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## IMMANUEL KANT

### 6. Letter to Markus Herz (1777)<sup>1</sup>

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. . . Dearest Friend,

Today Herr Mendelssohn, your and my honorable friend—as I take pride in calling him—departed from here. Having a man of such gentle disposition, and good spirits and intelligence for a constant and intimate companion in Königsberg would be the kind of spiritual nourishment which is completely lacking here, and which, as I grow older, I increasingly miss. I did not [I must admit] know how to enjoy the company of such a rare person, or how to avail myself sufficiently of [his presence in Königsberg] in part because I was afraid to interfere with

the business that had brought him here. The day before yesterday, he honored me by attending two of my lectures—*à la fortune du pot*, as one might say, since the table was not prepared for such a distinguished guest. The lecture, this time, must have seemed rather tumultuous to him; vacations had interrupted the previous one and most of the time, therefore, was spent on summarizing its content. The summary, naturally, lacked all the clarity and order of the lecture itself. I beg you to help me retain the friendship of this venerable man. . . .

#### NOTE

1. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), German philosopher who articulated in a systematic manner the precepts of the Enlightenment. Despite his negative views of Judaism, he had many Jewish disciples and friends.

Markus Herz (1747–1803), German-Jewish physician, disciple of Kant, friend of Moses Mendelssohn and advocate of the Enlightenment among

his fellow Jews. In August 1777, Mendelssohn (see chapter 1, documents 11 and 12, and chapter 2, documents 7, 15, 19, and 20) had made a business trip to Königsberg, the East Prussian city where Kant taught. Mendelssohn met Kant, with whom he quickly developed a friendship (see document 3 in this chapter). This letter is dated August 20, 1777.

Source: *Immanuel Kants Werke*, ed. E. Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1918), vol. 9, pp. 158–59. Trans. by J. Hessing.

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## MOSES MENDELSSOHN

### 7. The Right to be Different (1783)<sup>1</sup>

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. . . Brothers, if you care for true piety, let us not feign agreement where diversity is evidently the plan and purpose of Providence.

None of us thinks and feels exactly like his fellow man; why then do we wish to deceive each other with delusive words? We already

Source: Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, on Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush, with an introduction and commentary by Alexander Altmann (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 138–39. Reprinted by permission of the University Press of New England.

do this, unfortunately, in our daily intercourse, in our conversations, which are of no particular importance; why then also in matters that have to do with our temporal and eternal welfare, our whole destiny? Why should we make ourselves unrecognizable to each other in the most important concerns of our life by masquerading, since God has stamped everyone, not without reason, with his own facial features? Does this not amount to doing our very best to resist Providence, to frustrate, if it be possible, the purpose of creation? Is this not deliberately to contravene our calling, our destiny in this life and the next?—Rulers of the earth! If it be permitted to an insignificant fellow inhabitant thereof to lift up his voice to you: do not trust the counselors who wish to mislead you by smooth words to so harmful an undertaking. They are either blind themselves, and do not see the enemy of mankind lurking in the ambush, or they seek to blind you. Our noblest treasure, the liberty to think, will be forfeited if you listen to them. For the sake of your felicity and ours, *a union of faiths is not tolerance*; it is diametrically opposed to true tolerance! For the sake of your felicity and ours, do not use your powerful authority to transform some *eternal truth*, without which civil felicity can exist, into a *law*, some *religious opinion*, which is a matter of indifference to the state, into an *ordinance of the*

*land!* Pay heed to the right *conduct* of men; upon this bring to bear the tribunal of wise laws, and leave us *thought and speech* which the Father of us all assigned to us as an inalienable heritage and granted to us as an immutable right. Should, perhaps, the link between *right* and *opinion* be too prescriptive, and should the time not yet be ripe for abolishing it completely without courting damage, try, at least, to mitigate as much as you can its pernicious influence, and to put wise limits to prejudice that has grown gray with age.<sup>2</sup> At least pave the way for a happy posterity toward that height of culture, toward that universal tolerance of man for which reason still sighs in vain! Reward and punish no doctrine, tempt and bribe no one to adopt any religious opinion! Let everyone be permitted to speak as he thinks, to invoke God after his own manner or that of his fathers, and to seek eternal salvation where he thinks he may find it, as long as he does not disturb public felicity and acts honestly toward the civil laws, toward you and his fellow citizens. Let no one in your states be a searcher of hearts and a judge of thoughts; let no one assume a right that the Omniscent has reserved to himself alone! If we render unto *Caesar* what is *Caesar's*, then do you yourselves render unto *God* what is *God's!* Love truth! Love peace!

## NOTES

1. This call for religious tolerance and pluralism served as the peroration of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* (1783), his systematic demonstration of the compatibility of traditional Judaism with the precepts of the Enlightenment.

2. Alas, we already hear the Congress in America striking up the old tune and speaking of a *dominant religion*. [Mendelssohn's note.]

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## THE NEW ISRAELITE TEMPLE ASSOCIATION

### 1. Constitution of the Hamburg Temple (December 11, 1817)<sup>1</sup>

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... Since public worship has for some time been neglected by so many, because of the ever decreasing knowledge of the language in which alone it has until now been conducted, and also because of many other shortcomings which have crept in at the same time—the undersigned, convinced of the necessity to restore public worship to its deserving dignity and importance, have joined together to follow the example of several Israelite congregations, especially the one in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> They plan to arrange in this city also, for themselves as well as others who think as they do, a dignified and well-ordered ritual according to which the worship service shall be conducted on the Sabbath and holy days and on other solemn occasions, and which shall be observed in their

own temple, to be erected especially for this purpose. Specifically, there shall be introduced at such services a German sermon, and choral singing to the accompaniment of an organ.

Incidentally, the above-mentioned ritual shall not be confined to services in the temple; rather it shall apply to all those religious customs and acts of daily life which are sanctified by the church<sup>3</sup> or by their own nature. Outstanding amongst these are the entrance of the newly-born into the covenant of the fathers, weddings, and the like. Also, a religious ceremony shall be introduced in which the children of both sexes, after having received adequate schooling in the teachings of the faith, shall be accepted as confirmants of the Mosaic religion.

#### NOTES

1. The New Israelite Temple Association of Hamburg instituted the first systematic Reform worship services; it was founded by sixty-six Jews, led by Eduard Kley (1789–1867), Meyer Israel Bresselau (1785–1839) and Seckel Isaak Fraenkel (1765–1835)—all of them laymen. The Hamburg Temple was dedicated on October 18, 1818, the anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig, which marked the liberation of Germany from Napoleonic rule. Some historians see an ideological motive not only in this gesture but also behind the Reformers' naming their synagogue a "temple." That is, that by adopting the designation traditionally reserved for the fallen Temple of Jerusalem, the Reformers symbolically relinquished the hope of Israel's restoration and declared Hamburg their Jerusalem. Other historians ascribe to the Reformers the

more innocent motive of simply wishing to distinguish their house of worship from the traditional synagogue of Hamburg.

2. On the Feast of Weeks in the year 1815, Israel Jacobson (1768–1828)—the father of German Reform, the founder of a Reform temple in Sessen, Westphalia—inaugurated a "private" Reform worship service in his Berlin home. Later the services moved to the home of Jacob Herz-Beer, a wealthy Berlin banker. Due to the opposition of the conservative Prussian government the Reform synagogue of Berlin was closed down in 1817. Eduard Kley had served as a preacher in Beer's synagogue.

3. This word was intended to underscore the purely religious character of the Hamburg Temple.

Source: W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of Its European Origins* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), pp. 31ff. Reprinted by permission of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

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## THE HAMBURG RABBINICAL COURT

### 3. These Are the Words of the Covenant (1819)<sup>1</sup>

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These are the words of the covenant with Jacob, a law unto Israel, an eternal covenant; the world of God is one forever and ever. [These words are uttered] in accordance with the Torah and by judgment of the court of justice of the holy community of Hamburg—may the Lord bless it well—with the support of the leading men of learning in Germany, Poland, France, Italy, Bohemia, Moravia and Hungary. All of them join together, in an edict decreed by the angels and a judgment proclaimed by the holy ones, to abolish a *new law* (which was fabricated by several ignorant individuals unversed in the Torah) instituting practices which are not in keeping with the Law of Moses and of Israel. Therefore these pious, learned, holy and distinguished rabbis have risen to render the Law secure [against such infractions]. They have discovered a breach [of the Law] and have sought to contain it with prescriptions forbidding the three cardinal sins [of Reform]:

1. It is forbidden to change the worship that is customary in Israel from Morning Benedictions to "It is our duty to praise [the Lord of all]";<sup>2</sup> and all the more so [is it prohibited] to make any deletions in the traditional liturgy.

2. It is forbidden to pray in any language other than the Holy Tongue. Every prayerbook that is printed improperly and not in accordance with our [traditional] practice is invalid, and it is forbidden to pray from it.

3. It is prohibited to play a musical instrument in the synagogue on the Sabbath and on the festivals even when it is played by a non-Jew.

Happy is the man who heeds the decree of the sages of the court of justice and the words of the learned, pious and holy. Happy

is the man who does not remove himself from the congregation, in order that he may walk in the way of the good. He who desires the integrity of his soul will take utmost care lest he transgress, Heaven forbid, the words of the learned contained in this volume, as the sages of the Talmud, may their memory be blessed, said: "Pay heed to their legacy." Who is the man who fears the Lord and will not fear the words of the forty pious, exalted and holy men who have affixed their signatures to this book, sparing [thereby] himself and his household.

By Order of the Court of Justice of the Holy Community of Hamburg.

. . . Behold, we had hoped that these men [who have introduced Reform] would have attended to our words and listened to the voice of their teachers, who alone are fit to express an opinion on matters concerning what is permitted and what is prohibited. In former times the men of our proud city have listened to the voice of their teachers, who told them the path they were to take. We had thought that our judgment would be honored and that they would not dare to disobey our utterance, for our strength now is as it was formerly.

But we hoped in vain, for these men disobeyed the counsel [of their teachers] and sank into sin. They quickly built for themselves a house of prayer, which they called a temple, and published a prayerbook for Sabbaths and festivals, which has caused great sorrow and brought tears to our eyes over the destruction of our people. For they have added to and deleted from the text of the prayers according to their hearts' desires. They have eliminated the Morning Benedictions and the blessing for the Torah and have discarded Psalm 145, as well as other psalms

Source: *Eleh divrei habrit* (Altona, 1819), pp. 1, 3–5. Trans. by S. Fischer and S. Weinstein.

from the morning prayers. They have set their hands upon the text of the recitation of "Hear, O Israel," and in the wickedness of their hearts have deleted the texts of "To God who rested," "God the Lord," "True and firm" and "There is none to be compared to Thee."<sup>3</sup> Moreover, they have printed most of the prayers in German rather than in Hebrew. Worst of all, they have perpetrated a sore evil by removing all references to the belief in the Ingathering of the Exiles. [Their deletions include] the text "Lead us with an upright bearing to our land" in the benediction "With great love,"<sup>4</sup> the text "Who will raise us up in joy to our land?" in the Additional Service [*Musaf*] for the Sabbath and the texts "Bring us in jubilation to Zion your city" and "Gather our scattered ones from among the nations" in the Additional Service for festivals. They have thereby testified concerning themselves that they do not believe at all in the promise of our teacher Moses, may he rest in peace: "If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee."<sup>5</sup> This belief is one of the major tenets of our holy Torah. All the prophets have been unanimous in affirming that the God of our fathers would gather our scattered ones, and this is our hope throughout our Exile. This belief in no way detracts from the honor of Their Majesties the kings and ministers under whom we find protection, for it is common knowledge that we believe in the coming of the messiah and the ingathering of the exiles. No one has ever dared to object to this belief of ours, because they know that we are obligated to seek the well-being of the peoples who have brought us under their protection. They have bestowed much good and kindness upon us, may God grant them success in all their actions and works. Our opinion here corresponds to that which the learned men of our time, may their light shine, have elaborated in their letters. He who rejects this belief denies [one of] the fundamental tenets of our religion. Woe to the ears that have

heard that men have arisen in Israel to do violence to the foundations of our holy faith.

Yet with all this they are not content, for their hands are still outstretched and they continue to do evil. At the dedication of their house of prayer men and women sang together at the opening of the ark, in contradiction to the law set out in the Talmud and in the Codes: "a woman's voice is indecent."<sup>6</sup> Such [an abomination] is not done in our house of prayer, which has replaced the Temple, throughout the entire Diaspora of the sanctified ones of Israel. Who has heard or seen such a thing? In addition, they play a musical instrument (an organ) on the holy Sabbath and have abolished the silent prayer. They have even abolished the reading of a selection from the Prophets on the Sabbath [after the reading of the weekly portion from the Pentateuch] as well as the reading of the four portions [of the Pentateuch read in addition to the weekly portion on the four Sabbaths preceding Passover]. On Purim the congregation recited the prayer "Grant us discernment" instead of the Eighteen Benedictions, and in the evening they read the Book of Esther in German from a printed text [rather than from a handwritten Hebrew scroll]. Lack of space prevents the inclusion of all their pernicious customs and practices by means of which they have chosen to disobey the Holy One of Israel and to defy the holy sages of blessed memory, the court of their city and the vast majority of our community who are God-fearing and faithful and fulfill the commandments of God.

Thus we have resolved that this is not the time to place our hands over our mouths and to be silent. Were we to remain silent we would be committing a sin, for [the Reformers] would say the rabbis are silent and [their] silence [is to be construed] as consent. With honeyed words they would lead astray the God-fearing and the faithful who in their innocence would follow them. [The Reformers] would say to them: "Behold, the path upon which we walk is good. Come, let us join together and be one people." And so the Torah, Heaven forbid, would disappear.

Brethren, the children of Israel, it shall not be; Israel has not yet been abandoned. There are still judges in the land who are zealous for God's sake and who will rend the arm, and even crack the skull, of him who pursues the sin [of Reformers]. To these judges we shall hasten for aid. They will rise up and help us abolish the [wicked] counsel [of the Reformers] and strengthen our religion. Accordingly, we have girded our loins and written to the famous learned men of the holy communities of Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and Italy. We have sent

them our legal judgment, which we mentioned above, and we asked them if after close and careful study by means of their clear and pure reason they would confirm all that is in our judgment as being proper. In this way we can make public the abomination that has been committed in Israel. Every pious man who fears the word of God will pay heed to the words of the learned men of our time, may their light shine, and to our words. He shall not follow the counsels of the perverse who walk upon a crooked path.

## NOTES

1. In response to Liebermann's *Nogah hazedek* and *Or nogah*, the rabbinic court of Hamburg published this volume of *responsa* (halakhic opinions) on the admissibility of Reform, solicited from Europe's foremost rabbis, including *inter alios* Rabbi Eger of Posen, Prussia (1761-1837), Moses Sofer of Pressburg, Hungary (1763-1839) and Mordecai Benet, chief rabbi of Moravia (1753-1829). The appearance of this volume, which comprised twenty-two *responsa*, "may be said to mark the beginning coalescence of an Orthodox party opposed to all tampering with tradition" (W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook*

*of Its European Origins* [New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963], p. 34).

2. Prayer appearing at the end of the evening services as well as the morning services.

3. These prayers are part of the morning service for Sabbaths and festivals.

4. Prayer appearing before the recitation of "Hear, O Israel . . ." in the morning service for weekdays, Sabbaths and festivals.

5. Deut. 30:4.

6. Talmud, tractate *Berakhot* 24a and tractate *Kidushin* 70a.

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## MOSES SOFER

### 4. A Reply Concerning the Question of Reform (1819)<sup>1</sup>

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Letter from the Rabbi of Great Learning and Renown, Our Venerable Teacher Rabbi Moses Sofer, May God preserve him, President of the [Rabbinic] Court of Pressburg to the [Rabbinic] Court of the Holy Community of Hamburg.

Your [letter] has reached me and has shocked and overwhelmed me with its bitter tidings. For it brings the news that men who

do not submit to the yoke of heaven have lately appeared, seeking to nullify the covenant through devious schemes against the religion of our forefathers. One of their innovations is that their house of prayer should be tightly closed on weekdays and only open on the Sabbath. Would that even then its doors would be closed, for they have altered the text of the prayers which we have

Source: *Eleh divrei habrit* (Altona, 1819), pp. 32ff. Trans. by S. Fischer and S. Weinstein.