

## The Jewish religion and its attitude to non-Jews: Part 1 – Israel Shahak

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***I write here what I think is true, for the stories of the Greeks are numerous and in my opinion ridiculous.*** (Hecateus of Miletus, as quoted by Herodotus)

***Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas – Plato is a friend but truth is a greater friend.*** (Traditional paraphrase of a passage of Aristotle's Ethics)

***In a free state every man can think what he wants and say what he thinks.*** (Spinoza)

### The Jewish religion and its attitude to non-Jews

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#### Part-1: Prejudice and Prevarications

##### Definition of terms: liberation from outside

The first difficulty in writing about this subject is that the term 'Jew' has been used during the last 150 years with two rather different meanings. To understand this, let us imagine ourselves in the year 1780. Then the universally accepted meaning of the term 'Jew' basically coincided with what the Jews themselves understood as constituting their own identity. This identity was primarily religious, but the precepts of religion governed the details of daily behaviour in all aspects of life, both social and private, among the Jews themselves as well as in their relation to non-Jews. It was then literally true that a Jew could not even drink a glass of water in the home of a non-Jew. And the same basic laws of behaviour towards non-Jews were equally valid from Yemen to New York. Whatever the term by which the Jews of 1780 may be described – and I do not wish to enter into a metaphysical dispute about terms like 'nation' and 'people'<sup>1</sup> – it is clear that all Jewish communities at that time were separate from the non-Jewish societies in the midst of which they were living.

However, all this was changed by two parallel processes – beginning in Holland and England, continuing in revolutionary France and in countries which followed the example of the French Revolution, and then in the modern monarchies of the 19th century: the Jews gained a significant level of individual rights (in some cases full legal equality), and the legal power of the Jewish community over its members was destroyed. It should be noted that both developments were simultaneous, and that the latter is even more important, albeit less widely known, than the former.

Since the time of the late Roman Empire, Jewish communities had considerable legal powers over their members. Not only powers which arise through voluntary mobilisation of social pressure (for example refusal to have any dealing whatsoever with an excommunicated Jew or even to bury his body), but a power of naked coercion: to

flog, to imprison, to expel – all this could be inflicted quite legally on an individual Jew by the rabbinical courts for all kinds of offences. In many countries – Spain and Poland are notable examples – even capital punishment could be and was inflicted, sometimes using particularly cruel methods such as flogging to death. All this was not only permitted but positively encouraged by the state authorities in both Christian and Muslim countries, who besides their general interest in preserving ‘law and order’ had in some cases a more direct financial interest as well. For example, in Spanish archives dating from the 13th and 14th centuries there are records of many detailed orders issued by those most devout Catholic Kings of Castille and Aragon, instructing their no less devout officials to cooperate with the rabbis in enforcing observance of the Sabbath by the Jews. Why? Because whenever a Jew was fined by a rabbinical court for violating the Sabbath, the rabbis had to hand nine tenths of the fine over to the king – a very profitable and effective arrangement. Similarly, one can quote from the responsa written shortly before 1848 by the famous Rabbi Moshe Sopher of Pressburg (now Bratislava), in what was then the autonomous Hungarian Kingdom in the Austrian Empire, and addressed to Vienna in Austria proper, where the Jews had already been granted some considerable individual rights.<sup>2</sup> He laments the fact that since the Jewish congregation in Vienna lost its powers to punish offenders, the Jews there have become lax in matters of religious observance, and adds: ‘Here in Pressburg, when I am told that a Jewish shopkeeper dared to open his shop during the Lesser Holidays, I immediately send a policeman to imprison him’.

This was the most important social fact of Jewish existence before the advent of the modern state: observance of the religious laws of Judaism, as well as their inculcation through education, were enforced on Jews by physical coercion, from which one could only escape by conversion to the religion of the majority, amounting in the circumstances to a total social break and for that reason very impracticable, except during a religious crisis.<sup>3</sup>

However, once the modern state had come into existence, the Jewish community lost its powers to punish or intimidate the individual Jew. The bonds of one of the most closed of ‘closed societies’, one of the most totalitarian societies in the whole history of mankind were snapped. This act of liberation came mostly from *outside*; although there were some Jews who helped it from within, these were at first very few. This form of liberation had very grave consequences for the future. Just as in the case of Germany (according to the masterly analysis of A.J. P. Taylor) it was easy to ally the cause of reaction with patriotism, because in actual fact individual rights and equality before the law were brought into Germany by the armies of the French Revolution and of Napoleon, and one could brand liberty as ‘unGerman’, exactly so it turned out to be very easy among the Jews, particularly in Israel, to mount a very effective attack against all the notions and ideals of humanism and the rule of law (not to say democracy) as something ‘un-Jewish’ or ‘anti-Jewish’ – as indeed they are, *in a historical sense* – and as principles which may be used in the ‘Jewish interest’, but which have no validity *against* the ‘Jewish interest’, for example when Arabs invoke these same principles. This has also led – again just as in Germany and other nations of *Mitteleuropa* – to a deceitful, sentimental and ultra-romantic Jewish historiography, from which all inconvenient facts have been expunged.

So one will not find in Hanna Arendt’s voluminous writings, whether on totalitarianism or on Jews, or on both,<sup>4</sup> the smallest hint as to what Jewish society in Germany was really like in the 18th century: burning of books, persecution of writers, disputes about the magic powers of amulets, bans on the most elementary ‘non-Jewish’ education such as the teaching of correct German or indeed German written in the Latin alphabet.<sup>5</sup> Nor can one find in the numerous English-language ‘Jewish histories’ the elementary facts about the attitude of Jewish mysticism (so fashionable at present in certain quarters) to non-Jews: that they are considered to be, literally, limbs of Satan, and that the few non-satanic individuals among them (that is, those who convert to Judaism) are in reality ‘Jewish souls’ who got lost when Satan violated the Holy Lady (Shekhinah or Matronit, one of the female components of the Godhead, sister and wife of the younger male God according to the cabbala) in her heavenly abode. The great authorities, such as Gershom Scholem, have lent their authority to a system of deceptions in all the ‘sensitive’ areas, the more popular ones being the most dishonest and misleading.

But the social consequence of this process of liberalisation was that, for the first time since about AD 200,<sup>6</sup> a Jew could be free to do what he liked, within the bounds of his country’s civil law, without having to pay for this freedom by converting to another religion. The freedom to learn and read books in modern languages, the freedom

to read and write books in Hebrew not approved by the rabbis (as any Hebrew or Yiddish book previously had to be), the freedom to eat non-kosher food, the freedom to ignore the numerous absurd taboos regulating sexual life, even the freedom to think – for ‘forbidden thoughts’ are among the most serious sins – all these were granted to the Jews of Europe (and subsequently of other countries) by modern or even absolutist European regimes, although the latter were at the same time antisemitic and oppressive. Nicholas I of Russia was a notorious antisemite and issued many laws against the Jews of his state. But he also strengthened the forces of ‘law and order’ in Russia – not only the secret police but also the regular police and the gendarmerie – with the consequence that it became difficult to murder Jews on the order of their rabbis, whereas in pre-1795 Poland it had been quite easy. ‘Official’ Jewish history condemns him on both counts. For example, in the late 1830s a ‘Holy Rabbi’ (*Tzadik*) in a small Jewish town in the Ukraine ordered the murder of a heretic by throwing him into the boiling water of the town baths, and contemporary Jewish sources note with astonishment and horror that bribery was ‘no longer effective’ and that not only the actual perpetrators but also the Holy Man were severely punished. The Metternich regime of pre-1848 Austria was notoriously reactionary and quite unfriendly to Jews, but it did not allow people, even liberal Jewish rabbis, to be poisoned. During 1848, when the regime’s power was temporarily weakened, the first thing the leaders of the Jewish community in the Galician city of Lemberg (now Lvov) did with their newly regained freedom was to poison the liberal rabbi of the city, whom the tiny non-Orthodox Jewish group in the city had imported from Germany. One of his greatest heresies, by the way, was the advocacy and actual performance of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, which had recently been invented.

In the last 150 years, the term ‘Jew’ has therefore acquired a dual meaning, to the great confusion of some well-meaning people, particularly in the English-speaking countries, who imagine that the Jews they meet socially are ‘representative’ of Jews ‘in general’. In the countries of east Europe as well as in the Arab world, the Jews were liberated from the tyranny of their own religion and of their own communities by *outside forces*, too late and in circumstances too unfavourable for genuine internalised social change. In most cases, and particularly in Israel, the old concept of society, the same ideology – especially as directed towards non-Jews – and the same utterly false conception of history have been preserved. This applies even to some of those Jews who joined ‘progressive’ or leftist movements. An examination of radical, socialist and communist parties can provide many examples of disguised Jewish chauvinists and racists, who joined these parties merely for reasons of ‘Jewish interest’ and are, in this region, in favour of ‘anti-gentile’ discrimination. One need only check how many Jewish ‘socialists’ have managed to write about the kibbutz without taking the trouble to mention that it is a racist institution from which non-Jewish citizens of Israel are rigorously excluded, to see that the phenomenon we are alluding to is by no means uncommon.<sup>7</sup>

Avoiding labels based on ignorance or hypocrisy, we thus see that the word ‘Jewry’ and its cognates describe *two different and even contrasting social groups*, and because of current Israeli politics the continuum between the two is disappearing fast. On the one hand there is the traditional totalitarian meaning discussed above; on the other hand there are Jews by descent who have accepted and *internalised* the complex of ideas which Karl Popper has called ‘the open society’. (There are also some, particularly in the USA, who have not internalised these ideas, but try to make a show of acceptance.)

It is important to note that *all* the supposedly ‘Jewish characteristics’ – by which I mean the traits which vulgar so-called intellectuals in the West attribute to ‘the Jews’ – are *modern* characteristics, quite unknown during most of Jewish history, and appeared only when the totalitarian Jewish community began to lose its power. Take, for example, the famous Jewish sense of humour. Not only is humour very rare in Hebrew literature before the 19th century (and is only found during few periods, in countries where the Jewish upper class was relatively free from the rabbinical yoke, such as Italy between the 14th and 17th centuries or Muslim Spain) but humour and jokes are strictly forbidden by the Jewish religion – except, significantly, jokes against other religions. Satire against rabbis and leaders of the community was never internalised by Judaism, not even to a small extent, as it was in Latin Christianity. There were no Jewish comedies, just as there were no comedies in Sparta, and for a similar reason.<sup>8</sup> Or take the love of learning. Except for a purely religious learning, which was itself in a debased and degenerate state, the Jews of Europe (and to a somewhat lesser extent also of the Arab countries) were dominated, before about 1780, by a supreme contempt and hate for all learning (excluding the Talmud and Jewish mysticism). Large parts of the Old Testament, all non-liturgical Hebrew poetry, most books on Jewish philosophy were not

read and their very names were often anathematised. Study of all languages was strictly forbidden, as was the study of mathematics and science. Geography,<sup>9</sup> history – even Jewish history – were completely unknown. The critical sense, which is supposedly so characteristic of Jews, was totally absent, and nothing was so forbidden, feared and therefore persecuted as the most modest innovation or the most innocent criticism.

It was a world sunk in the most abject superstition, fanaticism and ignorance, a world in which the preface to the first work on geography in Hebrew (published in 1803 in Russia) could complain that very many great rabbis were denying the existence of the American continent and saying that it is 'impossible'. Between that world and what is often taken in the West to 'characterise' Jews there is nothing in common except the mistaken name.

However, a great many present-day Jews are nostalgic for *that* world, their lost paradise, the comfortable closed society from which they were not so much liberated as expelled. A large part of the Zionist movement always wanted to restore it – *and this part has gained the upper hand*. Many of the motives behind Israeli politics, which so bewilder the poor confused western 'friends of Israel', are perfectly explicable once they are seen simply as reaction, reaction in the political sense which this word has had for the last two hundred years: a forced and in many respects innovative, and therefore illusory, return to the closed society of the Jewish past.

## Obstacles to understanding

Historically it can be shown that a closed society is not interested in a description of itself, no doubt because any description is in part a form of critical analysis and so may encourage critical 'forbidden thoughts'. The more a society becomes open, the more it is interested in reflecting, at first descriptively and then critically, upon itself, its present working as well as its past. But what happens when a faction of intellectuals desires to drag a society, which has already opened up to a considerable extent, back to its previous totalitarian, closed condition? Then the very means of the former progress – philosophy, the sciences, history and especially sociology – become the most effective instruments of the 'treason of the intellectuals'. They are perverted in order to serve as devices of deception, and in the process they degenerate.

Classical Judaism<sup>10</sup> had little interest in describing or explaining itself to the members of its own community, whether educated (in talmudic studies) or not.<sup>11</sup> It is significant that the writing of Jewish history, even in the driest annalistic style, ceased completely from the time of Josephus Flavius (end of first century) until the Renaissance, when it was revived for a short time in Italy and in other countries where the Jews were under strong Italian influence.<sup>12</sup> Characteristically, the rabbis feared Jewish even more than general history, and the first modern book on history published in Hebrew (in the sixteenth century) was entitled 'History of the kings of France and of the Ottoman kings'. It was followed by some histories dealing only with the persecutions that Jews had been subjected to. The first book on Jewish history proper<sup>13</sup> (dealing with ancient times) was promptly banned and suppressed by the highest rabbinical authorities, and did not reappear before the 19th century. The rabbinical authorities of east Europe furthermore decreed that all non-talmudic studies are to be forbidden, even when nothing specific could be found in them which merits anathema, because they encroach on the time that should be employed either in studying the Talmud or in making money – which should be used to subsidise talmudic scholars. Only one loophole was left, namely the time that even a pious Jew must perforce spend in the privy. In that unclean place sacred studies are forbidden, and it was therefore permitted to read history there, provided it was written in Hebrew and was completely secular, which in effect meant that it must be exclusively devoted to non-Jewish subjects. (One can imagine that those few Jews of that time who – no doubt tempted by Satan – developed an interest in the history of the French kings were constantly complaining to their neighbours about the constipation they were suffering from ...). As a consequence, two hundred years ago the vast majority of Jews were totally in the dark not only about the existence of America but also about Jewish history and Jewry's contemporary state; and they were quite content to remain so.

There was however one area in which they were not allowed to remain self-contented – the area of Christian attacks against those passages in the Talmud and the talmudic literature which are specifically anti-Christian or more generally anti-Gentile. It is important to note that this challenge developed relatively late in the history of Christian-Jewish relations – only from the thirteenth century on. (Before that time, the Christian authorities attacked Judaism using either Biblical or general arguments, but seemed to be quite ignorant as to the contents of the Talmud.) The Christian campaign against the Talmud was apparently brought on by the conversion to Christianity of Jews who were well versed in the Talmud and who were in many cases attracted by the development of Christian philosophy, with its strong Aristotelian (and thus universal) character.<sup>14</sup>

It must be admitted at the outset that the Talmud and the talmudic literature – quite apart from the general anti-Gentile streak that runs through them, which will be discussed in greater detail in the [Appendix](#) – contain very offensive statements and precepts directed specifically against Christianity. For example, in addition to a series of scurrilous sexual allegations against Jesus, the Talmud states that his punishment in hell is to be immersed in boiling excrement – a statement not exactly calculated to endear the Talmud to devout Christians. Or one can quote the precept according to which Jews are instructed to burn, publicly if possible, any copy of the New Testament that comes into their hands. (This is not only still in force but actually practised today; thus on 23 March 1980 hundreds of copies of the New Testament were publicly and ceremonially burnt in Jerusalem under the auspices of Yad Le'akhim, a Jewish religious organisation subsidised by the Israeli Ministry of Religions.)

Anyway, a powerful attack, well based in many points, against talmudic Judaism developed in Europe from the thirteenth century. We are not referring here to ignorant calumnies, such as the blood libel, propagated by benighted monks in small provincial cities, but to serious disputations held before the best European universities of the time and on the whole conducted as fairly as was possible under medieval circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

What was the Jewish – or rather the rabbinical – response? The simplest one was the ancient weapon of bribery and string-pulling. In most European countries, during most of the time, anything could be fixed by a bribe. Nowhere was this maxim more true than in the Rome of the Renaissance popes. The *Editio Princeps* of the complete Code of Talmudic law, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* – replete not only with the most offensive precepts against all Gentiles but also with explicit attacks on Christianity and on Jesus (after whose name the author adds piously, 'May the name of the wicked perish') – was published unexpurgated in Rome in the year 1480 under Sixtus IV, politically a very active pope who had a constant and urgent need for money. (A few years earlier, the only older edition of *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius from which the violent attack on Christianity had not been removed was also published in Rome...) Alexander VI Borgia was also very liberal in this respect.

Even during that period, as well as before it, there were always countries in which for a time a wave of anti-Talmud persecution set in. But a more consistent and widespread onslaught came with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which induced a higher standard of intellectual honesty as well as a better knowledge of Hebrew among Christian scholars. From the 16th century, all the talmudic literature, including the Talmud itself, was subjected to Christian censorship in various countries. In Russia this went on until 1917. Some censors, such as in Holland, were more lax, while others were more severe; and the offensive passages were expunged or modified.

All modern studies on Judaism, particularly by Jews, have evolved from that conflict, and to this day they bear the unmistakable marks of their origin: deception, apologetics or hostile polemics, indifference or even active hostility to the pursuit of truth. Almost all the so-called *Jewish studies in Judaism*, from that time to this very day, are polemics against an external enemy rather than an internal debate.

It is important to note that this was *initially* the character of historicgraphy in all known societies (except ancient Greece, whose early liberal historians were attacked by later sophists for their insufficient patriotism!). This was true of the early Catholic and Protestant historians, who polemicised against each other. Similarly, the earliest European national histories are imbued with the crudest nationalism and scorn for all other, neighbouring nations. But sooner or later there comes a time when an attempt is made to understand one's national or religious adversary and at the same time to criticise certain deep and important aspects of the history of one's own group; and both

these developments go together. Only when historiography becomes – as Pieter Geyl put it so well – ‘a debate without end’ rather than a continuation of war by historiographic means, only then does a humane historiography, which strives for both accuracy and fairness, become possible; and it then turns into one of the most powerful instruments of humanism and self-education.

It is for this reason that modern totalitarian regimes rewrite history or punish historians.<sup>16</sup> When a whole society tries to return to totalitarianism, a totalitarian history is written, not because of compulsion from above but under pressure from below, which is much more effective. This is what happened in Jewish history, and this constitutes the first obstacle we have to surmount.

What were the detailed mechanisms (other than bribery) employed by Jewish communities, in cooperation with outside forces, in order to ward off the attack on the Talmud and other religious literature? Several methods can be distinguished, all of them having important political consequences reflected in current Israeli policies. Although it would be tedious to supply in each case the Beginistic or Labour-zionist parallel, I am sure that readers who are somewhat familiar with the details of Middle East politics will themselves be able to notice the resemblance.

The first mechanism I shall discuss is that of surreptitious defiance, combined with outward compliance. As explained above, talmudic passages directed against Christianity or against non-Jews<sup>17</sup> had to go or to be modified – the pressure was too strong. This is what was done: a few of the most offensive passages were bodily removed from all editions printed in Europe after the mid-sixteenth century. In all other passages, the expressions ‘Gentile’, ‘non-Jew’, ‘stranger’ (*goy, eino yehudi, nokhri*) – which appear in all early manuscripts and printings as well as in all editions published in Islamic countries – were replaced by terms such as ‘idolator’, ‘heathen’ or even ‘Canaanite’ or ‘Samaritan’, terms which could be explained away but which a Jewish reader could recognise as euphemisms for the old expressions.

As the attack mounted, so the defence became more elaborate, sometimes with lasting tragic results. During certain periods the Tsarist Russian censorship became stricter and, seeing the above-mentioned euphemisms for what they were, forbade them too. Thereupon the rabbinical authorities substituted the terms ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ (in Hebrew, *Yishma’eli* – which means both) or occasionally ‘Egyptian’, correctly calculating that the Tsarist authorities would not object to this kind of abuse. At the same time, lists of *Talmudic Omissions* were circulated in manuscript form, which explained all the new terms and pointed out all the omissions. At times, a general disclaimer was printed before the title page of each volume of talmudic literature, solemnly declaring, sometimes on oath, that all hostile expressions in that volume are intended only against the idolators of antiquity, or even against the long-vanished Canaanites, rather than against ‘the peoples in whose land we live’. After the British conquest of India, some rabbis hit on the subterfuge of claiming that any particularly outrageous derogatory expression used by them is only intended against the Indians. Occasionally the aborigines of Australia were also added as whipping-boys.

Needless to say, all this was a calculated lie from beginning to end; and following the establishment of the State of Israel, once the rabbis felt secure, all the offensive passages and expressions were restored without hesitation in all new editions. (Because of the enormous cost which a new edition involves, a considerable part of the talmudic literature, including the Talmud itself, is still being reprinted from the old editions. For this reason, the above-mentioned *Talmudic Omissions* have now been published in Israel in a cheap printed edition, under the title *Hesronot Shas*.) So now one can read quite freely – and Jewish children are actually taught – passages such as that<sup>18</sup> which commands every Jew, whenever passing near a cemetery, to utter a blessing if the cemetery is Jewish, but to curse the mothers of the dead<sup>19</sup> if it is non-Jewish. In the old editions the curse was omitted, or one of the euphemisms was substituted for ‘Gentiles’. But in the new Israeli edition of Rabbi ‘Adin Steinsalz (complete with Hebrew explanations and glosses to the Aramaic parts of the text, so that schoolchildren should be in no doubt as to what they are supposed to say) the unambiguous words ‘Gentiles’ and ‘strangers’ have been restored.

Under external pressure, the rabbis deceptively eliminated or modified certain passages – but not the actual practices which are prescribed in them. It is a fact which must be remembered, not least by Jews themselves, that for centuries our totalitarian society has employed barbaric and inhumane customs to poison the minds of its

members, and it is still doing so. (These inhumane customs cannot be explained away as mere reaction to antisemitism or persecution of Jews; they are gratuitous barbarities directed against each and every human being. A pious Jew arriving for the first time in Australia, say, and chancing to pass near an Aboriginal graveyard, must – as an act of worship of ‘God’ – curse the mothers of the dead buried there.) Without facing this real social fact, we all become parties to the deception and accomplices to the process of poisoning the present and future generations, with all the consequences of this process.

## The deception continues

Modern scholars of Judaism have not only continued the deception, but have actually improved upon the old rabbinical methods, both in impudence and in mendacity. I omit here the various histories of antisemitism, as unworthy of serious consideration, and shall give just three particular examples and one general example of the more modern ‘scholarly’ deceptions.

In 1962, a part of the Maimonidean Code referred to above, the so-called Book of Knowledge, which contains the most basic rules of Jewish faith and practice, was published in Jerusalem in a bilingual edition, with the English translation facing the Hebrew text.<sup>20</sup> The latter has been restored to its original purity, and the command to exterminate Jewish infidels appears in it in full: ‘It is a duty to exterminate them with one’s own hands’. In the English translation this is somewhat softened to ‘It is a duty to take active measures to destroy them’. But then the Hebrew text goes on to specify the prime examples of ‘infidels’ who must be exterminated: ‘Such as Jesus of Nazareth and his pupils, and Tzadoq and Baitos<sup>21</sup> and their pupils, may the name of the wicked rot’. *Not one word* of this appears in the English text on the facing page (78 a). And, even more significant, in spite of the wide circulation of this book among scholars in the English-speaking countries, not one of them has, as far as I know, protested against this glaring deception.

The second example comes from the USA, again from an English translation of a book by Maimonides. Apart from his work on the codification of the Talmud, he was also a philosopher and his *Guide to the Perplexed* is justly considered to be the greatest work of Jewish religious philosophy and is widely read and used even today. Unfortunately, in addition to his attitude towards non-Jews generally and Christians in particular, Maimonides was also an anti-Black racist. Towards the end of the *Guide*, in a crucial chapter (book iii, chapter 51) he discusses how various sections of humanity can attain the supreme religious value, the true worship of God. Among those who are incapable of even approaching this are ‘some of the Turks [i.e., the Mongol race] and the nomads in the North, and the Blacks and the nomads in the South, and those who resemble them in our climates. And their nature is like the nature of mute animals, and according to my opinion they are not on the level of human beings, and their level among existing things is below that of a man and above that of a monkey, because they have the image and the resemblance of a man more than a monkey does.’

Now, what does one do with such a passage in a most important and necessary work of Judaism? Face the truth and its consequences? God forbid! Admit (as so many Christian scholars, for example, have done in similar circumstances) that a very important Jewish authority held also rabid anti-Black views, and by this admission make an attempt at self-education in real humanity? Perish the thought. I can almost imagine Jewish scholars in the USA consulting among themselves ‘what is to be done?’ – for the book *had* to be translated, due to the decline in the knowledge of Hebrew among American Jews. Whether by consultation or by individual inspiration, a happy ‘solution’ was found: in the popular American translation of the *Guide* by one Friedlander, first published as far back as 1925 and since then reprinted in many editions, including several in paperback, the Hebrew word *Kushim*, which means Blacks, was simply transliterated and appears as ‘Kushites’, a word which means nothing to those who have no knowledge of Hebrew, or to whom an obliging rabbi will not give an *oral* explanation.<sup>22</sup> During all these years, not a word has been said to point out the initial deception or the social facts underlying its continuation – and this throughout the excitement of Martin Luther King’s campaigns, which were supported by so many

rabbis, not to mention other Jewish figures, some of whom must have been aware of the anti-Black racist attitude which forms part of their Jewish heritage.<sup>23</sup>

Surely one is driven to the hypothesis that quite a few of Martin Luther King's rabbinical supporters were either anti-Black racists who supported him for tactical reasons of 'Jewish interest' (wishing to win Black support for American Jewry and for Israel's policies) or were accomplished hypocrites, to the point of schizophrenia, capable of passing very rapidly from a hidden enjoyment of rabid racism to a proclaimed attachment to an anti-racist struggle – and back – and back again.

The third example comes from a work which has far less serious scholarly intent – but is all the more popular for that: *The Joys of Yiddish* by Leo Rosten. This light-hearted work – first published in the USA in 1968, and reprinted in many editions, including several times as a Penguin paperback – is a kind of glossary of Yiddish words often used by Jews or even non-Jews in English-speaking countries. For each entry, in addition to a detailed definition and more or less amusing anecdotes illustrating its use, there is also an etymology stating (quite accurately, on the whole) the language from which the word came into Yiddish and its meaning in that language. The entry *Shaygets* – whose main meaning is 'a Gentile boy or young man' – is an exception: there the etymology cryptically states 'Hebrew origin', without giving the form or meaning of the original Hebrew word. However, under the entry *Shiksa* – the feminine form of *Shaygets* – the author does give the original Hebrew word, *sheqetz* (or, in his transliteration, *sheques*) and defines its Hebrew meaning as 'blemish'. This is a bare-faced lie, as every speaker of Hebrew knows. *The Megiddo Modern Hebrew-English Dictionary*, published in Israel, correctly defines *sheqetz* as follows: 'unclean animal; loathsome creature, abomination; (colloquial – pronounced *shaygets*) wretch, unruly youngster; Gentile youngster'.

My final, more general example is, if possible, even more shocking than the others. It concerns the attitude of the Hassidic movement towards non-Jews. Hassidism – a continuation (and debasement!) of Jewish mysticism – is still a *living* movement, with hundreds of thousands of active adherents who are fanatically devoted to their 'holy rabbis', some of whom have acquired a very considerable political influence in Israel, among the leaders of most parties and even more so in the higher echelons of the army.

What, then, are the views of this movement concerning non-Jews? As an example, let us take the famous *Hatanya*, fundamental book of the Habad movement, one of the most important branches of Hassidism. According to this book, all non-Jews are totally satanic creatures 'in whom there is absolutely nothing good'. Even a non-Jewish embryo is qualitatively different from a Jewish one. The very existence of a non-Jew is 'inessential', whereas all of creation was created solely for the sake of the Jews.

This book is circulated in countless editions, and its ideas are further propagated in the numerous 'discourses' of the present hereditary Fuehrer of Habad, the so-called Lubavitcher rabbi, M.M. Schneersohn, who leads this powerful world-wide organisation from his New York headquarters. In Israel these ideas are widely disseminated among the public at large, in the schools and in the army. (According to the testimony of Shulamit Aloni, Member of the Knesset, this Habad propaganda was particularly stepped up before Israel's invasion of Lebanon in March 1978, in order to induce military doctors and nurses to withhold medical help from 'Gentile wounded'. This Nazi-like advice did not refer specifically to Arabs or Palestinians, but simply to 'Gentiles', *goyim*.) Two former Israeli Presidents, Shazar and Katzir, were ardent adherents of Habad, and many top Israeli and American politicians – headed by Prime Minister Begin and Vice President Mondale – publicly court and support it. This, in spite of the considerable unpopularity of the Lubavitcher rabbi – in Israel he is widely criticised because he refuses to come to the Holy Land even for a visit and keeps himself in New York for obscure messianic reasons, while in New York his anti-Black attitude is notorious.

The fact that, despite these pragmatic difficulties, Habad can be publicly supported by so many top political figures owes much to the thoroughly disingenuous and misleading treatment by almost all scholars who have written about the Hassidic movement and its Habad branch. This applies particularly to all who have written or are writing about it in English. They suppress the glaring evidence of the old Hassidic texts as well as the latter-day political implications that follow from them, which stare in the face of even a casual reader of the Israeli Hebrew



press, in whose pages the Lubavitcher rabbi and other Hassidic leaders constantly publish the most rabid bloodthirsty statements and exhortations against all Arabs.

A chief deceiver in this case, and a good example of the power of the deception, was Martin Buber. His numerous works eulogising the whole Hassidic movement (including Habad) never so much as hint at the real doctrines of Hassidism concerning non-Jews. The crime of deception is all the greater in view of the fact that Buber's eulogies of Hassidism were first published in German during the period of the rise of German nationalism and the accession of Nazism to power. But while ostensibly opposing Nazism, Buber glorified a movement holding and actually teaching doctrines about non-Jews not unlike the Nazi doctrines about Jews. One could of course argue that the Hassidic Jews of seventy or fifty years ago were the victims, and a 'white lie' favouring a victim is excusable. But the consequences of deception are incalculable. Buber's works were translated into Hebrew, were made a powerful element of the Hebrew education in Israel, have greatly increased the power of the bloodthirsty Hassidic leaders, and have thus been an important factor in the rise of Israeli chauvinism and hate of all non-Jews. If we think about the many human beings who died of their wounds because Israeli army nurses, incited by Hassidic propaganda, refused to tend them, then a heavy onus for their blood lies on the head of Martin Buber.

I must mention here that in his adulation of Hassidism Buber far surpassed other Jewish scholars, particularly those writing in Hebrew (or formerly, in Yiddish) or even in European languages but purely for a Jewish audience. In questions of internal Jewish interest, there had once been a great deal of justified criticism of the Hassidic movement. Their mysogynism (much more extreme than that common to all Jewish Orthodoxy), their indulgence in alcohol, their fanatical cult of their hereditary 'holy rabbis' who extorted money from them, the numerous superstitions peculiar to them – these and many other negative traits were critically commented upon. But Buber's sentimental and deceitful romanticisation has won the day, especially in the US and Israel, because it was in tune with the totalitarian admiration of anything 'genuinely Jewish' and because certain 'left' Jewish circles in which Buber had a particularly great influence have adopted this position.

Nor was Buber alone in his attitude, although in my opinion he was by far the worst in the evil he propagated and the influence he has left behind him. There was the very influential sociologist and biblical scholar, Yehezkiel Kaufman, an advocate of genocide on the model of the Book of Joshua, the idealist philosopher Hugo Shmuel Bergman, who as far back as 1914-15 advocated the expulsion of all Palestinians to Iraq, and many others. All were outwardly 'dovish', but employed formulas which could be manipulated in the most extreme anti-Arab sense, all had tendencies to that religious mysticism which encourages the propagation of deceptions, and all seemed to be gentle persons who, even when advocating expulsion, racism and genocide, seemed incapable of hurting a fly – and just for this reason the effect of their deceptions was the greater.

It is against the glorification of inhumanity, proclaimed not only by the rabbis but by those who are supposed to be the greatest and certainly the most influential scholars of Judaism, that we have to struggle; and it is against those modern successors of the false prophets and dishonest priests that we have to repeat – even in the face of an almost unanimous opinion within Israel and among the majority of Jews in countries such as the US – Lucretius' warning against surrendering one's judgement to the declamations of religious leaders: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum* – 'To such heights of evil are men driven by religion'. Religion is not always (as Marx said) the opium of the people, but it can often be so, and when it is used in this sense by prevaricating and misrepresenting its true nature, the scholars and intellectuals who perform this task take on the character of opium smugglers.

But we can derive from this analysis another, more general conclusion about the most effective and horrific means of compulsion to do evil, to cheat and to deceive and, while keeping one's hands quite clean of violence, to corrupt whole peoples and drive them to oppression and murder. (For there can no longer be any doubt that the most horrifying acts of oppression in the West Bank are motivated by Jewish religious fanaticism.) Most people seem to assume that the worst totalitarianism employs physical coercion, and would refer to the imagery of Orwell's 1984 for a model illustrating such a regime. But it seems to me that this common view is greatly mistaken, and that the intuition of Isaac Asimov, in whose science fiction the worst oppression is always internalised, is the more true to the dangers of human nature. Unlike Stalin's tame scholars, the rabbis – and even more so the scholars attacked here, and with them the whole mob of equally silent middlebrows such as writers, journalists, public figures, who

lie and deceive more than them – are not facing the danger of death or concentration camp, but only social pressure; they lie out of patriotism because they believe that it is their duty to lie for what they conceive to be the Jewish interest. They are patriotic liars, and it is the same patriotism which reduces them to silence when confronted with the discrimination and oppression of the Palestinians.

In the present case we are also faced with another group loyalty, but one which comes from outside the group, and which is sometimes even more mischievous. Very many non-Jews (including Christian clergy and religious laymen, as well as some marxists from all marxist groups) hold the curious opinion that one way to ‘atone’ for the persecution of Jews is not to speak out against evil perpetrated by Jews but to participate in ‘white lies’ about them. The crude accusation of ‘antisemitism’ (or, in the case of Jews, ‘self-hate’) against anybody who protests at the discrimination of Palestinians or who points out any fact about the Jewish religion or the Jewish past which conflicts with the ‘approved version’ comes with greater hostility and force from non-Jewish ‘friends of the Jews’ than from Jews. It is the existence and great influence of this group in all western countries, and particularly in the US (as well as the other English-speaking countries) which has allowed the rabbis and scholars of Judaism to propagate their lies not only without opposition but with considerable help.

In fact, many professed ‘anti-stalinists’ have merely substituted another idol for their worship, and tend to support Jewish racism and fanaticism with even greater ardour and dishonesty than were found among the most devoted stalinists in the past. Although this phenomenon of blind and stalinistic support for any evil, so long as it is ‘Jewish’, is particularly strong from 1945, when the truth about the extermination of European Jewry became known, it is a mistake to suppose that it began only then. On the contrary, it dates very far back, particularly in social-democratic circles. One of Marx’s early friends, Moses Hess, widely known and respected as one of the first socialists in Germany, subsequently revealed himself as an extreme Jewish racist, whose views about the ‘pure Jewish race’ published in 1858 were not unlike comparable bilge about the ‘pure Aryan race’. But the German socialists, who struggled against German racism, remained silent about this Jewish racism.

In 1944, during the actual struggle against Hitler, the British Labour Party approved a plan for the expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine, which was similar to Hitler’s early plans (up to about 1941) for the Jews. This plan was approved under the pressure of Jewish members of the party’s leadership, many of whom have displayed a stronger ‘kith and kin’ attitude to every Israeli policy than the Conservative ‘kith and kin’ supporters of Ian Smith ever did. But the stalinistic taboos on the left are stronger in Britain than on the right, and there is virtually no discussion even when the Labour Party supports Begin’s government.

In the US a similar situation prevails, and again the American liberals are the worst.

This is not the place to explore all the political consequences of this situation, but we must face reality: in our struggle against the racism and fanaticism of the Jewish religion, our greatest enemies will be not only the Jewish racists (and users of racism) but also those non-Jews who in other areas are known – falsely in my opinion – as ‘progressives’.

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1. The Jews themselves universally described themselves as a religious community or, to be precise, a religious nation. ‘Our people is a people only because of the *Torah* (Religious Law)’ – this saying by one of the highest authorities, Rabbi Sa’adia Hagga’on who lived in the ninth century, has become proverbial. [↪](#)
2. By Emperor Joseph II in 1782. [↪](#)
3. All this is usually omitted in vulgar Jewish historiography, in order to propagate the myth that the Jews kept their religion by miracle or by some peculiar mystic force. [↪](#)
4. For example, in her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, a considerable part of which is devoted to Jews. [↪](#)
5. Before the end of the 18th century, German Jews were allowed by their rabbis to write German in Hebrew letters only, on pain or being excommunicated, flogged, etc. [↪](#)

6. When by a deal between the Roman Empire and the Jewish leaders (the dynasty of the *Nesi'im*) all the Jews in the Empire were subjected to the fiscal and disciplinary authority of these leaders and their rabbinical courts, who for their part undertook to keep order among the Jews. ↪
7. I write this, being a non-socialist myself. But I shall honour and respect people with whose principles I disagree, if they make an honest effort to be true to their principles. In contrast, there is nothing so despicable as the dishonest use of universal principles, whether true or false, for the selfish ends of an individual or, even worse, of a group. ↪
8. In fact, many aspects of Orthodox Judaism were apparently derived from Sparta, through the baneful political influence of Plato. On this subject, see the excellent comments of Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture, Fusion and Diffusion*, Columbia University Press, 1959. ↪
9. Including the geography of Palestine and indeed its very location. This is shown by the orientation of all synagogues in countries such as Poland and Russia: Jews are supposed to pray facing Jerusalem, and the European Jews, who had only a vague idea where Jerusalem was, always assumed it was due east, whereas for most of them it was in fact more nearly due south. ↪
10. Throughout this essay I use the term 'classical Judaism' to refer to rabbinical Judaism as it emerged after about AD 800 and lasted up to the end of the 18th century. I avoid the term 'normative Judaism', which many authors use with roughly the same meaning, because in my view it has unjustified connotations. ↪
11. The works of Hellenistic Jews, such as Philo of Alexandria, constitute an exception. They were written before classical Judaism achieved a position of exclusive hegemony. They were indeed subsequently suppressed among the Jews and survived only because Christian monks found them congenial. ↪
12. During the whole period from AD 100 to 1500 there were written two travel books and one history of talmudic studies – a short, inaccurate and dreary book, written moreover by a despised philosopher (Abraham ben-David, Spain, c. 1170). ↪
13. *Me'or Eynayim* by 'Azarya de Rossi of Ferrara, Italy, 1574. ↪
14. The best known cases were in Spain; for example (to use their adopted Christian names) Master Alfonso of Valladolid, converted in 1320 and Paul of Santa Maria, converted in 1390 and appointed bishop of Burgos in 1415. But many other cases can be cited from all over west Europe. ↪
15. Certainly the tone, and also the consequences, were very much better than in disputations in which Christians were accused of heresy – for example those in which Peter Abelard or the strict Franciscans were condemned. ↪
16. The stalinist and Chinese examples are sufficiently well known. However, it is worth mentioning that the persecution of honest historians in Germany began very early. In 1874, H. Ewald, a professor at Goettingen, was imprisoned for expressing 'incorrect' views on the conquests of Frederick II, a hundred years earlier. The situation in Israel is analogous: the worst attacks against me were provoked not by the violent terms I employ in my condemnations of zionism and the oppression of Palestinians, but by an early article of mine about the role of Jews in the slave trade, in which the latest case quoted dated from 1870. That article was published before the 1967 war; nowadays its publication would be impossible. ↪
17. In the end a few other passages also had to be removed, such as those which seemed theologically absurd (for example, where God is said to pray to Himself or physically to carry out some of the practices enjoined on the individual Jew) or those which celebrated too freely the sexual escapades of ancient rabbis. ↪
18. *Tractate Berakhot*, p 58b. ↪
19. '*Your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed...*', Jeremiah, 50,12. ↪
20. Published by Boys Town, Jerusalem, and edited by Moses Hyamson, one of the most reputable scholars of Judaism in Britain. ↪
21. The supposed founders of the Sadducean sect. ↪
22. I am happy to say that in a recent new translation (Chicago University Press) the word 'Blacks' does appear, but the heavy and very expensive volume is unlikely, as yet, to get into the 'wrong' hands. Similarly, in early nineteenth century England, radical books (such as Godwin's) were allowed to appear, provided they were issued in a very expensive edition. ↪
23. An additional fact can be mentioned in this connection. It was perfectly possible, and apparently respectable, for a Jewish scholar of Islam, Bernard Lewis (who formerly taught in London and is now teaching in the USA) to publish an article in *Encounter*, in which he points out many passages in Islamic literature which in his view are anti-Black, but none of which even approaches the passage quoted above. It would be quite impossible for anyone now, or in the last thirty years, to discuss in any reputable American publication the

above passage or the many other offensive anti-Black Talmudic passages. But without a criticism of all sides the attack on Islam alone reduces to mere slander. 

