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The Jewish Family, Myths and Reality

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4. Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment

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In 1945, Jacob Katz published his fundamental article on Jewish attitudes toward marital and family life in traditional society.¹ Katz concluded his study with reflections on the new, individualistic values introduced by Moses Mendelssohn and the German Haskalah (Enlightenment), values which ultimately came to revolutionize attitudes toward marriage and the family. The chapter presented here on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries begins approximately where Professor Katz's leaves off and focuses primarily on Eastern Europe. Although this is a study of the new values of the Haskalah, we must be careful not to argue too clean a break with the past, for the new was often deeply entangled with the old. The norms of a new social order may germinate in a traditional society as forms of deviance. Certainly it appears that new sexual attitudes emerged in Central Europe a good century before they became widely accepted as norms.² The early Haskalah in Eastern Europe may have functioned in the same way. Moreover, the new attitudes we shall explore here may well have been not only the result of influence from European culture, but also the products of a dialectical dynamic *within* traditional Jewish society.

I shall address myself not to the development of a new social reality in Eastern Europe, but rather to new *mentalities* regarding the institutions of marriage and the family. We are concerned here with ideology in the broadest sense of the word. The attitudes and perceptions of very small

groups came to shape those of society as a whole. Thus, even if Jewish society was much slower to change than the intellectual elite, the Haskalah perceptions of social problems gave a new vocabulary to reality and contributed to its transformation.

Our discussion cannot however ignore a fundamental fact of Jewish social history from the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth: the demographic explosion which was far greater for the Jews of Eastern Europe than for the European population as a whole.³ From 1648 to 1765, the Jewish population of Poland increased by 3.2 times to more than half a million. By 1825, the Jews of that part of Poland partitioned to Russia totaled some 1,600,000. By the census of 1897, this number had risen again by 3.2 times to over 5 million. This extraordinary increase, which remains something of a puzzle to demographers, must have had a profound impact on our subject. For some two centuries, the Jewish youth cohort, as the sociologists like to call it, was enormous compared to older age groups. I mean primarily the group in the years we today label adolescence and early adulthood. Restless and searching, such youth groups typically fill the ranks of radical religious and political movements, as our own century attests.

Societies have always tried to control the potentially dangerous energies of their young. Natalie Davis and Richard Trexler have shown such mechanisms at work in Renaissance France and Italy.⁴ As Professor Katz has argued, the institutions of early marriage and education served similar functions in the Jewish world.⁵ But by the eighteenth century, the pressures of demography may have made such solutions by themselves inadequate. I would submit that the great religious and intellectual movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries may have all been products of the youth explosion. I have in mind, first, Hasidism, second, the yeshiva movement, which began in Volozhin at the beginning of the nineteenth century, third, the numerically much smaller Musar movement of Israel Salant, and finally, Haskalah itself. All of these movements, regardless of their fundamental ideological differences, were initially either made up heavily of teenagers or largely aimed at teenagers. As such, they provided varying ideological solutions to what Erik Erikson has called the crisis of identity that afflicts the adolescent.⁶ But if revolutionary in origin, these movements quickly became instruments for social control.

If we are to believe the psychologists, every generation experiences searchings for a viable adult identity which necessarily includes a certain rebellion and ambivalence toward its parents. Yet the development of ideologies as expressions of and solutions to the problem of identity occurs only at historical conjunctures when old identities are no longer

satisfying. In quiet times, the problems of adolescence are resolved primarily as venerable institutions provide the young person with avenues for maturation. When these institutions no longer prove adequate—for whatever reasons—the question of identity becomes a public matter, generating the impetus for new ideologies and ultimately new institutions.

We should not assume that because there is little evidence of conflicts between parents and children among Jews before the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe that such conflicts did not exist. But it is only with the emergence of the new ideologies aimed toward the young that these conflicts took on a public dimension. I do not propose to settle the question of whether ideology is merely the reflection of a struggle for identity or if it is the cause of youthful disaffection. But whether we label ideology chicken or egg, we cannot escape the conclusion that the new ideologies were manifestly part of generational conflicts. Here is one example from memoirs of the Yiddish writer Yehezkel Kotik.⁷ Kotik, who was born in 1847, describes how his father rebelled as a newly married thirteen-year-old against his grandfather by becoming a Hasid. Kotik himself took after his grandfather and became a *mitnagged* (opponent of Hasidism). His father then arranged a Hasidic bride for him and thus tried to win him back to the true religion. But Kotik, after two months of marriage, fled his wife and father to study at the yeshiva of Volozhin, a stronghold of the *mitnaggedim*. If Hasidism and *mitnagdut* served as the bones of contention between generations for Kotik, the same role was fulfilled by Haskalah for others and by assimilation, socialism, and Zionism for later generations.

Our focus here is the conjunction between ideology and identity in the early Eastern European Haskalah—that period up to around 1870 when the *maskilim* (followers of Haskalah) were still a persecuted minority. The ideology of the Haskalah has received considerable attention from historians.⁸ Productivization of the Jews, especially through the creation of Jewish farm colonies, moderate religious reform, change in dress codes, and a new educational system emphasizing European languages and sciences, were all parts of the well-known program of the *maskilim*. Yet this ideology did not emerge out of a vacuum but was rather the product of the biographies of the *maskilim* and, specifically, of the struggles for identity that marked their adolescent years. For it was typically during these years that the *maskilim* became converts to the cause. While many of the ideas of the *maskilim* were taken over almost word for word from the European Enlightenment, they were absorbed into a particularly Jewish framework, that is, the reality experienced by the *maskilim* themselves. Therefore, what is most interesting in the

ideology of the Haskalah is not so much the ideas themselves—which were for the most part derivative and not particularly original—but how they resonated against the problems of Jewish adolescence.

The most compelling and inescapable fact of life for any young maskil was early marriage. The educated elite from whose ranks the maskilim came were almost all married between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. Abraham Gottlober states flatly that everyone he knew was engaged by age eleven.⁹ Even if the lower classes were marrying in their later teens (as evidence indicates), the average age of marriage among Jews was extraordinarily young compared to marriages in Western Europe at this time and even to non-Jews in Eastern Europe.¹⁰ The early age of Jewish marriage attracted much attention by writers, such as Polish enlighteners from the late eighteenth century, seeking to reform the Jews. Even Central European rabbis such as Jacob Emden and Yehezkel Landau remark on the young marital ages of Eastern Jews as if they were commenting on some exotic African tribe.¹¹ As far as I have been able to determine, it was not until the 1870s that the age of marriage among the elite began to rise significantly beyond adolescence.¹²

What was the impact of marriage at the time of puberty? Here again we must emphasize that the observations of the maskilim probably do not reflect a new experience but rather give it, for the first time, a public meaning. That such marriage was a traumatic experience is attested by at least some of the traditional literature. For example, a celebrated case from the 1760s reported in Yehezkel Landau's *responsa* tells of a twelve-year-old boy married to an equally young girl and forced by family pressure to have sexual relations with her.¹³ In the middle of the act, one of the family, who were presumably waiting with bated breath outside the room, knocked on the door, thus aborting the children's attempt to meet the expectations of their parents. From that point onward the two would not go near each other, and shortly after his fourteenth birthday the boy disappeared. Although reported in the terse style of the *responsa* literature, one cannot fail to read such a case without experiencing the pathos and humiliation that must have caused the boy to run away from his in-laws' home. The point, however, is that such a case remained an individual and private one which has only come down to us because of the legal question of *agunut* (grasswidowhood).

The maskilim, on the other hand, transformed their own biographies into public polemic. The memoirs of Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg, Abraham Ber Gottlober, and Moses Leib Lilienblum, to name but three, are all conscious attempts to define the personal problems of Jewish childhood and adolescence as social issues.¹⁴ The memoirs follow certain conventions and must therefore be seen as works of

literature as much as objective accounts. Indeed, we learn less from them about the reality of Jewish life than we do about the image of that life which the maskilim consciously created. But in imaginatively reconstructing their early lives through their memoirs, the maskilim gave the first definitions of childhood and adolescence in Jewish history. As Philippe Ariès has suggested in *Centuries of Childhood*, the definition of childhood is a cultural construct that changes historically.¹⁵ Although a legal category of childhood in Judaism existed since the Talmud, it was the maskilim who gave the term its first social definition by rebelling against the traditional treatment of the child.

The beginning of adolescence is not determined solely by biology: cultural factors certainly play a role in determining the age of adolescent struggles. For traditional Jews in Eastern Europe, marriage at thirteen or fourteen marked the transition from childhood to a new stage of life which was neither adulthood nor childhood. The maskilim portray this Jewish form of adolescence as an extended death, rather like premature old age. Abraham Gottlober speaks of the child snatched out of the paradise of childhood and forced to eat the apple of love which is "honey mixed with poison."¹⁶ In this version of Adam's fall, early marriage was the kiss of death. In Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg's memoir, early marriage causes sexual impotence, which is the main theme of the book. This impotence is the medical analogue of the philosophical impotence and confusion which Guenzburg experienced during the same years. Both conditions are temporarily cured by a doctor who is also a maskil.¹⁷ In the juxtaposition of sexual and intellectual dysfunction, Guenzburg explicitly fuses the problems of personal identity and ideology. It is interesting that although Guenzburg sees these problems as a consequence of early marriage, he is equally opposed to the late age of marriage typical of the German Jews: by marrying only at thirty, the German Jews too often frequent prostitutes. Thus the proper age of marriage, says Guenzburg, is around eighteen, a piece of advice which can be found already in the Mishnah.

The maskilim see childhood as a period of naive innocence and unproblematic relationship to one's biological parents. In most of the memoirs, the parents are portrayed in unambivalent and thoroughly positive colors. Frequently the father is described as a maskil, although here the authors play with the traditional meaning of the word ("learned") which was only transformed by the Haskalah itself. An intimation that this idyllic relationship must end first comes when the young boy is sent off to the *heder* (one-room elementary school) at the age of five or six. In memoir after memoir, the *heder* and *melamed* (heder teacher) are presented as the very antithesis of home and parents. Here

the boy is abused and beaten. Perhaps the most graphic portrait of the heder is in Shmarya Levin's autobiography in which the melamed is nothing short of a pathological sadist.¹⁸ Yet the prevalence of this brutal figure suggests that we are not dealing here with just a literary stereotype but instead with a real figure drawn from life.

The experience of the heder clearly sharpened the contrast between home and outside world. It may well be that a kind of splitting occurred in the later memories of the maskilim in which the parents were seen as thoroughly positive figures when the reality may have been more complex. In the memoirs I have studied, the writers never admit to having been beaten by their parents, while the melamed invariably metes out corporal punishment. We may be justifiably skeptical of this image of reality. It is however significant that brutality is typically perceived as external to the family. This perception is quite a contrast to what historians of the European family have taught us about child rearing since early modern times; corporal punishment, although also administered in the schools, was typically the province of the father and must have played a role in the deep ambivalence toward the father which we find, for instance, in Erik Erikson's study of the young Luther.¹⁹ In the Jewish experience, this sort of harsh discipline is associated with an agent outside the family. Thus when the father and mother support the melamed, the child feels a sense of betrayal, an emotion which all the memoirists later experience in their marriages. There is a persistent tension in these works between the "good parents" who protect the child against a cruel world and a seemingly inexplicable alliance of these parents with the hostile values of society.

The heder is the first experience of separation from the parents and the memoirs invariably describe it in such tragic terms. But this separation is only a premonition of the more traumatic separation that will come with marriage. Curiously, however, the period of engagement, which usually lasted two years, is treated as the culmination of the idyllic childhood. Some maskilim describe experiencing feelings similar to romantic love toward their prospective brides, usually before they actually met them.²⁰ It may well be that the social expectations placed on marriage were the causes of these seemingly premature feelings. And, in fact, the maskilim are quick to add that they themselves had no notions of love whatsoever at this age. Although the maskilim report these feelings many years after the event when they had already been exposed to a European vocabulary of love, they were not merely literary inventions since many of these marriages ultimately failed. A failed marriage would tend to sour one's memory of the engagement period, so the persistence of more positive memories suggests that they were genuine and not later

retrojections. Here perhaps is some evidence that feelings of romantic attraction were permitted and even encouraged by traditional society as long as they took place within the framework of a *shiddukh* (engagement). Certainly the Yiddish chapbooks of this period support such an argument when they relate Jewish love stories between couples who are fated from birth to be united.²¹ Instead of dismissing the existence of romantic love in traditional Jewish life, we might consider the possibility that it was allowed to flourish within certain definite constraints.

If the period of engagement lent itself to a kind of puerile romance at a safe distance, the marriage itself seemed literally a death knell to all erotic feelings. The maskilim report the understandable fear of the two barely pubescent or probably even prepubescent children forced into marital relations, frequently without the slightest knowledge of what was expected of them. Guenzburg relates how his grandfather used the sexual symbols of the Kabbalah to try to instruct him about the birds and the bees. In virtually all of the memoirs, the trauma of premature sexuality seems to have made a mature relationship with the new wife extraordinarily difficult, and in some cases paved the way to later divorce. The failure of eroticism in many of these marriages led to sexual dysfunction in some cases, such as Guenzburg's. When the maskilim came later to adopt European ideals of romantic love, their own premature encounter with eros created a bitter tension between ideology and reality.

Yet it was not only the problems of relating to their new wives that plagued these memoirists: equally difficult were the separation from parents and adaptation to the new in-laws. Here the problems of the heder were magnified manyfold. We have to remember that most wedding contracts stipulated a certain period during which the in-laws would support the young husband as a student. He would live in their house together with his new wife. The length of this period of *kest* varied according to the relative wealth of the parties, but it typically covered a substantial portion of adolescence. Thus, during this stormy stage of life, the boy lived not with his biological parents but with in-laws. We know from the literature on the English public school what it meant to spend one's adolescence out of the home or, closer to our situation, what was the historical experience of apprentices and house servants separated from parents at an early age. Young Jewish boys experienced much of this trauma, but as sons-in-law, their situation was at once better and worse. They could be treated as a prize possession and pampered. Or, as the cases of most of the maskilim, as Solomon Maimon, Guenzburg, and Lilienblum attest, the in-laws could take over the function of the melamed as a persecutor.

Maimon describes the brutal treatment he experienced at the hands of his mother-in-law (the memoirs frequently blame the mothers-in-law much more than fathers-in-law).²² Here the domestic politics are characterized by quite a bit of physical violence, unlike the remembered childhoods of the authors. The young married man is treated like a child, although not as he was treated in his own childhood. The authors experience a distinct tension between their new status as married "adults" and infantilizing treatment at the hands of their in-laws.

The memoirs discussed here were all written by men so that we have ignored the problems which the young wives must have faced caught between their parents and their new husbands. The autobiography of Pauline Wengeroff, which is one of the very few we have that was written by a woman who grew up in the mid-nineteenth century, suggests that the problems of growing up Jewish in this family situation were perhaps as difficult for girls as for boys.²³ There is also a fascinating case from the nineteenth-century responsa literature of a young town girl who comes to live with her husband's family in the countryside (the reverse of the usual situation where the boy went into the girl's household).²⁴ Disconsolate at leaving her family and lonely in the rural setting, she was seduced by her father-in-law while her husband was off at school. Unfortunately, no such racy tale can be found in the reverse situation of the young maskilim.

Hence the natural conflicts which adolescents experience with their parents involved not the biological parents, but for most male Jews of traditional society, the in-laws. Once again, when the maskilim turn this situation into an ideological struggle, they bifurcate the family into the "good" biological family of their childhood and the "bad" family of their in-laws. It is their entrance into the latter which seems to cut off all hope and create feelings of despair and impotence. It is also typically during this period that they begin to discover Haskalah ideas and in most cases come into severe conflict with their in-laws. Thus it is not surprising that the polemic against early marriage which one finds in many Haskalah texts should have such a strong biographical dimension. The Haskalah represented an avenue of escape from the pressure-cooker of the adoptive family and it was an escape that allowed the maskilim to attack the very social system which had torn them out of their parents' arms, first to subject them to the heder and then to the prison of an early marriage. It might equally be argued that Hasidism and the yeshivot also offered avenues of escape from the life of the traditional family during adolescence, but they did not provide weapons of direct criticism. No wonder that some of the maskilim found their way to the Haskalah through the court of the Zaddik or the study hall of the yeshivah.

The system of controlled early marriage therefore naturally formed the focus of the Haskalah program of reform. It is impossible to understand the theory of productivization of the Jews without a new system of marriage. For the early maskilim, the old system of marriage put a premium on talmudic scholarship, both in its hierarchy of marital virtues and in the rewards of marriage. Instead of gaining a worthwhile profession, the young married man was expected to study. Financial support would come from his in-laws and later his wife. The maskilim focused on this practice in their critique of traditional society. For instance, in Smolenskin's *Ha-To'eh be-Darkhei ha-Hayyim*, a young Hasid proclaims to a maskil who wants to know how he supports himself: "Is my mother-in-law paralyzed that I should have to earn a living? Until the day the worms take up residence in her corpse, she will go on working and supplying our needs."²⁵ The maskilim advocated destroying this system by creating an adolescence to be dedicated to gaining an occupation. Marriage would come later, only when the boy could himself support his wife. Adolescence would thus become a time of some autonomy, or at least a period when the perceived constraints of family would be delayed.

It should be added that the Orthodox world was beginning to come to similar conclusions. Where the general belief in the Middle Ages was that a youth might devote himself more energetically to study if he was married, a number of rabbinic authorities such as the author of the *Arukh ha-shulhan* argued that study must precede marriage (a position which has support in the talmudic dictum: "Can he have a millstone around his neck and study Torah?"²⁶ The age of marriage of yeshivah students at the great Lithuanian yeshivot rose to twenty-five toward the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most important Rosh Yeshiva of the period, Naphtali Zvi Berlin of the Volozhin yeshivah, claimed that early marriage was medically unsound, even if earlier generations had been up to it (this is a view he probably got from Jacob Emden, who in turn may have had it from eighteenth-century medical treatises).²⁷

The connection between productivization and marriage in Haskalah ideology had a further dimension. The maskilim saw traditional marriage as a commercial transaction unsuited to the modern world. Instead of making money by productive labor or capitalist initiative, the focus of Jewish financial transactions was the shiddukh. The maskilim were particularly hostile to the institution of the *shadkhan* (matchmaker), who represented for them a type of *batlan*, or unproductive parasite. This image of marriage as a financial transaction had considerable justification as we can see by referring to Jacob Emden's autobiography, one of the most candid personal sources from the traditional world.²⁸ Much of Emden's account is taken up with the tedious financial details of various

shiddukhim, transactions which were frequently the largest in the life of the traditional Jew. One might note that despite the hostility of the maskilim toward the shadkhan and the public financial negotiations around the shiddukh, they themselves all too often resorted to the same practices. Thus, Y. L. Peretz's father, who was a maskil, arranged his son's marriage in the traditional fashion, and Abraham Mapu's letters to his brother are filled with descriptions of the wealth of various women he tried to marry off to his brother. Even Moses Mendelssohn, who boasted that his own marriage did not require a shadkhan, is said to have taken a shiddukh commission.²⁹

But if the maskilim did not live up to their own ideology, they at least wanted to remove marriage from the marketplace. Let us look at two didactic Haskalah novels. Israel Aksenfeld's Yiddish novel *Dos Shterntikhl*³⁰ is all about the tensions between the old commercial values, represented by the marital headband with its valuable stones, and the new values of capitalist commerce. As Dan Miron has pointed out, the former is based on fixed wealth and the latter on liquid.³¹ In this novel, women represent medieval values. The hero, Mikhl, overcomes these values by marrying the heroine but presenting her with a *shterntikhl* (headband) of false pearls. Once the *shterntikhl* and all the values it represents are shown to be bogus, the new capitalist spirit which Mikhl has acquired in Germany can emerge triumphant.

In a similar way, Mendele's first Hebrew novel, *Ha-Avot ve-ha-Banim* (1868), weds new commercial values with free choice in marriage. Women, says Mendele, should no longer be treated as commodities to be bought and sold by their parents; instead, Jews must learn to relate to true commodities. The novel, which is explicitly based on Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, is about the generational conflict instigated by the Haskalah. For Mendele, this conflict is an essential ingredient of progress. At the end of the novel, the hero and heroine are finally engaged after numerous misadventures and receive the blessings of the patriarch Ephraim. His death a symbolic eight days later is like an inverted *Brit Milah* (circumcision ceremony) which signifies the birth of a new set of values and the triumph of a new generation.

Influenced by the nascent movement of Russian feminism, the Jewish writers of the 1860s and 1870s, such as Y. L. Gordon and Lilienblum, tried to liberate the Jewish woman from the bonds of traditional marriage. Gordon's poem *Al Kozo Shel Yod* probably remains the most eloquent denunciation of the oppression of women by Jewish law and is certainly the first attempt to write from a woman's point of view—a stance that the earlier Haskalah was unable to adopt since it typically treated women as allegories for the medieval world it despised.

Lilienblum also wrote a number of bitter manifestos against the traditional view of women, denouncing in particular what he calls the wife as "chamberpot" (*avit shel shofekhin*).³² He argues that the functions traditional Judaism attributed to married women could as well be performed by a servant.

Just as the Haskalah advocated taking marriage out of the marketplace, so it preached taking women out of commerce. A moderate maskil like Mapu could still trumpet the business skills of prospective matches to his brother,³³ but more radical writers like Guenzburg and Ayzik Meyer Dik were not so compromising. In one of his didactic letter formularies, Guenzburg praises the customs of countries where men work and women stay at home; in his own country, he complains, the girls are active in business and their morals have deteriorated.³⁴ Similarly, Dik, the Yiddish pulp novelist, saw the marketplace as bad for feminine morals. In one of his novels he writes with a characteristic lack of subtlety: "The women of Israel and their daughters sit and sell all kinds of silk and linen and everyone who comes to buy wants to taste the taste of a virgin and possess her."³⁵ Commerce was the midwife of female promiscuity. Both marriage and women must be decommercialized.

Those familiar with the history of the European family will immediately recognize the bourgeois impulse in this view of women and the family. We have here a Jewish variant on the notion that a woman's place is in the home. If the maskilim directed their polemics against a specifically Jewish system of marriage and family, their goal was the same as that of other nineteenth-century writers on the family. They advocated such bourgeois values as privacy and chastity. Here we encounter an interesting tension in Haskalah thought: although the maskilim advocated romantic love and free choice in marriage, their erotic desires were severely curtailed by values of almost puritanical restraint.

It is worthwhile reflecting for a moment on the meaning of such a bourgeois family given the background of the maskilim. The position of women in this new family was clearly less powerful than in the traditional family, or at least in the *image* of the traditional family we find in the memoirs and fiction of the Haskalah. Where the maskilim experienced their mothers-in-law, and to a lesser extent wives, as powerful and domineering, they construct a family in which power implicitly lies in the hands of the husband. Their revolt against the traditional family is a revolt against matrilocality, or at least the version of matrilocality that they experienced as young husbands.

The maskilim contrasted their bourgeois aspirations with a peculiar vision of traditional Jewish life. Where the typical image of traditional Judaism is of strictly controlled sexuality, the maskilim describe it as

shockingly promiscuous. Such accusations against traditional society were particularly common in the Haskalah attacks on Hasidism. Joseph Perl, perhaps the most abusive critic of Hasidism in the early nineteenth century, believed that because the Hasidim focused all their attention on God and the Zaddik, they had abandoned their families.³⁶ Perl was particularly critical of the allegedly pornographic language of Hasidic theology (he deliberately distorted Hasidic texts to make them much more explicitly erotic).³⁷ Moreover, in his *Megalleh Temirin* (1819), two of the many interwoven plots involve promiscuous behavior by the Hasidim (in one case, two Hasidim rape and impregnate a Gentile woman; in another, the son of the rebbe sleeps with a Jewish woman). What Perl seems to be suggesting is that Hasidism has broken the bounds of sexual propriety on two fronts: its theology is obscenely erotic and its followers' behavior is promiscuous. He implies that the first leads to the second. On both the religious and social planes, all morality has broken down and the family is on the road to destruction. The maskilim pose here not as the critics of the family but as its redeemers; what they really have in mind is the bourgeois and not the traditional family.

It is curious indeed that the maskilim should have attacked Hasidism, of all movements, for unbridled eroticism. If anything, Hasidism was much more puritanical than mainstream rabbinic Judaism, at least if one is to judge from such Hasidic writers as Elimelech of Lysensk and Nachman of Bratslav. Hasidism celebrated the emotions over the intellect but redirected erotic feelings toward God. Here is a classic case of control and displacement of eroticism through theology. It might not be idle to speculate that the maskilim saw in Hasidism something uncomfortably close to home. Adolescents from the same general background as the Hasidim, they no doubt experienced the same erotic tensions which Hasidism had rechanneled. Where Hasidism confined dangerous erotic impulses to the love of God, the maskilim tried to do the same in an idealized image of the chaste bourgeois family.

Yet the escape to the family ultimately proved a personal and intellectual failure for the maskilim. Analysis of the literature of the end of the nineteenth century would be the subject of another chapter, but we should at least remember Baruch Kurzweil's shrewd observation that the heroes of the stories of Berdichevsky, Brenner, Gneissin, and others seem caught in perpetual adolescence.³⁸ The *Lebensphilosophie* of the end of the century demanded that eros be regarded as the touchstone of life. Yet the tortured and unsuccessful attempts at love which one finds in this fiction belie the bombastic philosophy it sought to serve.

The themes of sexual frustration and alienation in this literature are reflected in the biographies of the maskilim throughout the nineteenth

century. The trauma of adolescent marriage was all too frequently followed by divorce. Although I have not done a statistical study of the divorce rate among the maskilim, my impression from reading dozens of biographies and memoirs is that it was well above 30 percent.³⁹ In some cases, the frustrated youth left his wife in order to pursue Haskalah; in others, angry in-laws, upon discovering the boy's attraction to Haskalah, coerced a divorce. Yet the breakup of these marriages did not always lead to more successful second marriages. For these generations, mature eroticism often seemed unattainable. The only extramarital affair I know of from the Haskalah—that of Lilienblum—remained platonic and largely epistolary.

We cannot know whether the high divorce rate was a consequence of Haskalah or if, conversely, Haskalah may have been one result of unhappy marriages. One suspects that it was something of both. Yet the fact remains that in their literature as in their lives, the maskilim could not sustain the kind of family that was their ideal. Small wonder that Abraham Mapu, in a letter to his brother, decries family life. At a time when the myth of the Jewish family was becoming a stock in trade of Western European rabbis, he wrote: "Only one in a thousand will derive joy from family life and even that will only be a facade."⁴⁰

Small wonder, too, that the maskilim should turn to male friendships to replace shattered personal lives. Mapu writes to his brother: "Yes, the love of women is strong but as its price it will take the souls of the husbands. . . . Not so is brotherhood whose candle will never be extinguished."⁴¹ Time and again, Mapu, like other Haskalah writers, uses frankly erotic language to describe male friendships.⁴² Would it be too bold to suggest that the erotic energies which the maskilim could not direct toward women found their objects in men? Perhaps this speculation may help us understand the almost sectarian comradeship which we find among the maskilim.

I have argued that the formation of a Haskalah ideology and identity must be seen as a consequence of the life experiences of the maskilim and, even more important, of their perceptions of those experiences. In their revolt against traditional society, they wanted to revolutionize the politics of marriage and the family along the lines of romantic love and bourgeois marital relations which they adopted from Western literature. We may conclude that in their personal lives they could never realize these ideals; like the generation of the desert, they were still trapped by the realities of their own childhoods and adolescences. But if they failed to successfully wed eros to enlightenment, they did radically alter the perception of the Jewish family and thus contributed mightily to the erotic sensibility of the modern Jew.

Notes

1. Jacob Katz, "Marriage and Marital Relations at the End of the Middle Ages" [Hebrew], *Zion* 10 (1944-45), 21-54. In addition, see his "Family, Kinship, and Marriage Among Ashkenazim in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 1 (1959), 4-22. In this article, Katz extends the analysis of the 1945 essay to include Eastern Europe. A summary of these arguments can also be found in his *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York, 1961), chaps. 14, 15.
2. See Azriel Shohat, *Im Hilufei Tekufot* (Jerusalem, 1960), pp. 162-73. There is a good deal of debate over Shohat's thesis. Katz has suggested that what Shohat found among German Jews in the late seventeenth century was no more than deviations from the rabbinic norms which only changed with the Mendelssohnian Enlightenment. A synthesis of the Katz and Shohat positions might argue that deviance is a necessary prerequisite to new norms.
3. "Population," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 13, cols. 866-903 and the bibliography found there.
4. Natalie Z. Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," *Past and Present* 50 (1971), 41-75; Richard Trexler, "Ritual in Florence: Adolescence and Salvation in the Renaissance," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus (Leiden, 1974), pp. 200-64.
5. Katz, *Zion*, passim.
6. Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York, 1958, 1962), pp. 14, 41-42.
7. Yehezkel Kotik, *Mayne Zichrones* (Warsaw, 1913), vol. 1, pp. 110ff.
8. For Eastern Europe, see primarily Mordechai Levin, *Arkhei Hevra ve-Kalkalah ba-Ideologiya shel Tekufat ha-Haskalah* (Jerusalem, 1975); J. S. Raisin, *The Haskalah Movement in Russia* (Philadelphia, 1913); and Rafael Mahler, *Ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Haskalah* (Merhaviya, 1961).
9. Abraham Gottlober, *Zikhronot u-Masa'ot*, ed. R. Goldberg (Jerusalem, 1976), vol. 1, p. 85. Gottlober describes how the marriage brokers acted to force a low marriage age by pressuring parents to accept matches. The typical goal was to celebrate the Bar Mitzvah and marriage at the same party. Since a two-year engagement was considered necessary, the *shiddukh* (engagement) was often concluded when the boy was eleven.
10. See Adrejs Plakans and Joel M. Halpern, "An Historical Perspective on Eighteenth Century Jewish Family Households in Eastern Europe," in Paul Ritterband, ed., *Modern Jewish Fertility* (Leiden, 1981), pp. 18-32. The classic model for age of marriage is J. Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," in D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History* (Chicago, 1965). See also Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (2nd ed., New York, 1971), pp. 84-112.
11. On the Polish enlighteners, see Jacob Goldberg, "Jewish Marriages in Old Poland in the Public Opinion of the Enlightenment Period" [Hebrew], *Galed* 4-5 (1978), 25-33. On rabbinical opinion, see Ya'akov Emden, *She'elat Yavez* (Altona, 1738-59), Q. 14, p. 18; and Yehezkel Landau, *Noda be-Yehudah*, Part 2 (Prague, 1811), Q. 54, p. 63. Some of the early marriages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may have been a result of "panics" (*bahalot*) caused by

rumors that the government was about to legislate minimum marriage ages. See Israel Halpern, "Panic Marriages in Eastern Europe" [Hebrew] in his *Yehudim ve-Yahadut be-Mizrah Eropa* (Jerusalem, 1969), pp. 289-309. Halpern probably exaggerates the number of very early marriages since the tendency of the sources is to inflate such figures. Early marriage was common even without externally induced panics, although the latter brought about marriages at the age of eight, which was normally unheard of. In any case, the children typically were not brought together until they reached legal maturity. Halpern also contends that governmental decrees may have played a role in the eventual rise in marital age. While this may have been true in Bohemia where such regulations went into effect in the eighteenth century, it was not true in Russia where age of nuptiality was influenced by other causes.

12. See Shaul Stampfer, *Shelosha Yeshivot Lita'ot be-Me'ah ha-19* (unpublished dissertation, Hebrew University, 1981), Appendix. Stampfer brings evidence of the age of yeshivah students during the nineteenth century, which is some measure of the intellectual elite. A broader analysis of age of marriage in Russia between 1867 and 1902 can be found in Jacques Silber, "Some Demographic Characteristics of the Jewish Population in Russia at the end of the Nineteenth Century," *Jewish Social Studies* 42 (summer-fall, 1980), 277-78.

13. Landau, *Noda be-Yehudah*, part 2, Q. 52, pp. 45-46.

14. Mordechai Aaron Guenzburg, *Aviezer* (Vilna, 1863); Abraham Ber Gottlober, *Zikhronot*; and M. L. Lilienblum, *Ketavim Autobiografiim*, 3 vols., ed. S. Breiman (Jerusalem, 1970). Guenzburg (1795-1846) began his memoir in 1828 but did not complete it. Gottlober (1810-1899) published the first part of his autobiography in 1881 and the second in 1886, but the section on his youth and marriage seems to have been written in 1854. Lilienblum (1843-1910) is a generation later. His *Hatte'ot Ne'urim* ("Sins of Youth"), which is the relevant part of his autobiography, appeared in 1876 and, as such, is the only one of these works to have been written close to the period of life described (Lilienblum actually wrote the work in 1872-73).

15. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962).

16. Gottlober, p. 93.

17. On Guenzburg, see Alan Mintz, "Guenzburg, Lilienblum and the Shape of Haskalah Autobiography," *AJS Review* 4 (1979), 71-110. Mintz mistakenly thinks that Guenzburg's work ends with a resolution, when in fact the cure breaks down in the last two pages. But Mintz's treatment of these two autobiographies is by far the best recognition of the deliberate literary character of these works. See additionally Samuel Werses, "The Patterns of Autobiography in the Period of the Haskalah" [Hebrew], *Gilyonot* 17 (1945), 175-83.

18. Shemarya Levin, *Forward from Exile*, trans. Maurice Samuel (Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 51-52. Levin (1867-1935) relates how this discipline created adultlike behavior. Children attended the heder for most of the day and saw their parents for only an hour or so in the evenings. Because the heder was for boys only, it sharpened the separation between boys and girls.

19. Erikson, 63-79. See also Lloyd deMause, "The Evolution of Childhood," in Lloyd deMause, ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York, 1974), pp. 1-74; and David Hunt, *Parents and Children in History* (New York, 1970), pp. 133-48.

20. Guenzburg, 54; Gottlob, 94–95.
21. This literature is described in David Roskies, *Ayzik-Meyer Dik and the Rise of Yiddish Popular Literature* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1975), chap. 1.
22. Solomon Maimon, *An Autobiography*, ed. Moses Hadas (New York, 1947), pp. 31–33. Maimon's autobiography was first published in 1792–93.
23. Pauline Wengeroff, *Memoiren einer Grossmutter* (Berlin, 1913), pp. 100ff. Wengeroff's own marriage was a combination of old and new value systems. Although she was engaged in the usual way, she wrote love letters to her fiancé and spent time with him unchaperoned. She speculates that Nicholas I's edicts of 1845 requiring Jews to adopt modern clothing had an influence on marriage customs. Wengeroff came from an already partially enlightened family and all her children went on to convert to Christianity. Thus her testimony cannot be regarded as representative for the maskilim, but should rather be seen as evidence of changes among the assimilating merchant class.
24. Haim Halbershtam, *Divrei Haim* (Lemberg, 1875), Q. 28, p. 97. Halbershtam (1793–1876) was the founder of a Hasidic dynasty in Zanz, Galicia, in the first half of the nineteenth century.
25. Smolenskin, *Ha-To'eh be-Darkhei ha-Hayyim* (Warsaw, 1905), part 3, pp. 22ff. Translated in David Patterson, "Hasidism in the Nineteenth-Century Novel," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5 (1960), 367–68.
26. Yehiel Michael Epstein, *Arukh ha-Shulhan: Even ha-Ezer* (1905–6), Sec. 1, P. 11:3. Epstein claims that by his day (beginning of the twentieth century) the custom of child marriage had virtually disappeared. The main reason for early marriage was to prevent masturbation, but Epstein holds that "in these generations, the instincts have decreased" so that such preventive measures are no longer necessary.
27. Naphtali Zvi Berlin, *Ha'amek Davar* (Vilna, 1879–80), commentary on Exodus 1:7. For Emden's view, see the responsa cited in n. 11.
28. Jacob Emden, *Migilat Sefer*, ed. David Kahana (Warsaw, 1897). Emden wrote his autobiography around 1752.
29. Y. L. Peretz, "Zikhronot," in *Kol Kitvei Y. L. Peretz* (Tel Aviv, 1957), p. 146; Ben-Zion Dinur, ed., *Mikhtavei Avraham Mapu* (Jerusalem, 1970), pp. 184ff; and Katz, *Zion*, p. 50.
30. See the excellent translation by Joachim Neugroschel in his *The Shtetl* (New York, 1979), pp. 49–172. *Dos Shtetl* was probably written in the 1840s but was prevented from publication by Hasidic pressure. It was finally published in Leipzig in 1862.
31. Dan Miron, *Ben Hazon le-Emet* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 177–216.
32. Lilienblum, *Ketavim*, vol. 2, pp. 89–93.
33. Mapu, *Mikhtavim*, 5 August 1862, p. 185.
34. M. A. Guenzburg, *Kiryat Sefer* (Vilna, 1847), p. 59.
35. Quoted in Levin, *Arkhei Hevra*, p. 152. For a fuller treatment of this theme in Dik and other Yiddish authors, see David Roskies, "Yiddish Popular Literature and the Female Reader," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10:4 (1977), 852–58.

Roskies quotes a similar passage from Dik's *Royze Finkl* (1874): "Our Jews only consider it shameful for [a Jewish woman] to flirt with a young Jewish fellow, but not with a Christian, because in the latter case, it is a matter of business."

36. Joseph Perl, *Uiber das Wesen der Sekte Chassidim*, ed. Abraham Rubinstein (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 125, 146.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–43.
38. Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutinu ha-Hadashah: Hemshekh o-Ma'apekhah?* (Tel Aviv, 1971), pp. 234ff.
39. Guenzburg claims that early marriage produced a very high rate of divorce: out of every two women, one has had two husbands. See *Aviezer*, 104. Because of his own unhappy marriage, Guenzburg's testimony is suspect, but if we look only at the biographies of the maskilim, we find that his observation is not far from the mark.
40. Mapu, *Mikhtavim*, 29 October 1860, p. 133.
41. *Ibid.*, 12/26 January 1861, p. 138.
42. See *ibid.*, letters to Shneur Sachs, 1843, pp. 3–7, which include a "love" poem to friendship. See also his letter to his brother of 7 November 1857, p. 23, in which he writes: "My right hand embraces you and my lips kiss your lips." One must be careful not to impute too much to these conventions of epistolary style. What is significant is that such language seems appropriate between men but not between men and women. The modern ideal of friendship owes much to the German Enlightenment, and the language of friendship we find here is no doubt borrowed and translated. Whatever the particular emotional valence of these friendships, it is clear that they provided emotional outlets inconceivable within marriage. A comprehensive study of this neglected theme would have to include such sources as literature and letter formularies, in both of which there seems to be an abundance of evidence for male friendship.