BOOK REVIEWS

Meir M. Rothschild, Hachalukah, by RUBIN MASS (Jerusalem: 1969).

Reviewed by
Eliezer Berkovits

This remarkable little volume examines the ideological foundations of the *Chalukah,* the basis of subsistence of the old *Yishuv,* in the years 1810-1860, and finds in it the expression of the relationship of Galut Jewry to the idea of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael.* In 1810 the *Yishuv* consisted mainly of the descendants of the community of Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid, which emigrated to Palestine in the early eighteenth century, and of the various *Aliyot* of Eastern European Hasidim that went there during the eighteenth century. The year 1810 was a turning point. It brought the *Aliyah* of the *Perushim,* which was inspired by the teachings of the Gaon of Vilna and was led by his disciples. This *Aliyah* was responsible for the solidification of the Jewish settlement in Palestine as well as for the more effective organization and control of the fund raising activities of the *Chalukah.* The analysis of the author concludes with the year 1860, the year of the appearance of Rabbi Zevi Kabisher's *Derishat Zion,* that initiated a new religious ideology for Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael.*

Rothschild's work is an opening in the study of a greatly neglected epoch in the history of the *Yishuv,* as well as in the history of the Jewish people's relationship to *Eretz Yisrael.* It is based on a thorough analysis of the letters and appeals sent to the Jewish communities on behalf of the *Chalukah,* as well as of the vast halakhic material found in the responsa literature of the time.

The first impression one gains gives one a sense of shame and guilt for having so long permitted the denigration of the *Chalukah* as an abject form of charity handed out to a wretched group of prideless and poverty-stricken Jews. Poor, of course, they were. But their poverty and condition of dependence on charity was freely-

chosen. The vast community of Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid, the later Chasidic congregations, and the disciples of the Gaon of Vilna, did not go to Palestine in order to die there. Nor were they running away from European anti-Semitism. The political conditions in Palestine, if anything, involved much greater dangers for the immigrants than they had to face in their land of birth. They were immigrants of a singularly idealistic motivation. They went with their wives and children in order to live there in an atmosphere of holiness that was not to be found anywhere else in the world. It was an ideology that led them to *Eretz Yisrael* and made them—not at all unlike the first secular *Chaluzim* of a later period —accept freely the vicissitudes of poverty and the daily perils of political insecurity. It was their understanding of the importance of *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael,* and its significance for individual salvation and national redemption, which shaped their determination. We are indebted to the author for having restored the dignity of a phase of Jewish settlement that was unwisely violated by the propaganda of a newer ideology and a more recent epoch.

What of the relationship of the diaspora to *Eretz Yisrael?* The author divides this aspect of his work into two categories. He treats the *Chalukah* as an institution of *Tzedakah* (charity), as well as one with a manifold function on behalf of the Jewry of the Galut. Both these facets appear equally in the appeals as well as the halakhic literature of the time. As an act of charity, to support the poor of *Eretz Yisrael* takes precedence over the poor of one's own city. One of the reasons given is that the Jews of *Eretz Yisrael* are *Ba'alei Hama'asim,* men of the more perfect realization of Judaism, because they live in the Holy Land, where prayer and Torah have a unique quality. They are there for *Tikun Hanefesh,* for the sake of the perfection of the soul, which can nowhere be accomplished as fully as in *Eretz Yisrael.* The argumentation, halakhically endorsed, reveals the attitude of the Jews of the time to *Eretz Yisrael.*

More significant is that phase of the justification of the *Chalukah* which sees in it a cause of importance for all Jewry. There is the *Mitzvah* of settling in *Eretz Yisrael.* Do the diaspora Jews fulfill it? There are many commandments that can be realized only in the Holy Land. How are the Jews of the world to realize them? They may share in these commandments as they are fulfilled by those Jews, who but for the support they receive from their brethren, could not maintain themselves in *Eretz Yisrael.* The Jews in the Holy Land are the representatives of all Jewry. The Jewish settlers are also the keepers of the land, which without Jewish settlement, would be a desert from the Jewish point of view. The Jewish settlers prepare the redemption of the land and of all Israel by hastening the coming of the Messiah through the quality of their *Avodat Hashem,* their prayers opposite the "Gates of Heaven" and their Torah study in the atmosphere of the land's sanctity.

Rather interesting is another reason adduced both by the great Chida (Rabbi Chayim Yosef David Azulai of a previous generation) and the Chatam Sofer for the obligation to support the *Chalukah.* According to Maimonides (cf. *Kiddush Hachodesh,* the end of ch. 5 and *Sefer Hatmitzvot,* 153), the computation of the Jewish calendar depends on the Jews living in *Eretz Yisrael.* The diaspora follows their computation. Should Jewish settlement cease in the Holy Land, neither the new moon nor the holy days could be validly established in the diaspora. The computation of the diaspora would not be obligatory.

On the whole, because of the importance of *Eretz Yisrael* for Judaism and the Jewish people, by supporting the *Chalukah* the diaspora safeguards its own existence in the present and prepares for the future of all Israel.

Rothschild analyzes neatly the nuances between the ideologies of the Halakhah-oriented disciples of the Gaon of Vilna and the Kabbalah-influenced *Chasidim.* But both are in agreement in the understanding that *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael* alone offers the opportunity for the highest form of Jewish self-realization. The *Chalukah* represents an acknowledgment of that ideal by all Israel and is the chief means of contact between the Jewry of the diaspora and the land of Israel.

The *Chalukah* was based on an ideology of "spiritual settlement" in the Holy Land. The period came to a close when—as the author points it out—Rabbi Mordecai Eliasberg, one of the leaders of the *Chibat Zion* movement, called religious Jewry to the realization that the "spiritual settlement" must go hand in hand with the physical settlement of the land through agriculture, industry, and Jewish labor and defense.

One puts this important little volume down with an aching heart. The author is no longer among us. And he was only twenty-one years of age when he died. He was off duty in his barracks when the Jordanians ambushed some of his comrades on the Allenby bridge. With his boots untied, he ran to remove the wounded from under fire of the enemy. In his soul were harmonized the two ideologies of spiritual and physical settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel—*Erez Yisrael Al Pi Torat Yisrael.* May the memory of his short but dedicated life, and this first and only volume of his promising genius, remain a source of inspiration to Jewish youth the world over.

Jerusalem and Other Jewish Writings, by MOSES MENDELSSOHN, translated and edited by Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken, 1969).

Reviewed by
Edith Wyschogrod

Recently the New York Times carried the story of a plan evolved by the Board of Education in Netcong, New Jersey for the circumvention of the 1963 United States

Supreme Court ban on school prayer. Sections of the Congressional Record are to be read aloud to students in the high school gymnasium in lieu of "silent meditation" which itself was proposed as the surrogate for what the Board really wanted: effective common prayer acceptable to all faiths. A group of local clergymen attempted to negotiate such a prayer but failed to agree upon a text. Quite apart from the issue of constitutionality in the present instance, I should like to direct the attention of those interested in the problem of common prayer to a judicious and eloquent plea against it:

> A union of faiths, if it were ever to come about could have only the most disastrous consequences for reason and freedom of conscience. Suppose people were able to reach agreement concerning the doctrinal formulations they want to introduce as basic creed; suppose one could also manage to find symbols to which none of the religious groups now dominant... would object — what would be gained by this? Would it mean that all of you had arrived at the same view about religious truths?
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> No one who has the slightest insight into human nature can possibly come to this conclusion. This would merely be agreement on words, on a formula. The unifiers of faith would simply be collaborating in pinching off a bit from some concepts here and there, in enlarging the texture of words elsewhere, until their inner differences, can if necessary be squeezed in . . . Brothers, if you care for true godliness, let us not pretend that conformity exists where diversity is obviously the plan and goal of Providence.

This text was published in 1783 in response to an anonymous pamphlet entitled *The Search for Light and Right* actually written by an Austrian convert Joseph von Sonnenfels. The man who took up the cause against common doctrine and for a careful delineation of the powers of church and state led us, the Children of Israel, through the Red Sea into the modern world by way of the German and English Enlightenments. In his major work *Jerusalem* and in selected letters to Lavater and others (all beautifully translated by Alfred Jospe, director of programs and resources of the B'nai Brith Hillel Foundations), Moses Mendelssohn puts together not so much a Jewish theology of the *Aufklarung* as a Jewish political guidebook. It is a book of etiquette, not in the debased sense of a handbook on how to rise in court (as the advice of Polonius to his son Laertes) but a deeper work, an "etiquette" in the Confucian sense, a way of being in the state for the modern Jew. *Jerusalem* is, in part, a study of society and of the proper role of church and state within it. One of its purposes, although not entirely explicit, is to provide a rule of thumb for the modern Jew to guide him through the labyrinth of modern society by establishing what is proper to secular and ecclesiastical authority. These powers must arrive at a balance of forces "so that they will support the structure of society rather than crush its foundations."

The quest for a better social order requires the effort of Jew and Gentile alike. Both should be

able to undertake common projects of civic improvement without the interference of ecclesiastical authority since the actions which arise from the relations between men belong to the domain of civil authority exclusively. A man's relationship to Providence, which may be the source of his convictions, is none of the state's business. The church can show men that all duties are duties towards God; it can guide, teach and encourage, but it cannot punish and reward human actions. Punishment and reward are to be apportioned according to actions and not according to men's religious motives. The state cannot concern itself with the wellspring of human actions; that is the function of the church. But the church in its turn ought not to be concerned with these actions themselves but ought to confine itself to admonition, to teaching, to comforting and to confirming the citizen.

What of the duties and obligations imposed on man by religion? These can only coincide with the moral teachings of reason; Divine rights cannot collide with our own since Providence wants what is best for every individual and this "best" can only be "logically" consistent and free of contradiction. All men irrespective of their religious affiliations can perceive the truths of reason and thus are not cut off from the possibility of salvation. Just as each man is entitled to eternal life if his conduct merits it, each man is spared eternal damnation. He must be punished for his wrongdoing, but as soon as he has paid sufficiently, as soon as the success of the remonstrance is assured, his punishment ends.

All good and well for an Enlightenment Jew of theistic or deistic proclivities. But Mendelssohn was none of these; he was an observant Jew faithful in the traditional sense, and his theological adversaries were not slow to perceive the problematic nature of his position. If, it is argued, Mendelssohn is so eager to maintain the separation of church and state, he must for the sake of consistency, renege upon his allegiance to the Mosaic law which provides the very model of an ecclesiastical polity. His opponents are not particularly eager to have him go back upon what they must see as a revanchist policy towards ecclesiastical authority so much as to acknowledge the weaknesses of Judaism as a legal system and to turn towards what is to them the truer and more rational religion, Christianity. Indeed an anonymous author quoted by Mendelssohn writes of Judaism: "Moses prescribes coercion as well as definite punishment for the non-observance of ritual duties . . ." This author adds elsewhere, "The entire ecclesiastical system of Moses consisted not merely of teaching and instruction in duties, it was a complete structure of strict ecclesiastical laws. The arm of the church wielded the sword of the curse." Mendelssohn recognizes that this objection goes to the heart of the matter. He replies that if the religious edifice is crumbling "would I act wisely if I attempted to save my belongings simply by moving them from the lower to the upper floor? Would I be safer there? Christianity, as you

know, is built upon Judaism, and would therefore collapse along with it."

I have always been pleased to find this weak point in Christian proselytizers acknowledged by Immanuel Kant, for if revealed religion is called into question, Kant concedes that Christianity is no less problematic than Judaism. If the New Testament is valid for Christianity for all times, Kant argues, "every Christian must be a Jew whose Messiah has come." Kant understands very well that if the New Testament is permanently binding and if its inner assumption is that the Old Testament is conclusively revelatory for all men, then no Christian can hold the view, with any degree of consistency, that he is not bound by the statutory laws of the Old Testament. The trouble is, from Kant's point of view, that if one argues that something is true because revealed and not because it is in conformity with the tenets of reason, one is no longer in a position to argue about the *content* of the revelation. Even if it were the case, one could not say that the New Testament is preferable to the Old because it is more reasonable, since the reasonableness of the doctrine would be irrelevant in determining its validity for all men. Kant, being a master of arguments in favor of rational religion, writes:

> Mendelssohn very ingeniously makes use of this weak spot in the customary presentation of Christianity wholly to reject every demand upon a son of Israel that he change his religion. For he [Mendelssohn] says, since the Jewish faith itself is according to the avowal of Christians, the substructure upon which the superstructure of Christianity rests, the demand that it be abandoned is equivalent to expecting someone to demolish the ground floor of a house in order to take up his abode in the second story.

But to say that Christianity is in no better position than Judaism leaves unanswered a crucial part of the original question, namely, if there are no eternal verities save those which can be demonstrated by reason, how can the truth of the Mosaic law be upheld? Mendelssohn must either affirm that the truth of Judaism can be demonstrated or show that the content of Judaism is of such a nature that it *need* not be demonstrated. Mendelssohn takes the latter course. The eternal verities are indeed the truths of reason available to all straight thinking persons (i. e. to all rational men); these truths of reason cannot be undermined by revealed truths. But, he maintains, it is the great advantage of Judaism to have recognized this state of affairs and therefore to have avoided creedal statements. What Jews do possess is *"a divine legislation* — laws, commandments, statutes, rules of conduct, instructions in God's will and in what they are told to do to attain temporal and eternal salvation. Moses in a miraculous and supernatural way, revealed to them these laws and commandments, but not dogmas, propositions concerning salvation, or self-evident principles of reason." With regard to these last, all men are on an equal footing.

It would be folly to assume that

this radical separation of revealed legislation from revealed dogma solves the dilemma. The real weakness of Mendelssohn's position is the failure to grapple with the problem of why one is better off with Divine commands than with divinely revealed statements. Much could be said with regard to the difference between propositions which concern existing states of affairs, what Mendelssohn would call creedal statements, and those that deal with what ought to be the case or what ought to be done. But it is not on the basis of independent criteria that Mendelssohn prefers the latter over the former; it is rather because they are Divine commands that the statutory laws of Judaism are obeyed. And, indeed, is it not the case that to say God wants something of one — whether what is wanted is doing or believing — is itself a creedal statement and the very attitude denied as being proper to Judaism?

In addition one must ask what is the nature of the command itself? Is it a truth of reason? No, it cannot be a truth of reason since it is not apparent at once to all rational men, universally normative, etc. Is it contrary to reason? No, for God surely would not command that which is contrary to reason. Is it beyond reason and non-reason, beyond all distinction? No, because law by its very nature is codified, depends on general principles applied in particular instances, etc. Divine commands are not necessary truths, those which cannot be otherwise because they are based on immutable logical relationships, not contingent truths, those which depend on observations of recurrent events and which permit exceptions. They are, it would seem, dependent upon the truth of a historical event which happens only once and whose credibility depends upon the testimony of witnesses. Thus, for Mendelssohn the highest degree of certainty is reserved for the immutable and necessary truths of reason while the more doubtful evidence of history is adduced on behalf of the truth of Divine commands.

Since, however, for Mendelssohn positive religion does not wither away like the proverbial Marxist state, he manages to avoid some of the more extreme predictions made by defenders of rational religion. He does not, for example, foresee a universal church in which all men will strive for ethical perfection. Indeed, he is pessimistic with regard to human progress (being first a Jew and only second a man of the Enlightenment). Mankind as a whole proceeds at the rate of one step forward, two steps back. Society "oscillates constantly between fixed limits." Moral progress is possible only in the life of the individual.

Mendelssohn's wisdom is also apparent in his straightforward reading of the New Testament. The founder of Christianity, he reminds us, never stated explicitly that he wanted to do way with Mosaic law or exempt Jews from it. Indeed Mendelssohn, reading the New Testament in a thoroughly open and modern way, notes that the Apostles and disciples were in doubt as to whether Christian converts from paganism need observe

Mosaic law and be circumcised. "In fact," he writes, "the Apostle himself circumcised Timothy." It has taken a good many years, but this line of inquiry is now being pursued by such scholars as W. B. Davies and Joachim Schoeps to name only a few.

Despite some doubt which has been cast by recent scholarship upon the relation of the Enlightenment to the Jews, and despite the jaundiced eye with which contemporary thought regards its abounding confidence in reason, let us face it: the Enlightenment has given us our chance. Mendelssohn recognizes this indebtedness (particularly to Locke for his *Letters on Tolerance*). In turn it is historically imperative and politically interesting for us to pick up Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* not only to remind ourselves of the ideological roots of such comparatively innocuous controversies as the Netcong quarrel, but also to see at what point, at what price(and with what barbaric remissions) we ceased to be, juridically speaking, unpersons in the nations of the West.

REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

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