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## TORAH AND SECULAR CULTURE: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE IN THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Greeks and Jews, the peoples who have contributed most toward what we call Western civilization, have been comparing cultural notes for a long time.<sup>1</sup> The first such confrontation is said to have occurred in the middle of the fourth century B.C.E., when, in an anecdote repeated by Josephus,<sup>2</sup> a Jew from Lower Syria, that is the Land of Israel, came to converse with the philosopher Aristotle during the latter's stay in Asia Minor, in order to test his learning. This Jew, says Aristotle, not only spoke Greek but had the soul of a Greek; and, in the end, as the Greek philosopher admitted, far from teaching the Jew something, it was the nameless Jew who, having been intimate with many cultivated persons, imparted to the Greek something of his learning, so much so that Aristotle concluded that the Jews must be a race of philosophers.

This was, however, so far as we can tell, an isolated instance. Confrontation on a mass scale did not occur until the conquest of the land of Israel by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E. and his deliberate attempt to spread Greek culture, especially through the founding of new cities, the most famous of which, in Egypt, was named Alexandria after him. It was here that he invited Jews to settle, offering them civic rights equal to those of the Greeks. Within a short time the metropolis, which, representing the New World of its day, soon displaced Athens as the cultural center of the Mediterranean region, had a large number of Jews seeking their fortune in this veritable

New York City. These Jews spoke Aramaic, as we can see from the papyri, all of which, until about 300 B.C.E., are in that language; but, as with the Jews of America, the grandchildren no longer spoke the ancestral language, and we find that the papyri and the tombstone inscriptions, with very few exceptions, after that date are in Greek. By the year 270 B.C.E. the triumph of Greek was complete. What were the consequences? I wish here to consider two key instances of the attempt at accommodation of Greek and Jewish ideas and their impact, namely in the translation of language—the Septuagint—and in the translation of ideas—the philosophic system of Philo, and to compare this response to Hellenism with that of the rabbis in the Land of Israel.

In approximately the year 270 B.C.E., according to the *Letter of Aristeas*, King Ptolemy Philadelphus of Egypt sent for seventy or seventy-two elders from Jerusalem to translate the Torah into Greek so that he might add it to his great library.<sup>3</sup> This translation, however, also served the purpose of flattering the Jews, inasmuch as, when it was completed, the leaders of the Jews requested that a copy be given to them. So impressed were the Jews with the version that they decreed that it should remain as it was and not be altered. The community regarded the translation as divinely inspired so that they felt no need to consult the original.

The result was momentous. Noting the difficulties inherent in translation, the Talmud<sup>4</sup> quotes Rabbi Judah bar Ilai as saying: “He who translates a Biblical verse as it is formed [i.e. literally] is a liar, and he who adds thereto is a blasphemer and a libeller.” Franz Rosenzweig, who together with Martin Buber undertook to translate the Bible into German, once wrote in a letter to Gershom Scholem: “Only one who is profoundly convinced of the impossibility of translation can really undertake it.” Indeed, in a very real sense, as Leo Baeck once remarked, “All translation is commentary.” If, as Onkelos (Genesis 2:7) renders it, man, as *nefesh hayyah*, is a speaking being, it is the use of meaningful language which categorizes and makes distinctions that differentiates him from other creatures. In truth, the translator of the apocryphal Book of Ben Sira into Greek already realized the difficulties inherent in translation when in the second century B.C.E. he remarked that what was originally written in Hebrew does not have the same force when translated into another language. We may here illustrate the dangers of the translation by noting how the Septuagint renders four key terms: *Torah*, *emunah*, *hesed*, and *nefesh*.<sup>5</sup>

The usual translation of the word Torah in the Septuagint is *nomos*, “law” or “custom.” But Torah really means direction or instruction in the broadest sense. The five books of the Torah contain

not only law but also a record of the encounter of God and man, and, in particular, a history of the development of the Jewish people. Otherwise, as Rashi on the very first verse of the Torah comments, the Torah should have begun not with the creation of the world but with the first commandment. Indeed, when we read in Psalms (78:1), *Ha'azinah ami torati*—"Give ear, O my people, to my Torah," what follows is not a recapitulation of the laws but a history of the Jewish nation.

The word *nomos*, however, was by the Greeks traditionally contrasted with *physis*, "nature." To illustrate the difference, Herodotus<sup>6</sup> tells the story of King Darius of Persia, who asked some Greeks how much money he would have to give them in order to induce them to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. Of course, they were horrified and utterly refused, since they were accustomed to burn the dead. He then asked some people from India how much money he would have to give them to get them to agree to burn their dead. They, too, were horrified, since they were accustomed to eat their parents' dead bodies. Hence, concludes Herodotus, quoting Pindar the poet, *nomos*, "custom," is king. Again, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon stands for *nomos*, "man-made edict," as against Antigone, who espouses the cause of *physis*, the unwritten law of nature, which, she says, transcends *nomos*.

Therefore, the translation of Torah by *nomos* is utterly misleading; and yet, so far as we can tell, the translation was never challenged in Hellenistic Jewish literature. The result of this was that Paul,<sup>7</sup> speaking to Hellenized Jews, could refer to Judaism as a purely legalistic religion and could speak of the abrogation of the *Nomos* and of its displacement by the religion of the spirit. Sometimes, as Rosenzweig once perceptively remarked, history is made in dictionaries; this was one of those instances.

The translation of *emunah* by the Greek *pistis* supplies a second example of what we may call "creeping assimilation." It was Martin Buber, in his *Two Types of Faith*, who noted the difference between *emunah*, the unconditional trust in the relationship with God as in one's relationship with one's friend, and *pistis*, faith in an intellectual proposition. Plato, who was probably the most important single intellectual factor in the process of Hellenization in the East during the Hellenistic period,<sup>8</sup> speaks of *pistis* in the *Republic* as an opinion (*doxa*). In his discussion of epistemology in the *Line*,<sup>9</sup> it is the next-to-lowest degree of knowledge, being inferior to the knowledge of the Forms and of mathematical objects and being superior only to the knowledge of images. While it is true that Philo<sup>10</sup> speaks of *pistis* as the queen of virtues, for him it is, as for Plato, more of an intellectual quality, and hence removed from the central connotation of *emunah*.

Again, how should one render the word *hesed*—"mercy, kindness," which contains the ideas of pity and piety? The Septuagint uses either the word *eleemosynē*, "pity," or the word *kharis*, "kindness" or "favor." Both meanings miss the connection of *hesed* and *hasid*, "pious." As to pity, in particular, for the Greeks generally this was an undesirable emotion, as we see in Aristotle's famous statement in the *Poetics*<sup>11</sup> that the function of tragedy is to purge one's system of pity and fear. Seneca, the famous Stoic philosopher of the first century, says that to show pity is the mark of a weak character and one which a good man will avoid.

In the case of *nefesh*, "soul," the Septuagint generally renders this by the Greek word *psychē*, which also means "soul." But, again, every word has its range of meanings and connotations. To the Greek, especially in Pythagoreanism and Platonism, two of the philosophies popular among intellectuals in Hellenistic times, *psychē* is contrasted with *sōma*, "body"; and one is reminded of Socrates' famous dictum, *sōma sēma*,<sup>12</sup> "the body is a prison house," and of Socrates' last words to his pupil Crito,<sup>13</sup> that he owes a cock to Asclepius, the god of healing, presumably because at death his soul would be freed from the prison house of the body. But the word *nefesh* may mean "anyone"; and even if it means "soul," Judaism, with the exception of such movements as those of the Essenes and the Dead Sea Sect, spurns the harsh contrast between body and soul and the notion that the body is evil.

We may add that another type of conceptual error was introduced into the Septuagint through the translation of *eh'yeh asher eh'yeh* (Exodus 3:14) by *egō eimi ho ōn*, which in Philo<sup>14</sup> becomes *to on*, "that which is." Hence Philo, via the Septuagint, converts the God of personal religion into the Platonic Absolute of philosophy.

Finally, in rendering *Elohim lo tekallel* (Exodus 22:27) as *theous ou kakologēseis*, "You shall not curse gods," the Septuagint, followed by both Philo and Josephus<sup>15</sup>, stressed that the Jew is not permitted to speak in a derogatory fashion about other religions, including those that worship idols. This liberalism may have been a political necessity, but it clearly contradicts the prescription of Deuteronomy (7:25), which declares that the Israelites are to burn with fire the graven images of the gods of the Canaanites.

The Talmud,<sup>16</sup> on the one hand, speaks of the Septuagint as divinely inspired, for it says that God put counsel into the heart of the seventy-two translators, so that, despite the fact that they worked independently of one another, they emerged with exactly the same version of the Torah. And yet, in the treatise *Soferim*,<sup>17</sup> the Rabbis compare the day when the translation was made to the one when the Israelites made the golden calf. Apparently they came to realize that

while the idea of a translation was an excellent one, once the translation came to be read to the exclusion of the original this was equivalent to worship of an idol, a substitute for the truth. Indeed, we may suggest, the translation was praised only when those who consulted it recognized that it was not primary but derivative from the original Hebrew.

After language the next step in the attempt to accommodate Greek and Hebrew values came in the realm of ideas. The fact that, according to the *Letter of Aristeas*,<sup>18</sup> the chief of the translators, at the symposium sponsored by King Ptolemy Philadelphus in their honor, explains to the king that the Jewish God was simply another name for Zeus, shows the eagerness with which the Jew who authored this work sought to diminish the theological differences between the Greeks and the Jews. Thereafter, several Jewish (though their identity as Jews has, to be sure, been contested)<sup>19</sup> historians in Hellenistic Alexandria endeavored to show that the Jews, far from being obscurantists, had actually taught the arts and sciences to the most civilized of all peoples. Thus Eupolemus,<sup>20</sup> who lived in perhaps the second century B.C.E., speaks of Moses, in an obvious attempt to equate him with a Greek philosopher, as the first wise man (*sophon*), the first to transmit the alphabet to the Jews. Inasmuch as the fragment then goes on to state that the Jews gave the alphabet to the Phoenicians, who, in turn, taught it to the Greeks, Moses emerges as the world's great educator. Another second-century B.C.E. educator, Pseudo-Eupolemus,<sup>21</sup> in an obvious effort to show that the Jews did not isolate themselves from other civilizations, declares that Abraham taught astronomy and astrology first to the Phoenicians and then to the Egyptians. He even<sup>22</sup> equates the Biblical Enoch with Atlas, the Greek mythical giant who is said to have held the sky on his shoulders.

Again, the second-century B.C.E. historian Artapanus,<sup>23</sup> who almost certainly was an Egyptian Jew,<sup>24</sup> even equates Moses with Musaeus, identified as the teacher of Orpheus, the putative founder of a popular religion in Graeco-Roman times. We may note that there was a tradition, recorded by Hecataeus of Abdera (ca. 300 B.C.E.),<sup>25</sup> that Orpheus taught the Greeks the wisdom that he had learned from his Egyptian travels; Artapanus is saying that this wisdom actually came from Moses. Moreover, to judge from Josephus,<sup>26</sup> the Jews had been accused by such anti-Semites as the influential Apollonius Molon of Rhodes (first century B.C.E.), the teacher of Cicero, and the Alexandrian Apion (first century C.E.), of not having produced any inventors of useful arts or eminent sages. To counter charges of this sort, which we may well guess had been made earlier also, Artapanus<sup>27</sup> boldly declares that Moses invented

hieroglyphic writing, ships, machines for lifting stones, weapons, and devices for drawing water, as well as philosophy, all of which achievements had previously been ascribed to various mythical or semi-mythical figures. Moses is presented as a veritable philosopher-king, a genius in political science, who sets up a stable state, wins the love of the masses, assigns as gods cats, dogs, and ibises, and is even himself deemed worthy of divine honor by the priests, being identified with the popular Olympian Greek god Hermes. His crowning achievement, presumably in answer to the charge that the Jews were cowards,<sup>28</sup> is said to have been his success as a general against the Ethiopians, a people who had held off invasion by generals of the caliber of the Persian Cambyses and Alexander the Great. All of this shows a clearly apologetic attempt to prove that the Jews, far from being culturally isolated and misanthropic, as they had been charged by even the otherwise sympathetic third-century B.C.E. Hecataeus of Abdera,<sup>29</sup> in reality had contacts with civilized peoples from the very earliest period, and that their science, philosophy, and religion had, in fact, been the inspiration of those of the Egyptians and the Greeks. The fact that Moses is said to have been the founder of the cult of Apis the bull and of the worship of the ibis—which, one would think, would be regarded as utterly repugnant to Jewish monotheism—seems not to have disturbed the author.

The most amazing of these Graeco-Jewish historians is Cleodemus Malchus,<sup>30</sup> who, in an obviously desperate apologetic attempt to impute antiquity to the Jews and to connect them with Greek history, declares that two of Abraham's sons by Keturah joined Heracles, the greatest Greek hero, in his campaign against Libya and the giant hero Antaeus, the son of Earth, and that Heracles married the daughter of one of them. That a Jew should recount with obvious pride such a tale of intermarriage—and with a notorious womanizer and drunkard—seems incredible, unless we realize the degree to which Cleodemus went to break the Jews out of their apparent isolation. This, we may suggest, is perhaps the origin of the tale connecting the Spartans, who claimed descent from Heracles, with the Jews.<sup>31</sup>

When we come to Philo in the first century, we find, as Wolfson<sup>32</sup> has put it, a philosopher in the grand manner. First, there is the question of his method of interpreting Scripture. While Philo<sup>33</sup> does not deny that one should observe the laws literally and condemns those who go to excesses in their allegorizing, he quite clearly believes that the allegorical method is superior. Thus the higher purpose of circumcision<sup>34</sup> is the excision of excessive and superfluous pleasure. Again, the baking of dough into unleavened bread indicates the softening of the passions.<sup>35</sup> To be sure, the

method of allegory was known to the Rabbis, but the emphasis which Philo puts on it is clearly derived from the pagans, particularly the Stoics, who especially employed it in Hellenistic times to explain away difficulties in the text of Homer, the Greek equivalent of the Bible. It is this form of allegorization, probably derived through Philo, which influenced Paul's attack on the literalist interpretation of the *mitsvot*.

Once again, in connection with Philo, the key issue is his starting point. We see this behind the question<sup>36</sup> as to how the Greek philosophers could have arrived at the truth without direct revelation. The implication of the question is that the Greeks *did* have the truth. Philo's twofold answer is that either the Greeks had borrowed from the Bible or that philosophy itself was a divine gift to the Greeks to enable them to discover by reason and by the senses what the Jews had learned through revelation. But this latter answer implies that the Torah may be divided into philosophic truths and ritual truths, much as Mendelssohn was later to do, and that the latter were presumably merely a local code of etiquette.

Again, because he started with the assumption that Plato, whom he calls "most sacred,"<sup>37</sup> had the truth (whence the famous saying in Jerome and in several other Church Fathers<sup>38</sup> that "either Plato philonizes or Philo platonizes"), Philo posits that the theory of ideas is to be found in the Torah. Moreover, he was apparently disturbed, as some of the modern Bible critics have been, by the seeming discrepancy between the first two chapters of Genesis in the account of creation. Philo<sup>39</sup> resolved this dilemma by asserting that the first chapter discussed the creation of universals, forms, or ideas, whereas the second described the creation of particulars, since in the Greek (the only version which he knew) of Genesis 1:2 he read that the earth was "unseen and unformed," whence he deduced, in complete agreement with Plato, that prior to the visible world there existed an invisible world. Moreover, in resolving the problem of God's relation to the imperfect world, Philo postulated the intervention of a mediator, the *logos*, a term which he inherited from the pre-Socratic philosophers. He terms this *logos* "the idea of ideas,"<sup>40</sup> "the first-begotten Son of the uncreated Father" and a "second God,"<sup>41</sup> and "the man of God,"<sup>42</sup> concepts which clearly paved the way for the notion of the God-man and the intermediary between God and man in Christian theology.

In answering the implied question as to why God did not give the Torah to Abraham, Philo<sup>43</sup> declares that Abraham actually observed a higher law, of which the *Nomos* (the Septuagint's translation of the word Torah, it will be recalled) was only a copy. While it is true that the Rabbis<sup>44</sup> speak of Abraham as observing the

Torah even before its presentation to all of Israel, for Philo Abraham's achievement is regarded as superior to that of the revelation at Sinai since he had to deduce the Law for himself. Here again Philo paves the way for the Christian view that the Torah is inferior to the higher Law built into Nature and which, according to most Christian theologians, was reaffirmed by Christianity when it abrogated the inferior Law.

Moreover, as in Eupolemus and Artapanus, Moses in Philo emerges as a Platonic-like philosopher-king,<sup>45</sup> who is said to have had Egyptian instructors in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, harmonics, and philosophy, and who had Greek teachers in the rest of the Hellenistic school course.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, whereas the Hebrew (Exodus 6:12) describes him as of "uncircumcised lips," that is, a stutterer, Philo, following the Septuagint's translation "not eloquent," stresses that Moses was opposed to false sophistry, precisely, we may note, as was the Socrates whom Philo so much admired.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, in declaring<sup>48</sup> that he himself had been initiated into the Greater Mysteries of Judaism, in distinguishing between the Greater and Lesser Mysteries,<sup>49</sup> and in referring to Moses as one who had been instructed in all the mysteries (*emystagōgeito*) of his priestly duties, Philo was adopting terminology from the pagan Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. It is true that elsewhere Philo<sup>50</sup> calls the mystery religions "humbug" and says that no good man is thus initiated; but the employment of the mystic oxymoron term "sober intoxication,"<sup>51</sup> the repeated use of the word for the mystic *enthousiasmos* ("having God within one"),<sup>52</sup> his statement<sup>53</sup> that he has at times been filled with "corybantic frenzy,"<sup>54</sup> and, in general, the intensity with which he speaks of the mysteries, indicate that he does regard Judaism as basically a mystery religion. The strong feeling with which he speaks indicates that this is not merely the language of the mysteries. Such a transformation of Judaism into a mystery religion might very well have raised the question whether a Jew, searching for this type of religion, might not find a more authentic answer in a real mystery religion, such as the Eleusinian or Dionysiac or Orphic mysteries, or the worship of Sarapis or Isis and Osiris, or the later mystery known as Christianity.

Finally, in his attitude toward marriage, Philo adopted an ascetic stance reminiscent of the Stoics and hardly consonant with the mainstream of Judaism. The institution of marriage, he says,<sup>55</sup> in a passage recalling Paul's "better to marry than to burn,"<sup>56</sup> was only a means of perpetuating the human race. Moses, he says,<sup>57</sup> participated in marriage only for the lawful begetting of children. His high praise for ascetic groups, such as the Essenes<sup>58</sup> and the Therapeutae,<sup>59</sup> confirms this attitude. In using the image of athletic combat to



express the fight of the soul against the body and its passions,<sup>60</sup> Philo was following the tradition of the Platonists. Indeed, drawing the Platonic implications noted above of the Septuagint's word *psychē*, Philo<sup>61</sup> speaks of the soul as dwelling in the body as a tomb and carrying it about as a corpse.<sup>62</sup>

How did Philo come to such distortions? The answer is to be seen in his view of the Septuagint, the translators of which he hailed not as translators but as hierophants and prophets,<sup>63</sup> "as if they were possessed and divinely inspired."<sup>64</sup> Hence Philo apparently saw no need to learn Hebrew.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, if he had known Hebrew he could hardly have claimed<sup>66</sup> that the Greek of the Septuagint corresponded verbatim with the original. Moreover, Philo mentions a wide range of Greek writers, especially the epic and dramatic poets, shows an intimate acquaintance with the techniques of the Greek rhetorical schools,<sup>67</sup> and exhibits an extraordinary knowledge of the theory and practice of music<sup>68</sup> and athletics.<sup>69</sup> Yet, he says or implies nothing about his Jewish education, nor does he mention any rabbis by name (Hillel and Shammai, for example, were his direct contemporaries). And, so far as we can tell, despite his wealth and the relative proximity of Alexandria to Jerusalem, he made a festival pilgrimage to Jerusalem only once.<sup>70</sup> Hence it is not surprising that he should speak of the liberal arts as stepping stones to the highest study, which for him is philosophy<sup>71</sup> rather than the Torah. It is through philosophy, he says,<sup>72</sup> that man, mortal though he be, is rendered immortal. No wonder that Philo's name is unmentioned in the entire Talmudic corpus.<sup>73</sup>

The impact of Hellenism was felt not merely in Alexandria but also in the Land of Israel. Indeed, archaeological remains indicate that there had been commercial contact between Greeks and Jews for hundreds of years before Alexander. The objection of the Rabbis themselves was not to Greek as such. The fact that there are between 2500 and 3000 words of Greek origin in the Talmudic writings attests to that. Yet, it is important to note that there is no reference in the entire Talmudic corpus to any Greek author other than Homer;<sup>74</sup> and, as both Wolfson and Lieberman<sup>75</sup> have remarked, there are no Greek philosophical terms in all rabbinic literature. It is remarkable that in the vast rabbinic corpus we do not find the names of Socrates or Plato or Aristotle; and one wonders about the influence of Greek philosophy upon people who regarded the second-century Oenomaus of Gadara as the greatest Gentile philosopher of all time.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, we do not hear of a single rabbi who wrote a work in Greek, whereas in the Middle Ages great figures such as Maimonides and Judah Halevi composed important works in Arabic. Moreover, in the third century, though admittedly in a polemical passage, Origen<sup>77</sup>

declares that the Jews are not very well (or at all) versed in Greek literature.

To be sure, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi<sup>78</sup> is quoted as saying, "Why speak Syriac [i.e. Aramaic] in the Land of Israel? Talk either Hebrew or Greek." Nevertheless, the Rabbis decreed,<sup>79</sup> "Cursed be the man who teaches his son Greek wisdom"; and the prohibition was later (during the War of Quietus, 115–117 C.E.) extended<sup>80</sup> to the teaching of the language also. But this was a decree issued because of a special occurrence, namely the incident involving an old man who was learned in Greek wisdom and who misused this wisdom in suggesting that the Romans insert a pig in place of a kosher animal to be hauled up for the daily sacrifice. That Rabban Gamaliel<sup>81</sup> had five hundred students who learned Greek wisdom indicates that the key questions were the setting, the purpose, and the administration of such study. Moreover, the fact that Ben Dama<sup>82</sup> can ask Rabbi Ishmael whether one who has mastered the Torah may study Greek wisdom indicates that the decree was aimed against those who studied Greek culture to the disregard of Torah. Indeed, one of the explanations of the apostasy of *Aher* (Elisha ben Abuyah) is that Greek song did not cease from his mouth.<sup>83</sup>

In a magisterial work, Martin Hengel<sup>84</sup> has argued that, even before the accession of Antiochus Epiphanes in 175 B.C.E., Judaism in the Land of Israel was as deeply Hellenized as it was in the Diaspora. The evidence which he cites is largely based on archaeological finds which do indeed indicate that Jews had much commercial contact with Greek-speaking traders. Nevertheless, his assumption that Jews were influenced by their numerous Greek-speaking non-Jewish neighbors and by Greek-speaking troops stationed in the land is hardly warranted, any more than that the Jews of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century were influenced by the Russian and Polish populations amongst whom they lived and traded or by the Russian soldiers in their midst and whom, in fact, they disdained. The fact is that Hebrew and Aramaic were never in any danger of being eliminated as the major languages of the Jews, as they had been in Egypt; and indeed, in a significant comment, Josephus<sup>85</sup> admits that despite all his efforts to master the language, the habitual use of his native tongue had prevented his attaining precision in the pronunciation of Greek. He notes further<sup>86</sup> that the Jews do not favor those who have mastered many languages and that they ascribe skill in languages to ordinary freemen or even slaves. In truth, when Josephus composed his great world history, the *Jewish Antiquities*, he did so aiming primarily at non-Jewish readers, as is indicated by his citing as his precedent the translation of the Torah into Greek at the behest of King Ptolemy Philadelphus.<sup>87</sup> If Hellenization had been

as deep as Hengel claims, one might have expected Josephus to direct his work to Jewish readers at least as much as to Gentiles. Moreover, if Hellenization were extensive, we would have expected Philo to refer to the Hellenized works of Palestine, and we find no such references. Indeed, while the neighbors of the Jews in Nabataea, Palmyra, and Phoenicia developed syncretistic cults incorporating Greek elements, the Jews did not do so. We may guess that the Rabbis, moreover, would never have said such favorable things about Alexander if he had marked the beginning of something utterly evil—Hellenization. Furthermore, Hellenization could hardly have been profound, since we hear of few apostates; and, indeed, far more were attracted to Judaism either as “sympathizers” (the so-called “God-fearers”)<sup>88</sup> or as full-fledged converts.<sup>89</sup>

If we seek the key as to why the Jews of the Land of Israel were, on the whole, successful in resisting assimilation, the answer seems to be in the passage in Josephus<sup>90</sup> noted above, in which he declares that the Jews place a premium not on the mastering of languages but on knowledge of the Torah and its interpretation. If we ask why the people of Palmyra, Nabataea, and Phoenicia lost their distinctive identity whereas the Jews did not, the explanation would seem to be that the Jews—and the Jews of the Land of Israel alone—instituted, as early as the first century, a system of universal education for males,<sup>91</sup> established a chain of institutions of higher Torah education, *yeshivot*, and studied and eventually codified the Oral Law. Such was not the case in Alexandria, where, despite the numbers and wealth of the community, as evidenced, for example, in the tremendous loans which Philo’s family was able to give to Agrippa I<sup>92</sup> and in the huge synagogue (so reminiscent in size and lavishness of our own post-war synagogues and centers) in Alexandria,<sup>93</sup> we hear of no such system of education and no *yeshivot*.

Many scholars have been perplexed by the apparent violations of Halakhah in the archaeological remains in the Land of Israel, even in synagogues; some, such as Goodenough,<sup>94</sup> have postulated a “popular” Judaism over which the Rabbis had little control or influence, at least so far as art work was concerned. It is remarkable, however, that the Rabbis<sup>95</sup> agree that the idolatrous impulse had been eradicated from the people of Israel as early as the beginning of the Second Temple, and this is confirmed by the apocryphal book of Judith.<sup>96</sup> Goodenough had asked how Christianity was able to become so rapidly Hellenized despite its Jewish origin; his answer, based upon his exhaustive examination of Jewish art of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, was that Judaism was already deeply Hellenized. But the strength of Judaism during this period seems to lie in its paradoxical stubbornness and flexibility, its unity and

diversity, its self-confidence and defensiveness. For never has Judaism been beset by more powerful challenges from within—Samaritans, Sadducees, Essenes, Dead Sea Sect, Zealots, Sicarii, and Christians—and from without—the Greek Olympian religion, Orphism, the cult of the goddess Tyche (chance), the Isis-Osiris and Sarapis cults of Egypt, the philosophies of Platonism and Aristotelianism, the popular philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism, the anti-bourgeois Cynicism, the iconoclastic Skepticism, and the quasi-religious Neo-Pythagoreanism. And never has the response been more glorious—the Talmud in all its profound dialectic.

We may ask, in conclusion, why the works of Philo and of other Hellenistic Jews were not mentioned by the Rabbis and, indeed, were not even translated into Hebrew until the sixteenth century, whereas the attempted syntheses of Jewish and secular studies in medieval Babylonia and Spain did become part of the mainstream of Jewish literature, though, admittedly, only after a struggle in many cases. The answer would seem to be that Hellenized Jews such as Philo examined the Torah through the prism of the Greek language and culture, whereas a Maimonides viewed the Greek philosophers through the prism of the Torah and the Talmud. The cultured Jews of Alexandria derived their knowledge of Plato by reading Plato in the original, but their understanding of the Torah came second-hand through a translation, whereas the educated Jews of medieval Spain derived their understanding of Aristotle through translation and their knowledge of the Torah first-hand.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, the Egyptian Jews, though physically so close to the land of Israel, failed to maintain close ties with it, whereas the Babylonian and Spanish Jews did. The fact that we hear of so few Egyptian Jews who go to Israel and so few rabbis (Joshua ben Hananiah is one of the few exceptions) who visit Egypt means that the Torah knowledge of the Egyptian Jews lacked contact with the fountainhead of Torah. We hear, moreover, of no help given by the Egyptian Jewish community to their fellow Jews during the great war against the Romans in 66–74; in fact, we are even told<sup>98</sup> that the leaders of the community turned over to the Romans the revolutionary Sicarii who had managed to escape.

It is indicative of the Egyptian community's priorities that when Philo and its other leaders appeared before the Roman emperors Caligula and Claudius they urged the emperors to grant the Jews more civic rights and permission to enter the schools (which actually meant apostasy in view of the close connection between these schools and the pagan religion). Not many years later another Jewish leader, Johanan ben Zakkai, appeared before a man whom he greeted as emperor; but his request was for permission to establish a yeshivah at

Yavneh. It was that vision that enabled Judaism to survive and to flourish.

NOTES

1. On the comparison of Hebraism and Hellenism see Matthew Arnold, "Hebraism and Hellenism," in his *Culture and Anarchy* (New York, 1883), 109–127; Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. by Willard R. Trask; Princeton, 1953), 3–23; James Barr, "Athens or Jerusalem? The Question of Distinctiveness," in his *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York, 1966), 34–64; Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (trans. by J. L. Moreau; London, 1960); Isaac Herzog, "The Attitude of the Ancient Palestinian Teachers of the Torah towards Greek Culture," in his *Judaism: Law and Ethics* (London, 1974), 195–207; Milton Himmelfarb, "Hebraism and Hellenism Now," in his *The Jews of Modernity* (New York, 1973), 296–312; Kalman J. Kaplan and Moriah Markus-Kaplan, "Covenant versus Contract as Two Modes of Relationship Orientation: On Reconciling Possibility and Necessity," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 4 (1979), 100–116; Hans Kohn, "Israel and Hellas," in his *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York, 1967), 27–60; Moriah Markus-Kaplan and Kalman J. Kaplan, "The Typology, Diagnosis, Pathologies and Treatment-Intervention of Hellenic versus Hebraic Personality Styles: A Proposal on the Psychology of Interpersonal Distancing," *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* 3 (1979), 153–167; Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Two Sources of Western Culture," in Edmund Fuller, ed., *The Christian Idea of Education* (New Haven, 1957); Lev Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem* (trans. by Bernard Martin; Athens, Ohio, 1966); Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6 (1964), 5–29, reprinted in Leon D. Stitskin, *Studies in Judaism in Honor of Dr. Samuel Belkin* (New York, 1974), 45–68; Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Catharsis," *Tradition* 17 (1978), 38–54.
2. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.176–182. Hans Lewy, "Aristotle and the Jewish Sage according to Clearchus of Soli," *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938), 205–235, argued cogently that the learned Jew is a figment of the imagination of the third-century B.C.E. Clearchus, who here quotes Aristotle. This Jew is thus similar to those representatives of Oriental priestly wisdom who are often depicted as superior in wisdom to the greatest Greek philosophers. But apparently Clearchus, a follower of Aristotle, thought that such an incident was consonant with the character of Aristotle.
3. The story is told at length in the Pseudepigraphic work, *The Letter of Aristeas* (especially 9–11, 28–34), and more briefly in Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II. 5. 29–7. 44; Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.12–118; *Megillah* 9a–b; and *Soferim* 1:7–8.
4. *Kiddushin* 49a.
5. For a further discussion see, in particular, Charles H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 2nd ed. (London, 1954).
6. Herodotus, *History* 3:38.
7. Romans 7.
8. Moses Hadas, "Plato in Hellenistic Fusion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 (1958), 3–13.
9. Plato, *Republic* 7. 533e–534a.
10. Philo, *De Abrahamo* 46:270.
11. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449b 27–28.
12. Plato, *Gorgias* 493a.
13. Plato, *Phaedo* 118a.
14. Philo, *De Somniis* I. 39. 230.
15. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* I. 9. 53; Josephus, *Antiquities* 4. 207, *Against Apion* 2. 237.
16. *Megillah* 9a.
17. *Soferim* 1:7.
18. *Letter of Aristeas* 16.
19. For the argument see Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1: *Historians* (Chico, California, 1983) 2, 158–159, 189, 245–246.
20. Quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1. 23. 153. 4, and Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9. 26. 1. For the fragments of the Graeco-Jewish historians see Holladay (above, n. 19). For a discussion of these fragments see now Robert Doran, "The Jewish

- Hellenistic Historians before Josephus," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2. 20. 1 (Berlin, 1987), 246–297.
21. Quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9. 17. 3–8.
22. Quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9. 17. 9.
23. Quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9. 27. 3.
24. See Holladay (above, n. 19) 189–190, 195 n. 8a, 196 n. 14 and 15.
25. Cited by Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1. 96. 2.
26. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2. 148, 2. 135–136.
27. Quoted by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9. 27. 4.
28. Apollonius Molon, as cited by Josephus, *Against Apion* 2. 148.
29. Cited by Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 40. 3. 4.
30. Cited by Josephus, *Antiquities* 1. 239–241.
31. I Maccabees 12: 6–23; Josephus, *Antiquities* 13. 166–170.
32. See Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947) 2. 439–460.
33. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami* 16. 89.
34. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 1. 2. 9.
35. *Ibid.*, II. 28. 159.
36. Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 43. 214; *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 8. 57.
37. Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 2. 13.
38. Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* 11; Isidore of Pelusium, *Epistulae* 3. 81.
39. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 44. 129–130.
40. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami* 18. 103.
41. Philo, *De Posteritate Caini* 18. 63.
42. Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum* 11. 41.
43. Philo, *De Abrahamo* 46. 275.
44. Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 4:14.
45. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II. 1. 2.
46. *Ibid.*, I. 5. 23–24.
47. Philo, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 12. 38–39.
48. Philo, *De Cherubim* 14. 49.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* I. 59. 319.
51. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 23. 71.
52. E.g., Philo, *De Confusione Linguarum* 31. 159.
53. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami* 7. 35.
54. The Corybantes were the attendants of the pagan earth-goddess Cybele, who accompanied her with wild ecstatic dances and with orgiastic processions.
55. Philo, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 27. 102.
56. I Corinthians 7:9.
57. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* I. 6. 28.
58. Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 12. 75–13. 91; and *Hypothetica* 11. 1–18.
59. Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* in its entirety.
60. Philo, *De Migratione Abrahami* 6. 26.
61. Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* I. 33. 108; *Quaestiones in Genesin* II. 69.
62. Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* III. 22. 69, III. 23. 74; *Quaestiones in Genesin* I. 93.
63. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II. 5.25–7. 44.
64. *Ibid.*, II. 7. 37.
65. If, on occasion, Philo seems to be acquainted with the etymology of a Hebrew name, this is apparently due to his having an onomasticon written in Greek and giving the etymologies of Hebrew names. A document of this type, which has been found, is commented upon by David Rokeah, "A New Onomasticon Fragment from Oxyrhynchus of Philo's Etymologies," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968), 870–882.
66. Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II. 7. 38.
67. See Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati, 1982).
68. See my "Philo's Views on Music," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 9 (1986–87), 36–54.
69. See H. A. Harris, *Greek Athletics and the Jews* (Cardiff. 1976), 51–95.
70. Philo, *De Providentia* 2. 64.

71. Philo, *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 10. 43–44; *De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis Gratia* 14. 77–78.
72. Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* 25. 77.
73. The suggestion of Louis Finkelstein, “Is Philo Mentioned in Rabbinic Literature?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 53 (1934), 142–149, that Peloni in *Midrash Tannaim* 6:7 and in Tosefta *Yevamot* 3:4 (*Yoma* 66b) refers to Philo is ingenious but hardly proven. On the whole question of the effects of Hellenization upon the Jews of Hellenistic Egypt see my “The Orthodoxy of the Jews in Hellenistic Egypt,” *Jewish Social Studies* 22 (1960), 215–237.
74. Mishnah, *Yadayim* 4:6.
75. Wolfson (above, n. 32) I. 92; Saul Lieberman, “How Much Greek in Jewish Palestine?” in Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies, Brandeis University, *Studies and Texts*, vol. 1: *Biblical and Other Studies*, Alexander Altmann, ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 123–141.
76. *Bereshit Rabbah* 68:20.
77. Origen, *Contra Celsum* II. 34.
78. *Sotah* 49b.
79. *Sotah* 49b; *Menahot* 64b; *Bava Kamma* 82b.
80. Mishnah, *Sotah* 9:14.
81. *Sotah* 49b; *Bava Kamma* 82b.
82. *Menahot* 99b.
83. *Hagigah* 15b.
84. Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen, 1973); trans. by John Bowden, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1974), 103–106. See my “Hengel’s *Judaism and Hellenism* in Retrospect,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977), 371–382; and my “How Much Hellenism in Jewish Palestine?” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 57 (1986), 83–111.
85. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20. 263.
86. *Ibid.*, 20. 264.
87. *Ibid.*, I. 10–12.
88. For the evidence see my “The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12.5 (Sept.-Oct., 1986), 58–69.
89. For the evidence see my “Proselytism and Syncretism” [Hebrew], in Menahem Stern and Zvi Baras, eds., *World History of the Jewish People*, First Series: *The Diaspora in the Hellenistic-Roman World* (Jerusalem, 1984), 188–207, 340–345, 378–380.
90. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20. 264.
91. *Bava Batra* 21a.
92. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18. 160.
93. *Sukkah* 51b.
94. Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York, 1953–68).
95. *Yoma* 69b; *Sanhedrin* 64a.
96. *Judith* 8:18.
97. On this contrast see further Samuel Belkin, *Essays in Traditional Thought* (New York, 1956), 129–130.
98. Josephus, *Jewish War* 7. 414.