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HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
*Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem*

3101 CLIFTON AVENUE • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2488

December 10, 1991

(513) 221-1875

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman  
The Wexner Heritage Foundation  
551 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Rabbi Friedman:

It was a most pleasant surprise to receive your flattering letter today with its generous comments about my book on Jewish identity. Your name and your work have been familiar to me for many years and I believe we have a number of friends in common. I know that you are not one to give compliments easily -- and hence my very great satisfaction with your letter.

In response to your inquiry, let me note that I do not maintain close contacts with the University of Washington Press on this book, since I do not receive royalties. However, I would expect that they probably have a sizable number of copies still in stock, which they would be delighted to sell even at a considerable discount. If you are really thinking of as many as 500 copies, they should give you a price equivalent to a book club. I think it will only complicate matters if I become an intermediary. Instead, I suggest you write directly to the editor, Mrs. Naomi Pascal (a personal friend), indicating your interest and mentioning my name. Either she will give you a direct reply or she will channel your inquiry to one of her assistants. The address is University of Washington Press, P. O. Box 50096, Seattle, WA 98145-5096. The telephone number is 206-543-4050.

Good luck with your Wexner teaching. Our daughter, who is a Jewish Communal Service student at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, is a Wexner Fellow, but I believe that is the other Wexner Foundation.

All good wishes.

Cordially,

Michael A. Meyer  
Professor of Jewish History

The Wexner Heritage Foundation

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December 6, 1991

Prof. Michael A. Meyer  
Hebrew Union College  
3101 Clifton Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45220-2488

Dear Professor Meyer:

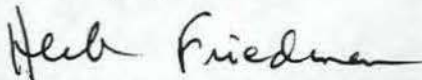
I've just finished your volume "Jewish Identity in the Modern World" consisting of the Stroum Lectures you gave at the University of Washington last year - and this is a fan letter, of which I write very few.

The clarity, of thought and language; the elegance of handling three major themes with such brevity; and the net result of coming to a conclusion for the reader instead of offering the usual hovering academic irresolution - all gave me great pleasure.

Further, I deal with this subject myself, in a different context - hence my delight in finding your volume, concerning which I would like to make a non-binding inquiry. If I wanted to order 100 copies or even 500 - if the price were right - are such quantities available? Can you find out, or should I make direct request of the Washington Press? Please guide me.

My context, incidentally, is the Wexner Heritage Foundation, on whose faculty I teach, as well as serving as its founding president. My lecture on this subject deals with the dual aspect of Jewish identity, as Americans and Jews. I begin with the Napoleonic Sanhedrin as the starting symbol of the modern dilemma, and end with the same conclusion you do. Now you can see why I was so attracted by your book. Congratulations.

Sincerely yours,



(Rabbi) Herbert A. Friedman

HAF/jf



December 6, 1991

Mr. Samuel Stroum  
1001 Fourth Avenue Plaza  
Suite 3714  
Seattle, WA 98154

Dear Mr. Stroum:

We met many years ago, when I was the Executive Vice-Chairman of the National UJA - and you were, as you have been all your life, one of the valued major supporters of Israel and the Jewish people.

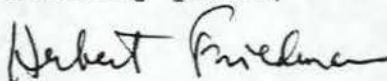
I have just finished reading Michael Meyer's book on "Jewish Identity in the Modern World; given and published in 1990 under the auspices of you and your wife at the University of Washington.

Please accept my compliments on a most significant accomplishment. It is a splendid piece of work, really the best, concise, clear definition of this problem which affects so many young American Jews. You are to be commended for making it available in print, and I intend to use it widely in my work.

I am serving now as president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation, which seeks to provide a strong educational component to those 40-year old men and women who serve as leaders in our local Jewish communities, and who often do not have the background of knowledge which they really should possess in order to lead. Meyer's book will be very helpful to me.

Once again, congratulations.

Sincerely yours,



(Rabbi) Herbert A. Friedman

HAF/jf

"JEWISH IDENTITY IN THE MODERN WORLD;

by Michael a. Meyer

University of Washington Press, 1990

Introduction

p. 6 "In premodern times the congruity between family and society prevented Jewish identity from becoming a problem....

Continuity prevailed across the generations....

It is modernization that breaks down the barriers to the world outside the Jewish community and creates the choices that threaten continuity."

p. 9 Three forces that have shaped modern Jewish identity.  
ENLIGHTENMENT drew Jews to a broader world  
ANTISEMITISM both strengthened and weakened Jewish ties  
ZION and the sense of peoplehood drew modern Jews together in support of a common goal.

I. ENLIGHTENMENT

The Powerful Enticements of Reason and Universalism

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Uriel Acosta, return from Marrano status to Judaism was troubled. He rejected rabbinic Judaism (accepted only the Biblical), was excommunicated and committed suicide.



Baruch Spinoza was a rationalist, a naturalist, could not accept a narrow definition of his Judaism, was also excommunicated.

Moses Mendelsohn managed to live as a traditional Jew and also a man of the European Enlightenment, for his two spheres, Judaism and reason, did not conflict. His religion possessed no superrational dogmas, and was tolerant of other faith communities. Further, his rational Judaism contained the idea of the "mission of Israel" to the non-Jews.

Samson Raphael Hirsch created modern "orthodoxy".

Zecharias Frankel started "conservative".

Abraham Geiger was the "reformer".

Heinrich Heine added love of beauty (Greek model) to his Judaism, as did

Saul Tchernichovsky, who venerated Apollo

Bialik described the allure of natural beauty as a corrupter of yeshiva students.

Isaac Baer Levinson, Russian Haskala-nik, urged Jewish schools to include secular subjects. Saadia and Maimonides were his models.

Russian Haskalah led many Jews to socialism.

Felix Adler identified with humanity in general, not the Jews in particular.

Franz Kafka, comfortable in middle-class Judaism, identified with OST-Juden, became a Zionist.

## II. ANTISEMITISM

The Ambiguous Effects of Exclusion and Persecution.

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By devaluing Jews, antisemitism may produce mild or severe negations of self. Or it may have entirely the opposite effect - resulting in renewed affirmation of Jewish identity.

Among premodern Jews antisemitism rarely attenuated Jewish identity; it severed rather to reinforce it. The more Jews were persecuted, the more they clung to their own faith; if necessary, dying as martyrs.

The dense antisemitic atmosphere of 19th century Germany often produced the extreme pathological phenomenon that has been called Jewish self-hatred. In his 1844 essay entitled "On the Jewish Question", young Karl Marx (baptized



at age 6) wrote that Judaism was not a religion or a peoplehood but the egoistic desire for money. "What is the worldly basis of Judaism? Practical necessity, selfishness. What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Barter. What is his worldly God? Money." The Jew was capitalism incarnate.

The Enlightenment raised expectations of tolerance and acceptance, yet its best exponents could not always free themselves of their antisemitic prejudices. This was painful.

Voltaire might cherish the ideal of a common humanity, but displayed little love of the Jews as individuals. He declared them an "ignorant and barbarous people who have long united the most sordid avarice with the most detestable superstition and the most invincible hatred for every people by whom they are tolerated and enriched."

Isaac de Pinto, defending Voltaire, nevertheless said he should have distinguished between Sephardim and Ashkenazim. The former were not guilty of the accusations. The latter were deserving of contempt.

Moses Mendelsohn reacted differently. Challenged to convert to Christianity or defend his orthodox faith, Mendelsohn became a defender of Judaism in the public arena.

In 1840 the Jews of Damascus were accused of ritual murder. Two outstanding Jews, Moses Montefiore of England and Adolphe Cremieux of France, travelled to the Middle East and intervened successfully.

In 1858 a Jewish child of the Mortara family in Bologna



was secretly baptized by a Christian maid and abducted to a monastery. There was a great outcry. Within a year, two international organizations were formed to defend Jewish rights everywhere - the Board of Delegates of American Israelites (24 congregations); and the French Alliance Israelite Universelle.

At century's end there were two major setbacks - the May Laws of 1881 in Russia, and reversal of liberalism in Austria-Germany which had started earlier in the century. The Russian situation provoked a huge migration to the west; and the German pressures produced many converts, but also many "Trotzjudentum" (defiance).

Some German jews looked for scapegoats and blamed "Ostjuden" for their troubles. (Cf. Sephardim blaming Ashkenazim in the Voltaire case).

The resurgence of antisemitism in Germany worked to strengthen Jewish identity. German Jews created a national organization for the first time to defend Jews. It was called "Centralverein deutschen Staatsburgen judischen Glaubens."

The Dreyfus Affair left the Jews of France without any determination to stand united against domestic antisemitism. The Affair seems only to have added impetus to the ongoing process of Jewish assimilation in France.

In Germany, under the impact of Nazi doctrine, the most assimilated of German Jews, often for the first time in their lives, now felt the need to confront and to reaffirm

their Jewishness. At the age of 24, the Nobel-prize winning Jewish chemist Fritz Haber had converted to Protestantism for the sake of his career. As a racial Jew, Haber was forced to resign as head of a scientific institute. He wrote to Albert Einstein: "In my whole life I have never been so Jewish as now."

Max Liebermann, most famous German Jewish painter, was assimilationist and anti-Zionist. Bialik failed to convince him. After Hitler came, Liebermann wrote a touching letter to Bialik recanting, at age 86 (see page 54).

Half the Jews of Germany left between 1933-38 - large numbers to Palestine. Synagogues filled. Jewish educational and cultural institutions flourished. Describing this period, Ernst Simon wrote a book "Aufbau in Untergang" - construction on the eve of Destruction".

The Holocaust eventually became a major factor in sustaining Jewish identity after World War II. Eichmann trial of 1961 added to this consciousness of a more determined Jewishness. Concern for the future of the Jews seems to run deeper than concern for the future of the Jewish religion.

Antisemitism in the Diaspora, and especially in the United States, has thus ceased to be ambiguous in its effect. Antisemitism, as collective memory, serves as a basic motive for Jewish identification.

"The erosive force today comes almost exclusively from the enlightenment side. Jews do not marry gentiles to



the enlightenment side. Jews do not marry gentiles to escape the odium of discrimination. If they intermarry it is because universal values have replaced particularism. Thus in their effect on Jewish identity enlightenment and antisemitism have come into direct opposition. Today, antisemitism serves almost exclusively to shore up and intensify Jewish identity."

### III. ZION

#### The Centripetal Force of Jewish Peoplehood

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p. 61 Enlightenment had led to an assimilation. Jewish universalism was eroding the capacity for Jewish survival. Westernized Jews had squeezed their Jewish identity into the narrow confines of religious affiliation. To become a Zionist, therefore, was to transcend the pernicious affects of enlightenment and antisemitism even while utilizing their benefits.

p. 65 For existing forms of Jewish identity it was cultural Zionism that offered the most serious challenges. Achad Ha-am, its progenitor and chief spokesman, was an agnostic in belief, a non-halakhic Jew in practice. Achad Ha-am wanted to transform the Jews' inner Jewish self. Religion would cease to be its indispensable essence. He wanted to draw secularists back into the Jewish orbit by showing that being



dominated by religion, Jewishness to him was not an adherence to a set of beliefs and practices. Rather it meant a share in the spirit that had created them.

Zion represented the goal of the Jewish spirit - to return to the physical land of Israel, to survive in continuity with Jewish history, to sustain intense intellectual and cultural productivity in the spirit (religious) of their ancient times.

p. 70      What is the image of the new Zionist Jew? Would he or she be secular or religious, a believer in Jewish normalcy or chosenness, culturally a European living in a Jewish state, or contrariwise, a Jew by culture, drawing upon the Jewish spirit to create a focal point of Jewish particularity in the ancient land? Thus ironically, the movement that set out to unify the Jewish people sowed its share of discord instead.

By 1948 Zionism had fully mobilized the centripetal force of Jewish peoplehood. With the establishment of the State, its focal significance for Jewish identity was no longer in question.

pp.73-75

Identity of Jew in Israel is equivocal - defined by Law of Return; or by struggle between secular vs. religious; or by difference between Israeli (who calls self Hebrew) vs. Diaspora; or increasing salience of Diaspora other times; or

Diaspora; or increasing salience of Diaspora other times; or feeling for sanctity of the land vs. compromise for some political goal. All of this is predicated on basis of fundamental difference between Israeli Jew and Diaspora Jew.

pp. 77-79

Yet Israeli Jews leave Israel in large numbers (yordim) while American Jews responded 83% in one survey (in 1983) that if Israel were destroyed they would feel as if they had suffered one of the greatest personal tragedies of their lives. They read the daily newspapers for news of Israel and live vicariously through its military victories and cultural and scientific achievements.

p. 82      Tensions and differences between Israel and the Diaspora and the changing nature of Diaspora Jewry are working to loosen the bonds of solidarity. Still the sense of peoplehood remains stronger than any other foundation of common Jewishness. Despite differences Zion has retained its influence as the most powerful symbol of Jewish unity and common destiny.

## V. CONCLUSION

p. 83              The Present State of Jewish Identity

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Nearly all contemporary Jews feel they are Jews and at



the same time something not specifically Jewish as well. For some, Jewishness remains their principal orientation in life, the center of their being. Most actively identifying modern Jews, however, have in one fashion or another absorbed the influence of enlightenment, but this does not interfere with their Jewish values and commitments.

p. 85      Antisemitism has become important for Jewish identity not as a force operative in contemporary society, but as a memory of the Holocaust. The intense consciousness of that event is felt as a particular imperative to prevent anything resembling a Holocaust in the future.

p. 85      It is, however, the sense of Jewish peoplehood that represents the strongest component of Jewish identity today.

Mostly, I trust, Jewishness will focus in the future, as in the past, on Zion. For Zion not only represents Jewish origins and Jewish unity. It is also the symbol of that Redemption which orients Jewish identity to its highest goal and gives it intrinsic meaning.

December 1991