

published in Yiddish were religious primers, basic guides written, ostensibly for women, in reality, also for the semi-literate, but viewed by all as "woman's fare."⁵⁷ Even hasidic tales and aphorisms, concerned as the writers were to preserve every nuance of the holy man's Yiddish words, were, nevertheless, always transcribed in Hebrew.⁵⁸ Things have changed dramatically over the past twenty-five years. Admittedly, the revival of the Hebrew language in Israel, and its attendant secularization, has diminished some of Hebrew's aura as the "the sacred tongue;" nevertheless, the emergence of a rich and sophisticated halakhic literature in English stems less from the fact that Hebrew has been desacralized than because English is now the mother tongue of the Anglo-Saxon *haredi* society, as is modern Hebrew to their Israeli counterpart.⁵⁹ The contemporary Jewish community is linguistically acculturated, unlike the communities of Eastern Europe, eighty percent of whom, in Poland, for example, still gave, as late as 1931, Yiddish rather than Polish as their first language.⁶⁰ The flood of works on halakhic prerequisites and the dramatic appreciation of the level of religious observance are proud marks of the *haredi* resurgence. This flow and swift absorption are possible, however, only because that community has unwittingly adopted the alien ways of knowing of the society in which it is enmeshed and whose language it now intuitively speaks.

With this acculturation came also the discovery of "the historicity of things." The secular education of many of the *haredim* was rudimentary, but it was enough for them to know that the record of the past is to be found in books. Any doubt of this was put to rest by experience. In life, one had to anticipate in some way the future, so as better to get a handle on it. The only way to do that was by knowing the past one's medical past, the past performance of a stock, of a business, or of a politician. There could be little memory of such pasts, but there was information, written records, and from these documents, a "history" could be reconstructed. If all else had a history, they too had one. To be sure, theirs was not 'History,' in the upper case, the sacred, archetypical record of the Bible and Midrash, with its "eternal contemporaneity,"⁶¹ but the more mundane sort, "history" in the lower case, replete with random figures and chance happenings. Hardly paradigmatic for posterity, still it was sufficiently significant to its immediate successors to merit their pondering its lessons. So alongside of the new genre of secondary works in Halakhah, there has appeared, in the past generation, a second genre, equally unfamiliar to their fathers, that of "history," written accounts of bygone events and biographies of great Torah scholars of the recent past, images of a nation's heritage that once would have been imparted by the vibrant voices of home and street, but now must be conveyed, like so much else in the "new world," by means of book and formal instruction.⁶²

These works wear the guise of history, replete with names and dates and footnotes, but their purpose is that of memory, namely, to sustain and nurture, to inform in such a way as to ease the task of coping. As rupture is unsettling, especially to the traditional, these writings celebrate identity rather than difference. Postulating a national essence which is seen as immutable, this historiography weaves features and values of the present with real and

supposed events of the past. It is also hagiographic, as sacred history often is. Doubly so now, as it must also provide the new text culture with its heroes and its educators with their exemplars of conduct.

Didactic and ideological, this "history" filters untoward facts and glosses over the darker aspects of the past. Indeed, it often portrays events as they did not happen.⁶³ So does memory; memory, however, transmutes unconsciously, whereas the writing of history is a conscious act. But this intentional disregard of fact in ideological history is no different from what takes place generally in moral education, as most such instruction seems to entail a misrepresentation of a harsh reality. We teach a child, for example, that crime does not pay. Were this in fact so, theodicy would be no problem. Yet we do not feel that we are lying, for when values are being inculcated, the facts of experience-empirical truth appears, somehow, to cease to be "true."

For if a value is to win widespread acceptance, to evoke an answering echo of assent in the minds of many, it must be experienced by them not simply as a higher calling, but as a demand that emerges from the nature of things.⁶⁴ When we state that honesty is 'good,' what we are also saying is that, ultimately, this is what is best for man, what we call, at times, "true felicity," to distinguish it from mere "happiness." We believe that were we to know all there is to know of the inner life of a Mafia don and that of an honest cobbler, we would see that honesty is, indeed, the best policy. The moral life makes claim to be the wise life, and, the moral call, to most, is a summons to realism, to live one's life in accord with the deeper reality.⁶⁵ A statement of value is, in this way, a statement of fact, a pronouncement about the true nature of things.

When we say that crime doesn't pay, we are not lying; we are teaching the child the underlying reality that we believe in or intuit, rather than the distorted one of our fragmentary experience. Just as moral instruction imparts the lessons of a reality deeper than the one actually perceived, so too must sacred history reflect, to the believer, the underlying realities of the past, rather than the distortions arising from the contingencies of experience coupled with the haphazardness of documentation.

And the underlying reality of Jewish history to the *haredim*, has been the Covenant that they had sealed with the Lord long ago at Sinai and which alone explains their miraculous continuance. There had been backsliding enough in their long and stiff-necked history, for which the foretold price had been exacted with fearful regularity. But when they had lived rightly, they had done so by compliance with that pact, living, as it were, "by the book-abiding fully in their "portable homeland" and living only by the lights of His sacred texts. How else *could* the People of the Book have lived?

So alongside of its chiaroscuro portrait of the past the unremitting struggle between the sons of Light and Darkness common to all sacred history, comes the distinctive *haredi* depiction of the society of yesteryear, the world of their fathers, as a model of text-based religiosity, of

