes and interests:

Common sensuousness...finds its pleasures in sweets and fats, dark blue, blood red, common and crude music, etc. Obstinacy, revenge and lust for power, etc. are the darlings of the animal morality, which are either too base or too dull and repugnant to the nobler taste. The acidity of lemons, the bitterness of almonds, some pale colors, natural and thoughtful melodies, kindness, forgiveness, beneficence, true honor and the accomplishment of its duty, etc. are its [the nobler taste's] delicacies. Childhood and puberty, as the animal and rational ages of the human species, provide the most remarkable example of this through the transformation of taste and the slow process of the ennobling of motives for action.²⁸

Formally, Lefin's Moral Stocktaking fits into the genre of musar (ethical) literature, a text devoted to instructing an individual how to live a truly pious life, beyond the boundaries set in legal (halakhic) writings.²⁹ The work merited twelve rabbinic approbations upon its initial appearance, and is peppered with numerous biblical and rabbinic prooftexts serving to convey an overall impression of fidelity to the tradition. The author clearly hoped that its form would appeal to traditionally-educated East European Jewish youth. Yet, Lefin explicitly broke with traditional musar, as he tells his readers, because it was inadequate to address the moral dilemmas of the day.³⁰ Traditional ethical writings, Lefin wrote, did not provide a concrete framework by means of which the individual could change his behavior. As he succinctly stated, "musar without advice is not sufficient at all."³¹ More-

²⁸ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128b, paragraph 5. Emphasis is mine.

²⁹ On the literary genre of musar, see Joseph Dan, Sifrut ha-Musar ve-ha-Derush, (Jerusalem, 1975) and Isaiah Tishby with Joseph Dan, Mivhar Sifrut ha-Musar, (Jerusalem, 1970).

³⁰ Lefin, paragraphs 12-14 and 19.

³¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 49.

over, traditional musar was insufficient because it depended upon an externalized stimulus of reward and punishment. Comparing the education of children through reward and punishment to the method of social control used by monarchs and other political leaders to maintain order, Lefin concluded that such methods were antiquated. He wrote:

Behold, the education of children in their father's and teacher's house, and political science, (meaning the education of an entire people through its rulers' and judges' behavior), about which the earlier generations of sages plumbed the depths, they have no usefulness for our discussion because they generally made use of bodily reward and punishment: the rabbi distributes roasted grain and nuts to the babes who heed his words, and chastises those [who refuse to listen] with a rod, and the hand of a lord is immediately extended to his serfs for rewards or punishments. But this has absolutely no relevance now.³²

Although never referring to his non-Jewish source by its name, Lefin acknowledged that the method he presented in Moral Stocktaking was not of his own creation. He wrote, "Several years ago a new method (tahbulah) was revealed, and it is [such] a wonderful invention for this [kind] of education that it seems that its renown will spread as quickly, if God desires it, as that of the invention of printing which brought light to the world."³³ Lefin was probably introduced to Benjamin Franklin's work late in the eighteenth

³² *Ibid.*, paragraph 18. Emphasis in the original. In his work on the origins of compulsory schooling in Prussia and Austria, James Van Horn Melton makes a similar point about the breakdown of the efficacy of external forms of social control in eighteenth-century Central Europe. He argues that the movement for compulsory school arose as a means of providing internalized methods of social control. See James Van Horn Melton, Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria, (New York, 1988).

³³ Lefin, paragraph 20. However, in an unpublished fragment to Nachlaß, Lefin referred to "the art of moral improvement or the skill of human animalness according to Franklin's quarterly, repetitive method of training." Published in Weinlös, p. 800.

The philosophes, in particular, and other Enlightenment activists, saw the printing press as a significant tool for the emancipation of mankind. See Roy Porter, The Enlightenment, (London, 1990), p. 40.

century through Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, who not only revered the American philosopher but knew him personally.³⁴ Mendel Lefin used Benjamin Franklin's method because the American natural philosopher had likewise come to the conclusion that moral reflection without a practical program of behavior modification was inadequate. Writing in 1784 from Passy, France, Franklin explained:

It was about this time that I conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined. While my care was employ'd in guarding against one fault, I was often surprised by another; habit took the advantage of inattention; inclination was sometimes too strong for reason. I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to present our slipping, and that contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct.³⁵

Franklin concluded, and Lefin affirmed his conclusion, that conviction alone was insufficient to change bad habits. Self-improvement required a structured plan of behavior modification, which, if properly implemented, would result in the inculcation of habitually moral behavior. As Lefin wrote:

When the connection between all the actions of the [various] "educations" is complete, they [the actions] immediately leave the domain of

³⁴ Czartoryski's respect for Franklin influenced his choice of the civic catechism for the National Cadet School. See Jean Fabre, Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et L'Europe des Lumières, (Strasbourg, 1952), pp. 147 and 156; Hillel Levine, "Menahem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1974, pp. 30 and 39; Isaac Silberschlag, "The English Source of our New Literature: First Contacts," (Hebrew), Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies, 2, Jerusalem, 1969, p. 72-74.

³⁵ Franklin, p. 78. Emphasis is mine.

the soul and become habits and are included in the process of thoughts...which continues without any destructive use of energy at all. It leaves the soul open to every kind of speculation or distinction which it desires, and upon this is built the "tool of education" to improve morals.³⁶

[Behavior modification could result in moral habits] like the [example of the] Græek man who carried a newborn calf on his shoulder for three years and never felt a difference in the calf's weight...because his habit [of carrying it] had so increased his strength."³⁷

Franklin's method was predicated on his belief that the repetition and cultivation of good habits would result in consistently ethical behavior. He believed that in order to "acquire the habitude" of all the desirable virtues an individual was best served by short-term concentration on one virtue at a time.³⁸ He thus devised a personal accounting system in which the individual would start with thirteen virtues (i.e. temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility) and devote one week to the development of each. Franklin ordered his virtues in a progression such that temperance or "coolness and clearness of head" would make the cultivation of "silence" easier, which, in turn, would allow him to "order" his day and make it more productive, etc. Franklin's behaviorist innovation lay in his design of a moral accounting book, in which each page was devoted to one virtue. On each page, he created a grid with the vertical columns representing the seven days of the week and the horizontal columns representing the thirteen virtues. During the week devoted to justice, for example, Franklin would strive to be as just as possible, "leaving the other virtues to their ordinary

³⁶ Lefin, footnote for paragraph 97.

³⁷ Ibid., paragraph 21.

³⁸ Franklin, p. 80.

chance," and make a mark in the corresponding box of that day's failings in the category of justice. At the end of the week, Franklin examined the markings to see how he had progressed, or lapsed, in the cultivation of that week's particular virtue. The thirteen-week cycle of weekly reflection and accounting repeated four times to round out the year. In this manner, Franklin hoped to have "the encouraging pleasure of seeing on my pages the progress I made in virtue, by clearing successively my lines of their spots, till in the end, by a number of courses, I should be happy in viewing a clean book, after thirteen weeks' daily examination."³⁹

Lefin borrowed Franklin's accounting system in its entirety for Moral Stocktaking.⁴⁰ He appropriated Franklin's suggestions that the individual select a "short precept" (in Lefin's words, a "short musar") that would encapsulate the week's virtue and create a special accounting book with the aforementioned grid. Lefin specified that the journal (pinkas) should be nine pages with eighteen sides, that the individual should use a lead pencil for the daily marks, but write the sums at the end of the week using a pen. He even borrowed most of Franklin's virtues; Lefin's original list of thirteen virtues included calmness (menuhah), patience (savlanut), order (seder), industry (harizut), cleanliness (nekiyut), humility (anavah), justice (zedek), frugality (kimuz), diligence (zerizut), silence (shetikah), tranquility (nihuta), truth (emet) and chastity (perishut) (Figure 1). Lefin added two additional

³⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

⁴⁰ The Hebrew title of Lefin's book, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, formed a perfect pun on the "accounting" (heshbon) implicit in Franklin's method.

שבוע א מנוחה הנפש

80

התנבא על מאורעות פחותי בערך רעות או טובות •
 שאינם כדאי לכלכל מנוחה נפשך :

רמזים	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז
טנוחה							
סבלנות							
סדר							
חריצות							
נקיות							
ענה							
צדק							
קיסוק							
זריזות							
שתיקה							
יחזקא							
אמת							
פרישות							

Figure 1. Mendel Lefin's Grid for Moral Self-Improvement [Mendel Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, (Vilna, 1845)]

lines in the grid, one for the sums of the particular week and one for a yearly summation and accounting. He concluded:

And you will see at the end of the year, with God's help, your sins will have decreased from week to week, cycle to cycle, year to year...and you will know that God desires your deeds....Ensure your staying on the path by continuing in this manner for a few more cycles...then erase the trace of a sin of a particular virtue from your journal and replace it with another that needs a remedy. Thus continue until the book is wiped clean of all spots, and you will be free to serve God with joy for the rest of your life until you return to dust.⁴¹

In fact, Lefin not only borrowed Franklin's method but completed the task that the latter had described, but never completed, in his Autobiography -- composing a handbook for individual use. Franklin admitted in his memoirs that he had never fulfilled his original intention to write an entire book, to be called The Art of Virtue, devoted to the subject of individual moral self-improvement, which would have finally provided the means to put his program of self-reflection into practice.⁴² Franklin never completed the task because he saw it in relation to "a great and extensive project," the creation of a United Party for Virtue which would bring together virtuous men from all nations to oversee the affairs of the world. He may have seen the United Party of Virtue as a political extension of the goals of his Junto group, a club Franklin created in 1726 devoted to the discussion of popular morality. Although Franklin kept Junto alive for over thirty years, he only shared his idea about his more ambitious plans with two friends. According to Franklin's own account, the demands of his pri-

⁴¹ Lefin, paragraph 26.

⁴² Franklin, p. 89.

vate and public lives prevented his founding the group and writing The Art of Virtue.⁴³

Lefin did not hesitate to incorporate Franklin's technique into Moral Stocktaking. The fact that Franklin explicitly stated in his memoirs that he conceived his method in ecumenical terms made the work even more palatable for Lefin, who would have been suspicious of any overtly Christian overtones.⁴⁴ Franklin was a man of the Enlightenment, unprejudiced and tolerant of diverse faiths, a believer in natural religion.⁴⁵ As he wrote:

I had been religiously educated as a Presbyterian and tho' some of the Dogmas of that Persuasion, such as the Eternal Decrees of God, Election, Reprobation, etc. appearing to me unintelligible, others doubtful...I never was without some religious principles; I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity, that he made the World, and govern'd it by his Providence, that the most acceptable Service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded either here or hereafter.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid. and pp. 91-92; on Junto, see Carl Van Doren, Benjamin Franklin, (New York, 1938), pp. 74-75 and Chiel, p. 51. According to Abraham Ber Gottlober, youth groups formed in Galicia and Podolia which modelled their behavior after the program in Moral Stocktaking. See Raphael Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, p. 77. If this anecdote is true then Lefin succeeded not only in completing Franklin's Art of Virtue but in establishing the voluntary societies that Franklin believed would form the core group of the United Party of Virtue.

⁴⁴ Franklin, p. 88.

⁴⁵ Franklin's reputation as a defender of religious tolerance also found expression in Nachman Krochmal's Hebrew translation of the American's paraphrase of a Persian parable in which Abraham is rebuked by God for being inhospitable to a pagan. See Alexander Kohut, "Abraham's Lesson in Tolerance," JQR, XV, 1903, pp. 104-11 and Joseph Klausner, "'Ethical Fable,' of R. Nachman Krochmal," (Hebrew), Tarbiz, I, 1930, pp. 131-135. In 1815, prior to turning his back on the Haskalah, Jacob Samuel Bik praised Lefin's use of Franklin's method by citing Mishnah Shabbat, 16:8, "Israel can make use of a light [on the Sabbath] kindled by a gentile." See Shmuel Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," (Hebrew), in Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, pp. 350-351.

⁴⁶ Franklin, pp. 76 and 92.

Unlike Franklin, Lefin did not direct his efforts at the whole of mankind, but toward the remaking of the Polish Jewish community of his day. In a letter to an eleven-year-old whom Lefin, having no children of his own, regarded as a son, the maskil emphasized his understanding of how traditional rabbinic Judaism properly exercised, ideally with the addition of his own behaviorist program, provided the means by which to develop control of the lustful, animal inclinations inherent in men:

Man is created, like every other creature, with many material qualities. Only in the fourteenth year, when his animal nature is fully developed, the higher soul, which also develops in him, begins to grow from day to day. Since this soul is younger than the animal soul in the thirteenth year, it is also much weaker than it [the animal soul]. For that reason our Sages spoke of two hearts or two inclinations. And since this soul [the animal soul] has no human reason with which to differentiate between good and evil, the Sages called it 'the old, foolish king'⁴⁷Behold, most people submit themselves, as is natural, and accept the yoke of the evil inclination upon themselves, and subdue the good inclination to make it work for the fulfillment of their passions, except the few divine beings who recognize the foolishness of the boorish old man, and know that its virtue will be its undoing. Thus, they work hard to stand their ground and to throw off the yoke of their animal passions, but they need to wage a long war against it (As it is written: 'Who is wise? One who conquers his (evil) inclination')⁴⁸....God gave the Israelites the Torah as a counterbalance to the "animal" in men. Just as a man can lift up a load which exceeds his strength through gears and balances, so is the Torah the best means against the power of passion, and just as levers conquer the loads little by little through their unceasing activity, the assiduous practice of the 613 commandments confers upon man the necessary heroic strength to cast off his evil inclination and to subjugate it to the good inclination....If a pious man was successful in the present in accumulating experiences day to day, then he makes a cardinal rule of God-fearing behavior out of them for an entire year. Then he assigns short, solid signs for every week, every day, indeed, every hour, short sayings for appropriate behavior, of which he accords a review account every evening...until he can devote only the Sabbaths, which are days for the soul's rest, to the

⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes Rabbah (Vilna), parashah 4, glosses Ecclesiastes 4:13 ("Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer has the sense to heed warnings") and compares the evil inclination to an "old, foolish king," and the good inclination to a "poor youth."

⁴⁸ Mishnah Avot, 4:1.

task of self-improvement, to investigate his actions from the six secular days and account for what will be useful to improve himself. Afterwards, every day, meaning, after the recitation of the shema in his bed, he turns inward to investigate his actions of the past day, and he resolves to make an improvement for the following day, through which he strengthens the quality of circumspection and destroys the characteristic of haste in his heart....This should continue every night, and as he grows successful in creating strategies (tahbulot), he will add a general way of behaving to them at the beginning of every month, like a binyan av (a Talmudic exegetical category) from all of his private experiences. And he will create an inclusive rule in the New Year for his behavior for the upcoming year....After all of this effort over many years, many gates of light and apprehension of psychology (hokhmat ha-heshbonot) here and in the world-to-come will be opened to him.⁴⁹

The Anti-Hasidism in Moral Stocktaking

Historians have tended to regard Mendel Lefin's use of Franklin's technique as a confirmation of their view that the impetus for the Haskalah among East European Jewry lay in its exposure to the West in general, and to the Berlin Haskalah's Western orientation in particular; they have regarded Moral Stocktaking as a translation of yet another text of the European and American Enlightenments into Hebrew.⁵⁰ Implicit in their view was an uncritical acceptance of a unidirectional influence of a Western text

⁴⁹ Mendel Lefin to an eleven-year-old, Tarnopol, September 24, 1817. Published in Bikkurei ha-Ittim, Vienna, 1827, pp. 5-8; an edited German version appears in Franz Kobler, Jüdische Geschichte in Briefen aus Ost und West, (Vienna, 1938), pp. 147-148.

⁵⁰ Hillel Levine not only pointed out the disguised anti-Hasidism in Moral Stocktaking, but showed that most literary historians erred in regarding it as a translation of Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac or of the entire Autobiography. See Levine, unpublished dissertation, p. 56, footnote #59.

such as Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography on a maskil like Mendel Lefin.⁵¹ Lefin clearly shared with Franklin the primary goal of anchoring morality in the development of the individual and the consonant ability to change behavior within the rational power of the self. But the larger concerns of the two writers belie the apparent similarity of their works. Franklin conceived of his behaviorist technique as an innovative way to improve individual character for the creation of an international political party (the United Party of Virtue) of virtuous men who would "act with a view to the good of mankind."⁵² Vague and utopian, Franklin's plan had no clear adversary. With no specific antagonist or religious authority to counter, Franklin did not have to provide justification for creating a new method of moral reflection and reform. In contrast, Lefin appropriated Franklin's method because he believed it efficacious in his battle against Hasidism.

In Moral Stocktaking, Lefin waged this battle covertly and with great artifice. Lefin referred to Franklin's system of moral accounting as a tahbulah, a word which appears in all of the maskil's writings. Its origin in Proverbs 1:5 ["A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsels (tahbulot)"], "tahbulah carries other meanings in different biblical contexts, and can indicate "tactics,"

⁵¹ Nachman Krochmal, Lefin's disciple, brilliantly used and subverted Western, specifically Hegelian, concepts and arguments to undermine the universalist claims of Western philosophers indebted to Kant and Hegel. Krochmal creatively rejected the "triumphalism" of modern, Protestant thinkers with "an equally triumphalist Jewish self-evaluation that sought to shatter this self-serving concept." Lefin had very different goals and a different audience in mind when he wrote Moral Stocktaking than did Krochmal when he wrote his Guide, but both men, related as mentor and disciple, creatively projected their singular, East European perspective onto the texts they wrote and adapted. See Jay M. Harris, Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age, (New York, 1991), pp. 309-311.

⁵² Franklin, pp. 89, 91-92.

"strategies," "ruses," and "evil designs."⁵³ In Moral Stocktaking, Lefin used the word to indicate both a benign method to guide behavior and a conscious subterfuge to counter the spread of Hasidism.⁵⁴

The anti-Hasidic stance in Moral Stocktaking pervaded both the content of the work and the form of the method of individual moral education. The first virtue enumerated in Lefin's work, menuhah (calmness), or in Franklin's terminology "temperance," permeates the entire text. A sense of inner calm and emotional balance -- the development of moderate temperament -- is necessary for the successful completion of Lefin's program. Menuhah was likewise imperative to render proper service to God in accordance with the traditional, rabbinic model favored by Lefin. His reiteration throughout Moral Stocktaking of words such as metinut (moderation), yishuv ha-da'at (consideration), as well as menuhah and menuhat ha-nefesh, illustrate his belief that the cultivation of these virtues represent an antidote to the Hasidic emphasis on unbridled emotion and ecstatic worship. In the realm of prayer, Lefin countered menuhat ha-nefesh to Hasidism's hitlahavut (ecstasy/ardor).⁵⁵

Lefin illustrated the necessity of menuhat ha-nefesh in the early pages of Moral Stocktaking with a parable:

⁵³ See Proverbs 11:14, 12:5, 24:6, 20:18, Job 37:12.

⁵⁴ Even Lefin's opponents, such as the maskil Tobias Feder who ridiculed his Yiddish translation of Proverbs, identified Lefin with the word tahbulah, "It [the debased translation of Proverbs into Yiddish] is the deed of R. Mendel Satanów and his stratagems (tahbulotav)." Published in Yehudah Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Kol Mehazezim (Voice of the Archers)," (Hebrew), Zehut, May 1981, p. 290.

⁵⁵ On hitlahavut in Hasidic prayer, see Gershom Scholem, "Hasidism: The Latest Phase," in Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 335.

Two young men, both sons of Torah who fear God, decided to pray [expressing] the intent of the meaning of the words. One had a sharp mind and a strong temperament, and was the only son of his father and mother, and the awe blazed in his heart so suddenly so as to force his soul with all of his strength to complete his prayers without any dross of a strange thought (mahshavah zarah). His evil inclination rebelled against him, and he became even more infuriated at it, and thus the struggle in his soul continued and grew for several months until he became crazy, and each time that he arrived at a place in his prayer to mention God's name, he became confused and mentioned the name of an idol in its place. Thus he became crazy, rebelled against his father and mother and threw himself from the roof and died. The second [youth] was of moderate intelligence, settled in temperament, an ignoramus at the time of his adolescence, and he began to train himself in Torah and divine service [avodah] slowly as he became older. He studied a lot of Torah and became famous as an important scholar in his city. He was pure and truthful in his negotiations with other men, and his prayer was clear from strange thoughts....He died with a good name, leaving a pleasant work on the Shulhan Arukh (a sixteenth-century legal code) after him.⁵⁶

These are daily occurrences in our time, due to our great sins, dear people are scorched in the fire of awe at the time of their youth when they rush to uproot and eradicate the evil inclination swiftly and to destroy its trace from within the creases of their hearts. The result is that they are drowned in black bitterness and dullness of the intellect, meaning, the death of their rational soul.⁵⁷

In this parable, Lefin warned the East European Jewish youths for whom he intended his work against the dangers of mistaking extreme ardor for appropriate forms of devotion and against focusing too much on the repression of "strange thoughts." The Hasidic claim that awe and ardor in prayer was more important than habitual prayer at the appointed times was a well-known target of the opponents of Hasidism.⁵⁸ The risks of extreme enthusiasm were fatal in Lefin's view and he urged his readers instead to

⁵⁶ Lefin, paragraph 16. Emphasis is mine.

⁵⁷ Ibid., paragraph 17. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁸ Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim: Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus she-beineihem ba-Shanim 1772-1795, I, (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 38-41, 45, 50, 54, 75; II, pp. 253-338.

approach prayer in a moderate, conventional fashion. In one of Lefin's later unpublished works, an imaginary description of the world-to-come, a righteous man bemoans the pressures from unnamed adversaries which he has had to withstand in "this world." From the complaints, "Some wanted to persuade me with very dazzling ardor (hitlahavut)," it is obvious that his fictitious pursuers were Hasidim.⁵⁹ The parable points to Lefin's suspicion of Hasidic techniques of repressing and sublimating evil thoughts (mahshavot zarot); in Moral Stocktaking, he proffered his systematic, moderate method of controlling the lustful passions of the animal soul as an alternative.⁶⁰ In light of the Hasidic revolution in Jewish religious behavior [i.e. the introduction of directed preambles (kavanot) and the emphasis on ecstasy or ardor in prayer] Lefin felt an acute need to present an accessible substitute method of individualized, internalized behavior modification to East European youth.

Lefin's concerns about the dangers of hitlahavut were shared by other Polish Jews. Writing to Lefin from Bar, a Podolian town south of Miedzybóz, Benjamin Reich, the son of Lefin's maskilic friend, Meir ha-Cohen Reich, delighted in regaling the older maskil with absurd tales of Hasidic homilies on the need for ecstasy in prayer:

I was in Miedzybóz before Rosh ha-Shanah (the New Year) with the Rebbe from Most, and I heard things from him that delight the heart of

⁵⁹ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, called Ma'amar Olam ha-Gemul, the section entitled "The Fate of the Righteous," p. 5a.

⁶⁰ Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah," p. 188 and his unpublished dissertation, pp. 190-195. On the technique of treating evil thoughts in Habad Hasidism, see Dubnow, II, p. 239, and Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan, "Hasidic Thought and Literature," (Hebrew), in Perakim be-Torat ha-Hasidut uve-Toldoteihah, Avraham Rubinstein, ed., (Jerusalem, 1977), p. 276. See discussion below on whether or not there was a specific polemic against Habad Hasidism in Moral Stocktaking.

the listener. Because words of straw are beloved to me, I will transcribe one of the things that he said in his [own] pure language.

"Our brothers in Israel, this is the rule, take into your heart that there are two kinds of service [prayer] to God, May He be Blessed. One is the characteristic of enthusiasm (lahav) and one is the characteristic of standing (nizav). [The first kind of service] is the man who burns during the time of his prayer and does a mizvah (commandment) with ardor, and the second [type] is the one who stands in one place and all of his behavior is only according to the Shulhan Arukh and the Seder ha-Yom. And certainly, the level of the second is worse than that of the first. Sometimes it is possible that the second will attain the level of the first....If he behaves himself this way for several days until all of his behavior becomes almost natural to him, then it is possible that he will obtain the levels of the first. [But] in my opinion he is in need of aid from Heaven and the merit of the aforementioned Patriarchs. Then, he, too, will come to the level of enthusiasm and this was intended by the verse (Judges 3:22): 'and the haft (nizav) went in after the blade (lahav)'." ⁶¹

A hortatory letter written by Meir Reich to his son in 1823 shows the influence of Lefin's Moral Stocktaking. Warning the young Benjamin against precipitous changes in behavior and unnecessarily long prayers, Meir Reich admonished:

At this moment I do not have anything to command you regarding your study and your business, except to warn you in a known and tested matter that the beginning of your study should be a very slow acquisition of habit, thus the end will really flourish, and not like those who are inflamed with their desire at the beginning of their study and who weary immediately of finding the opening to the wisdom and it [becomes] something loathsome in their mouths. Indeed, the enlightened ones are forbearing. And they profit doubly in the health of their bodies and the delight of their study....Your prayer should be short and [performed] with intention. ⁶²

⁶¹ Benjamin Reich to Mendel Lefin, undated, but sent to Lefin in Tarnopol, Galicia (second decade of the nineteenth century). Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 70. Emphasis is mine.

⁶² Meir ha-Cohen Reich to Benjamin Reich, Bar, 1823. Jacob Samuel Bik copied the letter into his private journal. See Merzbacher manuscript, found in the municipal library of Frankfurt-on-the-Main, 64, Ms. hebr. fol. 11, p. 39b; a microfilm of the manuscript is held in the Department of Photographed Manuscripts and Archives, JNULA. Emphasis is mine. In 1808, Lefin sent Meir ha-Cohen Reich a copy of Moral Stocktaking for his opinion. See the letter to Jacob Meshullam Orenstein, Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, papers of Mendel Lefin (1749-1826), JNULA.

The Reichs expressed concern, as did Lefin, that Hasidic prayer represented a deviation from the carefully structured liturgical formulae of traditional rabbinic Judaism, their content as well as their fixed time-bound daily schedule. Rabbinic Judaism properly understood, they believed, provided clear guidelines for the moderate acquisition of good moral habits and the temperate fulfillment of service to God.

For Lefin, moderation was the antidote to an extremist tendency, and this moderation could best be achieved through the use of Benjamin Franklin's method of cultivating the virtues slowly, habitually, week by week, over four cycles of the year. He concluded: "There is no question that the majority of cases of [moral] illnesses can only be healed through moderation."⁶³ Lefin's debt to Benjamin Franklin is apparent, but in his quest to strengthen the rational soul and harness the evil inclinations of the animal soul, the maskil also borrowed from, or was inspired by, Moses Maimonides.⁶⁴ In Maimonides' Eight Chapters, a discrete treatise on the mishnaic Tractate Avot, the philosopher discussed the soul, its constituent faculties, and the appropriate method of healing its imbalance or illness. Frequently comparing the illness of the soul with sickness of the body and the Talmudic sages with medical doctors, Maimonides stated his famous

⁶³ Lefin, paragraph 70.

⁶⁴ In fact, in Lefin's Iggerot ha-Hokhmah, two examples of which were first published in Ha-Me'asef in 1789, the maskil already expressed his commitment to moderation: "In the first section it will be explained how to control all the powers of the body and use every single limb, to restore and to strengthen them with a moderate effort, meaning, not to damage them by arduous labor, and not to freeze or damage them through laziness," suggesting that perhaps he used Franklin's method because it was harmonious with the Maimonidean perspective on behavior change that he favored. See Ha-Me'asef, 1789, p. 86.

harmonization of the Aristotelian "golden mean" with a life lived in observance of Jewish commandments. He wrote, "Good deeds are such as are equibalanced, maintaining the mean between two equally bad extremes, the too much and the too little. Virtues are psychic conditions and dispositions which are midway between two reprehensible extremes, one of which is characterized by an exaggeration, the other by a deficiency."⁶⁵ In the fourth chapter of the Eight Chapters, Maimonides stated that only "frequent repetition of acts...practiced during a long period of time" can accustom the individual to finding the proper mean. Although Lefin does not specifically mention Maimonides in the body of Moral Stocktaking, the influence of the medieval master is clear. Like Maimonides, Lefin made frequent analogies between bodily illness and moral illness, between doctors and moralists.⁶⁶ Moreover, Lefin even seems to have appropriated Maimonides frequent warnings in the Eight Chapters against the medieval palliatives of asceticism and physical chastisement as a cure for moral ills. In paragraph 74 of Moral Stocktaking Lefin speaks of "fools" so ardent to cure themselves of their evil inclination that they resorted to castration. The polemical thrust of

⁶⁵ Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, (New York, 1972), pp. 367-368.

⁶⁶ Lefin used a medical analogy in the introductory paragraph of Likutei Kelalim (Selections of Rules). See N. M. Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788-1792)," (Hebrew), in The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume, (New York: 1964), p. 287. The maskil's interest in medical science is well documented; in the late eighteenth century Lefin translated a medical text, Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am (The Book of Popular Healing), by the Swiss physician Tissot, sections of which were later bound with Moral Stocktaking. Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am was also part of Lefin's campaign against Hasidism. Couching the translation of the medical text in terms of providing East European Jewry with the means of fulfilling the commandment of visiting the sick, Lefin hoped it would be an effective antidote to medical charlatans and to the Hasidim who rejected the use of medicine. See Chone Shmeruk, "Moses Markuse and His Book, Ezer Yisroyel," in Shmeruk, Sifrut Yidish be-Folin: Mehkarim ve-Iyunim Historiyim, (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 190 and 196.

Maimonides' words were directed at ascetics, Lefin's toward his contemporary extremists, the Hasidim, although the castration charge appears to be the product of maskilic exaggeration.⁶⁷

Lefin's reverence for the medieval master is well attested. Although more often than not modelling himself after King Solomon, Lefin also imagined himself in a Maimonidean guise.⁶⁸ Believing the Maimonidean ideal to be an antidote to Hasidism, and conceiving the task of a maskil to spread a Maimonidean perspective among East European Jewry, Lefin began a translation of Maimonides' The Guide for the Perplexed into mishnaic Hebrew from the medieval Hebrew translation by Samuel Ibn Tibbon in the 1790s.⁶⁹ A Maimonidean outlook, Lefin believed, would revitalize the inner life of Polish Jewry by turning Polish Jews away from Hasidism and mysticism toward an idealized rationalist past. This is a leitmotif in all of his work, and was explicitly taken up by his disciple, Nachman Krochmal, in his The Guide for the Perplexed of Our Time.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Maskilic charges of sexual impropriety, which included general licentiousness and homosexuality, were both a carry-over from the anti-Sabbatian polemic and an essential feature of enlightened Jews' polemic against Hasidism as the next stage in anti-nomian Sabbatianism. See Simha Katz, "Letters of Maskilim Scorning Hasidim," (Hebrew), Moznayim, 10, 1940, pp. 266-276 and Elisheva Carlebach, The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies, (New York, 1990), p. 9. Extremism is the characteristic shared by the charges of castration and licentiousness.

⁶⁸ On Lefin's respect for King Solomon and his didactic use of parable, see Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, paragraphs 92, 112-115; the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128e, paragraphs 9-10; Mendel Lefin, Sefer Kohelet im Tirgum u-Viur, (Odessa, 1873), comment to Ecclesiastes 12:9; Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am, paragraphs 586-587; Levine, unpublished dissertation, pp. 10-11 and 76-77.

⁶⁹ Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of Haskalah Literature: From the Polemics of the Galician Haskalah," p. 106. On Elon Moreh, the introduction to the new translation, see Mahler, p. 79, and Chapter Five below.

⁷⁰ See Harris cited above and his "The Image of Maimonides in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," PAAJR, 54 (1987), pp. 127-130.

Maimonides' influence on Lefin may have been literary as well. Believing that Torah and Aristotle's golden mean were harmonious, and that both reflected the rejection of asceticism, physical chastisement, and flight from society, Maimonides cited Psalm 19:8 as a proof-text. He wrote:

The perfect law which leads us to perfection, as one who knew it well testifies by the words, 'the Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimonies of the Lord are faithful making wise the simple (mahkimat peti)' (Psalm 19:8), recommends none of those things [such as self-torture, flight from society, etc.]. On the contrary, it aims at man's following the path of moderation in accordance with the dictates of nature, eating, drinking, enjoying legitimate sexual intercourse, all in moderation.⁷¹

As Shmuel Werses has shown in his study of a manuscript bearing on Lefin's unpublished Yiddish anti-Hasidic parody, Mahkimat Peti (Making Wise the Simple), Lefin made ironic and caustic use of the same verse from Psalms to form the title of his work. Alluding to Isaiah Horowitz's gloss in his Shnei Luchos ha-Berit (Two Tablets of the Covenant), in which the mystic interpreted Psalm 19:8 as an attack on the study of philosophy and an encouragement to study Kabbalah, Lefin used the psalm to rebut the authority of the Zohar and the spread of mysticism.⁷²

Augmenting Lefin's general belief that Hasidism represented an extreme deviation from traditional Talmudic Judaism was his specific criticism of the institution of the zaddik, the existence of specific individuals, rebbes, who viewed themselves and were viewed by their followers as inter-

⁷¹ Moses Maimonides, Eight Chapters, cited in Twersky, p. 371.

⁷² Shmuel Werses, "On the Tracks of the Pamphlet, Making Wise the Simple," (Hebrew), in Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, p. 326.

cessors with the Divine.⁷³ The economic exploitation inherent in the zaddik's mediating relationship to his disciples was one aspect of Hasidic leadership that particularly galled Lefin. The eighth virtue in Moral Stocktaking was kimuz (frugality), in the description of which Lefin aimed his barbs at those (unnamed) individuals who are often praised by many people, but whose words were, in fact, a web of lies, flattery and hypocrisy, oft-quoted maskilic epithets for the Hasidic leaders.⁷⁴ The practice of pidyonot, giving money to the zaddikim to support them to ensure that one's entreaty would find its way to Heaven, struck Lefin as outright theft. He illustrated this by citing the midrash on the phrase ra'ut ru'ah in Ecclesiastes 4:6 ("Better is a handful with quietness, then both the hands full of labor and striving after wind/ra'ut ru'ah"): "Better that one does a small amount of his own zedakah (charity) than to steal, perpetrate violence and oppression and do more zedakah than others."⁷⁵ Lefin alluded to Hasidic leadership by describing arrogant individuals who claimed wisdom for themselves, but benefited from the harm they did to others. Their profligacy led them to the invention of new customs related to clothes and jewelry, as well as to the daily creation of [fictitious] new charities, which only served to embarrass those who

⁷³ See Chapter Two. On the doctrine of the zaddik in Hasidic thought, see Arthur Green, "Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq," in Jewish Spirituality, 2, Arthur Green, ed., (New York, 1987), pp. 127-156; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "God and the Zaddik as the Two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship," in Essential Papers on Hasidism, Gerson David Hundert, ed., (New York, 1991), pp. 299-329; Tishby and Dan, "Hasidic Thought and Literature," pp. 263-269; Joseph Weiss, "The Saddik – Altering the Divine Will," in Studies in Eastern European Jewish Mysticism, David Goldstein, ed., (Oxford, 1985), pp. 183-193.

⁷⁴ Lefin, paragraph 91. See, too, paragraph 103, where Lefin stated that nothing was more "despised, abhorred, abominated" than "mockery, injustice, deception and flattery."

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 92. See Ecclesiastes Rabbah (Vilna), parashah 4.

were poor and to heap respect upon those who impoverished them. The zaddikim constantly demanded new money from their followers while they built huge courts to support their expensive habits. Lefin's suspicion of the courts of the rebbes also led him to admonish his readers against large assemblies of people, and to urge them to select one frank and honest friend with whom to compare their moral progress.⁷⁶

Lefin had contemptuously expanded on the exploitation inherent in the practice of pidyonot in his unpublished Hebrew manuscript written after the Great Sejm:

Behold, those who accept charity to lie with lambs of gold and silver (and those who dress and sleep in expensive fine silks from the monies from donations from the redemption of souls (pidyon ha-nefashot), enjoying the galloping horse and a dancing chariot with a turtle wagon with kitchen servants traveling after them, and those who adorn their daughters and their wives with precious jewels and pearls, who make their secular times the sacred times of others, and their minds are comfortable with fattened [foods] and old wine that neither they nor their ancestors ever used) are called charlatans (rama'im)⁷⁷ in the books of the Sages, may their memories be as a blessing, upon whom givers of charity occasionally stumbled. So much the more so regarding those who impose obligations on the public collectively, and take their needs from the public coffers....I was cautious not to mention this as a complaint, calling them (instead) "pillagers of the masses," "quarrelers," "charlatans," "bamboozlers," "tricksters," etc. so as not to instigate revenge and strife, God forbid, upon them....If you ask why they take a lot of money every day, but still their hand is extended, behold there are several hidden reasons,⁷⁸ etc., and indeed, according to the simple meaning it is known that small change does not rest in their possession, not even one pound....Don't regard this according to the secret (sod), meaning, they have already redeemed it that same day through the distillers of [alcoholic] spirits and through the artisans and sellers of cloaks and expensive foxes....Just as the ancients used to bury those who were deceitful in matters of zedakah in a burial ground for thieves,

⁷⁶ Ibid., paragraph 45.

⁷⁷ See Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah," on the use of the word rama'i in Moral Stocktaking, p. 187.

⁷⁸ Emphasis is mine. Note the irony in Lefin's reference to the esoteric, hidden reasons for Hasidic practice.

now that restriction has been removed for this sect to do it publicly all of the time after they have struck the masses with the blindness of secrets (sodot).⁷⁹

The alleged sanctity of the zaddikim, whose claims to leadership and power were based solely on false charisma and manipulation of the Jewish public, was assured by the imposition of obligatory commandments upon their followers. In the above mentioned manuscript, Lefin railed against the "bundles upon bundles of new commandments" fabricated through the Hasidic hermeneutic of "secrets:"

[The Hasidim] perform miracles and deeds of heroism and write books of secrets, and one is obligated to believe in them as if they were principles of faith....The time was very auspicious for them to sink the reason of the masses into the cycle of their obscure secrets, and they make up new [commandments] at their pleasure...commandments of purities, commandments regarding the ritual bath, etc., and one is commanded to publicize and express their miracles and wonders within the secret of the "account of the chariot" (ma'aseh ha-merkavah) constantly (I heard how they do this prattle in this manner: "the zaddikim are called the patriarchs, and the patriarchs are the chariot, therefore, the tales of the miracles of the zaddikim are 'the account of the chariot'"), a fee for blessing guests, a fee for prayer on account of the sick with the golden secret...merrymaking as an obligatory commandment. There is always a feast. It is obligatory to gladden their great men with money and with words so that they will bestow upon [the individual Hasid] the holy spirit of delight...smoking tobacco and the permission to annul or to innovate tradition (for example, it is commanded to bake unleavened bread a week before Passover, and to eat a loaf made of legumes on Passover...white shtreimal, mourners staying by the doorway to smoke tobacco in the synagogue and in the house of study, the mourner wearing Sabbath clothing on the Sabbath and walking past the elevated platform where the Torah is read during the additional service for the Sabbath, old melodies for welcoming the Sabbath and for the evening service...one and a half cubits for ritual fringes around something made of linen and wool, mourners walking to a rhymed song appropriate to joyous occasions, immersing for a nightly emission on the eve of Yom Kippur...and a thousand more examples like this.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, pp. 2a-3b.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 3b. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d.

Lefin alluded to what he believed were deliberately obfuscating methods of Hasidic exegesis in the final comment of Moral Stocktaking when, upon advancing several of his rational explanations of traditional rabbinic texts, he criticized "the transgressors (ha-to'im) [who] heap obscure, tenuous interpretations upon the mind to obscure the eyes of those who seek their [the traditional texts'] wisdom, filling their bellies with exaggerations and false talk that has no meaning at all."⁸¹

As Lefin had stated in his French Essai, Hasidism, particularly through the institution of the zaddik, unfairly and deceitfully arrogated a unique relationship to God for its own initiates, excluding average, rabbinic Jews.⁸² This view of Hasidism's own exceptional relationship to the Divine explicitly relegated other Jews to lower spiritual status. Lefin elaborated on his critique of Hasidic exclusivity in the ninth chapter, justice (zedek), in Moral Stocktaking. For Lefin, a truly righteous man (zaddik) performed God's will by fulfilling the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Leviticus 18:19), meaning: respecting his fellow Jews (if not rational non-Jews) and doing good for all of Creation, particularly man. Lefin stated that the Sages considered this commandment to be "the foundation of the whole Torah." Respecting one's fellow Jews was the center of authentic Jewish faith (emunah) intended by the prophet Habakuk, when he expressed that "a righteous man (zaddik) shall live by his faith (emunah)" (Habakuk 2:4). Lefin undoubtedly knew of the Hasidic interpretation of this verse from Habakuk, in which the intransitive yihyeh (will live) was read as a transitive verb yehayeh (will vitalize). In the Hasidic reading, the verse emphasized

⁸¹ Lefin, paragraph 117.

⁸² See Chapter Two, footnotes 58-62.

the zaddik's singular power to mediate his followers' spiritual life: "a zaddik will vitalize [his followers] through his faith."⁸³ Lefin believed that Hasidism violated the "commandments between man and his fellow man, such as the prohibition against stealing and robbery, injustice and trickery, jealousy, hatred, gossip, etc." Reliance on the zaddik's monopoly on faith was antithetical, wrote Lefin consciously alluding to his enemies, to the positive commandment of gemilut hasidim (being charitable to others). Lefin deliberately compared what he believed was the "true" meaning of zedek (justice/charity) to the false exploitation of the zaddik in his book's ninetieth chapter; in Hebrew, the number 90 is written simply with the eighteenth letter of the alphabet, zadi/zaddik.⁸⁴

Up until now, we have focused on the way in which the content of Moral Stocktaking reflected Mendel Lefin's staunch anti-Hasidic position. Yet, the form of the book and its method were likewise central to his critique. Lefin turned to Benjamin Franklin's behaviorist method as the model for moral self-improvement because of his harsh assessment of the institution of the zaddik. Hasidism's new model of Jewish leadership appeared to offer East European Jewry a satisfying way of dealing with sin and immorality. Elimelekh of Lizensk, the most extreme example of the zaddik as spiritual mediator for individual Jews, dedicated most of his book, No'am Elimelekh (Elimelekh's Pleasantness) (1788), to the obligations of the "practical zaddik" in the expiation of the sins of his generation through his conscious identification with their transgressions.⁸⁵ Disturbed by the tendency

⁸³ Tishy and Dan, p. 267.

⁸⁴ Lefin, paragraph 90.

⁸⁵ Tishby and Dan, p. 267.

within Hasidism to view the zaddik in a quasi-Divine manner, Lefin needed to find a method of moral improvement that would reanchor spirituality within the personality of the individual. He had concluded in the introductory sections of the work that in his day traditional musar was inadequate to the task of controlling the animal soul; Lefin also knew that it could not stem the appeal of Hasidism. Franklin's technique firmly secured the process of controlling one's appetite and perfecting one's morals in the individual. No intercessor or mediator was necessary for the successful practice of the technique in Moral Stocktaking; all that was required was a self-conscious person with a notebook.

In his battle against Hasidism, Lefin used Franklin's technique and selectively employed the ideas of other eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers who sought to liberate the self from what Kant called "man's self-incurred tutelage."⁸⁶ For example, Lefin appropriated the belief of the French thinker Helvétius that self-love was the basis of morality.⁸⁷ Like Franklin, Helvétius (1715-1771) believed that morality should be treated like an exact science, experimental, observational, and behaviorist. Both men were interested in the moral catechism as a means of spurring morality,

⁸⁶ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, Lewis White Beck, translator and editor, (Indianapolis, IN, 1959), p. 85. This will be developed further in Chapter Four.

⁸⁷ Grossman, pp. 33-35. Lefin's interest in Helvétius also stemmed from their shared criticism of fanaticism and belief that legislation and education were agents of moral progress. Lefin began his plan for the rationalization of the rabbinate in Prince Adam Czartoryski's lands with a paraphrased quote from Helvétius' De L'Esprit, "'Virtues are the work of good laws,' say our newer politicians." Mss. 2253, the Czartoryski Library, Kraków, p. 28. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 6 and 128d; Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Authographs, Mendel Lefin Papers, JNULA.

influences which are also evident in Moral Stocktaking.⁸⁸ Yet, given Lefin's commitment to traditional Jewish life and his belief in the obligatory power of heteronomous Jewish law, liberation of the self did not mean liberation from divine authority, as it did for Helvétius and many of the philosophes.⁸⁹ Self-love for Lefin was an aspect of God-given morality. "Self-love (ahavat ha-adam et azmo) is the strongest of the loves that God planted in the animal soul...so he [man] could repel the various frequent spurts of lust and trouble against him in matters of the health of his body, raise his children and protect his possessions. From this, too, is born the real honor (ha-kavod ha-amiti)...so a man can have the ability to be happy when others enjoy his virtues."⁹⁰

Already in 1789, Lefin had stated explicitly that ethics were comprised of three types: "1) matters that are between man and himself, 2) matters that are between a man and his fellow men, 3)) matters that are between man and God."⁹¹ Moral Stocktaking is devoted to examining critically and improving those matters which are "between man and himself." Lefin's

⁸⁸ Grossman, pp. 94-95, 107. On Franklin's catechisms, see Fabre, p. 157. Solomon Maimon also reported that he was a proponent of Helvétius' system of self-love. See Solomon Maimon, The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon, Hugo Bergman, ed., (London, 1954), p. 111.

⁸⁹ Gay, I, pp. 3-8.

⁹⁰ Lefin, paragraphs 87-88, 90. Emphasis is mine. Note, too, that for Lefin, self-love never negated the obligation of loving others. As he wrote in his unpublished journal, "The commandment 'you shall love your God,' was given for the purpose of the commandment 'you should love your neighbor as yourself.' We learn from this that the commandments that are between man and God were generally given for the purpose of the commandments between man and man, thus the blessings of enjoyment (al ha-mezonot) were established, as were the commandments and the redemptions and the miracles that were done for our ancestors and for us, to compel man with the quality of recognition to do good for his fellow man." The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 53.

⁹¹ Ha-Me'asef, 5, 1789, p. 86.

emphasis on individual self-examination, what one historian has called "introspective psychology,"⁹² found a surprising ally in Israel Salanter (1810-1883), founder of the musar movement, later in the nineteenth-century. Boldly breaking with his mentors, Hayim of Volozhin and Zundel of Salant, Salanter divorced an individual's evil tendencies from the metaphysical realm of the Kabbalah's sitra ahra (other side) and placed responsibility for them squarely within the individual's soul. Lefin's Moral Stocktaking anticipated Salanter's severance of the link between evil and the mystical realm of the Kabbalah by replacing contemplation of the divine emanations with contemplation of the self.⁹³ Salanter, too, believed that lust could be controlled by the individual Jew through a program of ethical education directed by reason. Salanter was so influenced by Lefin's stress on the autonomy of the individual to deal with his evil inclination that he reprinted Moral Stocktaking in 1845, a posthumous imprimatur which ironically guaranteed its acceptance by the traditional Jewish community and its republication, up until today, of Lefin's work.⁹⁴

Despite Lefin's reliance upon Benjamin Franklin's method, their shared anchoring of moral perfection in the individual had different goals. As mentioned above, Franklin viewed individual moral self-improvement as an end in itself, or perhaps as part of his grand plan to create a United Party of

⁹² Levine, unpublished dissertation, p. 60.

⁹³ See Lefin's closing comment in Likutei Kelalim, "Finally, [we must] show them allusions to the Kabbalah in the brightness of the precious, fine science of psychology." See Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788-1792)," (Hebrew), The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume, (New York, 1964), p. 301.

⁹⁴ Immanuel Etkes, R. Yisra'el Salanter ve-Reishitah shel Tenu'at ha-Musar, (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 133-135, 142, 145-146.

Virtue. For Lefin, Franklin's technique provided a vehicle by which young men on the brink of a turn to Hasidism would remain within the traditional, meaning anti-Hasidic, Jewish fold. Moral Stocktaking therefore satirized Hasidism while offering a individualized program for moral self-improvement consonant with traditional values of devotion to God and to Jewish law. At all times, Lefin attempted to balance the innovation of the Enlightenment's emphasis on the self with the continuity of traditional rabbinic Judaism. Thus, while implicitly criticizing the large courts of the zaddikim, Lefin stressed the efficacy of the traditional havruta (study partnership) for moral training.⁹⁵ Individual self-improvement was to occur, Lefin hoped, as part of a return to the rational rabbinic past and the restoration of tradition, which had been usurped by Hasidism. The goal of the method, or tahbulah in Lefin's phrasing, was summed up in the maskil's Hebrew commentary on verse 12:11 from his Yiddish translation of Ecclesiastes. The biblical text reads: "The words of the wise are like spurs, like nails well driven in are the sayings of the masters of collections; they are given by one shepherd." Lefin glossed: "Thus was always the custom of the sages: to arrange their words in tahbulot to turn the people's soul toward the right path as in the manner of the chief shepherd who apportions hardened goads and rods to his deputies and youths...to goad the scattered flock to the beauty of the grass."⁹⁶ Through an accessible, individualized program of moral reflection,

⁹⁵ Lefin, paragraphs 34 and 44. Displaying his interest in western Enlightenment ideas, Lefin even went so far as to suggest that a man's wife made the most ideal partner for his technique of moral self-improvement.

⁹⁶ Lefin, Sefer Kohelet im Targum u-Vi'ur, (Odessa, 1873). See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128e, paragraph 9, where Lefin refers to King Solomon's ability to find only one wise man among a thousand people (cf. Ecclesiastes 7:28) who "would like to obtain enough superiority over the total mass [of people] in order to be able to graze these human animals on wisdom."

Lefin hoped to turn the masses of East European Jewry toward the right path, the Maimonidean path of rationalism and moderation, and away from the Hasidic path of irrationalism, superstition, and extremism, in order to guide them to the "beauty" of a revitalized traditional Jewish life.

Anti-Hasidism or Anti-Habad?

One historian interested in Lefin's anti-Hasidic stance has claimed that the maskil felt particularly threatened by Habad Hasidism founded by Shneur Zalman of Lyady (1745-1813). He argued that Shneur Zalman's rationalist system of Hasidic thought was too close to rabbinic Judaism for Lefin's comfort and that "similarity breded contempt."⁹⁷ Lefin wrote Moral Stock-taking, the argument continues, to compete directly with the Habad system of repressing evil thoughts (mahshavot zarot) in order to elevate and purify them.⁹⁸ The maskil wrote Moral Stocktaking in order to present an alternative method of restraining the animal soul, which was synonymous with the evil inclination inherent in evil/strange thoughts. One piece of evidence adduced for this theory is from Lefin's unpublished journal, where the maskil, basing his opinion on Maimonides, spoke of the pious Jew seeking

⁹⁷ See Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah," p. 189 and his unpublished dissertation, pp. 38, 64, 188.

⁹⁸ Shneur Zalman's view on the obligation of the individual Jew and of the zaddik, respectively, in the elevation and purification of evil/strange thoughts was not monolithic. In the Tanya, Shneur Zalman presented two views on the importance of elevating evil thoughts. He both advised the average Jew (ha-beinoni) besieged with an impure thought during prayer to simply divert his attention from it and to wage an active war against it through repression and subjugation. His sermons, published after his death, placed a much stronger emphasis on the elevation of evil/strange thoughts as fundamental to service to God than did the Tanya. See Tishby and Dan, pp. 275-276.

human perfection who always kept the thought of the fear of God before him as a motivation for the performance of the commandments.⁹⁹ Lefin contrasted the Maimonidean method of ensuring good, moral behavior (which, he noted, was also cited by Moses Isserles in his commentary to the Shulhan Arukh)¹⁰⁰ to:

Those who are in error, who say that it is a commandment to compel, force and strengthen this thought with a vigilant consistency, that it should not move from our eyes for even a minute. Not only is this matter against that which the Divine, may He be blessed, had implanted in the soul of man, [through] the process of ideas, which like a river never ceases. But, on the contrary, this manner [of controlling thoughts] will result in carelessness and boredom, as in the case of R. Joshua ben Levi, who like a fool, investigated a chicken for three hours [and fell asleep]¹⁰¹...and the action of R. Ishmael [b. Elisha] who said, "I will read [by the light of a lamp on the Sabbath] and I will not tilt it," and he inadvertently [tilted the lamp],¹⁰² and like the gnat of Titus.¹⁰³ Once it got started, there was no stopping it (like the act [of the intemperate youth] that will be explained in Moral Stocktaking).¹⁰⁴

Another source of support for this view appears in the eighth chapter of Moral Stocktaking on kimuz (frugality), which begins with the three words that form Habad's acronym, wisdom (hokhmah), understanding (binah) and reason (da'at).¹⁰⁵ Gershom Scholem, too, believed that the distinctive fea-

⁹⁹ Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, II, Shlomo Pines, trans., (Chicago, 1963), pp. 629-630.

¹⁰⁰ Shulhan Arukh, Oreh Hayim, 1:1.

¹⁰¹ BT Berakhot 7a and BT Avodah Zarah 4b.

¹⁰² BT Shabbat 12b.

¹⁰³ According to Jewish legend, a gnat entering the head of Titus (Flavius Vespasian, captor of Jerusalem, later Emperor of Rome) through his nose plagued him for seven years. See BT Gittin 56b and Genesis Rabbah (Albeck), parashah 10.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 53.

¹⁰⁵ Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah," p. 189.

ture of Habad Hasidism was its emphasis on the individual psyche and the "mystical direction of personal life," and Lefin clearly wanted to demystify both individual psychology and personal moral life in Moral Stocktaking.¹⁰⁶

While this view is compelling, Lefin's criticism of Hasidism, in fact, extended well beyond the bounds of Habad. His objections to Hasidism were wide-sweeping and generic. For example, the chapter on frugality cited above also satirized the profligacy and arrogance of contemporary zaddikim. As we have seen, the comments in the chapter on frugality comprised only a small part of Lefin's general critique of the institution of the zaddik, which informed most of his writings. Lefin pointed specifically to the deceit of the Hasidic leaders in an unpublished manuscript fragment:

Indeed, now a distorted and crooked generation has arisen. Their leaders, in particular, endear the people with all kinds of language of endearments and cajolery...asking how they are doing, inquiring after their well-being in order to turn them into faithful lovers, to obligate them to recognize their goodness, and to be their disciples, with all of their hearts and money, in the future. Not only this, but they peck out their eyes from understanding a book or any explicit reason in Scripture and they slander the pleasant musar of the Sages, may their memories be for a blessing, and turn their words into wormwood, filling their prayer books with the names of men and women and of their mothers....They promise an individual man or even entire communities that they see an edict about to befall them, and they [the zaddikim] have already begun to pray for them [the communities] with all of their might and they [the communities] allowed them to accept their offerings (pidyoneihem) from the Heavens. Thus, they [the Hasidim] send their agents and spies in order to find out the answers [to the edict], to allocate the paths of repentance for them [the communities] and to examine their means (tahbulot) of making a living, in order to use them for their own pleasure and the pleasure of their acquaintances.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Scholem, p. 341.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 55. Part of this manuscript is in Lefin's hand, the other in that of his disciple, Joseph Perl.

It is well documented that Shneur Zalman in fact played down the role of the zaddik and tried to distance himself from the great courts of his Hasidic contemporaries. He forbade visits by his followers more than once a year and emphasized teaching, rather than pidyonot, as the path toward spiritual communion with God, even daring to share "esoteric" secrets from the Hasidic tradition. In 1796, he issued Takanot Liozna (Edicts from Lyady) in an effort to balance the personal demands of his Hasidim with his own need to focus on service to the Divine.¹⁰⁸ Thus, while Lefin clearly directed his attention to the Habad methods for sublimating evil thoughts, the maskil's critique encompassed other Hasidic schools. Lefin had personal familiarity with Barukh of Miedzybóž's court, as he had attested in his plan to rationalize the rabbinate, and read the extant publications of contemporary Hasidic masters. He copied what he felt was evidence for the divine-like glorification of the zaddikim by contemporary Hasidism from their literature into his journal:

In the book The staff from Judah, page 11, I heard in the name of the gaon, the Hasid, Dov Beer of Mezhirech, an interpretation of the phrase "the master of the universe who rules before everything was created" (adon olam asher malakh be-terem kol yazir nivra), etc. 'It is known that a zaddik is called "all"/kol, and this is his interpretation of "the master of the universe who rules," by himself, meaning, before the zaddik was created (be-terem kol yazir nivra), but from the time that the zaddik was created "with all of His desire" (be-hefzo kol), the zaddik rules with God's awe.' And from the book Noam Elimelekh, page 22a, this is a direct quote, "'a storekeeper is exempt, but a homeowner is obligated,' meaning, that the essence of the obligation is on the zaddik, who is obligated to activate everything (kol) and he is called the homeowner who emanates eternally, as does a homeowner who influences his sons and upon the Holy One, blessed is he, as it were, the obligation does not fall on account that the zaddik alone, through his holy deeds, can activate everything." And from the same

¹⁰⁸ Tishby and Dan, p. 268. Immanuel Etkes, "R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady's Approach as a Hasidic Leader," (Hebrew), Zion, Jubilee Volume, 50, 1985, pp. 321-354.

reference, page 11b, this is a direct quote, "'God's eyes are toward the righteous ones/zaddikim,' meaning, through the zaddikim God's eyes can supervise Israel." Above, too, page 103b, there appears "You open up your hands [and satisfy the desire of every living thing]," etc. (Psalms 145:16), this refers to the zaddik, because the zaddik is the one that opens hands to the Holy One, blessed is he, so to speak."¹⁰⁹

Lefin went on to say that a truly righteous man (zaddik) would never touch the possessions or money of another Jew, a direct criticism of the practice of pidyonot. Any derisory anecdote about contemporary Hasidim fueled Lefin's campaign against them. In his letters to Lefin, his nephew, Yehuda Leib Zevi Hirsch Segal, satirized the rebbe from Opatów and mockingly cited Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye's Toldot Ya'akov Yosef (The Chronicles of Jacob Joseph) (1780).¹¹⁰ In an unpublished German manuscript on language, Lefin simply used the code word "Beshtian" to refer to Hasidic texts, all of which he wanted censored.¹¹¹

At the core of Lefin's criticism of Hasidism was his belief that Kabbalistic and Hasidic hermeneutics, coupled with the deification of the zaddik, led to idolatry. In a lengthy preamble to his discussion of his participation in the Great Sejm, Lefin described the dangers of reading the Torah without benefit of the Oral Tradition. He argued that the complex, often allegorical and metaphorical language of the Bible, what Lefin termed its "riddles," posed a danger for "the masses of people, and should only be communicated to someone to whom their proofs were also revealed orally." The risk of misinterpreting the Torah's language was great, as evidenced by the

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 129.

¹¹¹ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 5b.

descent into idolatry of the generations after Noah, and of the Egyptians and Greeks, all of whom "erred in time by mixing together stars and planets and the forms of their images, until in the end they, too, worshipped all kinds of beasts, animals, birds and frogs, and made graves for them and mausoleums, and built enormously huge altars for them as a memorial until today." The early Christians, too, had erred in interpreting the transubstantiation of Christ as the actual transformation of bread and wine into his body and blood. Conceding the antiquity of an esoteric Jewish tradition, Lefin argued that it had been deliberately concealed from the Jewish masses to protect them from misunderstandings which would lead to idolatry. As we have seen above, the publication of the Zohar and the further dissemination of kabbalistic interpretations with the spread of Hasidism became, in Lefin's view, the cause of the descent of Polish Jewry into ignorance and fanaticism. The Hasidim had taken the keruvim (angels) out of their esoteric "storehouses" and "discussed them in front of the masses, who are likely to believe in metallic bodies, which are actually only metaphors and allusions to lofty matters, and they projected these embodiments of metal onto divine matters, as is known from the brass serpent."¹¹² Lefin did not hesitate to identify contemporary zaddikim with idols and the Hasidism who turned to them for intercession with God as idol worshipers, "Our Sages, may their memories be for a blessing, said, 'Don't turn to idols (Leviticus 19:4),' 'to that conceived in your own minds.'¹¹³ And if you incline after them, the

¹¹² Rabbinic tradition, based on the biblical account in 2 Kings 18:4, credited King Hezekiah with destroying Moses' brass serpent out of fear that future generations would regard the physical shape as the actual embodiment of God. See BT Berakhot 10b and BT Hulin 6b.

¹¹³ BT Sabbath 149a.

result will be to turn them into the Divine...because when they turn intentionally, even toward bars of metal, they are likely to be made divine."¹¹⁴

While Moral Stocktaking may have been written with Habad in mind, it represents only one text in Lefin's life-long battle with Hasidism for the souls of East European Jewish youth. In fact, Lefin's anti-Hasidism knew no denominational bounds. Masa'ot ha-Yam (Journeys By Sea), his Hebrew translation of a German travelogue, is another example of the maskil's effort to counter Hasidism surreptitiously.

The Anti-Hasidism in Journeys By Sea

Throughout the nineteenth century, East European maskilim answered Naftali Herz Wessely's clarion call in Divrei Shalom ve-Emet (Words of Peace and Truth) (1782) for including knowledge of "the forms of the lands and the oceans (geography)" in the secular curriculum incumbent upon all men.¹¹⁵ For example, Joseph Perl encouraged the study of natural science and geography in Luah ha-Lev (The Heart's Calendar), the second section of his calendars which appeared in 1814-1816. Shimshon Bloch ha-Levi (1784-1845) penned Shvilei Olam (Pathways of the World), the first general geography in Hebrew, in the 1820s. Mordecai Aaron Günzberg (1795-1846), the noted Lithuanian maskil, devoted considerable energy to spread-

¹¹⁴ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, pp. 1a and 2a. For an association of zaddikim with idols, see, too, folder 5 and folder 127d, p. 8a.

¹¹⁵ Naftali Herz Wessely, Divrei Shalom ve-Emet, (Vienna, 1826, 2nd ed.), pp. 3 and 13.

ing historical and geographic information among Russian Jewry through translations of German histories and non-Jewish travel accounts.¹¹⁶

One of the vehicles favored by maskilim for disseminating geographic knowledge was translation and adaptation of the oeuvre of Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818), Moses Mendelssohn's correspondent and a leader of the German philanthropist movement. Campe's philosophic and pedagogic writings emphasized belief in Divine Providence, the immortality of the soul, reward and punishment, and the ability to improve one's life through good deeds. As a pedagogue, Campe sought to base his new educational system on a "realistic" education which eschewed fixed texts, workbooks, and rhetorical exercises that were divorced from the actual lives of the students.¹¹⁷ Jews who translated Campe's work into Hebrew and Yiddish, however, often removed the texts from their philanthropist framework in order to use them as a means of teaching geography to the Jews of Eastern Europe.¹¹⁸ At least five of Campe's books were translated into Hebrew and Yiddish and Mendel Lefin himself translated and adapted at least two of

¹¹⁶ On Perl's understudied luhot, see Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, pp. 149, 167. On Bloch, see Yosef Klausner, Historyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah, II, (Jerusalem, 1930), p. 354. On Günzberg, see Israel Bartal, "Mordechai Aaron Günzburg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity," in From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870, Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., (London, 1990), pp. 126-147.

¹¹⁷ Simon, pp. 151-152.

¹¹⁸ In the 1810 issue of Ha-Me'asef, Moses Mendelssohn of Hamburg's translation of Campe's Entdeckung von Amerika was praised for the benefit it would bring to "the dear people of Poland, who will not read [gentile] books." Quoted in Tsemah Tsamriyon, Ha-Me'asef: Ketav ha-Moderni ha-Rishon be-Ivrit, (Tel Aviv, 1988), p. 83.

Campe's Reisebeschreibungen. Little scholarly attention has been paid to Lefin's Journeys By Sea, which was published in Zolkiew in 1818.¹¹⁹

In its broad outline, the first journey included in Journeys By Sea tells of the travails of a group of British sailors who, after departing from the Chinese port of Macao, become shipwrecked on the island of Pelew.¹²⁰ From the earliest moments, it is clear that the trip will be a difficult one and the story describes how the British sailors are ultimately saved by their own ingenuity, by the generosity of the natives they encounter on Pelew and, most of all, by God's Providence.¹²¹ In an unpublished introduction to Journeys By Sea which remained in manuscript, Lefin informed his readers that he intended his translation to remind those who had fallen into dire straits, like the sailors of Campe's tales, of God's eternal vigilance. "But one who is drunk with misfortunes is likely to forget the Divine Providence of the Holy One, Blessed is He, [and he is likely] to despair of his life and to lose all

¹¹⁹ Mendel Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, (Zolkiew, 1818), contains two travelogues by Joachim Heinrich Campe, which originally appeared in Sammlung interessanter und durchgängiger zweckmässig abgefasster Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend, (Reutlingen, 1786-1793). On Jewish interest in Campe, see Zohar Shavit, "From Friedländer's Lesebuch to the Jewish Campe – The Beginning of Hebrew Children's Literature in Germany," LBIY, 33 (1988), p. 407; on Günzberg's translation of Campe's The Discovery of America, see Bartal, pp. 141-142; on the genre of travelogue in general, see Moshe Pelli, "The Literary Genre of The Travelogue in Hebrew Haskalah Literature: Shmuel Romanelli's Masa Ba'Rav," Modern Judaism, 11, 1991, pp. 241-260.

¹²⁰ The first journey is an adaptation of J. H. Campe's "Ein Bericht von den Pelju-Inseln, nach den Aufzeichnungen des Kapitain Wilson aus dem Jahr 1783," published in his Sammlung interessanter und durchgängig zeckmässig abgefasster Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend, volume 9, (Reutlingen, 1792), and based on the original English version, The Shipwreck of the Antelope East-India Packet, H. Wilson, Esq. Commander, on the Pelew Islands, situate in the West Part of the Pacific Ocean; in August 1783, "by one of the unfortunate officers," (London, 1788).

¹²¹ Mendel Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, pp. 2a and 11b. Cf. Campe, Sammlung, volume 9, p. 16.

expectation and hope forever."¹²² He emphasized continuity with traditional rabbinic views of God's soteriological power and of divine reward and punishment, beliefs which were consonant with the ideology of philanthropism that was based on a conception of natural religion. Lefin urged his readers to take Campe's descriptions of extraordinary human suffering, ultimately redeemed by a compassionate God as succor during their own misfortunes. Moreover, he urged those who had been saved from danger to tell of God's salvation as widely as possible. Lefin's exhortation about the importance of emphasizing God's Providence does not seem particularly innovative or subversive. Yet, he also included the following vague comment in his introduction: "Moreover, sometimes one teaches, incidental to this [to publicizing God's soteriological power], some kind of suggestion or stratagem (tahbulah) related to a matter different from the event."¹²³

As we have seen, Lefin frequently used the word tahbulah in his writings. In his unpublished introduction to Journeys By Sea, he once again selected this malleable word because of its complex, double-edged meaning. Lefin translated Journeys By Sea because he shared the conviction with other maskilic translators of Campe's work that East European Jewry should have a wider knowledge of the world.¹²⁴ Inherent in Lefin's translation was the value of appreciating an experience, even if its source was non-Jewish, that affirmed the theological assumptions shared by all enlightened men.

¹²² Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 124. Folder 124 consists of one single page of text. Although there is no date on the document itself, the watermark on the paper is legible as 1806. Self- or external censorship may have been the reason why the introduction was not included in the published version of Masa'ot ha-Yam, but Lefin himself gives no indication why the text remained in manuscript.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I:4, p. 79.

The tales told by non-Jews who believed in Divine Providence were worthy of being heard for their own sake, without any reference to their "enhancement" of traditional learning.¹²⁵ Because Lefin intended his translation for traditionally-educated East European Jewish youths, he was careful to justify his "suggestion" with prooftexts from the rabbinic tradition. As he wrote:

It is not sufficient to listen to stories of triumph that occurred before us, rather one must always pursue and honor the events of men come what may, to listen to them either orally or from their writing. As the Sages wrote: "Who is wise? The one who learns from every man,"¹²⁶ and they said: "Whether from a non-Jew or from Israel or from a slave or from a handmaid, the Holy Spirit rests upon him according to his deeds."¹²⁷

Lefin's citation of rabbinic sayings was not only a strategy to give his work the imprimatur of tradition. It also reflected his sincere conviction that a rational Judaism could be open to the universal values inherent in the experiences and knowledge of enlightened gentiles.

This conviction is implicit in the selection of Campe's tales for translation, tales in which the encounter between enlightened, "civilized" Europeans and "noble savages" figured prominently. A central component of the eighteenth-century's discourse on non-European peoples, the image of the "noble savage" contrasted the natural purity of non-Western tribal

¹²⁵ See Immanuel Etkes, "The Question of the Precursors of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe (Hebrew), in Dat ve-Hayim: Tenu'at ha-Haskalah be-Mizrah Eiropah, Immanuel Etkes, ed., (Jerusalem, 1993), pp. 25-44.

¹²⁶ Mishnah Avot, 4:1.

¹²⁷ Tana De-Beit Elijah Rabbah, parashah 10, chapter 1.

society with the depravity and corruption of European civilization.¹²⁸ The "savages" of Pelew, in Lefin's rendition, are described to be "proper and good men" (anashim hagunim ve-tovim).¹²⁹ Through their travail, the unfortunate Europeans learn (to their surprise) the important Enlightenment message that character, not pedigree, is the essence of mankind. In the second travel story included in Journeys By Sea, which described an ill-fated search for the Northeast Passage,¹³⁰ a sailor affirmed the Enlightenment's belief in Man's universal nature: "And this is a faithful testimony that God, may He be blessed, casts sparks of compassion in the heart of every man, he can be from any people that can pity and have compassion, one man for his brother, and can empathize with his pain."¹³¹ Although the natives encountered on Pelew are pagan, they, too, believed in the immortality of the soul and in the world-to-come. Raa Kook, a Pelewan

¹²⁸ For European representations of the new world, see Michelle Buchanan, "Savages, Noble and Otherwise, and the French Enlightenment," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, 15 (1986), pp. 97-109; Brian Fagan, Clash of Cultures, (New York, 1983); Frank E. Manuel, The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes, (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Stephen Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions, (Oxford, 1991); Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, The Savage in Judaism, (Bloomington, IN, 1990). The first encounter between the British and the natives of Pelew is characterized by mutual wonder. Later in the narrative, however, the British compare, to their dismay, their selfishness and suspicion to the generosity and compassion of the Pelewan natives. See Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, pp. 4b, 28a, 31a and 31b.

¹²⁹ Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, p. 4a.

¹³⁰ The travelogue is an adaptation of Campe's "Jakob Heemskerks und Wilhelm Barenz nördliche Entdeckungsreise und merwürdige Schicksale," which first appeared in Joachim Heinrich Campe, Sammlung interessanter und durchgängiger zweckmässig abgefasster Reisebeschreibungen für die Jugend, volume 1.

¹³¹ Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, p. 54b.

native who was the very embodiment of the "noble savage,"¹³² explains to Wilson, the British captain, "In our land, too, it is true that the wicked remain in the earth and the righteous rise to the firmament and are illuminated in a great radiance."¹³³ The first travelogue is full of anthropological descriptions and digressions about the people of Pelew and how they compare physically and culturally to the hapless British.¹³⁴ But the differences between the two cultures are rarely a source of discord. The value of recognizing that which is universal in men is underscored by the cultural exchange that takes place at the end of the story; a British sailor decides to remain in the East Indies while Lee Boo, the King of Pelew's son, sails to England with the British once they have repaired their ship.¹³⁵ In parting from his son, the King of Pelew tells him to regard Wilson as a father, and urges the captain to instruct his son in all the customs suitable for a British

¹³² For descriptions of the nobility of the Pelewan natives, see Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, p. 18a; (Lemberg, 1859), pp. 60 and 63. The extant 1818 copy is missing pages 37-52, so citations from the later pages are taken from the 1859 edition. Raa Kook is described concisely in the original English version, The Shipwreck of the Antelope, as appearing to be "above every species of meanness," p. 28, a quality which is embellished by Campe, "Dieser verständige und liebenswürdige Mann äusserte bei jeder Freundschaftsbezeugung, die man ihm erwies, die größte Erkenntlichkeit; er bemühte sich, die englischen Gebräuche und Sitten anzunehmen; und stöste durch sein ganzes Betragen Jedermann die höchste Achtung für die Geradheit und Güte seines Karakters ein." Campe, volume 9, pp. 37-38.

¹³³ Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, (Lemberg, 1859), p. 70.

¹³⁴ Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, (Zolkiew, 1818), pp. 4a, 7b, 9b and 15b. In fact, Lefin added two chapters to Campe's version of Wilson's voyage. These chapters comprise a quasi-anthropological exploration of the culture of the Pelewan and are devoted to "their customs, crops, houses, utensils, weapons and how they built boats," and to their "marriage, burial and religious customs, and to their virtues." See the 1859 edition, pp. 64-71.

¹³⁵ Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, (Zolkiew, 1818), p. 29a; cf. Campe, Sammlung, volume 9, p. 170. This kind of cultural exchange was typical of the period. In 1774, a Tahitian native was brought back to London by Captain Thomas Furneaux. See Fagan, p. 111.

citizen.¹³⁶

Clearly, Lefin translated Journeys By Sea as a way of broadening the geographic and cultural horizons of Polish Jewry. By choosing to translate Campe's writings, which were well respected by Lefin's fellow maskilim, and whose tales contained universal values, such as the beliefs in God's Providence, in divine reward and punishment, and in the immortality of the soul, that were not discordant with rabbinic Judaism, Lefin hoped that his effort to expand Jewish life beyond the four ells of Jewish tradition would not be met with suspicion.

Yet there is an even more covert message within Lefin's Journeys By Sea. Of the three editions published in the nineteenth century, none contains a preface and, as mentioned above, Lefin's introduction remained in manuscript.¹³⁷ Lefin opened the 1818 edition by alluding to Psalm 107: 23-24 ["They that go down to the sea in ships (yordei ha-yam be-oniyot), that do business in great waters; these saw the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep"] on the title page, which reads, The Book Journeys By Sea, They are God's Deeds and Wonders Seen by Those who Went Down to the Seas (Yordei ha-Yamim) in Dutch and British Boats (Be-Oniyot). A paraphrase of the psalm also appeared in an abbreviated form in the translator's note of the anonymous 1823 edition, while the 1859 edition cited

¹³⁶ These paeans to universalism notwithstanding, Campe's text was still imbued with the belief in Western superiority which informed the eighteenth-century image of the "noble savage." Europeans ardently projected a utopian, but childlike, nobility onto non-Western peoples, and remained firmly convinced that such a nobility was still inferior to the mature, although problematic, advances of civilized life. Lee Boo is confronted with the limitations of his paradisiacal island upbringing when, on landing in England, he realizes the liability of being unable to read or write. See Fagan, p. 90 and Greenblatt, p. 9. On Lee Boo's sense of inferiority, see Lefin, Masa'ot ha-Yam, (Zolkiew, 1818), p. 36a.

¹³⁷ Zolkiew, 1818; Vilna, 1823; Lemberg, 1859.

Psalm 107:23-24 in its entirety on the inside of the title page. On the one hand, Lefin's use of the psalm as an introduction to his translation served to make the work more palatable to a traditional audience; the simple meaning of Psalm 107:23-24 suited the contents of the story well.¹³⁸ But, his choice of the psalm was not merely literary. Lefin's decision to use this particular proof-text was part of his larger campaign against the mystification of traditional rabbinic Judaism.

A Hasidic commentary on Psalm 107 popularly known as Commentary to Hodu and attributed to the Ba'al Shem Tov was first published as Sefer Katan (Small Book) in Zhitomir in 1805 and printed a second time in Leszczów in 1816. The commentary to the psalm was well known among both Hasidim and kabbalists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was cited by the disciples of the Besht, including the Magid of Mezhirech, Jacob Joseph of Polonnoye, Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, Nahum of Chernobyl, and Shmuel Shmelke Horowitz of Nikolsburg.¹³⁹ The Beshtian interpretation of verses 23-26 glossed the verbs "descend" and "ascend" in the psalm to address the dilemma faced by human souls inextricably mired in sin.¹⁴⁰ In the most general terms, this problem is known in Hasidic thought as nefilat ha-zaddik, in which the zaddik's special responsibility to the sinful men of his generation requires that he, the leader of the generation, descend to their base level in order to elevate them as he

¹³⁸ Later in the century, the maskil Isaac Meyer Dik also employed a paraphrase of the psalm in his popular Yiddish travelogues entitled Pilei ha-Shem (God's Wonders). See Zalman Reizen, "Campe's 'Antdeckung von Amerike,' in Yiddish," YIVO Bleter, 5, no.1, 1993, p. 36, footnote 11.

¹³⁹ Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth Century Hasidic Thought, (Jerusalem, 1993), p. 342.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 347 and 354.

ascends to the Divine.¹⁴¹ The dangerous "descent" of the "higher souls" was the supreme test faced by the zaddikim; the successful "ascent" or redemption of captive souls was predicated on taking that risk. Indebted to ideas within Lurianic Kabbalah which it appropriated and transformed, the Hasidic interpretation of the adventure of descent into Sheol led to the creation of the new ritual of reciting Psalm 107 on the Sabbath eve.¹⁴²

The importance of Psalm 107 for mystical circles within Central and East European Jewry was known to their opponents as well. Eleazer Fleckeles (1754-1826), a leading rabbinic figure in Prague, which was the center of Frankism until the beginning of the nineteenth century, devoted the fourth part of his Olat Hodesh (The Month's Sacrifice) to a lengthy sermon, Ahavat David (David's Love), against Sabbatians and Frankists.¹⁴³ In the early pages of Ahavat David, Fleckeles used the Talmudic discussion (Baba Batra 73b) of Psalm 107:23-26, in which Rabbah bar bar Hana relates a series of extraordinary sights that he saw when travelling by ship as the springboard for his homily against the deviance of the kabbalists and Sabbatians. Fleckeles compared the water of the psalm to the "water" of the Torah and exhorted that only men who had sufficiently plumbed its depths, through immersion in the Talmud and the decisors, were worthy. His also shaped his sermon around the well-known Talmudic discussion of the four

¹⁴¹ Tishby and Dan, pp. 263-264, 266. See, too, Uffenheimer, pp. 367-368, footnote 43, on the psychological dimensions of the doctrine of the "descent of the zaddik" in Hasidic thought.

¹⁴² Uffenheimer, pp. 367-368. In normative rabbinic practice, Psalm 107 was recited either on the eve or the morning of the first day of Passover. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

¹⁴³ Eleazer Fleckeles, Ahavat David, (Prague, 1800). On Fleckeles' battle against Sabbateanism, see Shmuel Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut: Toldotav shel Ma'avak, (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 63-98.

permissible forms of interpretation, peshat (simple), remez (symbolic), drash (homiletic), and sod (esoteric), in which the last mode of interpretation, sod, was only to be studied after the first three forms were mastered.¹⁴⁴ Punning on the acronym PaRDeS (orchard) for the four modes of interpretation, Fleckeles referred to sod, that favored by the Sabbatians and kabbalists, as the wine produced only at the end of the season. The kabbalists who had not mastered the Talmud and the decisions erred like "old drunkards," becoming intoxicated on "cellared wine" before they had drunk water. Steeped in Kabbalah, they would emerge tottering and reeling, inebriated by the esoteric tradition, an allusion to Psalm 107:27 ("They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end").¹⁴⁵ The leitmotif of the sermon is that the Sabbatians bypass the traditional system of learning which permitted only those who had mastered the whole rabbinic corpus to turn to mysticism.¹⁴⁶

Joseph Perl gives further evidence of the widespread knowledge of the Hasidic interpretation of the psalm among both mitnaggedic and maskilic groups in Eastern Europe. On a small slip of paper buried in his archive, Perl noted that in his opinion Psalm 107:26 referred to nefilat ha-zaddik. Taking exception with Fleckeles' commentary, he wrote:

In my limited opinion, it seems that the interpretation of "they ascend to the Heavens, they go down again to the depths" (Psalm 107:26) is that sometimes the zaddik descends to katnut [the "minor" or "imperfect" state in which profane activities are carried out] in order to raise up the evil ones (see their holy books); the meaning of "they go

¹⁴⁴ BT Hagigah 14b.

¹⁴⁵ Fleckeles, p. 5a.

¹⁴⁶ Isaiah Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, I, (London, 1989), introduction, p. 40.

down again to the depths" is that the zaddikim need to descend to the depths, meaning, to katnut in order to "ascend to the Heavens," to raise the evil ones to Heaven.¹⁴⁷

As mentioned above, Mendel Lefin was well acquainted with anti-Sabbatian rabbinic writings and frequently relied upon Jacob Emden as a source for his own perspective on the links between the publication of the Zohar, the spread of Sabbatianism, and the emergence of Hasidism.¹⁴⁸ The fact that both a prominent anti-Sabbatian, Eleazer Fleckeles, and Lefin's virulently anti-Hasidic disciple, Joseph Perl, knew of the mystical meaning of Psalm 107 suggests that the Beshtian commentary was also known to Lefin. It is highly probable that Lefin deliberately appropriated Psalm 107:23-24 for his own purposes. By using the psalm and its paraphrase to open Journeys By Sea, Lefin attempted to uproot the psalm from the mystical matrix into which Hasidim had placed it. He had employed the same strategy in Making Wise the Simple.¹⁴⁹

By appropriating the Besht's use of Psalm 107:23-27, Lefin was making a broad statement about the opposing world-views of Hasidism and Haskalah. While the Ba'al Shem Tov and his disciples used the psalm to encode the biblical text with the religious significance specific to Hasidism and its religious leaders, Lefin cast the psalm as an invitation for traditional Jews to gain a broader appreciation of the non-Jewish world, both of which he believed shared such fundamental beliefs as the concept of Divine

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 59. On katnut, see Tishby and Dan, p. 266 and Gershom Scholem, "Devekut, or Communion with God," in Scholem, The Messianic Idea in Judaism, (New York, 1971), pp. 203-227.

¹⁴⁸ See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, pp. 1b and 2a; Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, p. 40; Werses, Haskalah ve-Shabta'ut, pp. 103-106.

¹⁴⁹ See above.

Providence. He read the psalm literally, i.e. as a pashtan, using its lyrical biblical poetry to introduce his translations of two treacherous sea journeys undertaken by Europeans. Using a manifestly secular work, Lefin endeavored to recapture what he believed was the original, unmystical meaning of the psalm. Encapsulated in Lefin's use of Psalm 107:23-26 was his conception of a Haskalah faithful to rational rabbinic Judaism, open to non-Jewish culture, and inimical to Hasidism and other forms of Jewish mysticism. Although Journeys By Sea appears superficially to be a simple, popular translation of the travails of some British sailors and a celebration of God's soteriological power, it is, in fact, another example of Mendel Lefin's subtle anti-Hasidic polemic.

As we have seen, Lefin consciously employed non-Jewish ideas in his work and translated non-Jewish texts for East European Jews in an effort to disseminate his conception of a moderate Haskalah. Although he shared many generic Enlightenment values with men like Benjamin Franklin and Joachim Heinrich Campe, such as the battle against superstition and ignorance and the effort to liberate the human soul from metaphysical dogma, Lefin was highly selective in how he employed their works. Moral Stocktaking and Journeys By Sea illustrate the maskil's effort to present the Haskalah as the authentic heir to traditional rabbinic Judaism, which he believed had found its truest expression in the intellectual tradition of Maimonidean rationalism, and reflect the cultural specificity of Lefin's Podolian origins. Central to both texts was Lefin's struggle against Hasidism for the souls of East European Jewish youth. The selectivity of Lefin's cultural borrowing in Moral Stocktaking and Journeys By Sea is representative of the maskil's method. Lefin's discussions of the constituent

faculties of the mind, of the limits of human reason and autonomy, and of the immortality of the soul -- which will be explored in the next chapter -- display the maskil's discriminating and careful use of the intellectual heritage of several eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers (i.e. Helvétius, Hartley, Kant, etc.) for his own vision of a moderate, religious Enlightenment.

Chapter Four

Mendel Lefin as a Natural Philosopher

Lefin considered his magnum opus to be Nachlaß eines Sonderlings zu Abdera (The Literary Estate of a Crank from Abdera), a philosophic work on Kantian philosophy which, except for fragments, was never published and is no longer extant.¹ Many of his peers also regarded him as a philosopher. Israel Bodek began a letter to Lefin with the following flourish: "To my dear friend, the complete sage, the divine philosopher, our teacher, R. Mendel Lefin, may his light shine, peace and blessing forever."² Several of Lefin's works, both published and unpublished, treat philosophical questions and reflect his intellectual debt to contemporary European intellectuals (such as Claude-Adrien Helvétius, John Locke, David Hartley, and Immanuel Kant), as well as to the medieval Jewish philosophic tradition, particularly to the

¹ Israel Weiniös, who had access to the Perl library in Tarnopol during the inter-war years, saw two editions of Lefin's Nachlaß. Lefin had begun the first edition, consisting of 242 folios, in 1794 in Sieniawa, and completed it in 1806 in Mikolajów, a fact which is confirmed by the appendix to the Perl Archive compiled by Phillip Koffler. The second edition, consisting of 248 folios, which was corrected and edited for publication, was completed in 1823. See Israel Weiniös, "R. Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów," (Hebrew), Ha-Olam, 40, 1925, p. 800. Roughly twenty fragmentary pages survived the transfer of the Perl archive to Jerusalem. The extant fragments from Nachlaß include those in the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers and in the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128, which contains five discrete fragmentary essays, four of which are from Nachlaß. Notes to Nachlaß also appear in Lefin's unpublished journal, the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130.

² Israel Bodek to Mendel Lefin, 13 Nisan (April 19), 1818, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 2.

works and thought of Maimonides. Close examination of Lefin's writings demonstrates that, along with the biblical translations, programs for the moral and cultural reform of the Jewish community, dissemination of medical and scientific information and translations of German literature, philosophic speculation also comprised a part of his maskilic oeuvre. As with all of his writings, Lefin's philosophic works were part of his overarching effort to safeguard traditional rabbinic Judaism from the onslaught of change, particularly from the challenges of atheism and Hasidism. His discussions of natural science, contemporary theories of psychology, and Kantian epistemology, as well as his speculations regarding the immortality of the soul, were efforts to garner philosophic support to ensure the future of an intellectually vibrant, yet traditional, Jewish way of life.

Science and Nature in the Service of Religion

David Ruderman has recently summarized an important scholarly debate on the degree to which Central and East European Jews in early modern Europe engaged in scientific study.³ One school argued that the primary stimulus to scientific activity among Ashkenazic Jews was the external influence of German, Italian, and Spanish culture; the other, seeing intellectual and cultural isolationism as the defining feature of Central European Jewish culture in this period, posited that little scientific knowledge penetrated into the Jewish world. Ruderman reframed the debate by maintaining that the primary challenge for Central and East European Jews inter-

³ David B. Ruderman, Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe, (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 56-99.

ested in science was to divorce physics from metaphysics so that the study of science would not challenge the fundamentals of their religious faith. Moses Isserles (1525-1572) and Judah Loewe of Prague (1525-1609) both circumscribed the role of science in order to create a permissible and autonomous realm for its study. In Ruderman's words, "The Maharal [Judah Loewe of Prague]...formulated a theological structure whereby Jewish faith was safeguarded from science and science was protected from the unwarranted intrusions of Jewish faith."⁴

Polish Jewry's specific cultural insularity created another set of historiographic problems. David Fishman concluded in his study of the Jews of Shklov in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that, besides a select group of Jewish physicians trained at the University of Padua and at the medical school of the University of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder, and a few Talmudists interested in astronomy as a means of deepening their understanding of the Jewish calendar, secular learning and science were "secondary features" of Jewish life in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.⁵ Countering these conclusions, Ruderman again pointed to Judah Loewe of Prague as the central figure in a "restructuring of Jewish thought" at that time which "reassessed the value of rational pursuits, severed physics from metaphysics, and recognized nature as a legitimate sphere of knowledge coexisting with divine sapience of rabbinic and kabbalistic traditions." Those Jews who were interested in science could find a

⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

⁵ The phrase comes from David E. Fishman, "Science, Enlightenment and Rabbinic Culture in Belorussian Jewry, 1772-1804," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1985, p. 30; see, too, his Russia's First Modern Jews: The Jews of Shklov, (New York, 1994) and "A Polish Rabbi Meets the Berlin Haskalah: The Case of R. Barukh Schick," AJS Review 12 (1987), pp. 95-121.

rabbinic justification for their pursuits in Judah Loewe; nature and physics could be seen as partners in the stimulation of traditional piety.⁶

Mendel Lefin assumed the bifurcation of physics and metaphysics in his discussions of psychology, epistemology, and the immortality of the soul. Yet, his separation of these two realms of inquiry was more likely the result of the commanding influence of eighteenth-century natural philosophy (which presupposed the separation of physics and metaphysics) than of the example of Loewe's attempt to restructure Jewish thought.

Always conscious of his traditional audience and dedicated to the continuity of traditional rabbinic observance, Mendel Lefin reinterpreted scriptural verses and rabbinic sayings to justify his interest in natural science. Responding to a query (which, no doubt, was a literary convention to allow Lefin to expand upon his views) about the significance of studying God's creatures in relationship to Divine service, Lefin argued that scientific investigation of the natural world could not but sensitize the observer to the greatness and purposefulness of God's creative power. Although man could not perceive the distinctiveness of an individual grain of sand or of a sesame seed without the aid of a microscope, God's infinite knowledge could fathom the essence of the largest and smallest of creatures. Citing the saying of Rabbi Yohanan, recited at the conclusion of the Sabbath, "Where you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed is He, there you find His humility," Psalms 113:5-6 ("Who is like the Lord our God, who is enthroned on high, and yet looks far down to behold the things that are in heaven, and on the earth!"), and Psalms 92:6 ("How great are your works, O Lord, how very subtle are your designs!"), Lefin concluded that the study of natural

⁶ Ruderman, pp. 94-99.

science inexorably led to the recognition of God's unique design for the natural world. This world, home to eighteen different kinds of ants, twenty-four types of lice, more than twenty-four varieties of spiders, eighty-seven kinds of crabs, more than one hundred kinds of gnats and over one hundred twenty types of flies, all coexisting and serving a role in the natural order, had to be the work of a purposeful God.⁷ His mention of the microscope (invented in 1660) and the citation of the long taxonomic list reveals Lefin's conservative interest in scientific inventions and discoveries. His paramount concern was not recent scientific innovation, but the investigation of natural science as a stimulus to traditional rabbinic piety. With that goal in mind, study of natural science should be encouraged among his contemporary Polish Jews.⁸

Lefin also looked to medieval Jewish precedents for support for his views on the necessity of studying the natural world. Referring to the chapter on "unity" in Hovot ha-Levavot (Duties of the Heart) by Bahya ibn Pakuda (second half of the 11th century), Lefin concluded that the unity and variety of the natural world illustrated God's greatness. Bahya ibn Pakuda was a passionate supporter of the religious obligation to study nature. In

⁷ The letter was originally published in Iggerot ha-Hokhmah (Letters of Wisdom), which was included in Lefin's Moda le-Binah (Insight to Understanding), (Berlin, 1789) and later reprinted at the beginning of all the post-1845 editions of Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh (Moral Stocktaking). The letter does not appear in the edition of Moral Stocktaking published in Lefin's lifetime. See, too, Lefin's unpublished "The Variability of the Standard of Human Life or for the Name Day of His Austrian Imperial Monarch, [His] Majesty's General Field Marshal, [His] Highness the Prince Adam Czartoryski, the 24th of December, 1814, a Serious but Edifying Consideration," Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128a, paragraphs 5 and 6. The Koffler appendix confirms Lefin's authorship of this essay, but cites 1815 as its date of composition. See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, appendix folder.

⁸ See Hillel Levine, "Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1974, pp. 67, 106-109.

the same work, the chapter on behinah (investigation), ibn Pakuda wrote: "Contemplate, therefore, God's creatures, from the largest of them to the smallest, and reflect on those matters which are at present hidden from you...and because these marks of divine wisdom vary in created things, it is our duty to study them and meditate on them until the whole matter becomes established in our souls and abides in our consciousness."⁹ Lefin considered the natural world to offer the most obvious proof of the existence of a good and purposeful God. As he wrote in Ha-Me'asef (The Gatherer):

Thus it is clear from natural science that God, may His powers be exalted, imprinted all of creation. It is an illuminated mirror through which to see His completeness. There you will find His infinite greatness in the place of His humility, there His wisdom and there His dominion, there His compassion and devotion to His creatures, etc. And from this they said that the goal of creation was two things: to reveal His completeness and to gladden His creatures. He did marvelous things in the creation of the types of trees and plants in a pleasing order and relationship, like that of nations and tribes, families and clans, species [kingdom, phylum, class, order, family]; all of them have roots, stems, branches, leaves, buds and flowers, and there is not even a hairsbreadth among them that is in vain: and their seed recreates its species eternally, and excites this one against the other one, and they join together in union, male and female, to give birth to that which is similar to them, etc.....[God's creative power is] even more [evident] in the creation of animals [which requires] vigorous and mighty devices, channels and vessels, thin cavities and even thinner cavities, innumerable exalted wonders and unfathomable forms [of creation].¹⁰

⁹ Cited by Ruderman, p. 22. Barukh Shick, a rav maskil (an enlightened rabbinic Jew), constructed his anatomy treatise, Tiferet Adam (Berlin, 1777) as a commentary upon the fifth chapter of Hovot ha-Levavot.

¹⁰ Ha-Me'asef, volume 5, 1789, pp. 83-84. Emphasis in the original. See, too, Lefin's letter to his uncle on the purpose of his book, Moda le-Binah (Insights to Understanding), (Berlin, 1789), Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 21, and p. 55 in the same folder.

Lefin frequently referred to "investigating" God's creatures in order to apprehend God's greatness as a fundamental responsibility of a self-conscious Jewish life. He considered it self-evident that man "must distinguish God's creatures, be observant of Creation according to his ability, and behold the stamp of the Creator of everything, Blessed is He, for in it His glory and perfection is inscribed."¹¹

Maimonides' love of the natural world also lent support to Lefin's interest in studying natural science as a goad to piety. In the Mishneh Torah, the Laws of the Foundation of the Torah (2:2 and 4:2), Maimonides concluded that contemplation of God's "great and wondrous works and creatures" would lead to love and fear of the Divine.¹² In the conclusion of his translation of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed into mishnaic Hebrew, Lefin reiterated his conviction that God's omnipotence was revealed in the dialectical juxtaposition of the most exalted creations (the planets) with the humblest (the insect world):

In the history of natural science we find many different bodies of unending number which infinitely expand in greatness and smallness (lift up your eyes and see the vast armies spread over the expanse of the Heavens), one of them is our sun, which emanates warmth and light to the world, whose vaulted space is not less than 32,000,000,000,000 parasangs...and half of a diagonal of the rotation of the sun (meaning, not less than 20,000,000 parasangs) is nothing with respect to the distance from one of the existing stars closest to the earth according to the astronomical account of our time. In contrast, we find a small ant with many legs of the same length, of this type there are thousands upon thousands of this length. And He who sits in Heaven lowers Himself to see such a simple creature, and makes an intestine and a bowel with holes for it, so not one of them will open or close, harden or detach, so the [ant] will not immediately die; rather it will eat and grow, reproduce in its image, and then be gathered [to the dust], so, too, we find a sesame shrub, whose size is like that of a

¹¹ Ibid., p. 85.

¹² On Maimonides' interest in the natural world, see Ruderman, p. 29.

tree, sending forth branches and twigs and thousands of fruits are hanging from them, and within them are the chambers of the sesame seeds, and when one looks at one of its seeds with a microscope, we see that it is but a complete replica of the form of its parent tree, and it seems that it, too, carries its small fruits with which it sows, and that every one of its grains of seeds is also a form of very thin tree, and carries fruit to the end of the generations, (this is no trifling matter for Heaven, for there is no artist like our God); this is the rule for all the other kinds of plants and animals which fill the space of the world. Their number is infinite and all of them are connected to one another and act upon one another in order to create one complete creation from everything. That is the rule of this world and His omnipotence, may He be blessed, is revealed through it. From the science of surgery we find an edifice of the limbs of bodies of animals arranged according to unending continuous stratagems, which testify to His infinite wisdom and lovingkindness.¹³

While the Enlightenment in all of its regional and national forms welcomed the scientific revolution, it would be inaccurate to state that it challenged fundamental religious views of the existence of a benevolent God. For many eighteenth-century thinkers, particularly those in the German-speaking lands, "truth [was] revealed not in God's word but in his work[s]," as stated by Cassirer.¹⁴ Lefin's pious stance, therefore, was entirely in keeping with many of his eighteenth-century contemporaries who saw no contradiction between scientific empiricism and religious values. Lefin was interested, for example, in Leonhard Euler (1707-1783), the greatest mathematician of the eighteenth century, who retained his religious convictions throughout his entire life.¹⁵ Lefin's view of the role of the study of natural

¹³ Conclusion to the translation of Moses Maimonides, Moreh Nevukhim (The Guide for the Perplexed), Mendel Lefin, translator, (Zolkiew, 1829), paragraph 5.

¹⁴ Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, (Boston, 1962), p. 43.

¹⁵ Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, II, (New York, 1966-1969), pp. 126-144. Lefin's interest in Euler is attested in his unpublished journal. See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 56 and by the note on its front page, which stated that a friend had borrowed the first volume of Euler's letters [Letters to a German Princess (1770)] from him on 3 Av (August 6), 1826.

science as a handmaid in the effort to encourage traditional piety was consonant with the scientific understanding of eighteenth-century natural philosophy.

Eighteenth-century natural philosophy was a mixture of scientific experimentation, involvement in the didactic popularization of the resulting scientific discoveries, and belief in the utility of these findings for understanding the ways of Providence and improving society.¹⁶ Benjamin Franklin typified the eighteenth-century natural philosopher; discoverer of the lightning rod and of the Pennsylvania fireplace, he believed in the practical application and moral utility of his experiments, affirming that a heightened sense of God's creative power could not but result from scientific knowledge. One of his private pupils, Polly Stevenson, affirmed the efficacy of scientific knowledge in underscoring God's purpose when she told Franklin, "If the Knowledge I gain from your Instructions is small, I am certain to receive one Advantage, I shall be taught to pay a grateful Adoration to the Great Creator whose Wisdom and Goodness are so manifest in the Operations of Nature."¹⁷

Lefin not only shared Franklin's belief in the study of nature as a means of understanding God's work, but was sympathetic to the commitment of natural philosophers to the dissemination of scientific knowledge

¹⁶ J. L. Heilbron, "Franklin As an Enlightened Natural Philosopher," in Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective, J. A. Leo Lemay, editor, (London, 1993), pp. 196-220.

¹⁷ Even Franklin's critic, Jean Antoine Nollet, concurred in his Leçons de Physique that "the most precious advantage, which every well-born soul cannot help but feel in studying Nature, is the need to recognize everywhere the Supreme Being who made this vast universe and who constantly presides over his works. The further one goes in this subject, the deeper the conviction grows that its object is not a product of chance; everything declares an infinite and astonishing power." Both citations are from Heilbron, p. 205.

beyond a small group of educated men. Franklin, Jean Nollet, Euler, Noel Antoine Pluche, among others, actively engaged in teaching young women physics, mathematics and astronomy.¹⁸ Lefin's mentorship of Sheindel Pineles, Joseph Perl's daughter, as well as his surprising comment in Moral Stocktaking that the best havruta (study partner) for a man was his wife, reflected his internalization of the openness with which natural philosophers approached the education of women, a value without precedent in traditional eighteenth-century Ashkenazic Jewish society.¹⁹ Of special interest to Sheindel Pineles, whom contemporaries referred to as an isha maskelet (enlightened woman), was Johann Georg Heinzmann's Die Feuerstunden der Grazien (The Graces' Hours of Fire) and Joachim Heinrich Campe's Väterliche Rath für meine Tochter (Fatherly Advice for My Daughter).²⁰ Praising Heinzmann's work, she remarked to her correspondent that "Sir Lefin, who is extremely knowledgeable, said that he never

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215. Henry Hunter, the translator of Euler's letters into English remarked in the preface: "Euler wrote these Letters for the instruction of a young and sensible female, and in the same view that they were written, they are translated, namely, the improvement of the female mind; an object of what importance to the world! I rejoice to think I have lived to see female education conducted on a more liberal and enlarged plan." See Letters of Euler on Different Subjects in Physics and Philosophy addressed to a German Princess, I, Henry Hunter, trans., (London, 1802), xviii.

¹⁹ See Mendel Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, (Lemberg, 1808), paragraphs 34 and 44. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 11a and 134b. On Joseph Perl's school for girls in Tarnopol, see Philip Friedman, "Joseph Perl as an Educational Activist and his School in Tarnopol," (Yiddish), YIVO Bleter, xxx-xxii (1948), pp. 143-149.

²⁰ Johann Georg Heinzmann, Die Feuerstunden der Grazien, (Bern, 1782) and Joachim Heinrich Campe, Väterliche Rath für meine Tochter, volume 36 of Sämmtliche Kinder- und Jugendschriften, (Braunschweig, 1830). For the phrase isha maskelet see Benjamin ha-Cohen Reich to Mendel Lefin, undated, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 70.

saw such a thing in his life."²¹ Enlightened men of the eighteenth century, including the maskilim, also employed the literary convention of dedicating their works to women. Isaac Euchel dedicated his German translation of the traditional Jewish prayerbook to Demoiselle Rebeka Meyer Friedländer, a young widow whom he had tutored. Joel Brill and David Friedländer also inscribed their writings to German-Jewish women.²² Lefin himself dedicated his Nachlaß to Izabela Czartoryska.²³

Lefin's seemingly dilettante-like interest in such disparate topics as natural science, German travelogues, biblical translations, ethical treatises, and transcendental philosophy, all of which he regarded as a means to bolster traditional rabbinic religious values, fit well into the broad scope of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, whose participants included inventors, literary figures, professors, travelers, experimenters, etc. The eighteenth-century natural philosopher, personified by Franklin, was not a specialist, but generally a man with catholic interests and passions.²⁴ Another Polish-Jewish maskil who conformed to this type was Abraham Jacob Stern (1762-1842), a brilliant mathematician known in his time for his practical inventions, such as the adding machine, which received a patent

²¹ Sheindel Pineles to Michael Inländer, February 2, 1824, N.M. Gelber Archive, Central Archives of the Jewish People, RP83/66.

²² Chone Shmeruk, Sifrut Yidish: Perakim le-Toldoteihah, (Tel Aviv, 1978), p. 155.

²³ A list of Lefin's unpublished works includes The Literary Estate of a Crank from Abdera (Nachlaß eines Sonderlings zu Abdera), by Mendel Lefin. Mikolajów, January 1, 1806. For the Nameday of Her Highness Izabela Czartoryska in January, 1794, Sieniawa). See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, the Hebrew and German typewritten appendix prepared by Philip Koffler of Tarnopol.

²⁴ Heilbron, p. 196. Gay notes that Franklin, D'Alembert, Maupertius, Lichtenberg and Buffon earned their reputations as scientists before philosophers. See Gay, I, p. 14.

from the Austrian government in 1815. Stern also wrote Hebrew poetry and was active in the public life of Polish Jewry.²⁵

Although Lefin never wrote a discrete scientific treatise and was not actively involved with first-hand scientific experimentation, as were maskilim like Stern and a rabbinic figure like Barukh Schick, he was aware of the impact of the Copernican Revolution on the scientific and intellectual community of his day.²⁶ A hint of Lefin's position can be found in his comment on Joshua 10:12 ("Sun, stand still upon Giv'on and moon, in the valley of Ayyalon; and the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies"), which, if read literally, could be adduced as a proof-text for the validity of geocentrism.²⁷ In his unpublished journal, Lefin interpreted the verse:

This is apparent, that the sun was never in Giv'on and the moon was never in the valley of Ayyalon. "A generation comes (ba) and a generation goes" (Ecclesiastes 1:4), etc., meaning, it goes "a fonds perdue," not literally walking in place, thus "the earth stands (omedet) eternally, etc." (Ecclesiastes 1:4), meaning exists [not stands], such as "and he established (ya'amid) them forever and ever (Psalms 148:6).²⁸

²⁵ Ephraim Kupfer, "From Far and Near," (Hebrew), in Sefer Zikaron Mugash le-N. M. Geiber, (Tel Aviv, 1963), p. 218. On Krochmal's negative review of his friend Stern's poetry, which he felt was too didactic, see Ephraim Kupfer, "Jacob Samuel Bik in Light of New Documents," (Hebrew), Gal-Ed, 4-5, 1978, p. 542.

²⁶ Samuel Joseph (RaSHi) Fuenn reported that Lefin and Schick were both resident at the same time on Joshua Zeitlin's estate in Shklov, Reisen, where the latter had personal use of a chemistry laboratory. See Samuel Joseph Fuenn, Kiryah Ne'emanah, (Vilna, 1860), p. 272.

²⁷ On Jewish attitudes toward the Copernican Revolution, see Hillel Levine, "Paradise Not Surrendered: Jewish Reactions to Copernicus and the Growth of Modern Science," in Epistemology, Methodology and the Social Sciences, Robert S. Cohen and Mark W. Wartofsky, eds., (Dordrecht, Holland and Boston, MA, 1983), pp. 203-225.

²⁸ Joseph Perl Archive, folder 130, p. 21. Emphasis is mine.

Lefin took the biblical Hebrew root amad (literally: to stand), which appears in the verse in Joshua and Ecclesiastes, and read it contextually, as "to exist" and "to establish." Both his medieval predecessor, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, whose Sefer Elim may have had a formative influence upon Lefin, and contemporary maskilim, such as Aaron Wolffsohn-Halle (1754-1835), supported the Copernican position. The latter criticized Phinehas Elijah Hurwitz (1765-1821) in the pages of Ha-Me'asef for his reluctance to accept Copernicus in his Sefer ha-Berit (Book of the Covenant), an encyclopedic survey of natural science presented in harmonious conjunction with the Kabbalah. Hurwitz relied on Tycho Brache's theory which held that all the planets, except the earth, revolved around the sun.²⁹ Lefin's implicit agreement with Copernicus indicates his openness to contemporary scientific theories, even of those which were viewed by many of his traditional contemporaries as opposed to Scripture.³⁰ Lefin resolved the conflict between science and faith implied by the verse in Joshua by relying on a non-literal translation of the verb "to stand," a hermeneutic technique which he had learned, in part, from his close study of the first chapters of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed. Lefin's disciple, Joseph Perl, continued on the path paved by his mentor regarding the compatibility of study-

²⁹ See Ha-Me'asef, (Berlin, 1809), pp. 68-75. On Sefer ha-Berit, see Ira Robinson, "Kabbala and Science in Sefer Ha-Berit: A Modernization Strategy for Orthodox Jews," in Modern Judaism, IX, 3, October 1989, pp. 275-288, although Robinson's use of the term "Orthodox" is anachronistic and conclusion that Hurwitz was a maskil very problematic. Hurwitz's interest in science displayed none of the features of modernization (interest and trust in gentile writings) characterized by the Haskalah.

³⁰ Tobias Katz (1652-1729), a Polish-Jewish doctor who had studied at the University of Padua and authored a popular scientific handbook for Polish Jews, Ma'aseh Tuviah (Tobias's Account) in 1707, rejected Copernicus on the grounds that his views contradicted scripture.

ing natural science as a way of honoring the Creator when he included Bezalel Stern's story, entitled "God Does Everything at its Appointed Time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11), which celebrated the seasons and God's providence over the laws of nature, in his unpublished 1813 luah (calendar). Perl's three published calendars, entitled Zir Ne'eman (Faithful Messenger), included discrete sections entitled "natural investigations" (behinot ha-teva).³¹

The Science of Man in the Eighteenth Century

The celebration of natural science shared by the Western European and Polish Enlightenments owed a great deal to British ideas, particularly to the revolution in thinking wrought by the ideas of Isaac Newton. Although German culture via the Berlin Haskalah served as the primary influence upon Lefin's intellectual world, he also had access -- both direct and indirect -- to British and French ideas.³² Alexander Pope poetically immortalized the scientific contribution to the new sense of the possibility of scientific discovery, and alluded to its potential challenge of accepted theological truths,

³¹ Joseph Perl Archive, folder 96b, pp. 1a-2a and Joseph Perl, Zir Ne'eman, (Tarnopol, 1814-1816). Stern was a student in Perl's school in Tarnopol and later became a leader in the newly-established Jewish community in Odessa. On Stern, see Michael Stanislawski, Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 58, 78, 93-94 and Steven J. Zipperstein, The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881, (Stanford, CA, 1985), pp. 44, 56-63, 102.

³² Both Adam Kazimierz and Adam Jerzy Czartoryski looked toward England, through which they traveled extensively, as a model of an enlightened society. See Zawadzki, A Man of Honour, pp. 17, 19, 31; Yosef Klausner, Historyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah, I, (Jerusalem, 1930), p. 15; R.W. Home, "Scientific Links Between Britain and Russia in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," in Electricity and Experimental Physics in 18th-Century Europe, Home, ed., (Hampshire, UK, 1992), pp. 212-213.

with the following couplet: "Nature and Nature's Laws lay Hid from Sight; God said, 'Let Newton Be!', and all was light."³³ For Newton, the experience of nature provided the raw material for establishing scientific principles, and those scientists who followed in his footsteps assumed that general scientific conclusions could only be attained through direct observation. Eighteenth-century thinkers interested in the nature of man extended Newton's conclusions about the natural world to humanity and attempted to make the study of mankind into a science. Psychology, they believed, should begin with the "solid facts" of natural science based on observation. Phenomena preceded principles, which could be drawn only from the results of empirical perception.³⁴ Just as philosophic enthusiasm for the study of natural science found resonance in Lefin's Iggerot ha-Hokhmah (Letters on Wisdom), traces of influence from many of the greatest "psychologists" of the century can be found in Lefin's philosophic writings, revealing how the maskil transmitted the Western European intellectual tradition to East European Jewry.

John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690) provided the intellectual foundation stone of a psychological application of Newton. Locke argued that neither principles nor ideas (which he also called "objects") were innate. The mind at birth was an "empty cabinet" capable of passive perception of the outside world.³⁵ Locke called this ability of the mind "experience" and divided it into two sub-categories, sensation and

³³ Cited in Roy Porter, The Enlightenment, (London, 1990), p. 17.

³⁴ Cassirer, pp. 7-8, 21-23.

³⁵ John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, I, Alexander Campbell Fraser, ed., (New York, 1959), p. 48.

reflection, which furnished the mind with all of its empirical data.³⁶ As he wrote:

I pretend not to teach, but to inquire, and therefore cannot but confess here again, -- that external [sensation] and internal sensation [reflection] are the only passages I can find of knowledge to the understanding. These alone, as far as I can discover, are the windows by which light is let into this dark room. For, methinks, the understanding is not much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things without: [would the pictures coming into such a dark room but stay there], and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man, in reference to all objects of sight, and the ideas of them.³⁷

Locke's sensationalism, the conception that all human knowledge was derived from the external environment, became the basis for the psychological thought of Helvétius, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, George Berkeley, David Hartley, Voltaire, and many other eighteenth-century philosopher-scientists. Each thinker, however, gave a different emphasis to Locke's assumptions. Locke believed that the mind, once it received external stimuli, had the ability to contemplate and reflect and argued that the mind's faculties included the qualities of discernment, comparison, composition, and abstraction. Berkeley and David Hume combined "sensation" and "reflection" into one comprehensive concept of "perception" to explain the capabilities of the mind. Condillac extended the idea of one exhaustive faculty of the mind even further. Taking a position of extreme sensationalism in his Treatise on Sensation (1754), Condillac argued that simple sense perception was the source of all human knowledge without conceding to the mind any active, mediating capacity to judge or discern

³⁶ On Locke, see Gay, II, pp. 167-180.

³⁷ Locke, pp. 211-212. Emphasis in the original.

among those sensations. He stated: "All thinking and judging, all desiring and willing, all powers of the mind, all powers of the imagination and all artistic creation, qualitatively considered, add nothing new, nothing essentially different to this fundamental element [simple sense perception]. The mind neither creates nor invents; it repeats and constructs."³⁸

Like Condillac, Helvétius asserted a position of extreme sensationalism. Although he argued in De L'Esprit (On the Mind) (1758) that man had two passive faculties, "physical sensation" capable of receiving impressions from the outside world and "memory" capable of retaining those sensations, in actuality they were one and the same. "I say, then, that the Physical Sensibility and Memory, or, to speak more exactly, that Sensibility alone, produceth all our ideas, and in effect Memory can be nothing more than one of the organs of Physical Sensibility."³⁹ Contra Locke, Helvétius believed that all of the faculties of the mind, its ability to perceive similarity and difference, agreement or disagreement, were reducible to sense perception.⁴⁰ Helvétius applied his sensationalism to his systems of education and ethics, positing the complete equality of men at birth and the infinite possibility of education as a catalyst to moral progress. Because the minds of individual men contained no pre-existing faculties, the external environment furnished the stimuli to human development and growth. The only principle that Helvétius considered inherent in the mind of an infant was the ability to sense pleasure and pain; all human beings, following this principle of cor-

³⁸ Cited by Cassirer, p. 25; see, too, pp. 17-18 and Gay, II, pp. 178-180.

³⁹ Claude-Adrien Helvétius, De L'Esprit or Essays on the Mind and its Several Faculties, (London, 1810), p. 7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 34.

poreal sensitivity, would avoid pain and seek pleasure. This principle of "self-love" was not synonymous with pride, but a natural aspect of the human condition that could produce either arrogance or modesty. Error, moral or otherwise, was the result of passion and ignorance.⁴¹

David Hartley (1705-1757), a physician by training, also proceeded from Lockian hypotheses regarding sense perception. His most famous contributions to the development of sense empiricism were his theories of the "association of ideas" and "vibrations," which he outlined in Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (1749). Locke had introduced the phrase "association of ideas" in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding to explain the ability of the mind to connect impressions or ideas such that when one discrete idea was evoked, the other ideas that were connected or associated with it would be simultaneously recalled. Locke had only used the "association of ideas" to explain cognitive error, such as a child's correlation of darkness with goblins or a pagan's association of God with corporeality.⁴² Hartley, however, saw in the connection of sense impressions the means by which simple ideas became more complex. His tenth proposition stated: "Any sensations A,B,C, etc. by being associated with one another a sufficient number of times, get such a power over the corresponding ideas, a, b, c, etc., that any one of the sensations A, when impressed alone, shall be able to excite in the Mind, b, c, etc. the

⁴¹ See Cassirer, pp. 26-63; Grossman, pp. 38-73; Ian Cumming, Helvetius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought, (London, 1955), pp. 68, 74-75; Helvétius, pp. 11, 29. See, too, Chapter Four on Lefin's use of Helvétius' concept of self-love.

⁴² Locke, I, pp. 529-535.

ideas of the rest."⁴³ Hartley drew upon Newton's Principia for information about the structure of the nervous system and its reception of external stimuli to undergird his argument of a "physiological psychology."⁴⁴ He explained the physiological basis for human understanding as follows:

The white medullary substance of the brain, spinal marrow, and the nerves proceeding from them, is the immediate instrument of sensation and motion....External objects impressed upon the senses occasion, first in the nerves on which they are impressed, and then in the brain, vibrations of the small, and as one may say, infinitesimal, medullary particles....The vibrations mentioned in the last proposition are excited, propagated, and kept up, partly by the äther, i.e. by a very subtle and elastic fluid, and partly by the uniformity, continuity, softness, and active powers of the medullary substance of the brain, spinal marrow, and nerves.⁴⁵

The theories of the "association of ideas" and "vibrations" provided Hartley with the vocabulary to explain human understanding. All ideas derived from simple sense perceptions, physiologically received by the vibration of the nerves and conducted to the brain. These simple perceptions became complex ideas through the "association of ideas." Although many philosopher-psychologists after Hartley rejected his reduction of all sense perception to the physical vibration of the nervous system, indications of Hartley's influence, and that of other sensationalists, can be found in Lefin's work.

⁴³ David Hartley, Observations on Man; His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations, (London, sixth edition, 1834), p. 41. On Hartley and the "Association of Ideas," see Croom Richardson, (unsigned), "Association of Ideas," in Encyclopedia Britannica, (11th edition), (London, 1910), pp. 784-786.

⁴⁴ See Gay, II, pp. 181-184, for the term "physiological psychology."

⁴⁵ Hartley, propositions 1, 4 and 5, pp. 5 and 8. The term "äther" is from Newton.

Mendel Lefin's Psychology

As mentioned above, Lefin believed that the human soul was comprised of three faculties: sensual, imaginative (also called "pictorial") and rational. He expanded upon his conception of human understanding in the introduction to an unpublished Yiddish essay on the immortality of the soul entitled Ma'amar Olam ha-Gemul (Essay on the Afterlife).⁴⁶ Lefin prefaced his essay with an outline of his psychological theories in order to discuss "whether or not his [a man's] portion is in Hell or in the Garden of Eden in the world-to-come...through simple, earnest reason (meaning, without superfluous and deceptive reasoning, like today's world of deception), in such a way, that it is a direct supposition which instructs the truth, from which it is necessary to understand it."⁴⁷ The human understanding perceives ideas, Lefin wrote, in three ways:

a) sensual, for example, I see the Emperor now or I hear his voice now or I feel something painful now or a kind of tickle in a part of my body, b) imaginative, something enters my mind, the image of the Emperor or of his voice, or a feeling that I once had in one of the parts of my body, c) rational, meaning, such thoughts which the mind either connected or separated from the aforementioned imagination. For example, size, swiftness, beauty, and ugliness, useful and harmful, cause, obstacle, help, falsehood and truth, want, supposition, doubt, certainty, proof, refutation, proof, contradiction, etc.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Note Lefin's specific mention of this heretofore unknown manuscript in his unpublished journal, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 69 and in Mendel Lefin, Elon Moreh, supplement to Ha-Meliz, (Odessa, 1867), where he refers to the pamphlet using the Hebrew shorthand, ayin, heh, gimel, pp. 16-17. See, too, the manuscript version of Elon Moreh, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 23, specifically chapter four of the unpublished section entitled "Key to the Pamphlet, Elon Moreh."

⁴⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, p. 1b.

⁴⁸ Ibid. See, too, the sources mentioned in chapter three, footnotes 20-23.

The first category of human understanding, sensual, illustrates Lefin's reliance on the sensationalist theories of his American and European contemporaries, although he only mentioned Euler, Franklin, and Helvétius by name.⁴⁹ The external world provided "concrete" stimuli which "push themselves involuntarily into the soul from the outside, and they move it more forcefully than the other thoughts, which glitter in front of the concrete thoughts like the little stars in front of the illuminated sun," wrote Lefin. In Moral Stocktaking, Lefin implicitly evoked Hartley's theory of vibrations to explain how the inner world of the soul, which he called Olam ha-Katan in Hebrew, received information from the external world (Olam ha-Gadol). Because Lefin's conception of the soul equated the world of the senses with the "animal soul," he argued that sensual perception was within its province:

When a man is calm, his rational soul burns brightly like a torch and his animal soul is sent to dispatch the light of reason to the whole body through the tubes of the brain (zinurot ha-mohim), the branches of the white threads which leave the brain and spinal chord and diffuse vitality and feeling upon the body (like the capillaries which leave the heart to carry the nourishment in the blood to all of the limbs). Their principle feeling is in their membranes, and when one channel [neuron] ceases [to respond] or its membrane hardens or weakens too much, then the existence and vitality of its [corresponding] limb is annulled.⁵⁰

In an unpublished German fragment, Lefin was even more explicit about Hartley's influence: "Each one of the active or passive, intentional or

⁴⁹ For Lefin's reference to Euler, see footnote 15 above; to Franklin, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, JNULA, Mendel Lefin papers, document b, and Weinlös, p. 800; to Helvétius, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, JNULA, Mendel Lefin papers, documents b, d and e, and the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 6 and 128d.

⁵⁰ Mendel Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, (Lemberg, 1808), paragraph 67 with its footnote, and paragraph 78; Lefin, Elon Moreh, p. 12.

involuntary, vibrations of the nerves produces an idea in our soul. Each of the ideas generally reproduces a former idea from the stores of memory, with which it associates or joins in some way."⁵¹ Indeed, Lefin referred specifically to the "association of ideas," calling it hiluf ha-rayanot, mehalekh ha-mahshavot, mehalekh ha-rayanot and kishur ha-rayanot in several places in his writings.⁵² Lefin believed that the process of aging stiffened and therefore diminished the sensitivity of the nerves; the condition of the human understanding was, thus, subject to a process of development, with infancy representing the point of the nerves' highest sensitivity, middle-age exemplifying a balance between the nerves' sensual acuity and rationality, and old age, concluding with death, signalling the end of all sensual experience.⁵³

Lefin, however, was not a pure sensationalist. Although he believed, like Locke and Hartley before him, in the capacity of the mind to retain the simple ideas it had received from the senses -- which the maskil referred to as the imaginative faculty of human understanding -- he placed even greater emphasis on the mind's active, rational capacity.⁵⁴ Lefin's interest in sensationalism reveals his use of contemporary psychological theory, but his rejection of the prevailing wisdom that human understanding was but a pas-

⁵¹ The Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, JNULA, Mendel Lefin Papers, document c, paragraph 25.

⁵² Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, paragraphs 78, 81-82, footnote to paragraph 97. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, folder 130, pp. 38-39, 56 and folder 127, p. 2a.

⁵³ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 71a, p. 2a. See, too, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128a.

⁵⁴ See Locke, I, pp. 193-195, Hartley, p. 2 and Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, paragraphs 50, 53, and 55, on memory and the mind's power to retain and recall previous sense perceptions.

sive response to external stimuli illuminates the distinctive contribution of the Haskalah's mediation of these quasi-canonical truths of the Western Enlightenment. Lefin, indebted to the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition, as well as influenced by Mendelssohn's discomfort with the sensationalist conception of man, argued that the mind had the capacity to conceptualize ideas independently of sense perceptions.

Like Mendelssohn, Lefin believed that the senses presented a disorderly mass of impressions to the brain, which could not untangle them without the skill of the rational faculty.⁵⁵ To prove his point, he contrasted the control exerted by the rational faculty of a mature, awake adult, to the unbridled exercise of the imaginative faculty during sleep. While sleeping, the faculties of sense perception and rationality shut down, giving the imaginative capacity of the mind (and its confused "association of ideas") free rein to combine the possible with the impossible, a proof with its own contradiction. Lefin explained:

However, or because the sensory thoughts are not present [while sleeping], a just, serious world is created for us out of those fantasies. Thus, we are relaxed from good dreams, and we have worries and anxieties and fears from bad dreams. (For example, a simple Jew can dream that he is sitting in the Land of Israel and takes back his donation to the Land of Israel from the official functionary, for he now really joyously lives in the Land of Israel, because he sees it and his thought and his reason do not deny it. In contrast, the greatest ruler can dream that he fell into a deep hole, thus he now [in his dream] really lives in dark suffering, etc.) However, soon the sensory thoughts and the rational thoughts both awaken, the entire delusion falls away and the "process of ideas" returns again to its habitual course (according to sensation and reason).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ On Mendelssohn's rejection of pure sensationalism, see Alexander Altmann, Moses Mendelssohn, (Hanover, 1983), pp. 658-659.

⁵⁶ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, pp. 3a-3b. See, too, Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, paragraph 78, Hartley, proposition 7, p. 29, and Euler, I, p. 359 on sleep as a condition in which sensual stimuli could not be perceived.

The rational faculty of the mind was, unlike the sensory and imaginative faculties, capable of controlling and guiding the "association of ideas," which Lefin compared to the unceasing, undulating motion of waves and running water. "In this kind of conception [the pictorial or imaginative], everything depends upon the blind and unalterable path of the associations of the ideas. The mind, in contradistinction, always decides upon one of the imagined conceptions as an object for its considerations: it holds it firmly and distinctly and steps from this conception to a second, [and then to a] third, solid and precise conception."⁵⁷ The ability of the rational faculty to order the tumultuous "process of ideas" ("the ability to connect ideas with intention") was the quality of the mind which distinguished men from animals. In animals and young children, the "association of ideas" was only defined by sensual thoughts. The existence of the rational faculty made language and speech possible; thus, it could also be called the faculty of speech.⁵⁸

Mendel Lefin's Epistemology

The eighteenth century preoccupation with defining how the human mind acquired knowledge was intimately bound up with a concern to elucidate the parameters of that knowledge. Interest in natural science and the empirical quality of sense perception did not necessarily mean the abandonment of traditional, even religious, metaphysics. The emphasis on

⁵⁷ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 71a, p. 1a; cf. folder 127d, p. 2a and Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, footnote to paragraph 97.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

what the mind could know through the senses, rather than what might have been previously considered innate to the faculty of human understanding, underscored the limitations of human apprehension to the natural world. Nature, and its study through biology and physiology, usurped the centrality of mathematics and physics. Reason was a tool to help guide man in understanding his relationship to the empirical world.⁵⁹ Lefin, too, grappled with delineating the limits of human knowledge. As in his psychology, Lefin's conclusions about the limitations of human apprehension illustrate his selective use of Western European ideas (Locke, Helvétius, Kant) and his dependence upon the thought of medieval Jewish rationalists, particularly Maimonides.

Locke's psychological and epistemological thinking reigned authoritative for the first half of the eighteenth century. In the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Locke affirmed that he would consider his writings a success if they helped the "busy mind of man" to stop "meddling with things exceeding its comprehension."⁶⁰ The senses could accurately respond to the material world, and were created by God in order to enable mankind to function in that world, in Locke's words, "to accommodate the exigencies of this life." An understanding of the finite capacities of the senses would lead to the recognition of God and of man's duty to Him, but not to "a perfect, clear and adequate knowledge" of life, which, "perhaps, is not in the comprehension of any finite being."⁶¹ Man should be content with the parameters of his knowledge, which were limited to the temporal

⁵⁹ Cassirer, pp. 13, 65-68, 93. See, too, Gay, II, p. 160.

⁶⁰ Locke, I, p. 28.

⁶¹ Ibid., I, pp. 28 and 402.

world. Helvétius also took the position that the accuracy and rationality of the perceptual capacity of the senses was defined by the empirical world. God said to man, he wrote, "'I endow thee with sensibility, the blind instrument of my will, that, being incapable of penetrating into the depth of my views, thou mayest accomplish all my designs.'"⁶²

Despite his interest in Helvétius, Lefin most often acknowledged the influence of a late Enlightenment thinker, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), as the source for his views on the limitations of human knowledge. He described his Nachlaß as "Reveries of a Fifty-year-old disciple of Kantian Metaphysics, consisting in eight essays," the first of which was entitled "Gesichtskreis des menschlichen Verstandes" (The Horizon of Human Reason).⁶³ Lefin's interest in Kant was shared by other maskilim, such as Solomon Maimon, Lazarus ben-David, and Markus Herz. In his French Essai to the Polish Sejm, Lefin mentioned the effort on the part of maskilim in Berlin to issue a new translation of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed with a commentary based on Kant's philosophy.⁶⁴ This commentary, Givat ha-Moreh (The Guide's Height), written by Maimon at the invitation of the society responsible for publishing Ha-Me'asef, was published by Isaac Euchel in Berlin in 1791. Lefin may also have penned a French essay on

⁶² Helvétius, p. 249.

⁶³ Weinlös, p. 800.

⁶⁴ [Mendel Lefin], Essai d'un plan de Réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la nation juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs, Warsaw, [1791], in Materialy do Dziejow Sejmu Czteroletniego, vol. 6, Arthur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michalski, Emanuel Rostworowski, Janusz Wolinski, eds., (Wroclaw/Warsaw/Kraków, 1969), p. 420.

Kant, dedicating it to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski.⁶⁵

Kant's revolutionary epistemology rejected the passivity of the sensationalist model of human apprehension. His philosophical method, which he called "transcendental," assumed the mind's active, a priori ability to apprehend empirical reality. Without the mind's activity, there could be no objective reality.⁶⁶ Kant, who sought to find and explain the existence of a universal structure of knowledge, argued that sensationalism was particularistic by necessity. Only an a priori structure of human understanding could meet the test of universality and objectivity. The details of nature, for example, could only be observed and sensed if the mind was a priori subject to universal laws of understanding. The same held true for all sense perception.⁶⁷

For Kant, therefore, the individual mind, also called "human understanding" or "reason," was the beginning and end of all cognition. A human being could only understand the perceptions of his senses because of the activity of the mind, and the parameters of the activity of the mind only extended to what it could empirically cognize. While sense perception alone was not sufficient to explain human apprehension, supra-sensible perception or traditional metaphysics was entirely beyond human apprehension,

⁶⁵ Meir Letteris, Zikaron ba-Sefer, (Vienna, 1868-69), p. 40. Isaac Euchel was Kant's student at the University of Königsberg; his teacher's influence can be seen in Euchel's programmatic article on the necessity of studying history, "A Word to the Reader about the Use of Ancient History and the Knowledge that is Connected to It," published in Ha-Me'asef, I, (Königsberg, 1784), pp. 9-14. See Shmuel Feiner, Haskalah ve-Historyah: Toldotav shel Hakarat-Ever Yehudit Modernit, (Jerusalem, 1995), p. 40.

⁶⁶ Ernst Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought, James Haden, trans., (New Haven, CT, 1981), pp. vii-xviii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 157 and 166.

even given the mind's activity. Kant thus concluded that human knowledge was inherently limited by empiricism and could not make any claims to metaphysical knowledge. Since metaphysical assumptions were not provable, Kant redefined metaphysics as the science of outlining the limits of human reason.⁶⁸ In one of his earliest works, Dreams of a Spirit-Seer (1766), he wrote:

Metaphysics is a science of the limits of human reason....I have not determined these limits with any precision here, but have indicated that the reader will find on further reflection that he can excuse himself from all vain inquiries with regard to a question the data for which are to be found in a world other than the one in which he perceives himself to be.⁶⁹

Kant's epistemology was both objective, in that it was subject to universal laws, and subjective, in that it was grounded in the mind of the individual.⁷⁰

Despite Lefin's self-definition as a Kantian, careful scrutiny of his writings demonstrates that he was even more dependent upon Maimonides' epistemological conclusions. As we have seen, most of Lefin's work was informed by a Maimonidean perspective. Lefin explicitly referred to Maimonides in his French Essai, the philosopher's Eight Chapters influenced the program for moderate moral self-reform in Moral Stocktaking, and Lefin undertook a comprehensive translation of ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation of the Guide for the Perplexed in 1785.⁷¹ In 1867, Lefin's introduction to that

⁶⁸ Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought, pp. 83, 101-102.

⁶⁹ Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁷¹ Lefin never fully completed the translation, but two parts of it were published posthumously in 1829 by two of his disciples, Mordecai Suchostober and Jacob Samuel Bik, who were aided by Izak Ozer Rotenberg and Isaiah Meir Finkelshtein. The third section was issued by Solomon Rubin in Ha-Karmel. See Klausner, I, pp. 220-221, and Weinlös, #42, p. 838. See, too, the correspondence between Joseph Perl and Solomon Yehudah Rapoport about Lefin's translation in Israel

work, entitled Elon Moreh, was published as a supplement to Ha-Meliz. Moreover, as we shall see below, Lefin's conception of the world-to-come, too, owed much to Maimonides' vision in his "Essay on Resurrection" and in the last chapter of the Guide of an immortal soul, finally liberated from the corporeal prison, free to apprehend the Divine.

The human intellect, Maimonides posited, could comprehend terrestrial physics, which formed a coherent, knowable system, but could not apprehend celestial physics and metaphysics, a more extensive system which concerned the Divine.⁷² In the Guide, Maimonides argued both that God and the celestial beings were not intrinsically knowable and that the corporeality of human beings inherently delimited their epistemological capacities. Lefin adopted Maimonides' definition of the parameters of human knowledge in its entirety. In the fourth chapter of Elon Moreh, he faithfully translated all of Guide I:31 to illustrate his support of that view. The essence of the chapter is as follows:

Know that the human intellect has objects of apprehension that it is within its power and according to its nature to apprehend. On the other hand, in that which exists there also are existents and matters that, according to its nature, it is not capable of apprehending in any way or through any cause; the gates of apprehension are shut before it....The fact that it apprehends does not entail the conclusion that it can apprehend all things -- just as the senses have apprehensions but it is not within their power to apprehend at whatever distance the objects of apprehension may be....[Although there are great differences in the intellectual capacities of individuals] this difference in capacity is likewise not infinite, for man's intellect indubitably has a limit at which

Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin-Satanower," (Yiddish), YIVO Bleter, II, (1932), pp. 354-55.

⁷² See Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja, and Maimonides," in Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature, I, Isadore Twersky, ed., (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 82-109. Pines noted a contradiction between Maimonides' very narrow limits of human apprehension and his belief that man's ultimate goal was intellectual perfection. See p. 82.

it stops. There are therefore things regarding which it has become clear to man that it is impossible to apprehend them....Do not think that what we have said with regard to the insufficiency of the human intellect and its having a limit at which it stops is a statement made in order to conform to law. For it is something that has already been said and truly grasped by the philosophers without their having concern for a particular doctrine or opinion. And it is a true thing that cannot be doubted.⁷³

Lefin not only assumed Maimonides' epistemology, but also adopted his "negative theology." Maimonides posited that the metaphysical realm was beyond the parameters of human apprehension and that God himself was unknowable to all men; God could only be known through his attributes of action.⁷⁴ In the Guide I:58, he stated that only a negative description of God's essence could be correct because any positive definition would imply some kind of deficiency in the Divine, who was complete in his omnipotence and omniscience. Lefin concurred, writing in Elon Moreh that human understanding sometimes functioned only as negative knowledge, such that we recognize that we can never know precisely how many stars are in the sky, but accept that there cannot be "less than" a specific number. "In every case where it is impossible to apprehend the essence of the thing that we are considering, we are satisfied with what it is not."⁷⁵

Lefin concluded his unpublished "Key to Elon Moreh" by citing the scriptural incident (Exodus 3:6) in which Moses hides his face from seeing God in the burning bush in order to underscore the fact that human apprehension is limited to the temporal world. Job, argued Lefin, in con-

⁷³ Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, I, Shlomo Pines, trans., (Chicago, 1963), pp. 65 and 67.

⁷⁴ Pines, pp. 98-100. See, too, Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, the Book of Knowledge, the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah (1:10).

⁷⁵ Lefin, Elon Moreh, p. 20.

tradistinction to Moses, could not accept the limitations of his knowledge, and wanted to understand fully God's attributes of judgment. Yet, only by studying God's attributes of action, particularly by examining the products of his creativity (the natural world), could man know God. Lefin wrote:

We find this, too, in God's response, may He be blessed, to Job's error in asking difficult questions from human consideration about the attributes of His judgment, may He be blessed. Human apprehension is sufficient for us to recognize just a tiny bit of His honor (kevodo), may He be blessed. We will merit blessing and success in two worlds [if we do] not stubbornly investigate that which covers God, as it is written: 'And Moses turned away his face lest he see God (Exodus 3:6)'.⁷⁶

In his effort to delimit the parameters of human apprehension, Lefin read Kant through Maimonides, thereby diffusing the differences between the two philosophers. Although both concluded that traditional metaphysics were beyond the range of the human mind and both accorded "primacy to the life of action," Kant's rejection of the validity of heteronomous legislation was a clear threat to traditional rabbinic culture and bore nothing in common with Maimonidean ethics.⁷⁷ In fact, more than one modern Jew who defined himself as a traditionalist keenly felt the challenge and could not remain silent in the face of Kantian ethics. Samuel David Luzzatto (1800-1865), for example, believed that Kant's argument, which defined a moral action as only that which was performed autonomously and freely by an individual out of a rational sense of duty, not out of submission to revealed authority, was categorically perilous for traditional Judaism. He

⁷⁶ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 23, p. 12. Maimonides cited the verse from Exodus in the Guide 1:5 and expanded on the difference between Moses' seeking to know God's way (derekh), which he was shown, and God's glory (kavod), which was withheld, in 1:54.

⁷⁷ Pines, pp. 100 and 109, footnote 84.

rightly sensed that Kant's "moral theology" secularized ethics and rendered divine commandment meaningless, if not completely invalid. Luzzatto expressed his repudiation of Kant through the wordplay of an acronym; KaNT (kaf, nun, taf) was the opposite of TeNaKh/Torah, Prophets, Writings (taf, nun, kaf).⁷⁸ In 1830, after his rejection of the Haskalah and turn to Hasidism, Samuel Jacob Bik wrote an illuminating letter to Nachman Krochmal, who later shared the letter with Samson Bloch ha-Levi (1784-1845) and Solomon Yehudah Rapoport, in which he juxtaposed Kantian ethics, with its attendant secularization and what he believed was its implicit assimilation, to traditional Jewish morality. Bik, too, punned on the initials of Kant's name:

You said that in my letter I turned from the path of truth, God forbid, and I already realized that this idea came to you and to our wise friend...because you dash after the teachings of the Christian [Kant]...and instead of grasping the gleanings of his philosophy and dispersing them to rocks of the Torah and the commandments, you wholeheartedly entrusted yourselves to him, "because to him your souls yearn" (an allusion to Psalms 42:2).⁷⁹

Lefin, however, did not internalize the challenge of Kantian ethics.

While Kant extended his ethics from his epistemology and concluded that

⁷⁸ Cited in Jay Harris, "The Image of Maimonides in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," PAAJR, 54 (1987), p. 122. Luzzatto was also known for his harsh critique of Maimonides, who he believed had ossified Jewish law in the Mishneh Torah and whose extreme rationalism paved the way for the influence of non-Jewish (Atticist, in Luzzatto's terminology) ethics upon traditional Jewish culture. See Emil Fackenheim, Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy, (New York, 1973), pp. 40-42.

⁷⁹ Cited in Kupfer, "Jacob Samuel Bik in Light of New Documents," Gal-Ed, 4-5, (1978) p. 539. The letter was later published in Ha-Me'asef ha-Hadash, 1, (Vienna, 1894), p. 103. The original verse from Psalms reads, "Ken Nafshi Ta'arog (kaf, nun, taf) elekhah elohim" ("for my soul yearns towards you, God"), spelling KaNT. For Kant as a religious thinker, see Adina Davidovich, "Kant's Theological Constructivism," Harvard Theological Review, 86:3, (1993), pp. 323-351.

they, too, were defined by the activity of the autonomous human mind, and not by the supra-sensible world, Lefin remained firmly grounded within a traditional Jewish understanding of heteronomous ethical behavior. Nothing in his writings even hints at an acceptance of Kant's autonomous, human-centered moral system, although Lefin, like Kant, rejected the idea that reward in the world-to-come should be the motivation for ethical behavior.⁸⁰ Following Maimonides, Lefin enjoined his readers to fulfill God's commandments out of love (ahavah) and fear/awe (yirah). Alluding to the Guide III:24, where Maimonides rejects the rabbinic concept that "trial" (nisayon) in the Bible should be understood as God's way of increasing an individual's reward in the world-to-come, Lefin, too, concluded that the only rational way to understand the binding of Isaac was to interpret it as an example of the primacy of awe to render proper service to God.⁸¹ From Kant, therefore, Lefin only took the positing of the limit of human apprehension, which was already anticipated and validated by Maimonides. Lefin's epistemological and ethical system was dependent upon God's command; ethical behavior, in fact, was best learned by imitatio dei. In his unpublished journal, Lefin did not withhold his criticism of a philosophy which in his view did not obligate an individual to act morally:

Indeed, the most perfect of teachers is the Divine, may He be blessed, Himself. Therefore we are commanded, "You shall walk in His ways" (Deuteronomy 28:9) and [we should] cleave to His virtues. This is one of the foundations of the Torah. From it we are commanded to recognize His ways from within his actions, meaning, that through this we learn to do good to other creatures, as Maimonides wrote, may his memory be blessed, in [the Guide] III:54 about the verse, "I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the

⁸⁰ Cassirer, Kant's Life and Thought, p. 86.

⁸¹ Lefin, Elon Moreh, pp. 3, 25-28. See, too, Ha-Me'asef, vol. 5, 1789, p. 84.

earth," (Jeremiah 9:23), (not philosophic knowledge which has no benefit for the matter of doing good to one's fellow creatures).⁸²

Moreover, the faculty of reason, which was the third component in Lefin's vision of the psychology of the soul, was indubitably bequeathed by the divine. As mentioned above, despite his use of sensationalist theory, Lefin clearly believed that the human mind was not merely a passive recipient of external stimuli. Man's rational faculty, and the capacity of his rational soul to train his animal nature, was a gift from a loving God. Again, following Maimonides not Kant, Lefin argued that God had fashioned man in His image (be-zelem), and that zelem meant "reason," which was unique to the human species, making it superior to animals, but inferior to the "separate intellects" (the heavenly hosts). Reason, God's "additional love" (hibah yatirah)⁸³ enabled man to be conscious of God Himself:

Even though God granted lovingkindness to all kinds of creatures through their limbs and wonderful powers with which they were created in order to attain their prey and for self-protection, in any case, such blessed creatures are not aware of themselves, and certainly not aware of their Creator's love; this is not so with this divine reason (zelem), for man recognizes the preciousness of this gift and the fact of God's love, for through this wonderful spark man can peek into the small breach between him and the breadth of the firmament to speculate about the distance of the exalted armies that are immeasurably far away, and about their great power, that every human being is nothing next to the smallest of them, and since all of them are separate intellects, certainly their power, reason, and justice are much higher than ours, according to their greatness and exaltedness, their clarity and their eternity, for they constantly tell of God's honor and glory.⁸⁴

⁸² Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 130, p. 55. Emphasis is mine.

⁸³ Mishnah Avot 3:14. See Lefin, Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh, paragraph 90 and the commentary of Tosafot Yom Tov on Avot 3:14.

⁸⁴ Lefin, Elon Moreh, p. 1.

Lefin clearly relied upon Maimonides' limitation of human apprehension to the sensible world in order to underscore his commitment to traditional Jewish heteronomy. He also implicitly argued against delving into the mysteries of metaphysics as part of his polemic against Hasidism. Lefin believed that contemporary Hasidim arrogantly assumed that they could apprehend the true nature of the divine by contemplation and investigation of the theosophic structure of emanations from the Godhead. Lefin protested that unlike Maimonides, who proved and explained his views through reason, the Hasidim merely asserted the veracity of what they believed, appealing to "closed secrets" that could not be subjected to rational proofs. Their self-confidence struck Lefin as overweening pride; King David himself had admitted his limitations, "My heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty, nor do I exercise myself in great matters or in things too exalted for me," (Proverbs 131:1), cited Lefin, "so how did the commoner [the average Hasid generally, or, more specifically, the Ba'al Shem Tov] leap to the top of the height, adorning the firmaments?"⁸⁵ Inquiry into the metaphysical realm, which was beyond the pale of human knowledge, could only lead to antinomian despair, insanity, or sexual deviance. Job's insistence upon understanding God's attribute of judgment led to grief. Ben Zoma's insatiable desire to explore the supra-temporal world led to dementia.⁸⁶ Mystical speculations about the unions and couplings of the divine emanations had led to the "sexual abominations" in the days of Shab-

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁸⁶ BT Hagigah 14b on the story of the four men who entered the pardes (paradise or orchard) of speculation, of which only one, R. Akiba, left unharmed.

betai Zevi and Jacob Frank. The implications of unlimited epistemological speculation were clear: Hasidism's theosophic inquiry into the nature of the divine was liable to lead to worship of other gods and to antinomian behavior.⁸⁷

Lefin distinguished between the human capacities of hokhmah (wisdom) and da'at (knowledge), arguing that the former represented metaphysical knowledge, the latter physical (e.g. scientific and mathematical) knowledge: this distinction provided him with a means of harmonizing a traditional Jewish conception of the continuous decline in understanding ever since the moment of Revelation with contemporary, eighteenth-century beliefs in the intellectual progress of mankind over time. There could be cumulative human progress in matters of reason, argued Lefin, but not in matters of metaphysics, where there had been no qualitative advance since the generation of the Patriarchs.⁸⁸ As "wisdom" became more and more distant from Revelation, "knowledge" continued to increase through time; Lefin legitimized his view with the proof-text, "For the earth shall be full of knowledge (de'ah) of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).⁸⁹ In fact, the progress of human knowledge over time constituted Lefin's definition of Enlightenment, as he wrote, "the sum of human discoveries

⁸⁷ Lefin, Elon Moreh, pp. 7 and 15. See, too, the somewhat gratuitous footnote on p. 20 for a critique of a group of Hasidim who, suspicious of finding leaven in their food, separated themselves from the general Jewish community on Passover.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13, and Levine, unpublished dissertation, pp. 68-69, 75.

⁸⁹ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 23, "Key to the Pamphlet, Elon Moreh," chapter 3 and Lefin, Elon Moreh, p. 13. See, too, Hillel Levine, "Dwarfs on the Shoulders of Giants": A Case Study in the Impact of Modernization on the Social Epistemology of Judaism," JSS, Winter 1958, pp. 63-72.

constitute Enlightenment (Aufklärung)."⁹⁰ Yet, for all of Lefin's interest in the advances of contemporary science and human knowledge, the study of nature and the physical sciences could only serve as handmaids to a Jew's higher purpose: to recognize, love and fear God within the limits of human epistemology, and to gladden his creatures as a result of that knowledge.

Mendel Lefin and the Immortality of the Soul

Although Lefin opposed speculation into God's nature and the structure of the supra-sensible world, he upheld -- as did most eighteenth-century thinkers -- the belief in the immortality of the soul. On the question of the soul's immateriality, Lefin followed his Berlin mentor, Moses Mendelssohn, whose Phädon oder über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele in drey Gesprächen (Phaedon, or Regarding the Immortality of the Soul in Three Dialogues) (1787), was arguably the preeminent treatment of the subject in the late eighteenth century.⁹¹ Lefin penned two essays on the soul's immortality, one in German, Los der abgeschiednen Seelen (The Fate of the Departed Souls), the other in Yiddish, Ma'amar Olam ha-Gemul (Essay on the After-life), and devoted chapter five of his Nachlaß to a discussion of

⁹⁰ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 133.

⁹¹ Altmann, p. 149. Other discussions of the soul's immortality included Johann Gustav Reinbeck, Philosophical Thoughts on the Rational Soul and its Immortality (1740) and Hubert Hayer, La Spiritualité et l'immortalité l'âme (1757). Maskilim, too, turned their attention to the subject; Isaac Satanów's Sefer ha-Midot (Ethics), published in 1784, discussed the soul and its immortal nature, but relied more on Kabbalistic interpretations than upon the Phaedon. See Altmann, p. 353. In his autobiography, Mordecai Aaron Günzburg described the formative influence Mendelssohn's Phaedon had on his intellectual development. See Israel Bartal, "Mordechai Aaron Günzburg: A Lithuanian Maskil Faces Modernity," in From East and West: Jews in a Changing Europe, 1750-1870, Frances Malino and David Sorkin, eds., (London, 1990), p. 129.

Mendelssohn's Phaedon.⁹² All three essays remained in manuscript, the last irretrievably lost. Unlike Mendelssohn, who was later criticized by Kant for his argument, Lefin did not endeavor to prove the immortality of the soul.⁹³ As one of Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith and a cardinal principle of traditional rabbinic theology, the immortality of the soul was, for Lefin, an unassailable fact. His essays on the immortality of the soul are descriptions of the world-to-come reported by a righteous man who has experienced the liberation of death. They can be seen as maskilic manifestos of an imagined paradise, and owe an implicit debt to Maimonides' vision of the beatific joy experienced by the disembodied soul capable of attaining intellectual perfection in the higher world, as well as to Mendelssohn's Phaedon, and to the eighteenth-century literary convention of the heavenly dialogue.⁹⁴

As mentioned above, the Essay on the Afterlife was prefaced by an introduction outlining the faculties of the soul. There Lefin underscored the

⁹² Weinlös, "R. Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów," p. 800, where he transcribes the outline for Lefin's Nachlaß; the fifth essay is called "Summary of Mendelssohn's Phaedon." Los der abgeschiednen Seelen is an incomplete version of Ma'amar Olam ha-Gemul. See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folders 68 and 127d, respectively.

⁹³ Altmann, p. 179. Kant's objections to the Phaedon appeared in the second and revised edition of Critique of Pure Reason (1787). In the section "On the Paralogisms of Pure Reason," Kant disagreed with Mendelssohn's proofs for the soul's incorruptibility. Even if the soul were simple (and thus not subject to annihilation or corruption), Kant argued, it had to have an "intensive quality," which could diminish. Thus, he reasoned, the soul could not disappear into nothingness in one instant, but could lose its powers slowly over time. Nevertheless, Kant, too, believed in the soul's immortality. See Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, (New York, 1929), pp. 373-374. See, too, François Fénelon's modern dialogue between Ulysses and Gryllus (who had been changed into a pig by the sorcerer Circe), in which Gryllus rejects the idea that there is anything in the body that is not subject to corruption. François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, Dialogues of the Dead; Together with some Fables, I, (Glasgow, 1754), pp. 29-30. Lefin mentioned Fénelon's descriptions of the world-to-come in The Fate of the Departed Souls. See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 68, p. 2b.

⁹⁴ Lefin himself had been the brunt of such a dialogue. See Chapter Five.

essential difference between the sensual and pictorial faculties of the soul, which were bound to a human being's corporeal condition, and its rational faculty, which was independent, even imprisoned, by the body. Like Mendelssohn, and Maimonides' before him -- who based his dichotomy between the body and the soul on his Greek predecessors -- Lefin believed that death only meant the physical demise of a person. Glossing Ecclesiastes 12:6-7, where the biblical text depicted death metaphorically, Lefin detailed the physical process of the separation of the body from the soul: "The spinal cord will harden [rigor mortis], the skin will burst open, the brain will split in half, and the veins and arteries will shrink....Then the body will turn into an inanimate object, and the soul will return to Heaven."⁹⁵ Maimonides discussed the world-to-come in several of his writings, viewing it as the pinnacle of a philosopher's life. In the Maimonidean afterlife, the soul, freed from the chains of the body, would be free to achieve intellectual perfection and to apprehend God.⁹⁶ Mendelssohn had argued, through an "enlightened" Socrates who welcomed death, that philosophers desired a complete break with their sensual passions in order to apprehend God without the fetters of the "terrestrial contagion" called

⁹⁵ Mendel Lefin, Sefer Kohelet im Tirgum u-Vi'ur, (Odessa, 1873).

⁹⁶ See Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, The Book of Knowledge, the Laws of Repentance, 8:2, 8:4, 8:6; Guide I:31, II:15; Commentary on the Mishnah, Tractate Sanhedrin, 10:1; "The Essay on Resurrection," in Crisis and Leadership: The Epistles of Maimonides, Abraham Halkin, trans. and David Hartman, ed., (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), pp. 211-245. Lefin wrote an essay on the Mishneh Torah which he hoped to edit even in 1826, but which is no longer extant, and mentioned Maimonides' "Essay on Resurrection" in his concluding remarks introducing his translation of the Guide. See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 67 and Moses Maimonides, Moreh Nevukhim, Mendel Lefin, translator, (Zolkiew, 1829). See, too, Harry Blumberg, "The Problem of Immortality in Avicenna, Maimonides, and St. Thomas Aquinas," in Wolfson Jubilee Volume, I, S. Lieberman, ed., (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 165-185.

the body. "Death is never terrible to a true philosopher, but always welcome."⁹⁷ In death, Lefin explained, the association of ideas in the human understanding would only be guided by the intellect, untrammelled by the sensual perceptions and imaginative associations.⁹⁸ Lefin described how the rational faculty of the soul, unburdened by worries about how to protect and provide for the body, would be liberated both to contemplate the individual's past and to apprehend God. Lefin wrote, in the voice of his fictitious righteous man:

Yet, I could never hold my thoughts together for long [in the sensible world]; [I was] never peaceful in the mortal Camera Obscura (dark chamber),⁹⁹ I could not revel in those blessed considerations. The power of my attention fluctuated every moment, the horizon of my consciousness was too constrained for me, the thread of my memory too short; I was never able to perceive objects from some distances, to say nothing of having an overall view with the necessary clarity of the extent of all that fell between [the distances]: one was too active for me, the other altogether too faint, this one too big, that one too small; until from one very constricted angle everything became imperceptible or incomprehensible to me.

Released of the bodily prison, I feel now completely reborn. Neither heat nor cold nor weather, withered health conditions of the body, temperaments and modifications of the tension of the nerves, nothing has any influence upon the power of my thinking anymore. No more unwelcome sensations, seizures from need, hatred, vanity, and all the other passions, drove my thoughts. Kindness and goodwill, together with all the noble feelings, even revived in me after those former base motivating forces were extinguished from my mind; free will, memory,

⁹⁷ Moses Mendelssohn, Phaedon, or the Death of Socrates, (London, 1789), p. 42 and discussion on pages 28-42.

⁹⁸ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, pp. 4b-5a. See, too, folder 71a, p. 2a and folder 130, p. 69.

⁹⁹ Note, here, Lefin's use of the Lockian phrase, "dark chamber," which the former rendered as camera obscura, itself a reference to a recent scientific invention. The camera obscura, a four-sided black box with a convex lens and one internal white surface, was an eighteenth-century ancestor of the contemporary camera capable of representing images that, in Euler's words, "were more accurate descriptions than [those] a pencil [was] capable of producing." See Euler, 2, Letter 79, pp. 317-318.

attention, wit, and the power of judgment became conjoined in me often, and, to [my] great surprise, all of my intellectual powers expanded.¹⁰⁰

One of the most exquisite rewards bestowed upon an individual in Lefin's fictive world-to-come was the reunion with formerly departed friends and relatives. Lefin's emphasis on friendship reflected Mendelssohn's clear literary influence; in the Phaedon, Socrates had allayed the apprehensions of his worldly disciples that death would spell the end of companionship. In the afterlife, the "enlightened" Greek explained, he would "meet the spirits of the departed, whose society is preferable to any friendship we enjoy here upon earth."¹⁰¹ It also displayed the nature of the social milieu of both the general European Enlightenment and of the Haskalah, whose proponents, mostly male, had created a community, a brotherhood, based on shared values and a commitment to their dissemination which transcended geographic boundaries.¹⁰²

Despite Lefin's fidelity to traditional rabbinic theology -- he never disavowed the national component of Jewish messianism¹⁰³ -- his conception of paradise had a distinctly universalist cast. Lefin's maskilic heaven knew no parochial boundaries of nationality or temporality; one who had merited

¹⁰⁰ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 68, p. 2a. See, too, folder 127d, p. 6b-7a.

¹⁰¹ Mendelssohn, pp. 23 and 48.

¹⁰² David Biale, "Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment," in The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality, Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman, eds., (New York, 1986), pp. 57, 62 n42. See, too, Mendel Lefin to Meir ha-Cohen Reich, Thursday, 9 Shevat (January 26), 1809, Joseph Perl Archive, folder 8 on the inextinguishable quality of their friendship.

¹⁰³ See Lefin's introduction to his Yiddish translation of Psalms, published in Simha Katz, "Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów's Bible Translations," (Hebrew), Kiriat Sefer, 16, 1939-40, p. 129.

the world-to-come could enjoy the company of "all of the sages and righteous men from all the nations and all the generations," individuals whom one knew formerly only through their writings. Paradise would reverse the Tower of Babel and return human society to a pristine stage of language in which all men could understand one another; no dialects would obscure universal comprehension. Confusion due to language would disappear. In mutual admiration, the sages from all the nations would discuss their pasts and all of the obstacles which they had faced in the lower world. They would laugh among themselves about their imagined misconceptions about the afterlife held when they were alive. The discussions among the disembodied intellects could go on endlessly and effortlessly, augmented by newly deceased souls joining the paradisiacal convocation.¹⁰⁴

Among the topics that would be discussed by the circle of bodiless souls was the variety of religious conceptions of service to God. In this section Lefin betrayed, once again, his preoccupation with Hasidism, for he could not help but point out how many righteous men who merited paradise had been plagued by the false beliefs of the new mystics while still in the material world. He wrote, in the voice of a disembodied soul in paradise:

Some wanted to persuade me with very dazzling ardor (hitlahavut), indeed, to recognize their lucky gods, and they, for the sake of my passionate service to the Holy One, Blessed is He (about which I took an oath from the tradition of my ancestors and teachers), wanted me to worship lively human idols. They wanted to mislead me. They showed me their rooms, their jewels, their foods and liquors and their precious households. Thus, certainly such gods, or at least the prophets from God must be [true] which have such grandeur around them. [They said to me:] "Devote yourself to them and heed only their words, then you will see the rose-covered path, and how easy it is to merit the two worlds with good courage." "No, no, I screamed, leave me alone, I want to continue on my thorn-covered path. I never want

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, pp. 7a-8a and folder 68, p. 2b.

to be persuaded by your exaggerations. I do not want to look for any secrets (sodot) in their glories, no prophecies in their charlatans and no pleasures in their guidance."¹⁰⁵

Lefin's imaginary righteous soul keenly felt the persecution of his Hasidic foes and the loneliness that came from remaining steadfast in his conception of the right, meaning rabbinic, manner in which to worship God. If Lefin projected those feelings onto his image of paradise, he did so because of his own sense of isolation in Podolia. The introduction to the second edition of Nachlaß ended with a statement that the author had "finally moved beyond the borders of Abdera," and no longer had to be considered a crank for doing scholarly work.¹⁰⁶ Lefin ended his Essay on the Afterlife with his protagonist lamenting the fact that he could not share his knowledge about the world-to-come with friends who were still imprisoned in their bodies on the earth. Were he to try, his mortal friends would probably feel that their dreams were mocking them. He thus concluded that the joy awaiting them in paradise would be even more pleasurable because it was unexpected.¹⁰⁷

Lefin's interest in the study of nature, in contemporary theories of psychology, particularly sensationalism, and in the debates over the nature of the soul illustrate how he employed eighteenth-century ideas to bolster

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, p. 8a.

¹⁰⁶ Published in Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin-Satanower," p. 348. The name "Abdera" had at least two meanings. It functioned in Greek folklore much the way Chelm did in Polish-Jewish folklore, as a synonym for a city inhabited by simpletons. Yosef Klausner thought it might also represent Brody, the "enlightened" city in which Lefin finally finished editing his philosophic work, because Abdera and Brody are spelled with the same letters of the Hebrew alphabet. See Klausner, I, p. 201.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, pp. 8b-9a.

his dependence upon medieval Jewish attitudes toward science and the true nature of piety. Science, he believed, was harmonious with religion and ought to serve worship of the Creator. Eighteenth-century natural philosophy was consonant with natural religion which, in Lefin's conception, posed no threat to traditional Jewish theology. Natural religion held as commonplace the existence of a purposeful God who had endowed mankind with the rational capacity to explore the natural world (which God had ordered), God's providence over humanity, and the immortality of the soul in heaven, or the world-to-come. Moreover, Lefin did not believe that Judaism's particular vision of redemption conflicted with the tenets of natural religion; he could image a universalist paradise in which philosophers of all periods and nations had the opportunity to engage in unencumbered intellectual discourse and a national redemption in which God gathered the dispersed Jewish exiles to the Land of Israel. Eighteenth-century natural philosophers, many of whom became Aufklärer, Lumières and even maskilim, also shared Lefin's distrust, if not hatred, of superstition, which made them even more desirable intellectual fellows.

Lefin's reluctance (or inability) to internalize the challenge of transcendental philosophy's autonomous system of ethics supports a view of the maskil as a natural philosopher. Despite his claims of being a follower of Kant, Lefin merely conflated Maimonides' epistemology with Kant's, ignoring the latter's revolutionary implications for the obligatory and heteronomous character of traditional Jewish law. When challenged by non-Jewish views that threatened the rabbinic world-view which he so desperately wanted to maintain, Lefin held steadfast to the intellectual world of the medieval Jewish rationalist tradition. Lefin's philosophic stance,

although timid, was consonant with the eighteenth-century Weltanschauung he admired and was eager to transmit to his East European Jewish audience. While he may not have innovated in the realm of philosophy, Lefin's writings successfully transmitted selective aspects of sensationalist theory to a Jewish audience unfamiliar with, and even potentially hostile to, non-Jewish thinking.

One man who boldly continued Lefin's philosophic work was Nachman Krochmal. In contrast to his mentor, Krochmal addressed the challenge of modern philosophic discourse directly, subverting Hegelian dialectics for his own purpose of defending and reviving rabbinic culture. Yet, despite their differences, Krochmal and Lefin shared many of the same goals: to transform contemporary Jewry intellectually, to defeat Hasidism, to elevate the traditional rabbinate, and to protect rabbinic culture.¹⁰⁸ In Krochmal's magisterial The Guide for the Perplexed of Our Time, the stamp of Lefin's moderate vision of the Haskalah had made its decisive impression.

¹⁰⁸ Jay M. Harris, Nachman Krochmal: Guiding the Perplexed of the Modern Age, (New York, 1991), pp. 309-311 and 314.

Chapter Five

Kozim Ia-Mehazez (Thorns to the Archer): The Language Polemic in the East European Jewish Enlightenment

One of the striking features of the Haskalah in Central and Eastern Europe was that long after German maskilim had abandoned writing in a distinctly Jewish language, their Polish and Russian compatriots continued to use not only Hebrew, but Yiddish, in their works. In Berlin, where maskilim felt the pressure of the modernizing nation-state to impose linguistic homogeneity on its new subjects -- at least through its bureaucracy -- the question of which language(s) they chose to use was critical.¹ The decision to write in German and to envision it as the future language of the Jews was taken for granted by many maskilim, just as the disparagement of Yiddish became a constitutive element in their program for the transformation of Jewish identity. Although select German-Jewish maskilim wrote in Yiddish in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Mendel Lefin's decision to translate the Bible into Yiddish resulted in the first major polemic

¹ On Josephinism and the Germanization of subjects within the Habsburg Empire, see Robert A. Kann, A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918, (Berkeley, CA), 1974, pp. 183-191 and 203. On the Jacobin campaign to standardize the use of French, see Andrzej Walicki, The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood: Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kosciuszko, (Notre Dame, IN, 1989), p. 73.

over the language question among East European maskilim.² Mendel Lefin was not a Yiddishist in the late-nineteenth-century or contemporary sense.³ He did not desire for Yiddish, which was the vernacular of East European Jewry, to become the literary language of the Jews, nor did he believe that Yiddish had inherent qualities which made it uniquely suited to be the modern Jewish language. But his use and defense of Yiddish illuminates his sensitivity to the particularities of the East European Jewish encounter with modernity. Recognizing that the historical circumstances of East European Jewry were vastly different than those of their West European brethren, Lefin chose to employ different means for the former's enlightenment. He viewed his task as a maskil to adapt the model of Enlightenment created in

² Two maskilic plays with large Yiddish components were published before the turn of the eighteenth century, Isaac Euchel's R. Henekh oder vos tut me damit (1793) and Aaron Wolffsohn-Halle's Leichtsinn und Frömmerei (1796), but in both cases the Yiddish was used as a means to portray the East Europeanness of specific characters in the play, not as the language of the production as a whole. The first entirely Yiddish play, the anonymous Di genarte velt (The Duped World), appeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century. See Meir Wiener, Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur in 19tn yorhundert, (Kiev, 1940), pp. 34-43 and Steven M. Lowenstein, The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family and Crisis, 1770-1830, (New York, 1994), p. 240, footnote 10. Joseph Perl also wrote in Yiddish in the early part of the nineteenth century, but did not publish his work. See Joseph Perl, Ma'asiyot ve-iggerot mi-zaddikim Amityim umi-Anshei Shelomenu, C. Shmeruk and S. Werses, eds., (Jerusalem, 1970). The language question reemerged several times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a litmus test of modern nationalist commitments. See Shmuel Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," in Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, (Jerusalem, 1990), p. 345, on the debate over Yiddish which took place in the Odessa periodical, Kol mevaser (The Heraldic Voice), in the 1860s.

³ Raphael Mahler vacillates in his assessment of Lefin's (as well as Perl and Isaac Ber Levinsohn's) decision to write in Yiddish. He concludes that the decision was both utilitarian, "a necessary evil without which the broad masses could not be approached with the slogans of enlightenment," and ideological, a reflection of the maskilim's warm opinions of the common people and their language. See Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century, (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), p. 39 and Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, 1:4, (Rehavia, 1956), pp. 79 and 82.

Berlin in order to transform East European Jewish society within the linguistic parameters of its own distinct culture.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, maskilim writing in Hebrew could publish their work in many locales, including Berlin, Brno, Pressburg, Kraków, Zolkiew, Tarnopol, Lwów/Lemberg, Vienna, Zhitomir, Vilna/Wilno and Prague. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, Vienna, despite legislation restricting Jewish residence, had become the center for Hebrew publishing in the Habsburg monarchy. Several Galician maskilim, such as Sholem ha-Cohen (1772-1845) and Meir Letteris (c.1800-1871), found employment as copy editors with the publishing house of Anton von Schmid, the imperial publisher of the Austrian Empire, who held a monopoly on the publication and distribution of Hebrew books. Hebrew became the lingua franca for enlightened Jews living throughout the Habsburg and Russian empires and the Hebrew journal became a meeting place for the free exchange of ideas.⁴

The situation of Yiddish writing and publishing was more complex. Although non-ritualistic Yiddish writing had flourished in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, its representative works, primarily addressed to women, were tolerated only as a literary sub-genre; this status shaped, along with other factors, the negative image of Yiddish held by most maskilim throughout the nineteenth century. The Haskalah's hostility to Yiddish dates to the movement's very beginnings, to the Mendelssohnian period. German maskilim, and East European maskilim intoxicated with German culture, based their rejection of Yiddish on educational, cultural, and social

⁴ Robert S. Wistrich, The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph, (New York, 1990), pp. 136-137. Bernhard Wachstein, ed., Die Hebräische Publizistik in Wien, (Wien, 1930), pp. xvi, xxvi, and xxix.

grounds, but Dan Miron has interpreted their deep antipathy to Yiddish as primarily aesthetic. Condemned as a dialect (a linguistic "mixture" and not a "pure" language), Yiddish was the antithesis of the maskilic ideal of daber zahot, a clear, orderly, grammatically correct, and elegant way of speaking and writing. Yiddish came to represent the cultural insularity that adherents of the Haskalah sought to end by learning German. Even when maskilim wrote in Yiddish, they rarely attempted to publish their works or, if they did, they did so anonymously. Coupled with the self-censorship which prevented maskilim from writing in Yiddish was the fact that most of the presses in Eastern Europe were run by traditionalists, who, unwilling to publish works which deviated from traditional norms, immediately considered any maskilic work suspect. Under Tsar Nicholas I in Russia, for example, only two Jewish printers, one in Vilna, the other in Zhitomir, were allowed to operate (a restriction originally and ironically initiated by maskilim) and both were dominated by Hasidim. Moreover, the Hasidim did not hesitate to destroy maskilic works which they believed were anti-Hasidic (many of them were); it is no accident that in many cases only one copy, often in disrepair, of a particular Yiddish maskilic text is extant.⁵

Mendel Lefin's turn to writing in Yiddish has been widely discussed in the scholarly literature by literary historians and Yiddishists.⁶ Nevertheless, a reassessment of Lefin's attitude toward Yiddish and its meaning for the

⁵ Dan Miron, A Traveler Disguised, (New York, 1973), pp. 15, 35, 43-44 and Chone Shmeruk, Sifrut Yidish: Perakim le-Toldoteihah, (Tel Aviv, 1978), pp. 238-239, 242.

⁶ Dan Miron gives an overview of the debate engendered by Chone Shmeruk's contention that Lefin did not differ from other maskilim in his negative evaluation of the place of Yiddish in Jewish culture. Miron himself agrees with Shmeruk that a Yiddishist reading of Lefin's use of Yiddish is "quite alien to the whole context of the Haskalah." See Miron, pp. 40-41.

clarification of the specific historical contours of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe is necessary. Moreover, the discovery of new archival and printed materials, which will be discussed below, further requires a reconsideration of the language polemic.

As Abraham Ber Gottlober recalled in his memoirs, Lefin had already decided to translate the entire Hebrew Bible into Yiddish while in Berlin in the early 1780s:

When Mendel Lefin was in Berlin and saw what Moses [Mendelssohn] had done for Israel in Germany and understood well the agreeable goal of guiding our brothers, the House of Israel, to walk proudly towards the wisdom that was foreign to them, he decided to undertake such a project in his land and birthplace.⁷ Finding no other way to be useful to his brethren in his country except to speak to them in their language [Yiddish] -- because all non-Jewish languages and books were like closed books to them -- he, girded up his loins to translate the books into the people's language [Yiddish].⁸

Lefin first translated Ecclesiastes, which he accompanied with a short Hebrew commentary, into Yiddish. Although published only in 1873, it was already composed by 1788, according to the approbation Alexander Sender Margoliot, the head of the rabbinical court of Satanów, gave to Lefin's Book of Popular Healing.⁹

⁷ Gottlober is referring to Mendelssohn's German translation of the Pentateuch, colloquially known by the name of its Hebrew commentary, the Bi'ur. Moses Mendelssohn, Netivot ha-Shalom (ve-ha-Hibur Kolel Hamishat Humshei ha-Torah im Tikunei Soferim ve-Tirgum Ashkenazi u-Vi'ur), (Berlin, 1780).

⁸ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, #40, 1873, p. 363.

⁹ The Book of Popular Healing was actually published only in 1794, but the approbation was written earlier, in 1788. See Mendel Lefin, trans., Sefer Refu'ot ha-'Am, (Zolkiew, 1794).

Lefin's decision to begin with the Hagiographa reflected the fact that the corpus of Wisdom literature held a natural attraction for maskilim.¹⁰ First, the Wisdom tradition in general taught worldly prudence and emphasized experience and common sense, using the mashal (parable) as a practical guide to a successful approach to life. The ancient stress on experience was consonant, at least superficially, with the Haskalah's embrace of modern empiricism. Second, in contrast to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, which stress the centrality of the Jewish community, the books of the Hagiographa focus their instruction on the individual.¹¹ As Isaac Euchel (1756-1804) wrote regarding his German translation of Proverbs, "I have chosen to translate and interpret the Book of Proverbs because it is a book of morals appropriate for every human being...a book meant for the education of man as such...Most of its proverbs deal with human relations and are not concerned with religion."¹² The emphasis on universalism and on individualism proved attractive to enlightened Jews like Lefin; the sanctity of the individual was a hallmark of both European Enlightenment and Haskalah thought.¹³ Third, the Wisdom scrolls were attractive to maskilim because they contained sparkling examples of biblical poetry (Psalms and Lamentations) and philosophy (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes), two central components

¹⁰ Mendelssohn, too, wrote a modern commentary on Ecclesiastes. See Moses Mendelssohn, Sefer Megillat Kohelet im Bi'ur Kezar u-Maspik le-Havanat ha-Ketuv al-pi Peshuto le-To'elet ha-Talmidim, (Berlin, 1770).

¹¹ Robert Gordis, Koheleth – The Man and His World, (New York, 1968), pp. 8-18.

¹² Cited in Isaac Barzilay, "National and Anti-National Trends in the Berlin Haskalah," JSS, 21, no. 3, July 1959, p. 180.

¹³ Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, I, II, (New York, 1966-69).

in the Haskalah's new emphasis on the Bible as the foundation of modern Jewish education.¹⁴ Consistent with the Mendelssohnian model in the Bi'ur, Lefin's translation of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were accompanied by a short Hebrew commentary. Proverbs was the only volume of Lefin's Yiddish translation of the Bible to appear during his lifetime.¹⁵

Although Lefin began his biblical translation project with a book from the Hagiographa, not from the Pentateuch, his effort signalled his fidelity to the Mendelssohnian path of translation. In the introduction to Proverbs, Lefin justified his Yiddish translation in the context of the Haskalah's preoccupation with the loss of Hebrew literacy and the concomitant abandonment of the Bible among the Jews of Eastern Europe. Lefin also explicitly hoped that his new Yiddish translation would supersede a contemporaneous Yiddish translation known as Megishei Minhah (Presenters of an Offering), which was widespread among Polish Jewry. Written by Jacob ben Isaac of Yenowa, the author of the Tsena u-Rena, Megishei Minhah conflated the content of Rashi's midrashic commentary with the simple, or contextual, meaning of the biblical text, thus superimposing a specific Jewish message upon an explicitly universalist book. Lefin's translation, which he rendered in the tradition of the medieval pashtanim (contextualists) to distance it from the midrashic style of commentary, was modelled after Moses Mendelssohn's Bi'ur. By retaining the original Hebrew word of Scripture as a Hebrew-component word in the Yiddish translation, Lefin fulfilled the mas-

¹⁴ Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I:4, p. 84.

¹⁵ [Mendel Lefin], Sefer Mishlei Shelomo im Perush Kezar ve-Ha'atakah Hadashah Bilshon Ashkenaz le-To'elet Aheinu Beit Yisra'el be-Arzot Polin, (Tarnopol, 1814).

maskilic emphasis upon the centrality of Hebrew.¹⁶ Aware that these innovations might raise the possibility of the rejection of his translation by the East European public he hoped to reach and which viewed maskilic works from the Berlin circle with suspicion, Lefin sought and received approbations from respected Polish rabbinical figures to introduce the book.¹⁷

Despite the thematic consonance with the Bi'ur in Lefin's decision to translate the Bible, his selection of Yiddish as the language of translation also signalled a departure from the Mendelssohnian path. The publication of Lefin's translation of Proverbs in 1814 immediately caused a sensation, but not on the part of Polish-Jewish traditionalists. The vitriol directed at Lefin's Yiddish translation came from a surprising source, from Tobias Gutmann Feder (1760-1817), an itinerant, renowned master of Hebrew grammar and Bible, whose satire, Kol Mehazezim (Voice of the Archers),¹⁸ attacked Lefin's use of Yiddish as "madness" and concluded that Lefin had degraded himself to the level of beasts with the translation. Voice of the Archers circulated in manuscript among maskilim in the second decade of the nine-

¹⁶ The exception to this principle of translation were words burdened with ideological significance, such as zaddik (a righteous man), which in eighteenth-century Poland would more likely be read as Hasidic Rebbe. In most cases in Proverbs, Lefin did not retain the Hebrew-component word zaddik, but rendered it as ehrlikh (honest) as part of his campaign against the Hasidic leadership. In his translation of Ecclesiastes 9:1, "For all this I noted, and I ascertained all this: that the actions of even the righteous (zaddikim) and the wise are determined by God," Lefin retained the word zaddik in the Yiddish in order to emphasize that God, not the Hasidic Rebbe, was the highest power. See Chone Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles of Mendel Lefin's Translation of Proverbs," (Hebrew), in Shmeruk, Sifrut Yidish be-Folin: Mehkarim ve-Iyunim Historiyim, (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 180-181.

¹⁷ See the introduction to Sefer Mishlei and the approbations of Joshua Heschel, the head of the rabbinical court in Tarnopol, and of Mordecai ben Eleazer Sender Margoliot, head of the rabbinical court in Satanów and son of Sender Margoliot mentioned above.

¹⁸ Judges 5:11.

teenth century, but was first published only in 1853 in an expurgated version. The original and most complete version of Voice of the Archers is replete with scatological and defamatory remarks.¹⁹ The title page alone is evidence of Feder's intemperate style:

Voice of the Archers

Three Arrows To One Side of It
And a Circle of Truth to Those Who Know It:

An arrow of victory²⁰ for the father of the German translators, Moses ben Maimon, may the memory of a wise man be blessed.

An arrow of victory for his disciples.

An arrow of victory for the elucidators of sacred texts in the correct way.

Insult and Disgrace

Upon the new translation of Proverbs which befouled it. Its foulness will ascend and its ill savour will rise,²¹ all who see it will flee from it²² and will extract it piece by piece²³ and it will be burned, to be consumed in fire, and its name will no longer be remembered.

Vomit and Excrement

From the body of Mendel Satanów, a man who in his youth was enlightened and in his old age became foolish,²⁴ who arranged words

¹⁹ The most authentic version of Kol Mehazezim was copied in Uman in 1830. See Yehudah Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," (Hebrew), Zehut, May 1981, pp. 275-303; Simha Katz, "Mendel Lefin of Satanów's Bible Translations," p.114, footnote 3; Moshe Pelli, "Voices that are not of this World," (Hebrew), HUCA, LIV, pp. 1-15.

²⁰ 2 Kings, 13:17.

²¹ Joel 2:20.

²² Nahum 3:7.

²³ Ezekiel 24:6.

²⁴ A pun on the homonyms: להשכיל and להסכיל.

with the taste of the white of an egg,²⁵ to find favor in the eyes of concubines and young women. But they, too, despise it completely,²⁶ saying, "are we short of crazy men that this one comes to play the mad man?"²⁷ Have you seen this rash man, for surely he attempts to defy the systems of the translators?²⁸ Pursue him as far as Shevarim!"²⁹ It will be a shame and a dreadful disgrace. His advice has perished and his wisdom has vanished.³⁰ His hair turned white and he did not know.

In the Year
But Woe to the Man who gives Birth to Vanity in his Old Age

According to the minor reckoning [1814]³¹

Feder's Voice of the Archers owed a conscious debt to Aaron Wolffsohn-Halle's Sihah be-Erez ha-Hayim (Dialogue in Heaven), which, published in Ha-Me'asef in 1794-1797, concluded with a critique of non-German translations of the Bible.³² Both satires used the literary convention of situating their maskilic protagonists in Heaven, meting out judgments on the lower world. In Feder's heavenly tribunal, Moses Mendelssohn, Menasseh ben Israel (1604-1657), Moses Hayim Luzzatto (1707-1747), Naftali Herz Wessely, Isaac Euchel, Joel Brill (1760-1802) and Judah Leib Ben-Ze'ev (1764-1811) find themselves incapable of deciphering Lefin's Yiddish

²⁵ Job 6:6.

²⁶ Ezekiel 15:57.

²⁷ 1 Samuel, 21:16.

²⁸ 1 Samuel, 17:25.

²⁹ Joshua 7:5.

³⁰ Jeremiah 49:7.

³¹ See Friedlander on the gematria of this phrase, p. 279.

³² Yehuda Friedlander, "The Language Battle in Eastern Europe at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," (Hebrew), in Min ha-Katedrah, (Tel Aviv, 1981), pp. 28-31.

translation of Proverbs. Mendelssohn could not understand even one of the 1,000 words while Luzzato and Menasseh ben Israel, concurring that the language was neither Italian nor Arabic, could not resolve its mysterious origins. Despairing of ever solving the linguistic riddle on their own, the maskilim finally seek the aid of the author of Melamed Si'ah (The Teacher of Discourse), a Yiddish text explaining the words of the Pentateuch and of the five scrolls in the Hagiographa, which was published in Amsterdam in 1710.³³ As rendered by Feder, the author of The Teacher of Discourse was the very embodiment of the demonized image of the Ostjude. He was repulsive to look at:

[Stationed]...at the beginning of the third level that is in Hell...[the author of The Teacher of Discourse] lies there with those who are unintelligible of speech and with those that steal their language from their neighbor.³⁴ He was a terribly old man, whose height was a span. Spittle ran down his beard, which descended to his navel. Hunchbacked and bruised in the testicles, he walks stooped over. In his locks of wavy, raven-black hair were countless insects, big and small.³⁵

Although arousing terror in the hearts of the maskilim, the Yiddish teacher is able to read the translation, and is depicted by Feder as rejoicing that his beloved language had finally found a talented translator.³⁶

³³ Elikim ben Jacob of Kamarna authored Melamed Si'ah in 1710 and also translated Menasseh ben Israel's Spanish version of Mikveh Yisra'el into Hebrew in 1681.

³⁴ Here Yiddish, seen as a thief of other language, is pitted against German, pure and honest, untainted by influences from other languages.

³⁵ Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 292 and Pelli, p. 10. On the image of the Ostjude, see Steven E. Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923, (Madison, WI, 1982).

³⁶ Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 292.

Like all of the maskilim who idealized Moses Mendelssohn and looked to his writings as exemplary, Feder accused Lefin of abandoning the Mendelssohnian method, "the correct way," of translating Scripture into German for a debased translation into an unintelligible language of peasants and women. Feder wrote, "Why now do you abandon the source of life [Mendelssohn's example] to hew wells for yourself, wells that are broken? One who drinks from them will die prematurely."³⁷ Feder expressed bitter disappointment that Lefin, who knew German and French, had chosen to work in Yiddish, which, Feder claimed for polemical effect, was not even Lefin's mother tongue.³⁸ Feder's disillusionment with Lefin was rendered all the more palpable by his depiction of Lefin as the maskil who, prior to his translation of Proverbs into Yiddish, could have guided the Jewish people in an epoch bereft of Mendelssohn, Wessely, and Euchel.³⁹ In Mendelssohn's closing soliloquy, the great philosopher consoled his fellow maskilim with

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280. The reference to peasants alludes to Lefin's use of Slavic-component words in his Yiddish. On the image of Mendelssohn among the maskilim, see James H. Lehmann, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and Me'asfim: Philosophy and Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah," LBIY, 1975, pp. 87-108 and Shmuel Feiner, "Mendelssohn and 'Mendelssohn's Students,' -- A Re-Examination," (Hebrew), Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies, 2, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 1-8.

³⁸ Born in eighteenth-century Podolia, Lefin must have spoken Yiddish from birth. Yet, Feder accused him, "Oh!! What have you done? You have desecrated the brilliance of German style; you were raised on its knees from the moment that you became a man, and you chose a destructive language, which your ancestors and teachers did not speak, and it became your mistress. You crossed the border from speaking to living, from the definition of an enlightened man to an empty man." See Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 280. The maskilic denial of knowing Yiddish can also be seen in Moses Markuse's claim in his Yiddish translation of Tissot's Book of Popular Healing that he had to debase his German in order to write in the Ashkenazic "jargon," although Yiddish was, in fact, his mother tongue. See Chone Shmeruk, "Moses Markuse from Slonim and the Source of His Book, Ezer Yisroyel," (Hebrew), in Shmeruk, Sifrut Yidish be-Folin, p. 185.

³⁹ Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 286.

the hope that, despite Lefin's betrayal, there was still a remnant among the Jews who would disseminate his German translation of Scripture and honor it by continuing to translate into German.⁴⁰

In light of the speed with which wealthy Berlin Jews replaced Yiddish and Hebrew with German in the second half of the eighteenth century, Feder's mean-spirited lament appears contrived.⁴¹ But in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the language question still burned deeply among maskilim; it represented larger issues, including the extent to which European Jews should acculturate into their host countries, the variety of means which should be employed in the Haskalah to enlighten the Jewish public, and the tenuousness of the Haskalah movement in general.

The first maskil to enter the fray over Feder's composition was Jacob Samuel Bik, Lefin's close friend, who, on 19 Tevet (January 1), 1815 wrote to Feder urging him not to publish Voice of the Archers.⁴² Bik, taking on the role of intercessor in the controversy, defended Lefin on five points: 1)

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 293.

⁴¹ Steven M. Lowenstein notes that by the 1740s Berlin Jewry had begun to replace written Yiddish with High German and that there continued to be "a complete continuum from 'pure' Yiddish through various intermediate stages to pure High German in Hebrew script" by the end of the century. He is careful to caution, however, against equating changes in the written language with those in the spoken realm. Dialect influences no doubt continued to influence the German spoken by Jews well into the nineteenth century. See Lowenstein, pp. 21-22, 46-48, 85. See, too, Ya'akov Shavit, "A Duty Too Heavy to Bear: Hebrew in the Berlin Haskalah, 1783-1819: Between Classic, Modern and Romantic," in Hebrew in Ashkenaz, Lewis Glinert, ed., (New York, 1993), p. 114.

⁴² First published in an incomplete version in Kerem Hemed, I, 1833, Bik's complete letter to Feder, found in Bik's personal journal, was published by Shmuel Werses. See Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's letter to Tobias Feder," (Hebrew) in Werses, Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah, (Jerusalem, 1990), pp. 338-355. For a comprehensive look at Bik's life, see "'Between Two Worlds': Jacob Samuel Bik between Haskalah and Hasidism: A Re-Examination,," (Hebrew), pp. 59-110 in the same collection.

criticism of Lefin would harm the already vulnerable Haskalah movement; 2) Feder had not only criticized Lefin's writing in his vitriolic satire, but had unfairly impugned the man himself; 3) despite Feder's claim that Yiddish was not Lefin's mother tongue nor the language which his ancestors and teachers had spoken, Yiddish was, in fact, the linguistic inheritance of Ashkenazic Jewry's great sages; 4) Yiddish was considered to be a real language, and not an illegitimate linguistic *mélange*, by gentiles, and could be developed into a literary language by men of letters, as had been done with other dialects; and 5) enlightened members of society had a responsibility to speak to the lower classes in a language that the latter could understand.

Bik's appeal to Feder provoked a response, which, although apologetic, barely veiled its threatening tone. In a letter to Bik dated on the 4th day of the Intermediate Days of Passover (April 30), 1815, Feder took great pains to praise Mendel Lefin, going so far as to say that Mendelssohn himself had passed the standard of the Haskalah to Lefin as his most able disciple.⁴³ Obsequiously, Feder asked how a man of Lefin's stature could be wounded by his, Feder's, mortal words. Feder then continued to say that although he never intended to impugn the great maskil's honor with his satire, he could not retract his words denouncing the Yiddish of the translation. Comparing himself at the very least to Socrates' "weakest students,"⁴⁴ Feder insisted that he had to stand by his words and the truth:

⁴³ The incomplete letter was first published by Meir Letteris in his Mikhtevei Ivrit, letter #6, (Lemberg, 1827), pp. 17-23 and then in Kerem Hemed, I, (1833) letter 29, pp. 99-102. A version of the letter, with several points of difference from the published editions, can also be found in the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136.

⁴⁴ Feder was, no doubt, alluding to Mendelssohn's Phaedon.

Your friend knew us [the other maskilim], that all of the excuses which we seek to improve his [Lefin's] translation and to place it in refined silver seven times over, will be nothing but vanity, whose end will be the base metals, a [chamber] pot whose refuse will never leave.⁴⁵ Thus, may one of the zealots slay me, I will not bow down to a lie and prostrate myself to vanity...Even in my last breath, I will speak out to the multitudes that Mendel Lefin destroyed the peace of his world for a lie. The moon that was within him sent forth his precious teachings. Instead he defiled himself with the filthy translation of Proverbs....The ink and the journal will scream upon him! For he destroyed them unto nothingness. And I will not deviate either right or left from the path of truth.⁴⁶

Then, Feder begged Bik and the other maskilim in Brody to send him 100 Polish zloty to cover the expenses incurred by the printer and publisher of Voice of the Archers. Once paid, they would not publish the work and Feder would throw the pages of his satire "upon the logs on the fire; they will not be remembered or noticed anymore." Should the 100 zloty not be forthcoming, Feder threatened, he would go ahead with the publication of Voice of the Archers.⁴⁷

Determined to stop publication of the satire, Bik enlisted the maskilim of Brody to come up with the necessary funds. In this effort, Bik also took the opportunity to discuss his defense of Lefin and to clarify his position on Yiddish with his close maskilic friends, Shelomo Yehudah Rappoport (1790-1867) and Nachman Krochmal. In a letter to Rappoport of 27 Nisan (May 7), 1815, Bik admitted that he was not sure about the usefulness of translating Scripture into Yiddish, but that he had come to Lefin's defense out of

⁴⁵ Ezekiel 24:6.

⁴⁶ Tobias Gutmann Feder to Jacob Samuel Bik, the 4th Day of the Intermediate Days of Passover (April 30), 1815, Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136, p. 1b. In Letteris, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 1b and 2a.

a sense of duty.⁴⁸ He also admitted to Rappoport that he, Bik, had not hidden his reservations about the translation from Lefin himself, one of many signs that Lefin and Bik were engaged in an ongoing discussion about language and the Enlightenment in the second decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ On 16 Iyar (May 26), 1815, Bik sent a letter to Nachman Krochmal in which he mentioned both the letter of defense that he had sent to Rappoport and Feder's response to his initial letter. He also attached a copy of Voice of the Archers for Krochmal's perusal. Although there is some historical speculation that an edition of Voice of the Archers was published in Berditchev in 1816, where Feder resided at the time, no historian has ever seen such an early printed version of the satire.⁵⁰ Thus it appears that Bik's effort to halt publication of Voice of the Archers was successful.

Yet, as the existence of the 1830 version of Voice of the Archers proves, Bik was not successful in preventing copies of the satire from circulating among East European maskilim. In fact, despite the standard historiographical portrait that depicted the target of Feder's barbs as tolerant, uncontentious, and above the fray, Lefin most certainly knew of the satire

⁴⁸ This letter appears in Bik's personal journal, which is held in the Merzbacher collection in the municipal library of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. A microfilm of this manuscript, #26448, is held in the Department of Microfilmed Manuscripts, JNULA. See page 15b for Bik's letter to Rappoport. See, too, Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," pp. 341-342.

⁴⁹ Werses, p. 341-342. See, too, Bik's letter to Lefin of 15 Adar (March 12), 1819, published in Philip Friedman, "The First Battles between the Haskalah and Hasidism: Hasidism and Hasidim in the Letters of Galician Maskilim (1819-1828)," (Yiddish), Fun noentn over, IV, 1937, p. 260-262.

⁵⁰ Simha Katz, Yosef Klausner, and A. M. Haberman believed that there was basis to the speculation that Voice of the Archers was published in Berditchev, and then stored, as early as 1816, despite Bik's intervention. See Katz, p. 114, footnote 3 and Klausner, I, p. 218. See, too, Bernhard Friedberg, Toldot ha-Defus ha-Ivri be-Folin, (Tel Aviv, 1950), p. 143 and Max Erik, Etiuden tsu der geshikhte fun der haskole, (Minsk, 1934), p. 158.

and of the epistolary fireworks it had produced.⁵¹ As Bik indicated in his letter to Rappoport, he himself had expressed reservations to Lefin about proceeding with his Yiddish translation of the Bible, including discussing Mendelssohn's disapproval of the project, prior to 1814.⁵² Moreover, there is an unusual phrase in Joshua Heschel's approbation to Proverbs which suggests that Lefin already knew of Feder's intention to write Voice of the Archers before he published his translation. Heschel wrote, using the traditional proof-text used for approbations, Proverbs 1:11, that the author of the translation of Proverbs had asked him to remind the readers that anyone encroaching upon the copyright of his work transgressed both a biblical and rabbinic injunction. While there is nothing unusual in this standard admonition, Heschel added the phrase "lest a strange man raise his hand against the work...and harm him [the author] with arrows [ve-yazik oto be-hizav],"

⁵¹ Simha Katz, pp. 114-116; Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, I:4, pp. 84-87; Yosef Klausner, Historyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah, I, (Jerusalem, 1952), p. 246; Zalman Reizen, Fun mendelson biz mendele, I, (Warsaw, 1923), p. 156. Historians have pointed to later defenders of Lefin, as if he were completely silent during the controversy. For example, Judah Ber Levinsohn defended Lefin in 1880 in his Eshkol ha-Sofer. Accusing Feder retrospectively, he wrote, "Your tongue is not of wine, it cleaved to the roof of your mouth." See Friedlander, "The Language Battle in Eastern Europe at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," pp. 12 and 17.

⁵² Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," p. 342. Mendelssohn's opposition to Yiddish, however, has been misunderstood in the literature. Based on his comment, made in the context of a proposal to revise the Jewish oath in Prussian courts, that "this jargon has contributed not a little to the immorality of the common man," many historians have concluded that Mendelssohn was implacably hostile to Yiddish. In fact, despite his extraordinary command of High German, Mendelssohn used Yiddish in his private correspondence throughout his life. He opposed mixing German and Hebrew in the oath formula because such an amalgam did justice to neither language; part of his problem with using Yiddish as a literary language was that Mendelssohn viewed it as "corrupt" German, not as a language on its own terms. He did not want Yiddish to become the official language of Prussian Jewry, but did not make a conscious effort to eradicate its use. See Werner Weinberg, "Language Questions Relating to Moses Mendelssohn's Pentateuch Translation," HUCA LV (1984), pp. 198, 237-241.

which appears to be a veiled allusion to Voice of the Archers.⁵³ It is likely that besides fearing the rejection of his Yiddish translation with its "modern" commentary by traditional East European Jews, Lefin also feared the reaction of his fellow maskilim, who undoubtedly had seen his other Yiddish translations in manuscript and had already discouraged him from undertaking the project. Although Lefin knew that most maskilim opposed using Yiddish for enlightening the Jews of Poland in general, and specifically recoiled at the translation of the Bible into a language they considered little more than a "jargon," he nonetheless went ahead with the endeavor. Yet he tempered his boldness with caution, publishing his translation of Proverbs anonymously.⁵⁴

Two recently discovered documents, both in Lefin's hand, demonstrate definitively that Lefin was well aware of Feder's satire and did not stoically ignore it.⁵⁵ On the front page of the first document, a satiric title page of a work designed as a literary echo of Feder's pamphlet, the text reads:

Thorns to the Archer

Two parts

1) Voice of the Thorns.⁵⁶ Letters from So-and-So to So-and-So with an introduction, commentary, and abridgment which weakens every one

⁵³ [Lefin], Sefer Mishlei, (Tarnopol, 1814), the first approbation, unpaginated. The emphasis is mine. Note, too, that the gematria in the letter that the author of The Teacher of Discourse sends to Lefin at the end of Voice of the Archers equals the year 1811, perhaps signalling that Feder had composed his satire at least three years prior to the publication of Proverbs. See Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 293.

⁵⁴ The work's anonymity was only noticed by Simha Katz, p. 516. On circulation of Lefin's Yiddish manuscripts prior to 1814, see Friedlander, "The Language Battle," pp. 10-11.

⁵⁵ See Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136.

⁵⁶ Ecclesiastes 7:6.

of them. With the addition of glosses to the books that have been published for the benefit of his orphaned generation in order to determine his limited intelligence and the baseness of his mixture. As the arrogance of his countenance broadens,⁵⁷ his mouth becomes impudent. Each epistle is certified with the signature of the writer except for those which have been printed.

2) A Thorn in the Hand of a Drunkard.⁵⁸ Endless parables and poems. The wail of a frog composing poetry; a mouse lording it over the crown of pride of a drunkard,⁵⁹ whose pleasure is his wine; the delicacies of the swine in the mud of his house.⁶⁰ Together all of them will totter, but will still sing. Turn away from a frog without any teeth. The mouse will leap [to] the heavens from his hole. What will the lame-footed⁶¹ drunkard, and the pig, like a battering ram without horns, praise in evil?

In the Year

'Tobias is a Drunk' according to the minor reckoning [1815]

His grave is in his throat⁶²

Berlin

("tit for tat," but not like it)

According to the gematria which appears at bottom of the document, Lefin penned the reponse in 1815, in Berlin, shortly after Feder wrote Voice of the Archers. Although Lefin was in Galicia, not in Germany, in 1815,⁶³ he composed the text to appear as if it were written in Berlin, the

⁵⁷ Psalms 10:4.

⁵⁸ Proverbs 26:9.

⁵⁹ Isaiah 28:1 and 28:3.

⁶⁰ Isaiah 66:17.

⁶¹ 2 Samuel 4:4.

⁶² Psalms 5:10.

⁶³ According to a list of materials from the Joseph Perl Archive in Tarnopol catalogued in the inter-war years by Philip Koffler, Lefin was in both Tarnopol and Sieniawa in 1815. See the appendix to the Joseph Perl Archive.

geographic center of the German-Jewish Enlightenment and the mythic pinnacle to which Feder aspired and in whose ideological mantle he so self-righteously cloaked his own work. Lefin entitled his fictive pamphlet Kozim la-Mehazez (Thorns to the Archer), a deliberate allusion to the title of Feder's satiric work, Kol Mehazezim (Voice of the Archers). He called the first section Kol ha-Sirim, a reference to Ecclesiastes 7:6: "For as the crackling of nettles (kol ha-sirim) under a pot, so is the laughter of a fool: this also is vanity." Here, Lefin sarcastically conveys that his critic's laughter, at Lefin's own expense, was the vain laughter of a fool. The title Kol ha-Sirim of the first section is also a reproach to the claim articulated by Feder in his response to Jacob Samuel Bik that Lefin's translation, no matter how great the effort to purify its language, would remain "nothing but vanity (re'ut ru'ah), whose end will be the drosses, a [chamber] pot (sir) whose refuse will never leave."⁶⁴ The second part of the text, written in a choppy style of strung-together biblical verses, is an example of bad melizah. Feder was known as a master of elegant, well-executed melizah, an honorific which he prized. Part two of Thorns to the Archer, thus, mocks Feder's literary style, comparing it to the "wailing of a frog," a charge which parallels Feder's characterization of Lefin's Yiddish as the language of animals, and compares him to those in Isaiah 66:17 who will perish at God's hand. The gematria at the bottom of the page, decrying Feder as a drunk, corresponds to the gematria that completes the title page of Voice of the Archers. The structure of Lefin's response, indicating two discrete sections, suggests that Feder's Voice of the Archers may have originally been penned in two parts,

⁶⁴ Ezekiel 24:6. Tobias Gutmann Feder to Jacob Samuel Bik, 4th Day of the Intermediate Days of Passover (April 30), 1815, the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136, p. 1a. In Letteris, p. 19. The emphases are mine.

an implication supported by Feder's own comments in his letter to Jacob Samuel Bik.⁶⁵

On the back of the page is a separate text, a second version of which also appears on the second side of a copy of Feder's original letter to Bik. Both versions are written in Lefin's handwriting. The existence of the copy of the letter itself suggests that Lefin was privy not only to Feder's response to Bik but also to Bik's original letter to Feder.⁶⁶ The second text, satirically written as if it had been penned by Feder on the same day that he had written to Bik, reads:

With God's help, Berditchev, the 4th day of the Intermediate Days of Passover [April 30], 1815, from the creation of the world.

"I will put iron on my neck and brass on my forehead, etc."⁶⁷

And This Weakens the Words of the Letter:

My signature below will testify that I am poor and insolent like all my friends who go begging, saying: "Take pity weak men and have compassion upon me because I am poor. I am expiring at your feet and am kissing the ends of your buttocks. Surely have compassion! Among those who were burned in some city, I am a priest that converted and my wife is in difficult labor. Take my daughter, who has matured, for ransom money. Upon whom can I depend? And if you do not listen to

⁶⁵ To Bik, Feder threatened: "Wait for me until the day that the second part of Voice of the Archers will be published, then you will know the truth....The first part which you saw, this too is still hidden in my tent!" Ibid., p. 1b. In Letteris, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Sections of this version of the letter are ripped. The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136. This copy of the letter may have been Lefin's own, perhaps sent to him by Jacob Samuel Bik in the midst of the controversy over the publication of Proverbs and is probably the second copy of the letter which Shmuel Werses mentioned finding in the Perl archive and which he speculated belonged to Lefin. When Werses examined the archive, he found the letter in folder 19. See Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," p. 347.

⁶⁷ Feder's letter to Bik begins with "I will put iron on my neck and brass on my forehead," and is dated "Berditchev, the 4th day of the Intermediate Days of Passover [April 30], 1815, from the creation of the world."

the voice of my supplication then I will have to curse, insult, vilify, and make you contemptible in the eyes of everyone, (or) then your heart will weaken and you will flee from the voice of the besmirched pig's shout of your persecutors, (or) then you will implore me to accept your ransom."

Lefin is clearly mocking Feder's manipulation of his poverty and his demand that the maskilim of Brody raise 100 Polish zloty to prevent the publication of Voice of the Archers.⁶⁸ Such a demand was nothing short of blackmail, and although Lefin never published his response, he obviously felt the need to answer Feder's libel with his own satiric remarks.

Lefin's commitment to writing Yiddish and translating into Yiddish in order to enlighten the Jews of Poland was a hallmark of his version of the Haskalah and a conscious adaptation of the Mendelssohnian model of translation. Historians have long lamented the fact that Lefin either never wrote a programmatic statement about this commitment or that a German essay, "Über die Kultur der polnisch-jüdischen Sprache als unfehlbares Mittel zu ihrer Aufklärung," mentioned in a partial list of Lefin's unpublished manuscripts, was irretrievably lost.⁶⁹ Although the German essay may no longer be

⁶⁸ As Feder wrote to Bik, "There is not a crumb for the infants who ask for bread....Be compassionate with me because I am engulfed by a crisis of poverty. Infuse money from your pockets, and I will give the printer and the engravers the amount of 100 Polish zloty." Tobias Gutmann Feder to Jacob Samuel Bik, 4th Day of the Intermediate Days of Passover (April 30), 1815, The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 136, pp. 1b and 2a, and in Letteris, p. 21.

⁶⁹ The essay is mentioned by Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles," p. 167, footnotes 5 and 6; Miron, A Traveller Disguised, p. 278, footnote 19; Friedlander, "The Language Battle in Eastern Europe at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," p. 9; and Weinlös, "R. Mendel Lefin of Satanów," (Hebrew), Ha-Olam, 13, #41, 1925, p. 819, who transcribes an undated German letter of Lefin's to an unnamed friend, in which he mentions: "Several manuscripts, which are ready for publication: a translation of the Psalms from the preacher Solomon, of the Book of Job, Jeremiah's Lamentations — all towards the uplifting of the Jewish vernacular [literally: "folk language"], together with a German essay on the importance of popular literature in the Yiddish language for the culture and Enlightenment of the Jewish inhabitants of Poland." The emphasis is mine. Lefin also mentioned the essay in a "list of still-to-be-edited essays" written in 1826. See the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 67.

extant, there is a letter written by Lefin which discusses the issue of using Yiddish as a means to enlighten the Jews of Poland.⁷⁰ Six pages long, written in maskilic German (German written in Hebrew characters) and addressed to a "dear friend," the body of the letter is not composed in Lefin's handwriting. Nonetheless, there is no doubt of the letter's authorship.⁷¹ Lefin often resorted to having his works written down by friends and disciples because of his diminishing eyesight, and the German letter is but one of many of his unpublished writings that are not principally composed in his handwriting.⁷²

The letter forms part of an ongoing exchange with one of Lefin's unnamed maskilic friends over the role of the intelligentsia in creating a literary language from a dialect. In light of Jacob Samuel Bik's comments to Lefin in his letter of 15 Adar (March 12), 1819 about how Lefin's excellent Yiddish translations of Benjamin Franklin's essays had made Bik rethink the issue of provincial languages and their relationship to a unified national audience, it is justified to speculate that Lefin's letter was written for Bik.⁷³

⁷⁰ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a.

⁷¹ Internal and external proofs of Lefin's authorship will be enumerated below.

⁷² In fact, Lefin complained that his fellow maskilim had disappointed him by not aiding him in writing down his translation of the Guide for the Perplexed: "And when they pressed me every single day, I granted them the request to finish my translation on the condition that they would give me assistants to ease the burden of my aging eyes. But within the course of several weeks I was forgotten in their hearts like a corpse and I had to finish that which I had begun without aides and writers, and without the works of the abovementioned philosophers." Moses Maimonides, Moreh Nevukhim, Mendel Lefin, trans., (Zolkiew, 1829), pp. 1a-1b.

⁷³ "First, I must wholeheartedly thank you for your great kindness [in sending me] your excellent translations of Franklin's essays....You will receive them in return with the first opportunity. I have had the opportunity to think again about the place of publishing literary works in provincial languages through them." Jacob Samuel Bik to Mendel Lefin, 15 Adar (March 12), 1819. Published in Friedman, pp. 260-262.

Lefin uncategorically placed the responsibility of creating a literary language from a rough dialect into the hands of a nation's educated elite. Basing his conclusions on the transformation of High German from a dialect into the literary language of the German Empire, Lefin argued that Yiddish, too, could be transformed into a literary language if members of the Jewish intelligentsia took the time to write interesting and scholarly works in it.⁷⁴ As he queried, "From whence was the German language able, today, to boast of so many masterpieces in all the areas [of Germany]? Did not the enlightened men of High Germany first take the trouble to write something interesting in their dialect?"⁷⁵ Lefin's attitude toward the possibility of cultivating Yiddish as a tool of Enlightenment is derived from his comparison with what he terms "the natural, cultural history of most of the European nations." Only through the writing of interesting works in the mother tongues of those nations would a general literary emulation occur which, in turn, would both stimulate the refinement of the language and the spread of the Enlightenment. The authors of such works would be encouraged and edified when they saw their works "finally ennobling the spirit and hearts of their brethren," from the most educated "to the lowest class of the rabble."⁷⁶

Despite Lefin's emphasis on the priority of written literature in the development and refinement of language, he concedes that in the right cir-

⁷⁴ On the evolution of High German into a literary language, see Hans Eggers, Deutsche Sprachgeschichte, 2, (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1986), pp. 254, 291.

⁷⁵ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 1b.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2a.

cumstances, when a country experiences auspicious economic growth, language may grow and develop from an oral context as well. Admitting that German developed orally long before the period of the Enlightenment, when High German became the standard literary language, Lefin argued that there still existed a proto-standardized literary language which was then developed by enlightened writers. Yiddish, unfortunately, could claim neither fortunate circumstances nor national economic development to spur its cultivation. Its development depended upon the concerted efforts of the enlightened Jewish intelligentsia. Lefin concluded this section of the letter with a triumphant boast: "So, we are, then, finally, at the first position where we started, meaning, the culture of the Polish-Jewish language as a means to their [Polish Jewry's] Enlightenment. Now the opposition [to writing in Yiddish] is removed."⁷⁷

East European maskilim who endeavored to reach the Jews of Poland acknowledged, albeit weakly, that their audience was not illiterate. They had no choice but to admit that the problem was that their audience was literate in a language that they, the intelligentsia, loathed. Lefin was palpably aware that the success of the Enlightenment of the Jews of Poland was predicated upon weaning that public away from their traditional literary canon, the Yiddish translations and petitionary prayers, that he and his fellow maskilim viewed as faulty and ungrammatical. Lefin's critique of the older Yiddish translations reflected his fidelity to the Mendelssohnian perspective on translation. Mendelssohn conceived of the German translation in the Bi'ur in order to supplant the word-for-word method of the older Judeo-German Bible translations, such as that in The Teacher of Discourse.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 3b.

German Jews of his period were already reading and speaking German and the word-for-word translations were often syntactically incorrect.⁷⁸ In his German letter, Lefin concluded that "steering the Jewish masses away from their "little Bibles" in the "Polish-Jewish language" will not be easy, for they "have been indispensable to the Jewish rabble here for a long time. Such triviality is thus incessantly smuggled from abroad or indigenously fabricated here. Furthermore, it will remain harmful with its obsolete content, which is nearly impossible to prevent."⁷⁹ Yet Lefin was a realist and acknowledged that Yiddish was, indeed, the living language -- a phrase he used three times in his letter -- of the Jews of Poland, and that only through the cultivation of a living language could the Enlightenment succeed. He posited that Yiddish could be cultivated to enjoy the same advantages that translations and popular literature had acquired in Germany. Yiddish, he believed, could be made relevant for modern Polish Jews.⁸⁰

Lefin defended his position on writing popular literature in Yiddish for the Jews of Poland as a legitimate extension of the Mendelssohnian path. Taking this position, he implicitly rebutted Tobias Feder's accusation that he had forsaken the Mendelssohnian literary heritage. Mendelssohn, Lefin wrote, succeeded in two important missions when composing his German

⁷⁸ Weinberg, pp. 228-231, 239; Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles," p. 171.

⁷⁹ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 6a. Mahler affirms Lefin's despair about the permeability of the borders between Russia and Galicia despite the "rigorous surveillance" of the Habsburg authorities. Mahler, Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment, pp. 107-108. See, too, Aian Sked, The Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire, 1815-1918, (New York, 1989), pp. 47-51 for an interpretation of the censorship under Metternich as a "nuisance" rather than as a harsh prohibition.

⁸⁰ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 6a.

translation of the Bible with its accompanying Hebrew commentary: the elevation of the literary culture and the Enlightenment of his brethren. Mendelssohn's disciple, David Friedländer, too, had some skill in this endeavor, and Lefin praised his translation of Ecclesiastes.⁸¹ These literary products, "inspired by a living language," were extraordinarily impressive, stimulating great interest among their audience by "intruding upon their feelings...with their sanctity...[and] sublime beauty."⁸² Yiddish translation and writings crafted with the same talent and sensitivity could uplift the Jews of Poland.

Lefin was not satisfied with merely an implicit response to Tobias Feder. In this unpublished German letter, he issued an unambiguous challenge to Feder's contention that the writing of Enlightenment works for the masses of East European Jewry would be in vain. Lefin even went so far as to invest his Yiddish writings with a soteriological power. The Jews of Poland would remain stuck in their base condition, Lefin asserted:

Until Providence finally delivers an efficient Redeemer on their account.⁸³ He looks after it [Polish Jewry] with zeal, studies their language, studies their manner of thought, and scouts out the right path to their hearts. Now he risks the troublesome business with the most possible mercy to write many beneficial works, attractive to their taste, in their language. The weak minds of the "enlightened" ridiculed his

⁸¹ David Friedländer, Der Prediger, aus dem hebräischen, (Berlin, 1788).

⁸² The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 134a, p. 4a. Note, too, however, that while praising Mendelssohn's and Friedländer's translations, Lefin was dismayed at the alacrity with which certain sectors of Berlin Jewry discarded traditional rabbinic materials.

⁸³ Lefin used the German word, Erlöser, for "redeemer," a choice which may be an indirect refutation of Feder's charge in Voice of the Archers to Lefin to "be diligent, to restore the precious languages [Hebrew and German] which have not had a redeemer [go'el] closer than you since the death of Mendelssohn." See Friedländer, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 280. The emphasis is mine.

undertaking in the beginning, [but] the approbation of his audience and the desired progress of his effort is sufficient enough for the honest man, until truly deserving men who support his work appear, enriched with several products so that the importance of popular writing is finally generally recognized, [so] that the common people, above all, cautiously take a chance with this reading matter, finding it harmless, reasonable, and edifying, and abandon their aversion to the "polished" world, disdain ignorance, improve the pleasure in the beautiful, the noble, and the natural, learn the scholarly language of books, and acquire various advice, comfort, and instruction from it.⁸⁴

Lefin's implicit description of himself as a redeemer of the Jewish masses of Poland who suffered ridicule by other maskilim is one of the internal proofs that the letter is, indeed, his work. Other evidence includes the phrase, "Über die Kultur der polnisch-jüdischen Sprache als Mittel zu ihrer Aufklärung," which echoes the title of an unfinished essay mentioned in another Lefin manuscript;⁸⁵ the quotation from one of Lefin's favorite rabbinic maxims, "Who is Wise? The One Who Learns From Every Man;"⁸⁶ the appeal to censorship of kabbalistic works as a means to stem the spread of Hasidism;⁸⁷ and the comments by the author that he and the letter's

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 2a. The emphasis, referring directly to Feder, is mine.

⁸⁵ Note that the underlined phrase in the following sentence, "so sind wir denn endlich zum ersten Gesuchtpunkte wovon wir ausgegangen sind, das ist, von der Kultur der polnische-jüdischen Sprache als Mittel zu ihrer Aufklärung. Nun wieder herausgenommen," resonates directly with the title of the essay alluded to by Lefin in his list of unedited works, "Über die Kultur der polnisch-jüdischen Sprache als unfehlbars Mittel zu ihrer Aufklärung." See the Joseph Perl Archive, folder 134a, p. 3b and folder 67.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 4b. The phrase is from Mishnah Avot, 4:1. See, too, the use of this phrase in the unpublished introduction to Lefin's Masa'ot ha-Yam, the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 124.

⁸⁷ Lefin wrote: "As a matter of fact, the book censor should, indeed, bar the way of all literary compositions of idolatry and Kabbalah. It is only a pity that in this regard the censors were not yet regulated and directed enough [to bar] traces [of these books] everywhere. Thus, now we are flooded...by Beshtian libraries from Russia, which, since they are forbidden, become more dearly prized by their followers in this place [Galicia]," p. 5b. Compare with Lefin's Essai d'un plan de Réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la nation juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs, paragraphs #56 and #57, p. 414 and the Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 72, p. 3b.

recipient have been engaged in frequent discussions about provincial languages, dialects and the Enlightenment. Last, although the manuscript was not hand-written by Lefin himself, there are four places in the text where Lefin's own hand can be discerned.⁸⁸ Although the manuscript is not dated, the earliest possible date of its composition is 1811, the date alluded to by The Teacher of Discourse of Feder's first composing Voice of the Archers.⁸⁹ Bik wrote his letter to Lefin regarding their correspondence about provincial languages in 1819, making 1819 the latest possible date of Lefin's response.

Undaunted by the fracas which his translation of Proverbs into Yiddish created and despite his isolation, Lefin persisted in writing in and translating from Yiddish, believing perhaps that his fellow maskilim would finally recognize the efficacy of writing in the mother tongue of East European Jewry. Besides Proverbs, he also completed translations of Ecclesiastes and Lamentations, and worked on Psalms and Job. Gottlober also claimed to have seen manuscript copies of all five scrolls of the Hagiographa in Bar in the possession of Meir ha-Cohen Reich.⁹⁰ Moreover, as mentioned above,

⁸⁸ On page 5a, Lefin himself wrote the words "polnisch-jüdische" and "dazumals;" on page 5b, he wrote the words "fanatischer" and "von."

⁸⁹ See footnote 53 above. The undated German letter penned by Lefin in which the essay on the use of Yiddish for the Enlightenment of the Jews of Poland is mentioned must have been written between the publication of Moral Stocktaking in 1808 and the publication of Proverbs in 1814, thus dating the essay's writing to sometime prior to 1814. See Israel Weigl, "R. Mendel Lefin of Satanów," p. 819. Whether or not Lefin wrote several versions of the essay, or reworked it in the form of the letter after the polemic with Feder, cannot be known at this juncture.

⁹⁰ A. B. Gottlober, Ha-Magid, 1873, #40, p. 363. For a transcription of part of manuscript 8^o/1053, which is held in the Division of Microfilmed Manuscripts in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, and which includes all of Lamentations, Psalms 1-62 (including an introduction in Yiddish) and Job 1-16, 1-18:15, 28:6-37:12 and 38:12-41:5, see Katz, pp. 114-133. Ecclesiastes was published in 1873 by Hirsch Reich, Meir ha-Cohen's Reich's nephew, and Yehudah Kari, his son-in-law. Mendel Lefin, Sefer Kohelet im Tirgum u-Vi'ur, (Odessa,

Lefin sent Jacob Samuel Bik various Yiddish translations of the works of Benjamin Franklin after 1814.⁹¹ One Yiddish scholar also believed that it was Lefin who wrote The Duped World, an anonymous anti-Hasidic comedy in Yiddish which appeared in the second decade of the nineteenth century, whose author had connections to the Galician Haskalah and which relied on Yiddish translations of Proverbs that were very close to those by Lefin.⁹² Lefin's anti-Hasidic satire, Der ershter khosed (The First Hasid), which is no longer extant, was also written in Yiddish. It is also probable that Lefin was the author of the very rare Oniyah So'arah (The Raging Boat), an anonymous bilingual (Hebrew and Yiddish) translation of Wilhelm Y. Bontekoe's tale of his voyage to the East Indies, which also appeared sometime in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Evidence pointing to Lefin's hand in The Raging Boat was its (probable) publication in Zolkiew, where Journeys by Sea, Lefin's Hebrew translation of two of Joachim Heinrich Campe's travelogues, and The Duped World, first appeared, its joint publication with one of the travelogues from Journeys by Sea in the Vilna 1823 edition of that same title, the use of Slavic words in the Yiddish translation, and its being translated from the same source, Campe's German

1873). YIVO also published a variant of Lefin's translation of Ecclesiastes in 1930.

⁹¹ See footnote 73 above. See, too, Shmuel Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder," p. 343.

⁹² Meir Wiener, Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur in 19tn yorhundert, (Kiev, 1940), p. 38.

travelogues, as those in Journeys by Sea.⁹³ Last, the existence of Lefin's unpublished Yiddish essay on the immortality of the soul, Essay on the Afterlife, points to his continued use of Yiddish even after the Feder debacle.⁹⁴ Lefin published no other Yiddish work besides Proverbs during his lifetime, but, clearly, he continued to write in Yiddish and to share his manuscripts with maskilim sympathetic to his concerns with reaching the masses of Polish Jewry.

⁹³ The earliest extant edition of Oniyah So'arah is held in the Jewish National and University Library and is missing the title page and the first few pages, making it extremely difficult to attribute the work. It runs 57 pages with the Hebrew translation on the top and the Yiddish on the bottom of the page. Unusual words known to a German reader, but not to a Hebrew or Yiddish reader, appear in parentheses. Linguistic features of the translation include the use of Slavic-component Yiddish words and of hypercorrections to make the Yiddish appear more "western," for example, hypercorrecting and thus mistranslating the German word for "ship" as shuf instead of shif. These features were characteristic of the Yiddish of East European maskilim who wanted their words to appear more "enlightened," and less "eastern" (Polish). I am indebted to Professor Chava Turniansky of the Hebrew University for her linguistic and literary insights into this text.

Catalog information about Oniyah So'arah is contradictory and vague, although Samuel Poznanski claimed definitively that Lefin was its translator. See Samuel Poznanski, "Wiener's 'Bibliotheca Friedlandiana,'" JQR (original series), vol. IX, 1897, p. 159. For the best bibliographic discussion of the book, see Isaac Yudlov, The Israel Mehlman Collection in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, 1984, entry #1299, p. 208, who cites 1818, but with a question, as the date of publication for Oniyah So'arah. Yudlov also describes in full the various dates cited, as early as 1802, for the first edition and the confusion caused by similarities between Oniyah So'arah and Masa'ot ha-Yam. Although Bontekoe's tale was originally written and published in Dutch, the 1823 edition of Oniyah So'arah states that it was translated from a German translation of a French translation of the Dutch original. "Wilhelm Ysbrand Bonteku's Abenteuer auf einer Reise von Holland nach Ostindien," appears in volume V of Campe's Sammlung. Oniyah So'arah was subsequently published four times in the nineteenth century, but the 1823 (Vilna), 1825 (Vilna/Grodno), 1844 (Warsaw) and 1878 (Warsaw) editions of Oniyah So'arah are monolingual; the Yiddish translation no longer appears. An abridgement appeared mid-century under the title, Oniyah So'arah: Kizur me-Sipuro asher Kara Lo be-Naso al ha-Yam, Ha'atakah me-Ashkenazit (The Raging Boat: An Abridgement of His [Bontekoe's] Journey on the Sea, Translated from the German), (Warsaw, 1854).

⁹⁴ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 127d, and Chapter Four.

Although Lefin's use of Yiddish was instrumental, his deep commitment to making the Haskalah accessible to East European Jewry required, almost forced, him to make something beautiful and useful out of the imperfect tool.⁹⁵ Lefin modernized Yiddish while preserving the uniqueness of its Podolian dialect. In so doing, he recognized the power of a living language to motivate its readers. Writing in a Yiddish that was native to the Jews of Podolia would redress the problem of comprehension created by maskilic translations into melizah Hebrew, which in its fidelity to biblical syntax ignored the reality of a population which no longer understood the original biblical language. Lefin concluded in his introduction to the Yiddish translation of Psalms, which remained in manuscript, that clear and direct language was preferable to "comments from thousands of types that are cojoined like a braid of gold," and that "the best remedy to rectify the aforementioned failings, it seems, is to prepare a complete translation of several psalms...in our Yiddish language as it is spoken by us today."⁹⁶

Despite Mendelssohn's commanding influence, Mendel Lefin defined his Haskalah as a adaptation of the Berlin path and shaped his program for the transformation of Polish Jewry in the cultural context from which he came, the world of Podolian Jewry. A Haskalah program imported from Berlin without modification, which imposed a "foreign" language and culture upon Polish Jewry, was predestined to fail.⁹⁷ The European Enlightenment itself had challenged the legitimacy of dialects and enlightened absolutist

⁹⁵ Literary scholars universally praise Lefin's Yiddish style. See Mahler, Divrei Yemei Yisra'el, 1:4, pp. 82-83; Miron, p. 41; Reizen, pp. 157-158.

⁹⁶ Published in Katz, pp. 129-130.

⁹⁷ Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles," p. 171.

states had imposed state languages on linguistically heterogenous populations. But, East European maskilim emerged from a traditional Jewish milieu and faced a traditional Jewish public which lived in two languages, a linguistic-cultural condition defined as diglossia. East European Jewry naturally used Yiddish as their vernacular and leshon ha-kodesh (liturgical/ritual Hebrew) for all aspects of religious life, including communal edicts. As a generalization, East European maskilim directed their linguistic efforts "not at ending the diglossia but at replacing the two component languages: the state language or a European language (most commonly, German) for Yiddish, and biblical Hebrew for leshon ha-kodesh."⁹⁸ Lefin's program of *Haskalah* was distinct from both the European Enlightenment and the later East European *Haskalah*. By insisting on the efficacy of Yiddish for enlightening East European Jewry, Lefin implicitly rejected the replacement of the diglossia which the modern age heralded. He did not argue for the total replacement of Yiddish by Hebrew or German. He explicitly supported the retention of a dialect of Yiddish by employing expressions specific to Podolian Jewry and by deliberately translating away from German-component Yiddish words, when he had the syntactical choice. In the introduction to his mishnaic Hebrew translation of Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, Lefin reiterated his commitment to the cultural precision of translation:

We know that one must always select words that are known to the listeners and to limit as much as possible the use of words that are strange, and to use them only if they convey a particular precision in

⁹⁸ Israel Bartal, "From Traditional Bilingualism to National Monolingualism," in Hebrew in Ashkenaz, Lewis Glinert, ed., (New York, 1993), p. 145. Emphasis in the original. Professor Bartal elsewhere recognized Lefin's unique position on Yiddish. See Israel Bartal, "The Image of Germany and German Jewry in East European Jewish Society During the Nineteenth Century," in Danzig: Between East and West, Isadore Twersky, ed., (Cambridge, MA), 1985, p. 11.

that syntax or to a unknown word in particular, because every unfamiliar word burdens the speaker and weighs heavily upon the listener, and if [the use of the unfamiliar word] does not have a specific intention, then it results in emptiness.⁹⁹

Lefin's singularity with regard to Yiddish and Feder's attack upon it point to a subtle shift in cultural boundaries inaugurated by the Haskalah. Israel Bartal has argued that Feder's assault on Lefin's translation of Proverbs into Yiddish may be seen as an expression of a pre-Haskalah "consciousness of the bond with Germany" among European Jews.¹⁰⁰ In this reading, Feder's insistence on the primacy of German as the language of the maskilim and the Jewish future is an attempt to preserve Polish Jewry's connections to its past in Ashkenaz (Germany). Yet, in Voice of the Archers, Feder actually uses the word "Ashkenaz" twice, and not synonymously. He depicts Moses Mendelssohn as "the father of the Ashkenazic (German) translators,"¹⁰¹ and has the pathetic Yiddish teacher from Amsterdam ecstatically declaim after reading Lefin's Proverbs:

I am an Ashkenazi [a Yiddish speaker] in the unwall'd cities, and in the cities of fortresses,

With this merit, I will grasp Paradise, I will be a free man,

...

⁹⁹ Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed, Mendel Lefin, trans., (Zolkiew, 1829), p. 2. Lefin clearly took himself seriously as a translator, and here refers to an article on the art of translation which he had begun to write at the time that he started to translate the Guide, but which he subsequently lost. Mendelssohn had written on his theory and philosophy of translation in the introduction, Or Linetivah (Light for the Path), to the Bi'ur. Weinberg, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰ Israel Bartal, "The Image of Germany and German Jewry in East European Jewish Society During the Nineteenth Century," p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," p. 279. The emphasis is mine.

I will not be ashamed in the whole world, not in this one and not in the next, my Torah is surely observed,

The fragrance of my spice and the light of my translation are like balsam and clove.¹⁰²

Feder's inconsistent use of the word "Ashkenaz" to mean both Germany and a contemporary Yiddish-speaking Polish Jewry highlights the cultural disjunction between the two communities. In fact, Feder sarcastically had the author of The Teacher of Discourse associate what he claimed was the authentic language of Ashkenaz, Yiddish, with "those who do not shave their beards," further evidence of the acculturated distance German Jewry had travelled in the eyes of traditional East European Jewry.¹⁰³ Feder's linguistic Germanocentrism denied the linguistic and cultural rupture which existed between German (meaning, Berlin) and Polish Jewries at the turn of the century. Lefin's stubborn insistence on the need and effectiveness of writing in Yiddish indicated that he accepted the real cultural gap that existed between the two communities.

Although Lefin also sought to preserve older patterns of pre-modern Jewish life through his program of Haskalah -- in particular the maintenance of a medieval rationalist rabbinism -- he was not bound by a rigid language ideology that ignored social reality. Lefin's attitude to all language, not only

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 292. The emphasis is mine.

¹⁰³ Friedlander, "Tobias Gutmann Feder: Voice of the Archers," pp. 292-293. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, most married Jewish men in Berlin were not wearing beards, including leaders of the traditional Jewish community. See Lowenstein, p. 45.

to Yiddish, was contextual and utilitarian. As he wrote in the unpublished introduction to his translation of Psalms:

It is known that there is a great difference between simple speech and the language of poetry and prose. When one has to do some general matter with one's peers -- all the more so when one has to give orders to a servant -- then [one uses] language in its simplest form. But if one has an important matter to discuss, particularly with someone of a higher social status, then the language will be constructed completely differently. All the more so when [the language] is between man and God (for example, in matters of prayer and praises such as "the Heavens tell of God's honor," and hallelujahs, or petitions and requests, or thanks for the goodness that we have received from Him, may He be blessed), then the language must become its most elevated, purified, and adorned [form].¹⁰⁴

A vital, living language was a malleable tool which could express a multitude of sentiments and ideas. In the hands of a capable writer, it could address a variety of readers. Lefin's linguistic utilitarianism distinguished him from his maskilic peers in Berlin, whose vision of the Haskalah was inherently Hebraist.¹⁰⁵

This dynamic approach to language bothered yet another of Lefin's maskilic contemporaries. In 1854, Abraham Ber Gottlober complained to Jacob Bodek (1819-1855), a Galician maskil known for his critical demeanor, that Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855), an Italian Jewish scholar, had misunderstood Lefin's goals in translating into both mishnaic Hebrew

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Katz, pp. 129-130.

¹⁰⁵ Lefin, however, articulated the hope that Hebrew would be restored to its former glory in the messianic age. In the introduction to his Yiddish translation of Psalms, he wrote: "May the Holy One, may He be blessed, with the righteous Redeemer, quickly redeem us soon, to bring us home to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the Temple. So that we can again see the High Priests doing their Divine Service and see the Levites again singing their songs in our sweet, holy language, playing with organs, flutes and trumpets. Then we, too, will express the passionate psalms with joyful tears." Cited in Katz, p. 130; Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles," p. 168.

and Polish Yiddish. Reggio had criticized Lefin's translation of the Guide for the Perplexed as useless because it was not translated from the original Arabic, but from the medieval Hebrew of Samuel ibn Tibbon (c. 1160-c. 1230). He also attacked Lefin's aspiration to make the Guide comprehensible to average learned Polish Jews as a misuse of the philosophic work. Reggio correctly pointed out that Maimonides had specifically written his work to be esoteric, and not for "those who have not engaged in any study other than the science of the Law...[that is] the legalistic study of the Law."¹⁰⁶ Yet, Lefin was not the first maskil who appropriated Maimonides for his own purposes.¹⁰⁷ Lefin, like other maskilim, was an activist.¹⁰⁸ His self-definition was predicated on a critique of contemporary Polish-Jewish society and on the creation of programs that would transform it. In a famous rebuke of what he perceived to be Nachman Krochmal's philosophic retreat, Lefin reprimanded his student for not actively engaging the Jewish public:

For what use has the sun in her adornment to us if not the spread of her rays? Of what avail to us would be the fact that God's spirit rested upon the Prophets, if these men had not troubled to disseminate their holy spirit among the common people and despite all persecutions and sufferings, to go through the streets and marketplaces and proclaim, "Come hither, O sons, return! Hear the words of the Lord

¹⁰⁶ For Gottlober's letter, see Ha-Boker Or, II, (Lemberg, 1887), p. 6. For Reggio's comment, see Iggerot Yashar, Vienna, 1834, letter #18, the footnote on p. 118. The quote from the Guide is from Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, introduction to Part I, Shlomo Pines, trans., (Chicago, IL, 1963), p. 5. Lefin actually acknowledged in his introduction to the translation of the Guide that Maimonides had not intended the book for beginners, yet he proceeded with his translation nonetheless. See Moses Maimonides, Moreh Nevukhim, Mendel Lefin, trans., (Zolkiew, 1829), p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ See Lehmann, Jay M. Harris, "The Image of of Maimonides in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Historiography," and Chapter Three.

¹⁰⁸ Feiner, pp. 3-6.

and see!" How much did these righteous ones endeavor, destroying all of their strength to open the uncircumcised ears, how much did they give their hair to those who pluck it out¹⁰⁹ in order to place a heart of flesh into a heart of stone? And you for whom it would be easy to enlighten your people from your bedroom if you took up a pen, you refuse? You hide in the corners of your house and say, "I have become wise." Whether or not you have become wise or have increased the findings of your soul, is it for you alone that you have become wise? Did not God send you here in order to revitalize? To open bleary eyes and to redeem crushed souls?...It would be good for you, whom God filled with spirit and strength, to show the House of Jacob the right path, and to direct its steps toward the path of Reason without deviating from its Torah at all....A wise man, who in peace, dignity, and manifold honor could do marvelous things with one word that would be useful for his generation and thousands of future generations. A man like this hides in the corners of his house and lives lazily without doing anything?¹¹⁰

Lefin's goal as a translator in general and his commitment to writing in Yiddish in particular was instrumental, a tactic based on a clear-sighted vision of the cultural and social reality of the audience, the masses of Polish Jewry, whom he hoped to reach. Although he sought to raise the literary level of Polish Jewry, in Yiddish and in Hebrew, Lefin's preeminent concern as a maskil was not linguistic.¹¹¹ The redirection and inner spiritual revitalization of Polish Jewry was his most pressing concern.

¹⁰⁹ Isaiah 50:6.

¹¹⁰ Meir Letteris, ed., Mikhtavim, (Lemberg, 1827), letter #10, pp. 33-35.

¹¹¹ In a letter to Jacob Orenstein, the head of the rabbinical court in Lwów, Lefin expressed his surprise that Orenstein did not "feel the need for grammar in the Holy Language as with all other languages, for a distorted style disgraces the speaker and confounds the listener." See Mendel Lefin to Jacob Meshullam Orenstein, 1808. The Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin Papers, JNULA.

Conclusion

While most research on the Haskalah has focused on the nexus between the Enlightenment and the emergence of the absolutist state, this study has emphasized the pre-absolutist, Polish context of the beginnings of the East European Jewish Enlightenment. Mendel Lefin's long life was not coincident with any singular political trend or event. Rather, his life paralleled the variety of changes which overtook Europe at the end of the eighteenth century: the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; the emergence of the Jewish Enlightenment in Berlin and its radicalization; the efflorescence of Hasidism in his native Podolia and its spread to Volhynia and Eastern Galicia; the debates of the Polish Great Sejm about the need for reforming the Polish state and discussions over the integration of the Jews into a new polity; the beginning of Hasidic publishing and the organized opposition of the mitnaggedim to Hasidism; the involvement of the Russian government in the internal affairs of the Jewish people with the imprisonment of Shneur Zalman of Lyady and the promulgation of the legislation of 1804; the three partitions and final dismemberment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; and finally, the Congress of Vienna and the creation of the post-partition boundaries of East Central Europe, which would remain in effect until the end of World War I.

Witness to these portentous events, Lefin responded with a distinct vision of the Jewish Enlightenment which was informed, at all times, by his Polish, specifically Podolian, origins. Moreover, maturing in the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth and supported by a Polish magnate meant that Lefin did not face the state-imposed pressures of acculturation that weighed so heavily on his Berlin peers. These historical circumstances, as well as his own temperament, led Lefin to work toward forging what he perceived was a middle path between the twin excesses of the Zuaufgeklärte of Berlin and of Polish Hasidism. In his struggle against these two forces, moderation was Lefin's cri de coeur, his weapon to preserve rationalist rabbinic Judaism against being perverted by Hasidism or discarded by indifference. Lefin believed that only through the moderate Haskalah could Judaism survive the challenges of modernity.

In his essay for Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski's Name Day, Lefin emphasized that truly enlightened men capable of balancing behavioral extremes were a very rare breed.¹ Positing the moderate Haskalah as the means to achieve such a balanced life, Lefin distanced himself from the radicalization of the Berlin Jewish Enlightenment without rejecting its fundamental aspirations, such as the openness to gentile knowledge, the reinvigoration of the study of the Bible, and the commitment to human moral autonomy within a traditional Jewish religious framework. Lefin defined the Enlightenment as the accumulation of human knowledge regardless of its source, Jewish or gentile, but insisted that intellectual openness did not necessitate a wholesale adoption of non-Jewish culture. Lefin remained suspicious of the "pseudo" or "false" Enlightenment of some of Berlin's wealthy Jews throughout his life. As he wrote sarcastically:

For several hundred years, every single nation in Europe has been flattering its fellow human beings. They educate their sons from their

¹ The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 128a, paragraph 9.

youth to learn how to deceive other men, and they say that this is a very important element in "their morality" (hokhmat nimusei derekh erez shelahem) through which a man learns to love other creatures for his own use for all of his days. When they harm another human being, what will be, will be. Even if they have never met him before, they begin to ask him how he is doing with flattery, saying, "I am your servant," "I am ready to be at your service," "I came out to greet you, to welcome you," and "I have yearned to greet you since hearing about your name and your deeds," etc. And when he finds them sitting at a meal, they invite him to dine with them with trickery and all kinds of lures. Thus they all get to know each other well, and they trust one another totally because several of them know [the biblical verse, Exodus 33:11] on their own, as it is written, ["And God spoke to Moses] face to face [as a man speaks to his friend]," etc., but our holy ancestors did not instruct us, the children of Israel, in this way, rather [they taught us] to distance ourselves from every kind of falsehood, deception, and hypocrisy, and they forbade us to speak one way from our mouth and another way from our heart, because it was as loathsome to them as an abomination, etc.²

Lefin's critique of the direction taken by the Haskalah in Germany underscores the complexity of the influence exercised upon other Jewries by the Berlin model of Enlightenment. Nothing about the encounter between German and East European Jews was monodirectional.³ Just as the presence of a few East European Jews in Berlin (and the specter of their masses to the East) fed the imagination of acculturating German Jews, the Berlin example of rapid acculturation helped to define Lefin's vision of a moderate Haskalah. Just as Lefin's experience in Berlin provided the impetus to bring the ideas of the Haskalah back to Polish-Jewish society, his

² The Joseph Perl Archive, JNULA, folder 55. The emphasis is mine. Although this text is written in Joseph Perl's hand, the verses cited on the bottom of the page appear in the introduction to Lefin's Yiddish translation of Lamentations. See Simha Katz, "Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów's Bible Translations," (Hebrew), Kiryat Sefer, 16, (1939-1940), p. 122.

³ Steven E. Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923, (Madison, WI, 1982), chapter one.

personal encounter with the Haskalah in Berlin led to a critique of Ha-Me'asef and "false" Enlightenment.

While Lefin self-consciously appropriated and employed non-Jewish ideas in his writings, he saw himself in a conservative role, defining himself not in opposition to tradition, but as a protector and preserver of the rabbinic past. His effort to create a moderate Haskalah appropriate for Polish Jewry was also part of an effort to disassociate maskilim like himself from the image of the East European Jew being created in Berlin. His assertion of the positive values of traditional rabbinic Judaism as he believed it had been practiced in Eastern Europe and his critique of European morals was the beginning of a characterization of the assimilated, uprooted Western European Jew that would inform later, conscious Jewish nationalisms.⁴ Lefin, did, however appropriate the negative stereotype of the East European Jew for his own polemical purposes. Distancing himself and other rabbinic Polish Jews from the demonized image, he willingly applied it to the Hasidim.

Lefin's critique of Hasidism owed much to the polemics of its rabbinic opponents (the mitnaggedim); both mitnaggedim and early maskilim like Lefin shared the perception that traditional rabbinic culture was threatened with dissolution in the eighteenth century. Like the mitnaggedim, Lefin drew an analogy between Sabbatianism, Frankism, and Hasidism. He endeavored to make common cause with the besieged traditional rabbinate against the Hasidim, even appealing to the non-Jewish authority

⁴ Israel Bartal, "The Image of Germany and German Jewry in East European Jewish Society During the Nineteenth Century," in Danzig: Between East and West, Isadore Twersky, ed., (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 1-17, particularly pp. 12-14.

(Czartoryski) to intervene in the running of the Jewish community in order to strengthen it. In Lefin's mind, a magnate-dominated kahal still allowed some measure of Jewish communal autonomy and was preferable to its outright abolition.

Lefin's tactical and ideological alliance with the mitnaggedim demonstrates that the lines separating one group of Jews from another were not so clearly drawn in the late eighteenth century. Late in the eighteenth and early in the nineteenth century, maskilim like Lefin had warm relations with rabbinic leaders, such as Jacobka Landau, Jacob Orenstein, and Beerish Rappoport. Even though Lefin had depicted the Jewish past as locked in an eternal dualistic struggle between legitimate rationalism and illegitimate mysticism in his French Essai, he met with Hasidim to counter gentile persecution in the early part of the nineteenth century. Despite his critique of the direction of the Berlin Haskalah, Lefin maintained warm relations with Berliners, such as Moses Mendelssohn, David Friedländer, and Simon Veit, and had a positive image of Berlin until his last days.

The effects of the state's involvement in Jewish life caused a rapprochement between the mitnaggedim and their opponents only in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Then they found common enemy in the maskilim.⁵ Yet Hasidic critics of the Jewish Enlightenment later in the nineteenth century did not distinguish between Lefin's moderate Haskalah and the efforts of acculturated, Reform German Jews to modify Jewish practice. One critic, articulating the same dualistic conception of the Jewish past posited by Lefin in his essay for the Four-Year Sejm, wrote:

⁵ Mordecai Wilensky, Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim: Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus she-beineihem ba-Shanim 1772-1795, I, (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 16.

I heard an evil rumor when I was still a young boy. My great, just, and famous fathers and teachers told me that the staff had blossomed and calumny had flourished in the land of Ashkenaz and Prussia, that evil, ungodly men had arisen who were wise [in] evil, but knew not how to do good. A web of evil doers had joined together in Berlin, the capital city of Prussia....They spread their odor so much until their stench...arrived [here]. Woe to the ears who received such rumors, woe to the generation that grew up in those days, in which this evil sect rejected the mantle of the Torah and the commandments. It was not sufficient for them (although they sinned and caused the masses to sin and want), God forbid, to deviate all of Israel. The leaders of the crocodiles who spoke with flattery, may their names be wiped out and uprooted from the world, [were] Moses [Mendelssohn] of Dessau and Naftali Herz Weisel. Isaac Satanów and Mendel [Lefin of] Mikolajów were connected to them. They...created a school to educate the youth in absolute heresy from their young years, to annul the Torah from the essence of its teaching, which is the Talmud and the Decisors,...only to teach them gentile languages and Hebrew and to increase their knowledge of grammar. But this [instruction], too, was only occasional. The essence of their intention was known to all their friends and acquaintances: to lead them [the youth] in the paths of those who reject the Torah of Moses and the Oral Torah, in particular.⁶

Lefin's critic together with many historians have concurred that the defining feature of the Enlightenment and the Haskalah was the development of a secular intelligentsia.⁷ When linked with the emergence of

⁶ Sefer Kena'ot ha-Shem Zeva'ot, (Safed, 1925), attributed to "Rebbi Natan, the brilliant student of our holy Rabbi NaHMaN," pp. 1-2. See, too, Joshua Mundshein's interpretation of Shneur Zalman of Lyady's requirement that only ethical texts with Jewish origins be permitted as a critique of Israel of Salanter's Musar movement and its use of Lefin's Moral Stocktaking, which was based on Benjamin Franklin's technique for moral self-improvement. Joshua Mundshein, Migdal Oz, (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 421. On dualistic conceptions of Jewish history, see Shmuel Feiner, Haskalah ve-Historyah: Toldotav shel Hakarat-Ever Yehudit Modernit, (Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 130-132 and Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?" in Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Steven J. Zipperstein and Jonathan Frankel, eds., (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1-37.

⁷ Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, I, (New York, 1966-69), p. 3; Roy Porter, The Enlightenment, (London, 1990), pp. 11, 38-41, 72-74; Jerzy Lukowski, Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795, (New York, 1991), p. 222; Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, (Boston, MA, 1962), p. 91; Shmuel Feiner, too, argues that the Haskalah played a role, although not the exclusive one, in the secularization of the Jews, but also defines the Haskalah as a conservative, defensive movement relative to other ideological streams in modern Jewish history. See Shmuel Feiner, "Towards a Definition of the Haskalah," in New Perspectives on the Haskalah, David Sorkin and Shmuel Feiner, eds., (Hebrew Union College Press, forthcoming).

absolutism and the concomitant attenuation of the influence of religion in official, public life, the secularizing impulse of the Enlightenment appears uncontested. But, as I have argued, Lefin's Haskalah developed in a pre-absolutist historical context and he always defined it in religious terms. There was nothing secular in the content of Lefin's conception of the Haskalah. The fact that the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth never had the opportunity in the late eighteenth-century because of the opposition of its magnate power brokers to join the newly emergent absolutist states meant that Lefin did not experience the creation of a cameralist bureaucracy and independent middle-class which fulfilled a modern secular function in the new polities. Evaluated on its own terms and in its own historical context, Mendel Lefin's conception of a moderate Haskalah was fundamentally religious and opposed to secularization.⁸ All of his writings emphasized the compatibility of traditional rabbinic piety and human reason, and many of his works explicitly defended the Oral Law. Safeguarding, yet invigorating, traditional Judaism, was the defining feature of Lefin's work as a maskil. His Haskalah was a conservative effort to help Polish Jews make the transition to modern times without the sense of crisis which characterized the experience of Berlin maskilim. We can only wonder how and if Lefin's Haskalah would have changed had he been subject to their pressures.

⁸ For the moderate, "'rabbinic haskalah' with a small 'h'," in Hungary and Bohemia, see Michael Silber, "The Historical Experience of German Jewry and Its Impact on Haskalah and Reform in Hungary," in Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model, Jacob Katz, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987), pp. 111-115.

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Abbreviations:

HUCA: Hebrew Union College Annual

JQR: Jewish Quarterly Review

JSS: Jewish Social Studies

LBIY: Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook

PAAJR: Publications of the American Academy for Jewish Research

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