

RELIGION AND CIVILIZATION SERIES

THIRTEEN AMERICANS:
THEIR
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

EDITED BY

Louis Finkelstein

CHANCELLOR, THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

Published by

The INSTITUTE for RELIGIOUS and SOCIAL STUDIES

Distributed by

HARPER & BROTHERS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

Digitized by Project Zikaron
Touro University-NY Libraries
www.zikaron.tourolib.org

2026

COPYRIGHT, 1953

BY THE INSTITUTE FOR RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL STUDIES

*All rights reserved including the right
of reproduction in whole or in part
in any form.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

JUDITH BERLIN LIEBERMAN

To be born into a family which has produced men of great learning and of outstanding gifts of leadership can have a stunting effect upon the growing and maturing mind—especially as such assets are not passed on in the manner of some material goods. Fortunate are the children of such families if they are not made to feel the pressure of their heritage and if no unusual demands are made on them. Such was the spiritual milieu into which I was born. (My account will, therefore, include the influences exerted upon me by the three ancestors who were closest to me.)

The first time my curiosity was aroused in the history of our family was when in our travels we stopped off in Warsaw and visited the burial ground where my father's father had been laid to his eternal rest. The monument was a turretlike mausoleum surrounded by a low iron fence. Within the enclosure, the ground was strewn with pamphlets and papers yellowed with age. In the stillness of the air and the fervent attitude of father, there was the tremor of bygone years. The Hebrew characters on the slips expressed the urgent supplications and innermost yearnings of people who sought relief in their personal distress through the merit of the Good Deeds the deceased had performed in his lifetime. It was then that I learned that my grandfather had been a *Tzaddik*—a man who devoted all his life to study, to prayer and to the service of his fellow-men. He was the man who had trained a generation of the most

outstanding Rabbinic scholars and leaders dispersed over Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.

My grandfather, Rabbi Naphtali-Zvi Yehuda Berlin—called for short the *Naziv* (from the contraction of the initials), a word meaning “governor” in Hebrew, came of a family that combined wealth with learning. At the age of twelve, he was admitted to the Yeshiva of Volozhin, which was the center of Jewish learning in the nineteenth century. He was a student of great ability and extraordinary application, and in a few years he became the son-in-law of the son of Rabbi Chayyim, the founder of the Academy and a member of the Dynasty, the term used to refer to the family. At the age of thirty-seven, the *Naziv* succeeded his deceased father-in-law as the head of the institution.

About grandfather's diligence, many stories bordering on the legendary, have been told. He would devote eighteen hours a day to study. To get some snatches of sleep, he would close his eyes holding a lighted candle of such a length that it could burn only fifteen minutes, then the burning sensation at the tip of his fingers would awaken him and he would resume his work. Such tales, however, do not illustrate the mode of life the *Naziv* would prescribe for the Yeshiva men. Of course, a student must not waste his time on worthless matters, but the Head would recommend habitual hours for sleep and regular times for meals. In his book, *From Volozhin to Jerusalem*, my father relates that grandfather was overheard saying to a very studious boy, “You devote so many hours to your books that you have no time to digest and master the material. If you allow more time for rest and meals, you will be able to fathom the meaning of what you have learned.” Nevertheless, the voice of the Torah was never silenced in the hall of learning. There were always students who were bent over their books late at night, and others would come in after midnight and stay there undisturbed till early dawn. The only break in the monotony was the radiant appearance of the head of the school. When the town was soundly sleeping and enveloped in darkness, and the “old man” in his study was deeply engrossed in the big folios before him, he would suddenly rise from his place startled by some poignant recollection. He would close the tome,

leave his house, and with resolute steps proceed in the direction of the "Holy Place of Study." He knew that many of his "children" would be pondering over the Talmud. He would walk the length and breadth of the large hall, take a good look at each figure, and pause over a youth who, overcome by drowsiness and heat, had dozed off in front of a burning charcoal fire. Grandfather would waken him with a gentle touch and warn him of the danger of a hot fire. He was anxious lest the overheated boy should take a cold drink and get chilled. There was hardly time to sound all these warnings when some hesitant steps were heard and a young student, who had been struggling with a difficult text, approached him. Grandfather, with kindness in his eyes and the friendly smile that always hovered on his lips, would gently stroke the young cheeks and patiently elucidate the difficult passage.

It is very likely that grandfather's reputation as a pedagogue has obscured his significance as a scholar. The spoken word can be heard and the magic of personality felt, but many years must elapse before the written word can be understood. Grandfather placed truth above all, and no trouble was too much for him to seek it. In those days, when modern research was unknown amongst Rabbinic scholars, and extensive travel unusual, he went by train to the capital of Russia to look for a manuscript of the work of Rab Ahai Gaon—a medieval scholar—and purchased it for a large sum of money. Unlike other Rabbinic scholars of his age, grandfather in his great commentary on Rab Ahai first tried to reconstruct the historical background and to correlate the work of Rab Ahai to those of the later codifiers of the Law, primarily to that of Maimonides.

One of the most impressive facts of the truly great Rabbinic minds was that their preoccupation with the study of the Torah never obstructed their view from the national needs of their people. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when the idea of "Return to Zion" was still new, grandfather gave theoretical and practical expression to his support of the movement that later became known as the "Lovers of Zion." He found occasion to express his convictions on this head, in connection with the explication of certain passages of the Bible in his monumental Commentary. According to the Naziv,

there is no place where the relation between the Creator and His people is as close as in the Land of Israel. The Jew can live a complete religious life *only* in the land of his Fathers, because a great part of the Law is applicable only to the Land of Israel. When the question of the Sabbatical year in Palestine arose, grandfather, moderate by disposition, insisted upon strict observance of the laws because he said, "We are ready for sacrifices not merely for the sake of furnishing the Land of the Philistines with inhabitants, but in order to settle the Holy Land with men devoted to the worship of the Almighty and the observance of His Commandments." No practical measures were too humble for the realization of this dream. A coin box was placed at the entrance of the hall on the eve of the Atonement services (an innovation in those days) and with grandmother's blessing, the son of his old age (the subsequent leader, Rabbi Meir Berlin) was put in charge of the collection.

Grandfather's second wife, my grandmother, was his close blood relation and twenty-five years his junior. The unusual match came about in the most extraordinary manner. Grandmother's fine bearing, personal charm, and intelligence attracted many suitors. She, however, had set up as her ideal her own scholarly father, Rabbi Michael Eppstein, author of many books that had become part of the standard equipment of those who practiced Jewish Law. She consented to marry a man of fine appearance and of considerable means, with the implicit understanding that he would devote time to gaining proficiency in the Torah. The young woman soon realized, however, that her husband had no penchant for the arduous task though he made an attempt. She felt she could not go on living a life of frustration. No pleading on the part of the young man (and of both families) could dissuade her from leaving him and hiding for months to escape the Russian law according to which the spouse had the legal right to force his wife's return. Finally the divorce was granted to her, and she returned to her parents' home strengthened in her determination to live a life that had inner meaning. Shortly after, an honored guest arrived from Volozhin with personal greetings from grandfather. When the conversation turned to family affairs, the visitor, realizing the wilfulness of the young woman,

boldly suggested a match between uncle and niece. The parents were shocked nor could grandfather see his niece binding herself to a man many years her senior. The only one who welcomed the strange proposal was the beautiful and spirited woman. Months passed before the niece met her uncle, whom she had never seen before, and everybody felt that it was the hand of God when the union was shortly solemnized.

Grandmother, who was mother and pal to me the four years I was stranded at her house and later when she lived with us in New York, would keep me spellbound with the stories of her glorious past. Indiscreet as youngsters sometimes are, I asked her (as I blush even now to recall) whether she had ever regretted the decision about her marriage. There was something in her brown eyes and proud bearing which spoke of her happiness more eloquently than words could. Grandmother lived a full life, happy in the role of a helpmeet to the great man who was her life companion, content with the man who took great care of his appearance and was lovable in every way. Grandmother took complete charge of the finances of the institution, which in itself was a great challenge to her ability. Almost all the fellows—and they numbered 400–500—studied on a scholarship basis, and in order to free them of all mundane cares, their board and lodging were paid for. As a matter of fact, the Academy was the town's principal source of income. Harassed as grandmother was by these financial responsibilities, she had the satisfaction of being the mistress of a large household and the queen of the town.

About twenty years later, when I lived under grandmother's roof, the changed conditions did not affect grandmother's way of life. As the wife of a prosperous merchant and patron of learning (she had married again), she still assumed responsibility for the well-being of the townspeople and her house was always open to those in need of advice and financial aid. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the poor girl of marriageable age, the sick in need of medication, and the small businessman in times of economic depression, all claimed her special attention. With fires frequent and devastating in those districts of dense forests and straw-thatched roofs, many a Jew who had been rendered destitute, would be aided by her systematic plan

of action. At a still later period, in Jerusalem, when grandmother reached the ripe age of eighty years, I was startled more than once by a hand (that was all I could see of the person in question) reaching from the outside for its share of the Sabbath loaves which had been lined up in a neat row on the window sill.

Amidst all this activity the grand old lady kept up her lively interest in men of learning and in the study of the Bible. She appeared to prefer the company of learned men to the prattle of women. She considered her day's work done only after she had covered a day's portion from the Torah and the Prophets. In winter her self-imposed assignment was the Book of Proverbs and in summer the Sayings of the Fathers. She was guided by these wise teachings in her personal conduct. She would overlook the failings of others and disparaging remarks about other people's doings would elicit from her the mild warning, "Do not judge your neighbor until you have been in his position."

She accepted the values of the new times and found fault with the past. "We girls were not taught like the boys, we were treated like a flock of sheep," she would complain of her early education. Though she valiantly tried to overcome her ignorance of the English tongue by taking private lessons and working hard on the *th's*, she felt unhappy because she could not master it. She followed my scholastic career with great satisfaction. If she ever had any feeling of envy it was, she remarked, for the opportunity the American woman had and the equality she enjoyed with the other sex. Her greatest fulfillment she found in her only son (the elder having passed away) and the relationship between mother and son was that of mutual understanding, deep love, and—on the part of the son—a certain element of awe.

In an attempt to sketch the main features of father's personality, elusive as they are (because the inner light he radiated diverts attention from the details), it becomes more and more obvious that the feeling of regard and consideration was the basic note in father's attitude to all fellow beings. Just as his belief in God was untroubled by any doubts, his trust in people was unshaken by any experience he might have had. Because of his fundamental fortitude, everybody

around him seemed to gather courage and strength, and the impossible became possible, and the unreal real. Being the prime force behind Religious Zionism, and in any undertaking he associated himself with, his advice was always sought in times of crisis and his presence was essential in hours of weighty decisions.

If father ever transgressed any commandment of the Torah, it was the prohibition against favoring the poor. Of course, I do not mean that he showed bias in their favor in judging lawsuits, to which the passage in question (Leviticus 19:15) refers. But when there were people waiting for him in his office, it seemed as if his eye first recognized the one who sought his counsel, for among the host who sought him (besides those who conferred with him on matters pertaining to his party, the upkeep of many institutions of learning, promotion of journalistic and cultural enterprises) there were those who needed his personal help, whether in the nature of material or spiritual assistance. Nobody was turned away either at the office or his residence. "A man is a man," was his attitude, and no personal inconvenience to him or to his family, or threat to his declining health could restrict his activity. Regardless of his heavy schedule, he would personally contact endless lists for others when he was on his frequent (organizational) trips to distant parts of the world. To the public at large he appeared in the light of a great leader with a knack of stirring hundreds and thousands of people with the thundering quality of his voice, originality of thought, and fine delivery. In contrast to the soft-spoken man that he usually was, he would display a leonine pugnacity. Both his followers and anti-Zionists harkened as to one who spoke with the voice of tradition of the spirit of Israel. Though all his life he fought for a united Judaism and stood above party interests, he was the leader of the Religious front that wrested concessions from the Center Parties and the Laborites within the Zionist Organization. His stand was rooted in the vision of a Jewish State built on the principle of Torah-true Judaism and the spiritual values that have come down to us from the Prophets and the Rabbis. His firm conviction was that unless a majority of our people lives on the land promised by God and speaks the language in which the Bible was given, they are doomed to an existence barren of Jewish

content and to ultimate loss of identity. Being both the man of action and the student, he could turn out a prodigious amount of work, no intrusions ever disturbing his serene flow of thought. He was the editor of the Talmudic Encyclopedia and the promoter of a new edition of the Talmud. Disregarding his physical weakness, he would stealthily disappear into his study at night and write long articles and essays for various publications with hardly any correction to mar the long white sheets of paper. Being one of the architects of the new State, he strove to promote legislation in the light of the Torah and on the basis of democracy. His political creed was permeated with a new hope for the future of the whole of mankind, and he envisaged American democracy and freedom of thought and speech established all over the world.

Father's attitude toward his children was "live and let live." No books were recommended that a parent felt children ought to read; no restrictions were made as to the choice of friends or places visited. At times the impression was created that father had little time to worry over his children's problems. As I look back, I can see that father jealously watched over his children's doings—though in the most unobtrusive way, as if allowing the young wings to unfold spontaneously. Want of over-protection early developed in me a sense of self-reliance and helped me to stand up to the trials of unusual circumstances in which I early found myself.

Throughout childhood there was the keen awareness of God, the Protector watching over our personal fortunes. The feeling was inculcated in us when my sister, having fallen through the broken bannister of a wooden shed escaped with slight injuries, or when she was restored to us after having been lost amid a hustling crowd on our arrival in a metropolis. When we joined father in Berlin, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the struggle for economic existence could not escape the attention of the youngsters. Though mother came from an affluent family, the dowry she had received was soon lost to a partner in a business venture in which father showed no interest. Our small apartment served as office for the promoter, editor, and journalist—all three combined in father—of the first Hebrew weekly in the German capital. Mother was the clerk, more

hindered than assisted by me in the work of stamping envelopes and mailing the papers at the nearest post office. On Fridays our home would invariably assume a new glory, and all worry would disappear as if by magic. Dressed in our best, we would impatiently await father's return from the synagogue accompanied by the angels who were to usher in the Sabbath, the day of complete rest. Soon the sweet melody of "Peace Upon You" filled the air followed by "Virtuous Wife" in tribute to the mistress of the house. For it was she who on a snow white tablecloth had lit the Sabbath candles and prepared the fish and the coffee cake, the taste of which made us hanker for it the rest of the week.

It was left to mother, a graduate of a secondary school with a deep appreciation for good education, to supervise our formal training. Mother, far from resting on the laurels of the past, had great ambitions for her children. We were put into schools of reputable standing. The method of teaching the three R's may have had its merits, but little attempt was made to stir the pupil's imagination or allow for individual differences. Nor could the private teacher, to whom our Hebrew education was entrusted often at the price of a third of father's salary, awaken a lively interest in the matter taught. A Hebrew poet of note or a student of Semitics, who was thought most likely to succeed, could not be expected to give thought to the presentation of a passage in the Bible. As a result a stare of blank boredom was often concealed behind lowered eyelids.

I leave it to recognized authorities to determine the effects of the world wars and the resulting political upheavals on the forming of the personalities of our generation. The monstrosity of Hitler and the annihilation of all "inferior" peoples cut into the very being of a Jew. The rebirth of the Jewish State brought an upsurge of feeling and hope for mankind. By mere chance my personal fortunes were early bound up with the momentous happenings in the world. Having urged father to take me, a third-grader, on what was intended to be a two weeks' visit to my grandmother in Lithuania, a series of Odyssean adventures began. On the day we were to cross the border back to Berlin, war was declared. After months of waiting, our attempts to return together and rejoin the rest of the family in

Stockholm by the northern route were foiled by the good advice of a chance acquaintance not to expose a child to a voyage on icy waters. As I was left in the care of grandmother, my life took on something of an epic quality. I recall a covered wagon with the load of grandmother, her husband, myself, and some earthly possessions slowly moving through a blizzard in the wake of retreating Russian regiments into the capital of White Russia. Vivid are the recollections of the rejoicing of old and young after the fall of tyranny and the exalted spirits with which the new era was awaited. Important to mental growth was access to a private library that contained the best of the world classics. Tolstoy, London, Byron, were read avidly and the morbid characters of Dostoievski were gleeful topics for lengthy discussion by adolescent girls. I sought answers to the questions "how" and "why," in pictorial abridged editions of Darwin and Haeckel. But whereas the young minds gloried in the rationalistic approach to the creation of the world, whereas all tradition was discarded with ease, I found reassurance in the memory of grandfather standing on the eve of Yom Kippur on the threshold of the House of Learning and asking for forgiveness of those whom he had harmed unwittingly. There was also the feeling of spiritual nearness to father and mother beckoning to me from across the seas of the New World where they had settled, and strengthening me in my beliefs.

My reunion with my father after the armistice in 1918 was an overpowering experience. Coming home to the blessed shores of the United States was a most welcome relief from the complex system of passports and other restrictions on personal liberty in Russia. New life began and new interests were awakened. At Columbia University the study of the principles of democracy underlying the political order of the New World and the constitutional history of the United States and of nationalistic movements with Muzzey and Hayes, respectively, inspired me to make a study of the doctrines of liberation in the light of English literature. Inspiring were the seminars of Professor Bernard Fehr, head of the English department at Zurich University and formerly of Cambridge, England. Professor Fehr, who was the rare combination of a brilliant scholar and an artistic

temperament, could draw with masterly strokes the Englishmen of letters and men of thought, and in his lectures poets such as Milton and Blake came to life again. It was at that time that I began to question the reliability of some footnotes made to Robert Browning's poems which had been inspired by Jewish sources. Whereas the commentators relegated some of the verses to pure "fancy," they were in truth images taken from the Midrashic and Talmudic treasures. In particular one poem entitled, "Ben Karshook," which is omitted from many selections of the poet's works, led me to look for parallelisms between the writings of the English poet and Hebraic lore. The remarkable similarity in the story of Rabbi Perida between the wording of the poet and a passage in the Talmud inspired me to delve into the poet's past, to scan through the complete list of books found in his private library as catalogued by Sotheby & Company, to inspect the Hebrew writing in the original manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and to come across an unrecorded manuscript of his father's commentary on the Bible.

My interest in Hebrew learning was further stimulated by life and work in Jerusalem, marriage to a scholar, and educational work in the United States. Life and work in Jerusalem required the harnessing of all human power in the country. In the twenties immigration laws permitted thousands of young men and women to enter the Land where they hoped to see the fulfilment of the Promise given to the Fathers of the Jewish people. The vision of a People with all its attributes never looked brighter. Neither limitation of funds nor restriction of space could deter the new generation from breaking up their homes and setting forth to Zion, where the name, David, was to mean again inner strength and implicit trust in God and the memory of Sarah, the protecting arms of a mother. The hold of a ship could be miraculously stretched. Money was procured with the willing assistance of more fortunate passengers. The blue skies were a marvelous setting for merry song and gay laughter. On one such voyage, we exchanged our berths for deck chairs so that the difference in the cost could be applied to purchasing additional tickets for new immigrants. The arrival at Tel-Aviv or Haifa was heralded by more song and carefree laughter. The stucco buildings

exhaled warmth of temperature and warmth of feeling and the sidewalks resounded with the noisy, hurried clatter of footsteps and the hubbub of voices. There was no time for sleep. Structures rose like mushrooms, and new enterprises blossomed overnight.

People with some systematic training in the fields of pedagogy were absorbed by the expanding communities. Teaching of European history and literature at a teacher's training school for girls, whose cultural backgrounds and training were as varied as the countries they came from, presented a great challenge to an inexperienced teacher like myself. There was excellent material from Western Europe, but haunted by the memory of broken families, and the shadows of the dead. There were girls of darker shades from North African countries, whose families abandoned their cavelike dwellings and set out on their long trek to Zion on a donkey. One such girl lost her father when he fell off the donkey while stumbling through the sands of the desert and reached Jerusalem with a sick mother and three smaller children to care for. The equipment of their one-room dwelling consisted of makeshift mattresses and sacks of burlap for protection against the cold winds.

At the completion of a four-year course all differences were ironed out and after rigorous finals in Bible, Prophets, Hebrew Literature, and pedagogy, the graduates were competent enough to staff schools in both large and small settlements set up by the Education Department of the Jewish Agency.

The recollections of my visit to the communal settlements are most vivid. These settlements are a form of life that can hardly be found anywhere else. Private interests were entirely subordinated to the good of the community. The house became the property of the collective, and the tractor was acquired with the pooled resources of all members. In the Mizrachi communities, one of which was named after my grandfather, "The Well of Naziv," prayers were said at dawn and after a heavy day's work, young faces and eager eyes were bent over the large folios in the pallid light of the barn. Sabbath was a day of complete rest, and the milking of the cows was permitted in order to bring relief to the animal, though the milk could not be drunk or put to any use. The greatest favor asked of a visitor was

the negative of a snapshot taken by the American camera. The objects to be snapped were in the following order of importance: first the cow and plough, then the newborn baby, and finally the adult. Most of the children were, as in other communes in Israel, blue-eyed and fair-haired.

The radically changed conditions in the thirties presented new challenges and called for new educational projects. In an air charged with tension, when shots were heard intermittently, and many victims were felled by Arab snipers, it became imperative to found all-day nurseries to enable mothers to take the places of their husbands on duty elsewhere. I felt that the obligation to establish such institutions in Jerusalem especially for religious groups, fell on me. We organized all-day summer play schools to care for undernourished children who in peaceful time might have vacationed on Mt. Carmel or on the shores of the Mediterranean. Though additional activity was accompanied by physical hardships, there was the satisfaction that an earnest effort was being made to prevent the lifelong ill-effects that are known to have resulted to the mind and body of some of the youthful population from the disturbed conditions of those years. A most rewarding project was the founding of a dormitory for the young women at the Mizrahi Teachers' Training School for Girls, who with limited means of their own could find congenial living conditions and be assured of a bright future as career women in their own country and in many distant lands such as India, where the need for trained Hebrew teachers was very great.

In 1940, I returned to the United States with my husband after days of flying over the sandy wastes of the Middle East, a stop-over at the British oil wells of Bahrein and days spent at Bombay. My return made me painfully conscious of the sad fact that the world at large had still to learn much from America. Though "the idea and example" of America had invaded the world, the virtues of political freedom and belief in personal liberty still had to be accepted by many countries in order to make democracy work. We received a hearty welcome from the customs officer in New York who had heard of the great institution of learning to which my husband had been called. Subsequent association with men and women of high

moral qualities and great scholastic attainments, and lifelong friendships which have been formed, have mitigated any hardship which might be felt by the wife of a scholar wholly devoted to study and research. Precious have been the moments to me when my husband has been able to tear himself away from his work in order to illuminate the gleanings of Jewish treasures not only with his erudition but with the moral strength drawn from the wealth of Torah that has motivated every action of his life.

My husband, though by nature disinclined to express his personal beliefs, has brought to bear upon me, by his mode of living and conduct, the great force that Torah has been in the destiny of our people and in the lives of Jews as individuals. He helped me to gain an insight into the role that the Jews play as individuals and as a people in the community of nations.

Jews have survived anguish and physical torment because they were imbued with the teachings of the Torah. They knew that the cause for which they were suffering was worthy of their sacrifice. Thus suffering, instead of breaking them, gave them spiritual depth and strength and even satisfaction, as it frequently does to people of noble character. A striking example of this phenomenon was the reaction of the German Jews to the events of the nineteen thirties. In most cases it was those who were ignorant of or estranged from their spiritual heritage that committed suicide. Those who had preserved Jewish learning and observance found the strength to go elsewhere and take roots in a new environment.

In Jewry, the Torah has been an affair of the masses. The Torah specifically commands every Jew to study it, and the passage in question is included in the *Shema*, which every Jew repeats twice daily: "And ye shall teach them (the words of the Torah) to your children, talking of them, when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 11:19). For since the Jewish people was chosen by God to keep His commandments, the Jewish people must spend all the time it can studying His commandments.

How this peculiar feature struck the eye of an outsider is eloquently attested by a German officer who was interested in biblical studies.

While serving in the German Intelligence Office in Warsaw during the First World War, this writer records, his office learned that something very mysterious was going on in the Jewish section. It was said that coachmen would come one after another without passengers and disappear mysteriously into a certain courtyard. The writer continues that he went to investigate for himself and arriving at the place in question with two detectives, stood and watched. It was true. Coachman after coachman was driving in with no passengers in his cab. All of them disappeared into a courtyard into which the scholarly writer followed. He finally came into one of the upper stories of the building. There he opened the door and saw two long tables, surrounded by coachmen who were sitting in their high hats, bent over books, and listening attentively to a man who was expounding something. The officer realized at once that there could be no question about a plot being fomented against the government. Nevertheless, he stood, dazed. He reports that he remained motionless, observing the occupants of the room without being able to comprehend what was going on. Finally he motioned to one of the listeners, for until then no one had even taken notice of the intruders. Utilizing his imperfect knowledge of Yiddish, the officer asked the Jew, "What is this?" "Why, this is a synagogue," the Jew replied. The officer repeated his question, "What is this?" "Why, they are sitting and studying the Law." The officer asked, "Is today Yom Kippur, a holy day?" "No," the Jew said, "This is what we do every day." "You mean to say that every day you come here and listen to a lecture on the law?" "Why, certainly," the Jew said. "After a hard day's work?" "Yes, that is what we do." The officer was convinced, and he concludes his account saying: "It is amazing. It is unthinkable. It is inconceivable that German drivers should come every day to the University and listen to lectures on law!" The officer, of course, could only have realized dimly, if at all, what the Torah had meant to the Jews through the ages, how, like a lone beacon, it alone had relieved some very gloomy pages of Jewish history, and how the Jew clung to it and found comfort in it.

It was this evaluation of the Torah that strengthened me in my resolution to do my small share in the restoration of Zion, the

center whence Torah shall come forth. Early in my college career, I joined the Mizrachi Organization, the Orthodox branch of the Zionist movement, of which my father was the leader. The essence of Mizrachi ideology is: Israel restored on the principles of the Torah. Such doctrines as universal brotherhood of man in God's image, the Messianic dream of permanent peace, the doctrine of the sovereignty of every soul as expressed in the complete physical rest on the Sabbath, are to the Mizrachi the *conditio sine qua non* for the structure of the Jewish State. An Israeli whose only cultural mark is the ability to speak Hebrew would be an Israeli bereft of all the other spiritual values which have come down to us. In order to build for the future, we must return to the past.

In the capacity of national political chairman of the Mizrachi Women's Organization, I have been called upon to clarify our stand in the political setup of the Zionist Organization. The central idea of building a Jewish State on the land of our Fathers is common to all Zionists. Just as the essence of sugar is sweetness to all human beings, so Zionism is to all Zionist parties the restoration of the Jewish State. The lump of sugar, however, can also convey a variety of meanings. Whereas to the peasant it is sweetness only, to the physician it is primarily a means of nutrition. Moreover, to the industrialist it is a substance to be exploited for industrial purposes, and to the chemist it conveys a distinct chemical formula. Yet the sweetness of sugar remains the basic feature to all. In the same way, the restoration of Israel has to the Mizrachi, besides the meaning common to all, an additional significance. This is an Israel based on its spiritual heritage. Roots steeped in the past give the State not only a firm hold on the present, but lend to it that spiritual content which makes its existence worthwhile.

The practical work carried on by the Mizrachi Women's membership has been in the direction of establishing projects in Israel where cultural possessions could be transmitted in the most up-to-date fashion and in an adequate physical environment. The institutions in Israel established by the Mizrachi Women's Organization of America, whether they are schools, where all kinds of vocations are taught, or whether they are children's villages and social welfare

centers, take great pride in their lovely exteriors, progressive approach to education, and Jewish spiritual content. As a member of the National Administrative Board of the organization, it has been incumbent upon me to share the task with other members to guide those thousands of co-workers who have dedicated themselves to the practical aspect of our work.

As I look back upon the latter years of my New York period, I become keenly aware that my preoccupation with the Bible, Prophets, and Commentaries has given me a great deal of inner satisfaction. It was also in a sense a fulfilment of my nostalgia for these subjects which in the past did not form the central theme in the education of girls. I consider it a great privilege to have been instrumental in elevating the teaching of Bible and the traditional commentaries to their rightful place in the curriculum of the Shulamith School for Girls. This institution, founded by a group of parents and friends, wholeheartedly devoted both to the ideas of American democracy and to the Jewish heritage, has been inspiringly successful in carrying out an integrated program of bilingual cultural experience. The name, Shulamith, which is that of the heroine of the Song of Songs, and the motto of the school, "Return, oh, Return," are evocative of the spirit which has formed the curriculum of the school. The revival of the study of sources on the elementary level meets the desperate need for filling the void felt by the Jewish child—the desire for roots, the yearning to "belong." In the Bible, the child learns of the beginnings of his own history, of the pride and greatness of a people, acquires a knowledge of and love for the Hebrew tongue, and encounters situations which help him resolve his own difficulties.

The wholesome tendency to integrate the past with the present is illustrated by the following incident at one of the Bible classes on the adolescent level. The teacher explained the meaning of "Do not gossip," and how base it is to engage in gossip, a vice which tends to befall the idle. The following day, in the course of the lesson, one of the girls suddenly raised her hand and made the following observation, "Teacher, yesterday while taking a stroll we made up our minds to abide by the law and not to gossip. To our great consternation, we had nothing to talk about." Whereupon another girl, from the

opposite corner of the room reiterated the same thought. "It is true," she said, "we could not make any conversation, we did not open our mouths." The children preferred for once not to talk, as a result of reading the wise words of our sages who regard the "evil tongue" as only less serious than bloodshed.

Precepts like these and stories centering round such ideas as Abraham's hospitality and Moses's simplicity, give the child a positive image of human nature and enable him to find faith in himself. A positive version of the world was recently unfolded by a third-grader in the words which closely resemble ancient prophecy: "I dreamed that God created the world anew. He created one people and one language. The word, 'death,' was not known and the dead came to life again."

The Haggadic literature which I have been trying to integrate into Bible teaching, opens a gateway to a storehouse of untold pleasures to our pupils. At the same time, I do not lose sight of the prime importance of teaching the great moral foundation upon which American life has been founded. A perfect example of such an integrated lesson—the teaching of a democratic philosophy—is afforded by the Rabbinic speculation about Jeremiah's ancestry. The theory that Jeremiah was descended from Rahab may strike most readers as merely a simple Rabbinic whimsy. But as a teacher, I try to emulate the Rabbis who insist upon making it a lesson in democracy. "Let the son (Jeremiah) of the reformed wanton, the Rabbis teach, come and reprove the wanton son (*i.e.*, the prophet's contemporaries) of the paragon (meaning Israel's forebears)."

In the mere existence of such variety of educational institutions, there lies the strength and glory of American life. The freedom to express oneself freely and to preserve one's cultural heritage will bring out the best that is in all peoples in America, and will mold a form of life whose unity will grow out of its diversity.

JUDITH BERLIN LIEBERMAN

The daughter of the outstanding Jewish leader, Rabbi Meir Berlin, and wife of Professor Saul Lieberman, was born in Lithuania in 1905. She received her elementary education at a Berlin elementary school,

her secondary and college education in New York City. After receiving her B.A. from Hunter College, she did post-graduate work at Columbia University, and the Universities of Berlin and Zurich, where she received the Ph.D. She is the author of *Robert Browning and Hebraism*. Active in educational and social fields, she taught from 1932-1940 at the Mizrahi Teachers' College for Women, Jerusalem, and organized various social projects for the rehabilitation of children under Mizrahi auspices. Returning to the United States in 1940, she has been principal of the Shulamith School for Girls—an institution that pursues a bi-lingual program—English and Hebrew. She has served as National Political Chairman of the Mizrahi Women's Organization of America, and has contributed articles on political and educational issues to *The Mizrahi Woman* and other publications.