

Several weeks ago we discussed the life and thought of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, better known as Maimonides. We revealed at that time that it was often said that "from Moses to Moses, there was none like unto Moses". That is to say, some scholars hold that Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides was the greatest Jew since Moses the first. The man of whom we shall speak tonight is often referred to as the third Moses, the 3rd in a triumvirate of Great Jews whose given name was Moses. This man is Moses ben Menahem Mendel, better known as Moses Mendelssohn. Moses the first lived about 1200 BCE. Maimonides lived about 1200 CE. Mendelssohn ~~lived~~ was born in 1729 and died in 1786. The first Moses <sup>was born</sup> lived in Egypt and <sup>the</sup> Canaan. The second Moses <sup>was born</sup> lived in Spain and <sup>the</sup> Israel/Egypt. The third Moses lived in Germany. In their combined lives they indicate the broad sweep of history and thought covered by the people of eternity, the Jews.   
 *the vast reach of*

The first Moses was responsible for the foundation-stone upon which the religion and the culture of Israel has been built. ~~Mose~~ He gave us the Torah which contained the noblest law ever to govern a people.   
 ~~prior~~ The second Moses, Maimonides, gave us a restatement of the law, the "Mishneh Torah", which, 2400 years after the 1st Moses, was a brilliant attempt by one man to codify all of the laws developed by the authorities of Israel down through the centuries. As we indicated when speaking of Maimonides, he not only re-stated the law, he sought to heighten it and to point up its virtues.

We do not know ~~too~~ much about the philosophic notions of the Moses of the <sup>later</sup> Egyptian saga. The Bible only tells us that he opposed the scientists of his day whom Pharaoh placed in opposition to him. We also know that such legislation as Moses fathered or mediated had to be grounded in a broad philosophy ~~steeped~~ <sup>with</sup> a high regard for humanity and reason. Nonetheless, the Bible does not tell us that Moses was among other things a philosopher. It tells us only that God commanded, and Moses mediated that command to the Hebrews.

Moses, the 2nd, Maimonides, was clearly a philosopher, in addition to being a codifier of law. He sought to tie together the God who spoke at Sinai with the God of reason of Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher. Moses, the 3rd, Mendelssohn, was also clearly a philosopher. Like Moses the 2nd, he sought to show that Judaism was essentially a religion of reason, even though it was based on revealed legislation.

Maimonides wrote the "Moreh Nevuchim, A Guide to the Perplexed." 500 years later, ~~Maimonides~~ <sup>Mendelssohn</sup> studied the "Moreh Nevuchim". While most Jewish boys limited their education in Germany to the study of Talmud and specific religious law, Mendelssohn <sup>also</sup> studied philosophy, Mathematics, science, poetry, Latin, Greek, French, and English. There was a cultural rebirth being experienced in Germany. <sup>the</sup> ~~only~~ <sup>the</sup> Jewish community remained isolated and unconnected with this stirring. In the Spain of Maimonides, the Jews were in the vanguard of cultural developments, serving as a bridge over which Arabic culture spread to Europe. In the Germany of Mendelssohn, the Jew, by and large, was not even an interested spectator to what was going on. <sup>The great culture of Spanish Jewry was almost unknown to German Jewry.</sup>

As a young man Mendelssohn became prominent in the world of letters because of his articles and essays on esthetics and literature. He became the chief collaborator in a journal which evaluated all literary works published in Germany. He became known as "The young Hebrew who wrote in German". The oddity of this phrase can be appreciated only if we remember that the Hebrews spoke and wrote only in Yiddish. Even to the

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Jews living in Germany, German was a foreign language, so complete was the isolation of the cultural ghetto.

When he was 38 years old, Mendelssohn published ~~his~~ a philosophical work on the immortality of the soul, entitled "Phädon". First of all, it was amazing that a Jew should attempt to write such a work in German. Secondly, the work ~~is~~ today <sup>is considered</sup> one of the best productions of classic German prose. Thirdly, although the work dealt with philosophy, its style was so lucid, that its meaning was clear to all. "Phädon" became the best seller of its time. Mendelssohn became known as the "German Plato" because Plato's dialogue on the immortality of the soul bears the name "Phädon". His fame spread to all European countries, because the work was translated into every European language.

<sup>in "Phädon"</sup>  
Mendelssohn ~~is~~ contended that the body must have at least one substance which is neither corporeal nor composite, <sup>and</sup> which unites within itself all ideas and conceptions. He called this essence which is indivisible and self-existing, the soul, and he claimed that the soul was immortal, it could not be destroyed. The authority that Mendelssohn used to support his argument was not scripture but reason.

Phädon obtained notoriety for M. throughout the <sup>European</sup> Christian world. ~~The Jewish community, however, was not much disturbed by him until he~~ Gotthold Lessing, the most liberal of German authors, took M. to his heart, as did many other German <sup>greats</sup>. Thinkers and writers travelled hundreds of miles to see him. Lessing wrote the famous, "Nathan der Weise" in which the noble hero is obviously patterned after his friend Mendelssohn. One Christian minister named Lavater was so overwhelmed by this "German Socrates" that he sought to convert ~~this noble Jew~~ him to Xty. Lavater appealed to Mendelssohn's sense of reason and challenged him to refute the correctness and superiority of Xty. M. was drawn into the public debate and spent many weary years of his life carrying on a running fight with still many others who soon entered the dispute.

As Maimonides was both a Talmudist and a philosopher, both Jew and Greek in spirit and in mind, so Mendelssohn was both Jew and German. He wanted to teach the Jews the German language and thus prepared them for German culture. To do this, he translated the Torah, which hitherto had appeared only in the Hebrew, into German. The translation was <sup>written</sup> either in German letters or with Hebrew letters. The commentary was in Hebrew. Thus by reading the Bible with which he was so familiar, the Jew could easily learn German.

Mendelssohn went beyond this to aid in the establishment of a new kind of school system in the Jewish community. ~~He aided in~~ The Judische Freischule, opened in Berlin in 1781, with his cooperation, taught secular as well as religious subjects.

The Bible tells us that above all things Moses the 1st was "anav," humble. It tells us also that Aaron had to present the message of Moses to Pharaoh because Moses stammered in his speech. Mendelssohn, Moses the 3rd, shared both of these attributes of Moses 1st. Mendelssohn was hesitant in his speech and reluctant ~~every~~ to join an argument. He was also afflicted with curvature of the spine. Legend has it that when he asked a beautiful girl to be his wife, she demurred on the grounds that he stammered and looked like a hunchback. He replied that when he was young he had a dream <sup>in which</sup> he saw an angel. He asked the angel his mission, and the angel replied, "I am on my way to perform an unhappy task. I must deprive a beautiful young girl of her fluency of speech and her physical beauty. "

M. went on to say to the girl he wished to marry, " I pleaded with the angel to spare the girl and to give me her afflictions". According to the legend, the young lady immediately agreed to be his wife. Unfortunately, however, the children of their marriage were not as humble as their father, nor were they as true to the religion of their fathers. We are told that they became lost in the labyrinth of abstract philosophy and lost their interest in Judaism. *parents*

The father, however, ~~was anchored~~ *pledged to his people* even while he was a profound philosopher, was deeply immersed in the traditions of Judaism. He was one of the first in Germany to advocate the emancipation of the Jews who were second-class citizens. In support of his position, he wrote, "Jerusalem, oder uber Religiöse Macht und Judenthum", better known simply as Jerusalem. *written as* In this work, M. ~~was~~ dealt with two main topics, church and state, and Judaism. In part one he contended that:

a) The aim of both the church and state should be human happiness. Here he is at one with the Declaration of Independence of America and the declaration of the Baal Shem Tov in Eastern Europe during the same period. This revolutionary doctrine for Germany argued against the long time-honored notions that the church and the state were supreme in themselves and the individual had to bend to their needs and desires.

b) Secondly, he contended that the church had no right to own property and that church law was essentially contradictory to the nature of religion. Since the church had for centuries been perhaps the biggest land-holder in Europe, this position suggested a social and economic revolution. In taking this position, M. bridged the centuries between the Biblical period when ownership of property was vested not in the church but in the family and the American period when ownership became vested in the individual.

c) Thirdly, M. pleaded for the separation of church and state and held that all men were entitled to freedom of belief and conscience. Today statements like this are commonplace. Mendelssohn was the first person in German to present such views in writing.

The second part of the work known as "Jerusalem" dealt with Judaism. Here, M. wrote that Judaism, unlike Xty has no dogma which is essential for salvation. He argued that eternal truths are based not on supernatural revelations but on reason. Like the Baal Shem Tov he did not recognize sudden miracles as evidence of God's power. He stressed the importance of the regular laws of nature as proof of the divine influence. On the other hand, while we would suppose that a man of such liberality would evaluate the ceremonies of Judaism critically, Me. argued that the ceremonies were part of a divine legislation. He held that " the spirit of Judaism is freedom in doctrine and conformity in action". It is interesting to note that while the 2nd and the 3rd Moses stressed reason as the source of authority, neither of them sought to liberate themselves from the ceremonies derived from the laws of the 1st Moses. We might say that they were rationally above orthodoxy but they were not prepared to step outside of *the Jewish community* which at that time did not dream of entertaining any liberality in the observance of customs. It would seem that the Baal Shem Tov who stressed the power of the spirit rather than the power of the mind was nevertheless more willing than Maiminides and Mendelsohn to challenge the authority of established customs and ceremonies.

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*Orthodox Jews claim M. Mendelssohn because his appeal to  
reason.*

While Moses Mendelssohn in no way considered himself to be a reform Jew, later reformers looked to him as their predecessor. Certainly, in his attitude toward separation of church and state, in his attitude towards freedom of conscience, in his love for science and the humanities, M. was the father of reform Judaism. Actually, in the movement away from orthodoxy in any religious development, the most difficult step is the introduction of an ~~atmo~~ mental climate in which new ideas might be tolerated. After M., it was much easier for the later reformers to define Judaism in ~~rational~~ *universal* terms. While M. himself hesitated to take ~~the~~ *the* ~~natural~~ *step* of a critical attitude towards customs and ceremonies, the critical evaluators of Judaism who followed him, were able to do this with comparative ease. The primary mission of Reform Judaism was to liberate Jewish ideas from their Mosaic setting and to project them into the new age with its new problems and expanding horizons. This mission was simplified by the courageous 3rd Moses, who like the 2nd Moses, sought to direct the Jewish ~~eyes~~ towards the world community. To do this, telescope

Mendelssohn and the reformers who followed him had to divert the telescope from its sole preoccupation with Israel. After Mendelssohn, the Jewish soul no longer looked inward along; after many centuries of ~~chauvinism~~ *isolation which had become* the soul of Judaism began to look outward and to ~~shed its light~~ *shed its light* add its strength to man's search for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. *2nd nature*

II challenge of Savaler - a priest to accept & began long battle to defend Judaism.

Both Jew & German - wanted to teach Jews German language & prepare them for G. culture. Translated Torah into German for his own children.

Solomon Shebrow prepared a Hebrew commentary for the translation of Genesis 1778. Based by some. He calm. Opposed or contemptuous of theologians - "those pugnacious proclaimers of peace"

Then translating Psalms - 1st in German character & then in Hebrew type but in German - w/ a Hebrew commentary.

1783 complete Hebrew Bible - inaugurated new era in Jewish school education.

Founded out of Sinische Freischule in Berlin 1781 w/ sec. & 2nd ed.

M. ht or advocate emancipation of Jews - wrote "Jerusalem, oder über religiöse macht und Sukkothum"

Shows frequent analogies of Jewish "Tractatus theologico-politicus" - although fundamentally of a different conclusion.

- part I
- a) Removal of Church & State - human happiness
  - b) Church - right of own property - not a part of the state - but in Germany - church has & excommunicates
  - c) pleads for separation of Church & State - but in Germany - freedom of belief - common

part II  
Judaism - no dogma - but for salvation - revelation  
eternal truths - based on reason & not supernatural revelation  
Judaism is not revealed rel. but revealed legislation.