



Mourning in this "Happy Land"  
Tisha B'Av and the American Jewish  
Experience

Zev Eleff

“The great cause of Improvement in Government, in Religion, in Morals, in Literature, is the great cause of mankind. Bigotry and Despotism may rear their “miscreated fronts” to thwart your way, but the consuming beams of Truth must drive them back to their original darkness. **In this happy land, however, you have no such obstacles to oppose;—equally of laws and freedom of conscience leave you a wide and cheerful field to act upon.**”

Isaac Harby, *A Discourse Delivered before the Reformed Society of Israelites*, November 21, 1825





# THE OCCIDENT,

AND

## AMERICAN JEWISH ADVOCATE.

Vol. V.]

IYAR 5607, MAY 1847.

[No. 2.]

### SYNAGOGUE REFORMS.

IN our last we inserted a letter from our special correspondent in England, relative to the improvements required by Dr. Adler in the conducting of the worship in the Synagogues in his rabbinical see. No doubt the greater part of our readers took especial notice of the details, more particularly if they are persons belonging to the German and Polish denominations, for whose government the orders were issued by the chief Rabbi of Great Britain. And though the authority of the learned divine does not extend beyond England and its dependencies, and the rules do not properly affect the Israelites of the Portuguese form in several particulars: we still think that for all that the missive of Dr. Adler is of great moment to all our brothers in America, and wherever the English language is spoken. There are so many ties which bind together both shores of the Atlantic, the inter-communication becomes daily so much more frequent and certain, that nothing now can be matter of indifference because distance happens to separate the countries; and more particularly is this the fact with religious movements, so that when the impetus is given in one place, the visible traces of the same will be

“Thou knowest we are bereft of our country, and we must sing praises in a strange land; we have now no Jerusalem, no temple, no high priest, and no burnt offering for thy worship. But, oh Lord! Though despisest not a repentant heart, therefore wilt Thou hear our prayers which we will offer up to Thee within the walls of the house, to be erected on this foundation.”

“Rev. Mr. Rosenfeld’s Address at Charleston,” *Occident* (May 1847): 78-79

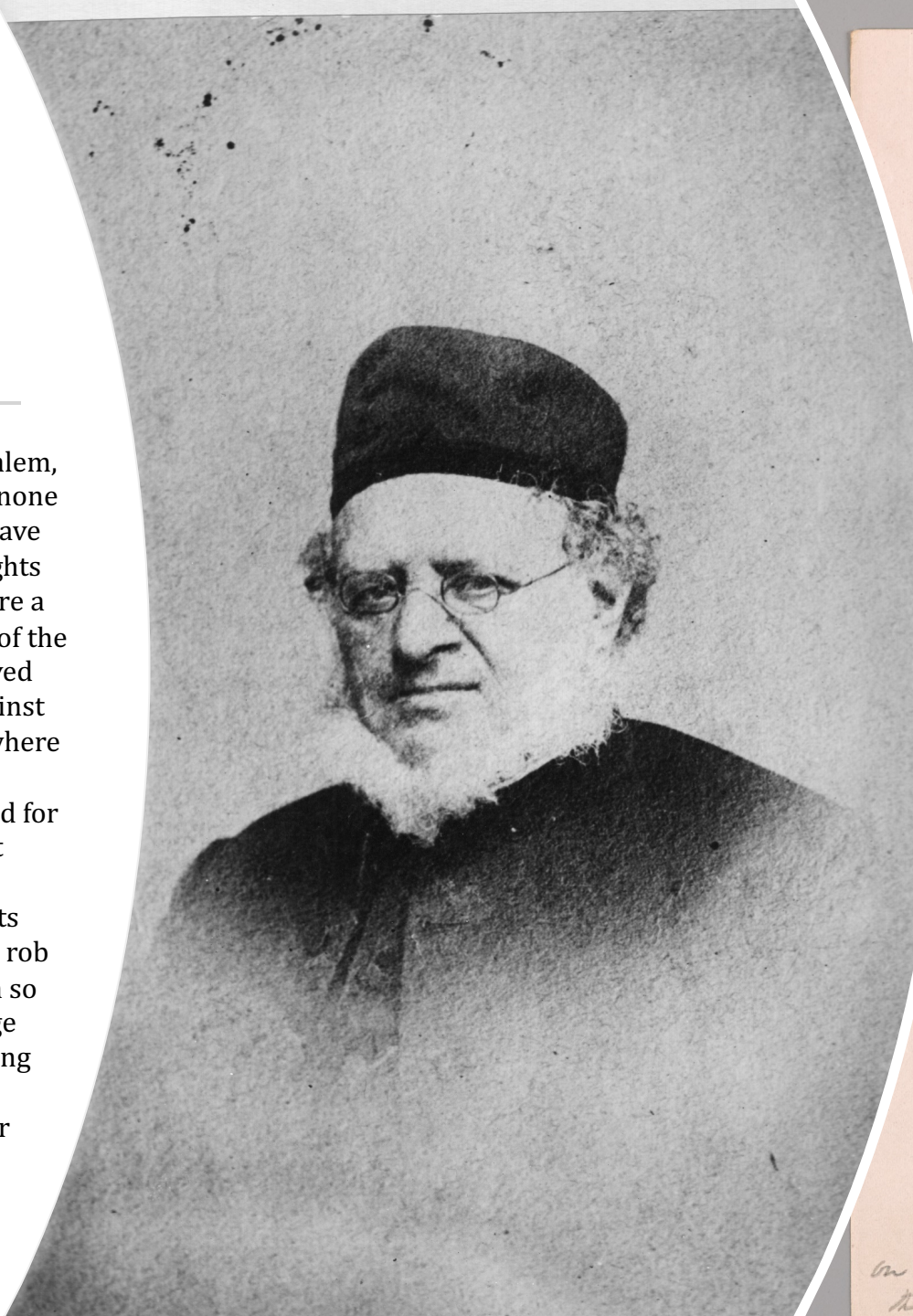
“I have not seen the paper you sent containing an account of the Charleston congregation but have heard some passages quoted that are certainly unorthodox. “This is our temple, this is our city, this is our Palestine.” Is it possible a Jew can write or speak so? Then where is the truth of prophesy [sic]? Where the fulfillment of promises? What is the hope of Israel? Of what does the scattered people bear witness? Alas we may hang our harps on the willow and weep for the spiritual destruction of Jerusalem when her own children are content to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land and deny the words of God so often repeated by the prophets. I am afraid the good people of Charleston are paying too much for their organ and allow more important objects to be sacrificed. Certainly the greatest enemies of the Jews never have denied their claims on the country inherited from their fathers, or doubted they would be restored to it in the time God shall appoint. How then can the Charleston congregation sell their birth right for a mess of pottage? But I beg your pardon, as I said before I speak from hearsay and would fain hope there are watchmen at their posts, scattered among the people who will warn them when they are in danger of falling into error by the spirit of innovation which has been the vice of ages among other religious denominations.”

Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Gratz Cohen, March 29, 1841, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH



Morris J. Raphall, *The Constancy of Israel* (Charleston, 1850), 17

"You tell us that these United States are Jerusalem, that Israel wishes for no restoration, and has none to expect. And so, because a handful of Jews have in these states recovered those inalienable rights which belong to them as men: Because here are a few—not one in a hundred, of the professors of the faith of Israel throughout the world, are relieved from the grievous pressure from without, against which their brethren in the faith have every where to bear up: Because here the lowest, the most material of their animal wants can be provided for with abundance, and the finger of scorn is not actually and pointedly held up at the Jew; therefore, he is to sever his hopes and interests from his suffering brethren, and is not only to rob them of that energy, that mortal motive which so long has sustained them, but is even to outrage their feelings and lacerate their hearts by telling them that their constancy is folly, their firm adherence to principle stiffneckedness,—their deeply rooted faith a delusion."



**MASONIC HALL,**  
**ST. PAUL STREET.**  
 SYLLABUS OF  
**A Course of Six Popular Lectures**  
 ON THE  
**POETRY OF THE HEBREWS,**

AS CONTAINED IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES,  
 By the REV. MORRIS J. RAPHALL, M. A. PH. D.,  
 RABBI-PREACHER AT THE SYNAGOGUE, BIRMINGHAM, ENG.

*Tuesday* **LECTURE I.** *January 29, 1850*  
 INTRODUCTION. Definition of Poetry; difference between Sacred and Profane Poetry. Genius and poetic superiority of the Hebrew Language. Parallelism. Sacred Poetry identified with the History and Institutions of the Israelites; its progress to be traced through **FOUR** periods:—*First Period*, Fragments of Antediluvian Poetry. The Patriarchs. Joseph. The blessing of Jacob. The book of JOB; conjectures on the time and place of its composition. Was Job an historical or only an allegorical personage?

*Saturday* **LECTURE II.** *Feb. 2.*  
*First Period Continued.* The book of JOB. Under what species of poetic composition might this book be classed? Proved to be a Dramatic Poem. Its general design—its plot or action—its dramatis personae. Job; his wife; his three friends. Character of the dialogue—its connection and progress.

*Tuesday* **LECTURE III.** *" 5<sup>th</sup>*  
 RETROSPECT OF FIRST LECTURE. *Second Period.* The national poetry of the Hebrews originates with Moses; his writings the standard models of all subsequent Hebrew poets. Means by which he exercises his great and lasting influence on the minds of the Israelites. Moses' ode on the Red Sea; his last song; his blessing; the 90th Psalm. The book of *Jasher*. Deborah's ode.

*Thursday* **LECTURE IV.** *" 7<sup>th</sup>*  
*Third Period.* Condition of the Israelites prior to the reign of David. His poetical talents early developed; the vicissitudes of his life; their influence on the character of his poems. The collection of *Thillim* or Psalms. The authors of that collection. Didactic poetry of the Hebrews. State of the nation at Solomon's death.

*Saturday* **LECTURE V.** *" 9<sup>th</sup>*  
*Fourth Period.* Prophetic poetry, only found in the Sacred Scriptures. Balaam, the non-Israelite prophet; his style. "Schools of the Prophets." The meaning of the word *Nabi*, (prophet—orator.) The authority of the prophets; whence derived; its influence. Prophecy; its general design; characteristics of prophetic poetry.

*Monday* **LECTURE VI.** *" 11<sup>th</sup>*  
*Fourth Period continued.* Isaiah; his times; character of his compositions; sublimity, Jeremiah; his times; character of his compositions; pathos. Ezekiel; character of his compositions; force. The minor prophets. Captivity in Babylon; its influence on the language and habits of thought of the Israelites. The three last prophets. Close of the Canon of the Old Testament. Concluding remarks.

N. B.—The various translations introduced are original.

**Ticket for the Course.....Two Dollars.**  
**Single Ticket.....Fifty Cents.**

Tickets for the course may be had at the Book Stores of ISAAC P. COOK, 76 Market street, JOSEPH ROBINSON, 117 Market street, JAMES S. WATERS, 244 Market street, and at the door.  
 Single tickets at the door of the Lecture Room.

Doors open at 7 o'clock. Lectures commence at 7½ o'clock, P. M.

Printed by BULL & TUTTLE, 134 Baltimore street.

*on Tuesday evening 12<sup>th</sup> (11 o'clock) DTC gave a lecture for the 'Aged Women's Home'; about 225 present, probably more*

*Lecture was in German!*

“There is a second party that has already come more in contact with the world and that with sagacious foresight understands very well that something must be done to satisfy the wants of the time. It is the party of external order and decorum ... **They are willing to add something to the services and religious ceremonies, but will never agree that anything should be subtracted therefrom. They do not wear their beard any more in the nine days of Ab; they shave them themselves on Yom-tob, &c. but consider themselves anyhow as good Jews as the first class, who are willing to banish and excommunicate at any cost and any risk, reform and reformers.**”

L.D. “Parties—Keep Peace!” *Asmonean* (August 4, 1854): 125





“Many ask: why do we, who do not care to return to Palestine, observe the חרבת בית המקדש. This is asked only by those who see nothing in Reform Judaism but a matter of convenience. Many of them chant kinot (without fasting!), drape the synagogue in black—but don’t shed a tear. For us, however, next to Sinai, this day marks the most important occurrence in our history. The rabbis, in a prophetic spirit said: thus today we celebrate the birthday of the Messiah, i.e., Israel in the beginning of its messianic activities. On Passover, we celebrated the redemption from Egypt, our having been chosen as God’s first born. But today we celebrate the birth of Israel as a redeemer of mankind, for on this day began our wanderings throughout the world.”

David Einhorn, “Ninth of Ab,” *Sinai* 4 (1859): 239



### Domestic Record.

Gentlemen of the old school speak, loudly against our late Cleveland sermon on Zechariah 8:19, concerning the abrogation of national fast days including the 9th day of Ab, called by the prophet "the fast of the fifth" (month). We forgot then and there to quote the passage from the Talmud where the same thing is stated.

The passage is Rosh Hashanah 18 *b* and reads thus:—

קרי להו צום וקרי להו ששון ושמחה בזמן שיש שלום  
יהיו לששון ולשמחה וש גוהות המלכות צום אין גורת  
המלכות ואון שלום רצו מחענין רצו אין מחענין

The prophets call these days "fasts" and then again days of joy and gladness—i. e., when peace prevails they will be for joy and gladness; but when persecution exists they are days of fast; but if neither exists, those who choose may fast, and those who choose otherwise shall not fast."

It is not necessary to be more orthodox than the Talmud.



the latter in a section partitioned off. A boys' choir, re-enforced by a few men's voices, and a cantor with a weak tenor voice, sang some compositions of Sulzer as poorly as in a village synagogue; but dignity and decorum ruled—the beginning of a better future—and I breathed easier. Dr. Merzbacher, of blessed memory, preached. There was nothing in his delivery to attract a stranger; but he spoke of the end of the *Galuth*, of the morning that was dawning also for the house of Israel. His words made me feel at home, although he did not treat the *Tishah b'ab* as drastically as I should have wished.

Such was the status of the synagogues of New York in 1846. Outside of Lilienthal and Merzbacher, there was not one leader who could read unpunctuated Hebrew, or, with the exception of a few private individuals whom I shall mention later, had the least knowledge of Judaism, its history and literature. One of the most prominent individuals denied emphatically that *Rashi* had written a commentary to the Book of Samuel, and another, who had just chanced to buy the Vienna edition of the *Yad hachazakah*, and, after having had it most elegantly bound, had placed it on his parlor table, told me in all seriousness that that book had in fact been written by Moses Maimonides, and then asked me naively whether I had ever before seen a copy of this valuable work. I found at that time in New York but three men in private life who possessed any Jewish or any Talmudical learning; viz., Nussbaum, Goldsmith, and Falkenau. The first was usually called *Morenu* Nussbaum, the last named was the son of

## PHILADELPHIA LETTER.

PHILADELPHIA, July 19. 1877.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE AMERICAN ISRAELITE

A Grand Union have we had in Philadelphia, a grand Union from which discord has been banished and to which we are cordially invited. A Union whose basis are the generosity and fraternity of our American Israelites, and which will rapidly spread its protecting branches from the Eastern to the Western ocean. The relief it has left in Philadelphia is that of a cordial welcome. The presence of the convention in our city has been conducive in increasing an interest in the minds of many previously ignorant of the very existence of the Union, and to those whose ideas on the subject were, at best, vague and passive, it has presented the knowledge of actual facts and the lull that has followed the departure of the delegates may be considered as indicative of a firm faith in amalgamation next

annually leave the city for a sojourn among the mountains, or a visit to the seashore, remain stationary this season. The pleasure of preferring home comfort is said to be a vulgar


### THE FAST OF AB

Has, indeed, now-a-days few adherents. With one or, perhaps, two exceptions the attendants at the synagogues might have been reckoned upon the fingers. Services are held on the 9th, but it may be doubted whether it be necessary to open the houses of prayer for morning or afternoon services.

The project designed by your venerable townsman, Dr. Lilienthal, to start a *Quarterly Review*, will no doubt be supported by the Jewish clergy throughout the country. We possess enough newspapers, good, bad and indifferent, but a literary issue devoted exclusively to the discussion of theological and scientific subjects, and calculated by its size and form to allow the writer full scope to express his ideas, unabridged and not cut up, is a desideratum.

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And the lesson of the Ninth of Ab, is that we must not alone wail, but work. We must be true to the obligations imposed upon the children of Abraham, which, if we but knew it, are our highest and dearest privileges, and the promises of reward for renewed obedience will be as strictly fulfilled as were the threatenings of punishment for disobedience. As in the one case, so in the other, they are the inevitable results of the workings of the law of cause and effect. We have but to do our duty and entrust the issue to the great First Cause.

S. S. C.



“Let us now cast a glance into a strict Orthodox community to study the ritual observed on the Ninth of Ab. On the eve of the fast day the people, in stockings or slippers, are seated on the floor of the synagogue, or rather on little benches lower than their regular seats ... Business is not in general interrupted in the Ghetto during the day, but in the houses of the pious the candles for the dead are burning; the children do not play in the streets as usual; the people do not greet one another. After the evening service, at which a lesson of the Torah is read, the fast day is ended.”

“The Ninth of Ab: How and Why the Fast is Observed,”  
*New Era* (July 1904): 169

“The fast of Tisha b’Ab comes this year at a time when the hopes that the glorious past of the Holy Land will be revived still persists in millions of Jewish hearts. The time has not yet come when orthodox Jews are unwilling to observe this day by fasting and prayer. Whether it ever will come is extremely doubtful ... Now that working for Zion has come to supplement the ancient and time-honored custom of prayer for it we may reasonably hope that the custom of mourning for Zion will ere many years have rolled around be regarded as no longer necessary.”

“The Ninth of Ab,” *Jewish Exponent* (August 12, 1921): 4

“The observance of the eve of Tisha B’av was indeed beautiful and traditional. Seated on the floor, campers and councellers [sic] recalled the periodic exiles which began with the first and second destruction of the Temple. Uncle Hal Koppelman, in his characteristic way, held his audience spell bound by his dramatic narration of the history of Tisha B’av. Then Uncle Bernie interpreted the history of Tisha B’av, past and present. He pointed out the significance of the dispersion of our people, and what is the modern condition of the Jew. And as a fitting climax to the evening Cantor Kantor chanted the Kinos. A word of praise is in order for the Hebrew group which was led by our very able Hersh Stein.”

“Jewish Life in Camp Mohaph,” *Mohaph Mirror*  
(1924): 5



מסד

מחנות קיץ עבריים

## MASSAD HEBREW CAMPS

IN THE POCONO MOUNTAINS

MASSAD ALEPH  
TANNERSVILLE, PA.

MASSAD BETH  
DINGMAN'S FERRY, PA.



“From the earliest days of the Massad idea its founders put their accent on all those forms of Jewish life which are instrumental in the preservation of Judaism. Few students of Jewish history doubt the tremendous importance of religious precept and practice in the survival scheme. At Massad the prayers, the observance of Shabbat, the impressive rites of tishah b’av and other religious observances become integral and functional because they assume their natural place in the totality of Jewish living. For example, the whole community of Massad prepares for the Sabbath; camper and counsellor alike engage in transforming the area of the profane into holy ground. It is hard to exaggerate the positive effect of such participation on the child.”

Maurice M. Shudofsky, “Massad—An Experiment in Hebrew Summer Camping,” *Jewish Frontier* 18 (December 1951): 29



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Norman Lamm, "Tisha B'av Today,"  
*Jewish Life* 23 (July-August 1956): 47-51

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"Practically, the continued observance of Tisha B'av must concern itself with the two great historical events of modern times as well as with past history. These two are: "Churban Europa" and the founding of Medinath Israel ... a valid orthodox view on the question of continued observance of the national fast days, based on Halochic [*sic*] grounds, sees no need of discarding them because of contemporary developments. It sees rather in the great historic events of the last two decades, an opportunity for deepening our experience of these days, an occasion for discovering new avenues of expression of the entire gamut of our national experiences within rather than without the framework of the hallowed traditions of Israel. By blending these historic events into the grand stream of Jewish religious life, we will find an opportunity for giving new dimensions to our near-emasculated religious consciousness."