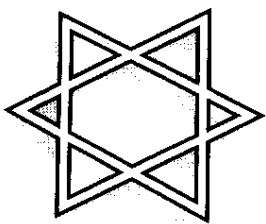


## Jewish Life in Modern Times

3

### The Hasidim and Mitnagdim

By the start of the modern period, Jews were established throughout Europe, North Africa, and certain Asian countries. Despite the lessening of anti-Jewish feeling in many places, the large communities of Eastern Europe were to suffer many changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their security was interrupted in 1648. In that year Bogdan Chmielnicki (1593-1657) was elected the leader of the



Cossacks and he led a revolution against the Polish aristocracy. The Jews, some of whom were stewards of the great estates, were very much identified with the interests of the upper classes and took the brunt of the onslaught. It was a massacre. Probably as many as a quarter of the Jewish population of Poland was murdered during the course of the upheaval and many others were sold in the slave markets of Constantinople (today's Istanbul). Poland ceased to be a secure refuge.

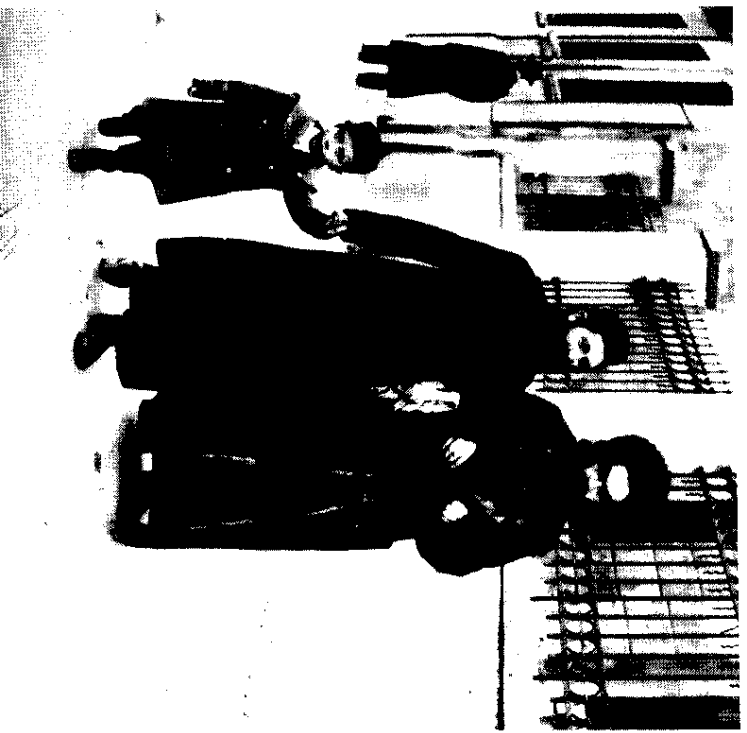
History shows that instability promotes messianic yearnings, and this may explain the phenomenon of a second trauma which followed in the wake of the first. Shabbetai Zevi (1626-76), a gifted but unbalanced scholar, had attracted many followers. He had been born in Smyrna on the Ninth Day of Av (Av 9), the traditional birthdate of the Messiah. After the horrors of the Chmielnicki revolution, Jews everywhere were hoping

for the immediate advent of a messianic redeemer. Shabbetai was expelled from his own community in 1651, but by 1665 he had been recognized as the Messiah by Nathan Benjamin Levi of Gaza (1644-80). Nathan of Gaza (in southern Palestine) believed that he himself was the Prophet Elijah, the forerunner. He sent messages throughout the Jewish world, promising that soon the Turkish Sultan would be deposed and that the Twelve Tribes of Israel would be united once more. The current difficulties he described as the "birth pangs of the Messiah ..."

World Jewry was in an uproar. The date of redemption was set for June 18, 1666. A Christian contemporary described how he "perceived a strange transport in the Jews, none of them attending to any business... All their discourses, all their dreams and disposal of their affairs tended to no other design, but a reestablishment in the Land of Promise, to greatness and glory, wisdom and doctrine of the Messiah." However, when Shabbetai landed near the Ottoman capital of Constantinople, he was promptly arrested. He was taken to the court of the Grand Vizier where he was given the choice between being put to death or converting to Islam. Shabbetai and his wife chose to become Muslims and he finally died in exile in Albania.

Amazingly, this was not the end of the matter. Nathan of Gaza continued to insist that Shabbetai was the Messiah and that his conversion was a part of the ongoing battle with the forces of evil. **Shabbetean** beliefs continued to be held in some quarters and some Jews followed their master into Islam, forming the *Dönme* ("Apostate sect"). A *Dönme* community existed in Istanbul until the mid twentieth century. Nonetheless, for most Jews, the whole episode was devastating. Shabbetai was not the Messiah. God had not sent his anointed one to save Israel and the world. It seemed as if *Talmudic* scholarship and traditional rabbinic learning had failed them. The Jews of Eastern Europe were looking for a new type of Judaism.

They found it in the teachings of Israel ben Eliezer (c.1700-60), known as the *Baal Shem Tov* ("Master of the Good Name") or Besht. He grew up in the Carpathian mountains (in present-day Romania) and his mystical preaching attracted a



*Rabbis in Lodz, Poland, walking to the synagogue on Sabbath in 1915. The Sabbath is a day of rest and an occasion for prayer, study, and refreshment of the spirit. Synagogue services include readings from the Torah and the Books of the Prophets.*

group of followers. He insisted that the study of *Torah* should be an act of devotion and that the whole of daily life could be an offering to God. In particular, he emphasized that worship should be a source of joy; he used to say that his disciples should serve God with gladness since a joyful man is overflowing with love for his fellows and for all God's creatures. The Besht's followers were known as the *Hasidim* ("pious ones") and the movement spread throughout Eastern Europe. Various new leaders emerged and, in the course of time, leadership became

hereditary, handed down from father to son. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, probably almost half of Eastern Europe's Jewry identified itself with the new movement.

*Hasidim* loved to explore the Kabbalah, the main Jewish mystic tradition. Once an esoteric tradition, with origins going back to the last days of the Tanakh, it had developed mainly in Sephardi lands. Scholars now believe that it both influenced and was in turn influenced by Islamic Sufism and Christian pietism. Kabbalah's prime books were *Sefer Bahir* (Book of Bahir) and the *Zohar* (Splendor). *Hasidim* tried to open up this hitherto secret world to ordinary Jews in the *Ashkenazi* sphere. But most of all, they derived from Kabbalah the values and attributes of devotion, adherence, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

Important characteristics of *Hasidism* included rejoicing and enthusiasm which became part of the religious experience of ordinary people. It was not long before distinct *Hasidic* sects arose, each one led by a *Tzaddik* ("Righteous Man"), who is believed to be the spiritual channel through which God's grace flows. By observing the *Tzaddik*, the *Hasid* can learn how God can be worshiped in every detail of life, from tying one's shoes to eating one's food or taking a nap. As the spiritual leader of his community, the *Tzaddik* holds mass audience, gives individual advice and is supported by the donations of the faithful. Tales circulated describing the miraculous saintliness of the *Tzaddikim* and collections of their homilies were published.

The Eastern European *Hasidic* groups were decimated by the Nazi Holocaust. Nonetheless the movement survived, particularly in the United States and in Israel. Adherents are perhaps the most visible segment of the strictly Orthodox community and the men in particular are readily identifiable by their dress (black hats, beards, side curls, black suits, ritual fringes, and magnificent fur hats on the Sabbath). Among the best known groups are the *Lubavitch*, *Satmar*, *Bels*, *Bobover*, *Gur*, and *Vishnitz* (each named after their town of origin).

However, not all Jews were persuaded by *Hasidism*. Many scholars disapproved of the *Hasidic* deviations from the traditional liturgy. They deplored the setting up of separate houses

of worship away from the local synagogue and, most of all, they were appalled by the *Hasidic* neglect of painstaking textual study. These traditionalists were known as the *Minagdim* ("Opponents") and their leader was the learned *Gaon* of Vilna in Lithuania, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman (1720-97). The Vilna *Gaon*, as he was called, was himself a child prodigy and was regarded as a master of *Talmud* at the age of 13. He was determined to preserve traditional scholarship and he was a major figure in the revival of *Talmudic* study. There was bitter conflict between the *Minagdim* and the *Hasidim*. Books were burnt, decrees of excommunication were pronounced, and it was not unknown for parents to go through the rites of mourning if one of their sons joined an *Hasidic* sect.

The difference between the two groups is delightfully illustrated in a (possibly apocryphal) story about the Vilna *Gaon*. He was giving a tutorial and two boys were looking out of the window at a bird soaring through the sky. When asked what they were thinking, one boy replied that the bird made him think of the soul ascending towards Heaven. The reply was too reminiscent of *Hasidic* mysticism and the lad was told to leave the class. The other said that he was wondering what would happen if the bird dropped dead and fell on a fence boundary. To whom would the carcass belong? The Vilna *Gaon* was delighted: "God be praised for someone who knows what religion is about!" he said.

Today, hostility between the *Hasidim* and the *Minagdim* has largely disappeared. The *Hasidim* have also become learned *Talmudists* and, perhaps more importantly, a far greater threat to both these groups emerged with the advent of the Western **Enlightenment**. The Jews of Western Europe were being freed from their ancient civil disabilities and were being increasingly affected by secular culture. They were beginning to question such fundamental principles as the divine origin of *Torah*. This was an abomination to both *Minagdim* and *Hasid*. Against it they were prepared to stand firm together and the late twentieth-century strictly Orthodox community contains both *Hasidic* and non-*Hasidic* members.

### Enlightenment and Reform

While the *Minagdim* and the *Hasidim* were fighting their battles in Eastern Europe, great social changes were occurring in the West. In the Holy Roman Empire, under Emperor Joseph II (1741-90), an edict of toleration was issued. Jews were no longer to be confined to special places of residence, restricted to their own schools or made to wear distinctive clothing. Similarly, in 1791, the National Assembly of France granted full citizenship rights of the Jewish population and it was agreed that there should be full freedom of religion. Napoleon (1769-1821) went one step further, once he had taken over the French government. In 1806, he convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables and, the following year, he revived the Sanhedrin, the traditional supreme body of Jewish government. From then on the French Jewish community was organized much as if it were a department of the civil service.

Napoleon himself was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, but, despite residual Christian anti-semitism, his reforms could not be undone. Several German and French intellectuals argued for the rights of the Jews and gradually additional freedoms were procured. In 1869 the North German parliament proclaimed Jewish emancipation and by 1871 all restrictions on occupation, franchise, marriage, or residence were removed. Meanwhile, in England, the Jews had been free to conduct their own religious life as they saw fit since the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, various religious tests existed which prevented Jews from taking a full part in the political and cultural life of the nation. These were all abolished during the course of the nineteenth century and in 1858 the first Jewish Member of Parliament took his seat in the House of Commons.

While these momentous social changes were taking place, the Jews themselves were experiencing an intellectual revolution. The most influential thinker of the Jewish Enlightenment was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86). Encouraged by the Christian philosopher G. E. Lessing (1729-81), he taught that God's existence, His providence, and His gift of immortality

could all be discovered by the use of natural reason. He believed that the mission of the Jews was to call attention to the Oneness of God and to be a constant reminder to the rest of humanity of the call of ethical monotheism.

He also called for freedom of worship and the removal of state interference in religious affairs. As he put it, "Do not hold out bribes or incentives to encourage people to adopt particular theologies. Allow everyone who does not disturb the peace ... to pray to God in his own way."<sup>2</sup> At the same time he encouraged the modernization of Jewish education; he translated the Pentateuch into German and wrote an extensive Biblical commentary. Through his leadership, German Jewry became acquainted with secular European culture. He himself remained a strictly observant Jew, yet his advocacy of Jewish emancipation brought another dilemma in its wake: how far could a Jew absorb the outside world's culture before he assimilated altogether? Was it just an accident, then, that four of Mendelssohn's own six children eventually converted to Christianity?

The Jewish Enlightenment completely changed the lives of Western Jewry. No longer were they restricted in residence (ghetto) or occupation. They became knowledgeable in the ways of the secular world and many came to feel that the traditional ways of worship were no longer suitable. One result, the Reform movement, started in Germany. The financier Israel Jacobson (1768-1828) built the first Reform Temple at Seesen. There the liturgy included prayers in German, as well as choral singing. Another similar congregation was started in Hamburg in 1818, which issued its own Prayer Book. This omitted all reference to the Messiah and to the restoration of the Twelve Tribes to the Holy Land. Members of the Temple saw themselves as loyal Germans and they owed no allegiance to any other place. Meanwhile, influenced by the historical thinking of the time, some religious leaders were denying the fundamental doctrine that the *Torah* was handed down in its entirety by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. They tried to study the history of Judaism with no religious preconceptions. Others were arguing that Judaism was simply a religious tradition of ethical monotheism

and that many traditional practices no longer had any validity. They recommended modifications of the dietary laws, praying with the head uncovered, and even transferring the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday to be more like their Christian fellow citizens.

The new movement spread rapidly. The first conference for Reform rabbis had taken place by 1838. The West London synagogue for Reform Jews was founded in 1841. A Reform Rabbinical Seminary was opened in Breslau in 1854, another in Hungary in 1867, and the *Berlin Hochschule* opened its doors in 1872.

However, increasingly, the United States was to be the main centre for Reform activities. The first American Reform Temple was founded in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1824. Its liturgy was similar to that of the Hamburg Temple and its founders described its purpose as to avoid anything that might disgust well educated Israelites. Later Reform Temples were built in most major American cities. A new American Reform Prayer Book was published and the first conference of American rabbis took place in Philadelphia in 1869. The Hebrew Union College, the first American Rabbinical Seminary, opened in 1875 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The principles of American Reform Judaism were laid down in Pittsburgh in 1885. It was agreed that the Jewish tradition should take account of the findings in modern scholarship, that only the moral laws of the Pentateuch were binding for all time, that Jews should no longer look for the coming of the Messiah or the restoration of the land of Israel, and that the dietary laws and the laws of ritual purity were anachronistic. This provided a credal framework for American Reform Judaism for the next fifty years. By the end of the nineteenth century, many Jews of North America were almost indistinguishable from their fellow citizens in dress, manners, education, and aspiration. In this century Reform Judaism has undergone further developments and a variety of credal platforms and new Prayer Books have been produced.

The Orthodox did not allow this transformation to take place without a fight. They were horrified by the new developments and feared that participation in secular culture could all

too easily lead to assimilation. The best known German Orthodox thinker of the time was Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-88). He himself had been educated at the University of Bonn. Nevertheless he defended Orthodoxy, arguing that the purpose of life was not to attain happiness, but to serve God. The *Torah*, he insisted, was of divine origin and must be the guiding principle of Jewish life. At the same time he believed that it was possible to be fully observant, while being conversant with modern culture. This position came to be known as Modern Orthodoxy. There could be no compromise on the doctrine of the God-given nature of the *Torah* and the Reform movement must be unequivocally condemned. At the same time, Jews could also have the benefit of a secular education and could enjoy the fruits of modern culture.

Although Modern Orthodoxy was highly influential in Western Europe, the Jews of Poland, Russia, and the Baltic States were less affected by it. Western Europe had longer traditions of democratic compromise; by contrast, in the more radical traditions of Eastern Europe, disaffected Jews chose socialist secularism as their preferred tool of protest against Orthodoxy. Change was inevitable, but it was to come not as a result of political emancipation, but in response to anti-semitism and the opportunity of an entirely new life across the Atlantic Ocean.

### Anti-semitism and Zionism

It was hoped that anti-semitism would disappear with the transformation of Jewish life in Western Europe. This was not to be the case. Instead the nature of Jew-hatred altered. In the previous centuries, the Jews were regarded as social outcasts. The Christian Gospels taught that the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah and had sent him to his crucifixion. The vast majority of Christians could not understand why the Jews persisted in their ancient faith since it had been superseded by Jesus' teaching. The Jews were seen as stubborn, obtuse, and blind to God's

grace. Yet, if a Jew converted to Christianity, attitudes immediately changed. The Jew was no longer a Jew; he or she was a Christian. She/he gained all the rights and privileges of his/her new status and, provided she/he completely rejected his/her former beliefs, she/he became a fully accepted member of Christian society.

The very term "anti-semitism" was not used until the 1870s and it described a new prejudice. The inventor of the term, Wilhelm Marr (1818-1904), insisted that the Jews were not alien because of their religion, but because they were of a different and foreign race. He believed that modern history should be understood as an ongoing battle between "native Teutonic stock" and the Semitic foreigner. By 1881 it was being claimed that the Jewish physical type was a threat to the pure-bred German nation. Jews were described as innately mercenary, egoistic, materialistic, cowardly, and degenerate. These views were spread in such publications as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This was circulated in Russia from the late 1880s and was supposedly the documents of a Jewish organization bent on world domination. Although known to be a forgery, the *Protocols* are still circulated in Russia today and are enjoying new audiences in the Arab world and among some fanatic American groups.

In the late nineteenth century, anti-semitism became an important factor in European politics. It was used by beleaguered governments to focus discontent away from the authorities. In Russia, attacks on the Jews were described as pogroms. A pogrom was an onslaught on one sector of society by another and all too often it included rape and murder as well as the destruction of property. There was a series of pogroms against the Jewish community of Russia between 1881 and 1884 after the assassination of Czar Alexander II (1818-81). The civil powers did little to help the Jews—rather they encouraged the mob and many Jews felt that the only safety lay in emigration to the New World. A second wave of Russian pogroms occurred between 1903 and 1906 and there was a third outbreak during the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war. Altogether

it has been estimated that between 1917 and 1921, as many as 150,000 Jewish people were killed by units of both the Red and the White Armies. It was not surprising that the Jews of Eastern Europe were anxious to leave. Between 1881 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, approximately two million settled in the United States, a further 350,000 in Western Europe, 200,000 in the United Kingdom, 40,000 in South Africa, 115,000 in the Argentine, and 100,000 in Canada.

Western Europe was also not immune to Jew-hatred. The Dreyfus case brought it to international notice. Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935) was a high ranking French Jewish army officer, who was accused of high treason and sentenced to life imprisonment. He consistently protested that he was innocent and it was eventually discovered that his conviction was based on false documents. Nevertheless, when he was tried again in 1899 a second guilty verdict was returned and he was only finally vindicated in 1906. The episode divided French public opinion; many found it impossible to believe that a Jew could also be a loyal Frenchman. A young journalist, Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), described the scene of the conviction vividly: "The wild screams of the street mob near the building of the military school where it was ordered that Dreyfus be deprived of his rank, still resound in my ears..."

Herzl became convinced that the only solution to anti-semitism was the foundation of a Jewish State. Palestine was chosen as the site for this Jewish state because this is where Jewry last ruled itself, and because of the biblical connections. The old dream of returning to the Promised Land had been retained in the Jewish community and was enshrined in the liturgy. It was still believed that in the days of the Messiah, the Twelve Tribes would be gathered together again and the Temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem. As early as 1882, after the first Russian pogroms, a group of Jews had left for Palestine to establish themselves as shopkeepers, artisans, and farmers. Herzl himself argued for the creation of a Jewish State by international agreement. He convened the First Zionist Conference in Basle in 1897 and devoted the rest of his short life to drumming

up diplomatic support. In fact, he himself was willing to consider other locations besides Palestine. The British were prepared to offer a tract of Uganda in Africa to the Jews and, after a visit to the poverty-stricken Jewish villages of Russia, Herzl was so desperate that he was prepared to accept. However, the proposal aroused a storm of protest at the Sixth Zionist Conference and, just before his death, Herzl was forced to affirm his commitment to Palestine.

The small Jewish population in Palestine mainly consisted of religious pilgrims in the Holy Cities, and was vastly outnumbered by Palestine's predominantly Muslim Arab population. Furthermore, the land was under Ottoman Turkish rule. Some Zionists, like the British Jewish author Israel Zangwill, seeing the indigenous Arabs as mainly itinerant nomads, called Palestine "A land without people for a people without a land." Others, though, were more far-sighted: in 1891 Ahad Ha-Am warned that Jews would not realize their dreams unless they respected the rights and aspirations of Palestinian Arabs. So with the benefit of hindsight it seems a clash was inevitable.

There is an old saying that where there are four Jews there are six opinions. This was certainly true in the Zionist movement. The **World Zionist Organization**, founded by Herzl, was the umbrella body. Socialist Jews also became members of the **Poale Zion** (the Labour Zionist party). Those of the Orthodox who were willing to participate joined the *Mizrachi* party, which was dedicated to the preservation of strictly Orthodox ways within the new State. However, the majority of Western and Eastern (except for the Orthodox) delegates to the Zionist conferences were entirely secular in outlook and this caused considerable conflict with the Orthodox Jewish establishment in Europe. Prominent early Zionists included Aaron David Gordon (1856–1922) who was determined to encourage agricultural as well as commercial settlement, the writers Ahad Ha-Am (1856–1927) and Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934) who were intent on producing a Hebrew rather than a Yiddish culture, and the socialists Nahman Syrkin (1868–1924) and Ber Borochov (1881–1917) who were encouraging the creation of

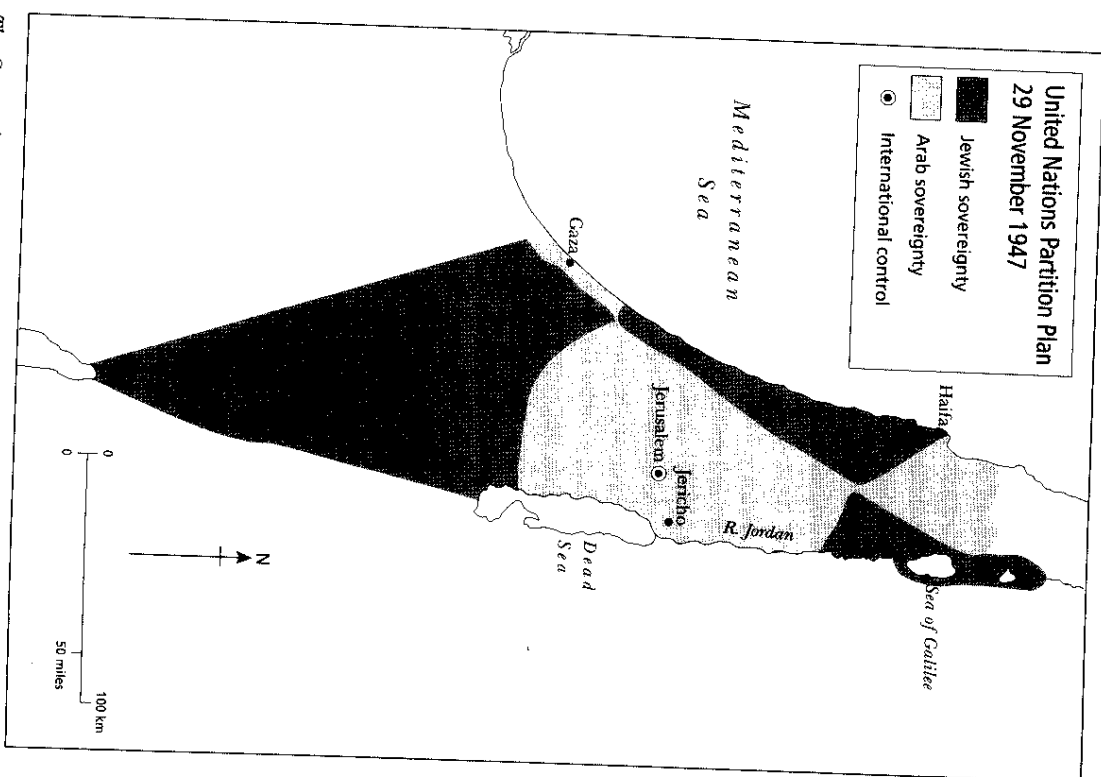
collective agricultural settlements (*Kibbutzim*) and the growth of trade unionism.

In the early days of Zionism, many of the strictly Orthodox were uneasy. In 1912 they organized the *Agudat Israel* to unite rabbis and lay people against the new movement. They maintained that the Ingathering of the Exiles could not take place until the Messiah had appeared and that it was forbidden to anticipate or to force divine deliverance. Even after the Holocaust, there were those who argued that the Zionist commitment to the ingathering of the displaced Jews of Europe was misguided since it is not possible to determine God's plan for his Chosen People prior to the coming of the Messiah.

After World War I, the newly formed League of Nations agreed that Britain should administer Palestine. The Jewish population continued to grow. In 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, the British government had promised its support for a Jewish State in Palestine. By the late 1920s, the various socialist groups had joined together to form the Israel Labour Movement. Chaim Weizman (1874-1952) was President of the World Zionist Organization and he tried to cooperate with the British. Meanwhile the Arab inhabitants of the land had become increasingly nervous of Jewish immigration and by 1936 they were launching offensives against the settlers. The situation was becoming impossible. In 1937, a British Royal Commission suggested that Palestine be partitioned between the two groups, but this was rejected in the White Paper of 1939 and Jewish immigration was substantially cut back. Nothing further could be done while the battles of World War II waged. And meanwhile calamity befell the Jews of Europe.

### Judaism in the Twentieth Century

In the 1930s both Europe and the United States were in the throes of serious economic depression. The situation was particularly bad in Germany where between 1930 and 1933 more than six million people were unemployed. The government was



The State of Israel was proclaimed in 1948 after British withdrawal. In the face of Arab opposition, the UN had drawn up a plan whereby Palestine was to be divided into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a small internationally administered zone around Jerusalem (see p. 72).

unstable and in 1933, after several ineffective coalitions, Adolf Hitler (1885-1945) was appointed Chancellor. Hitler was the leader of the National Socialist Party; the Nazis; his ideology was based on a fusion of anti-Communism and anti-semitism. He was convinced that all Jews were degenerates and parasites and he argued in his book, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), that it was the treachery of the Jews which caused Germany to lose World War I. He perceived the Jews as a demonic people, who were seeking world wide domination. As he himself put it:

The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspecting girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people ... the Jews were responsible for bringing Negroes into the Rhineland, with the ultimate intention of bastardising the white race which they hate and thus lowering its cultural and political level so that the Jew might dominate ...<sup>1</sup>

Once the Nazis had gained power, a series of anti-Jewish regulations came into force. Jews were deprived of citizenship, were forbidden to marry, or have sexual relations with, German citizens, and were compelled to register their property. Then, on the night of November 9, 1938, the government organized a concerted attack on all Jewish businesses and communal institutions. Synagogues were burnt to the ground, shops were destroyed and many individual Jews were murdered. The events of *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) made it clear to the Jews of Germany that they could expect no mercy from the Nazis. They tried to find means of escaping from the country with their families, but it was not easy. The United States also had many unemployed and was accepting very few new immigrants. The British had curtailed Jewish settlement in Palestine and the countries of Western Europe were not inclined to take in any more refugees. Families resorted to desperate measures, sending their children abroad without them to distant relations or on *Kindertransports* (child-transports).

All too many, however, were forced to stay and once World War II had broken out in September 1939, there was no escape.

The German armies overran Europe and everywhere they continued their persecution of the Jews. In Poland there was a large Jewish population and everywhere the Jews were seized and were forced to participate in a massive work program. These slave laborers toiled for seven days a week, were dressed in little more than rags, and were given totally inadequate rations. Then, once the Nazis had invaded Russia in 1941, special squadrons known as *Einsatzgruppen* were coopted to deal with the Jews. In each conquered town, the Jews were rounded up, marched out to the countryside and shot. It has been estimated that between October 1941 and December 1942 1.2 million people were murdered in this way.

However, this was not sufficiently systematic or efficient for the Nazi leaders. At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942 the "final solution of the Jewish question" was outlined and explained. A network of concentration and extermination camps was set up. From all over Europe, the Jews were rounded up and deported "for resettlement" in the East. Initially they were crammed into ghetto areas in the major cities. From there they were transferred to concentration camps. There, in the camps of Chelmo, Auschwitz, Sobibor, Majdanek, Treblinka, and Belzec, the young and fit were selected for work while the elderly, the infirm, and children were sent to the gas chambers. The workers lived in miserable conditions, in a state of perpetual fear, cold, and hunger. Once they themselves became too weak to labor they too were sent to their deaths. The camp at Auschwitz, in southern Poland, could hold 140,000 prisoners and it had five crematoria which could dispose of 10,000 bodies a day. The whole operation was conducted with ruthless efficiency and even when Germany was clearly losing the war, nothing was allowed to hinder the transportation of Jewish civilians to the camps. Altogether, it is generally thought that six million Jews died in this Holocaust.

In many places the Jews did their best to resist. There were several small-scale rebellions in the concentration camps and



the inmates of the Warsaw ghetto held out for several weeks against the might of the German Reich. Nonetheless, in most places the Jews were poor and isolated; they were surrounded by hostile neighbors and they were abandoned by the rest of the world. They had no chance. By the end of World War II, European Jewry had effectively been decimated. The old synagogues, *Yeshivot*, and centers of Jewish learning were destroyed for ever.

The demise of Eastern European Jewry and the creation of the State of Israel are two interrelated events. World Jewry rallied to the Zionist cause. Jews had fought in the British, United States, and Canadian armies but the problem of the refugee concentration camp survivors seemed to be insoluble. Also, the situation in Palestine itself was impossible. A sizeable sector of the Jewish population, under the leadership of Menahem Begin (1913-92), were prepared to employ terrorist tactics against the British administrators. On November 6, 1944, Lord Moyne, the British minister for Middle Eastern affairs, was assassinated. A rift developed between the leader of the World Zionist Organization, Chaim Weizman, and Begin over the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, but the campaign of violence continued and culminated in the hanging of two British army sergeants. The British could stand it no more. They handed over the responsibility to the newly formed United Nations.

The Americans backed the Zionists. The President, Harry S. Truman, was both personally sympathetic and anxious to secure the Jewish vote in the 1948 Presidential election. The question was first discussed in May 1947 and on November 29, the United Nations General Assembly, with both Russian and American support, agreed that Palestine should be partitioned into a Jewish and an Arab state and that Jerusalem should be an international zone (see map, p. 69). Zionists accepted the principle of partition, but Arabs did not, reasoning that partition would deny them their "national rights" over the whole land, as they claimed was guaranteed by the United Nations charter.

Immediately the Arabs began to attack the Jewish settlements, but, under the leadership of David ben Gurion (1886-



*The Western Wall is the surviving part of the outer wall of the Temple in Jerusalem. Regular services have been held there since the Middle Ages, and today it remains a place of prayer for all Jews.*

1973), the Jews consolidated their position. On May 14, 1948, the independence of the Jewish State of Palestine was declared, based both on the resolution of the United Nations and on Israel. Still the conflict continued and by 1949 the Israelis held large tracts of land beyond the frontiers designated by the United Nations. An armistice was eventually signed between Israel on the one side and Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon on the other. The peace was to be permanent.

War broke out again in 1956, in 1967 (when the Israelis captured Jerusalem and the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza

Strip, and the (Jolan Heights), and in 1973. Even today the problem of Palestinian refugees, who constituted most of the pre-war Arab population of Palestine, has still not been solved. In the 1947-8 war, more than half a million Arab refugees fled from their homes. Some found sanctuary in the surrounding countries, but too many live in temporary camps which are a constant source of discontent and guerrilla activity.

Nonetheless, today the State of Israel is perhaps more secure than at any time in its existence. Since 1978 the Egyptians have participated in the peace process. Then in 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon in order to destroy Arab guerrilla bases. This destabilized the area. Five years later, Palestinians in the occupied territories began a concentrated program of resistance (intifada) which involved stone throwing, ambushes, and selective strikes. The Israelis realized that compromises would have to be made. Beginning in 1991 further peace talks have taken place between the government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization which have raised hopes that an autonomous Arab Palestine could be created which would coexist peacefully with Israel. Talks were interrupted and the whole of Israeli society was rocked by the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by an extremist Jewish student in 1995. Peace developments may also have been threatened by the victory of the hardline Likud party in the 1996 Israeli elections. Nonetheless, despite enormous problems, there is no doubt that the international community recognizes the existence of the Jewish State of Israel and, at the same time, with pious Jews everywhere "prays for the peace of Jerusalem."<sup>5</sup>

## Jewish Beliefs and Practices

4

### God and Torah

Before embarking on a discussion of the Jewish religion, it is essential to emphasize again that by no means all people who identify as Jews are religious. There is also a wide variety of religious practice and belief within the community. What follows here is a brief description of traditional Orthodox Judaism since that is the form of Judaism which has been followed for hundreds of years. At the same time it must be remembered that many Jews in America, the home of the largest community in the world, are not Orthodox, and the Reform and Conservative movements follow their own customs and liturgies. Yet these, too, are ultimately rooted in the Hebrew Bible. In addition, many Jews practice no religion at all.

The essential belief of Judaism is that God is One. The primary prayer of the Jewish faith is the assertion of this conviction. It is known as the *Shema* from the Hebrew word for "Hear!" When they rise in the morning, when they go to bed at night, and, hopefully, on their deathbed, most Jews recite, *Shema Israel, Adonai Eloheym, Adonai Ehad!* ("Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One). This is the supreme truth, the essential message of the Scriptures and it was this unique insight that God gave to the Jewish people. As it is written in the Book of Deuteronomy, "To you it was shown that the Lord is God, there is no one other besides Him."<sup>6</sup>

