Reprinted from the HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1949

The Place of Book-Learning in Traditional Jewish Culture

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In this paper the author reconstructs the education of the East European Jew, bringing into sharp relief the cultural patterns which give rise to that education and, in turn, are perpetuated through the educational content and system. Intellectual achievement is the universal goal. Lifelong study is considered to be commanded directly by God and highest social status goes to him who can give evidence of prolonged and fruitful study. This status is transmitted as a family heritage but it can also be attained by the poorest individual who is well versed in the content and interpretation of the Holy Books—"Better a learned bastard than an ignorant priest." This pattern is traced through acculturation processes outside of the Jewish communities in East Europe and its basic components in Jewish life in the United States are pointed out.

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METHODOLOGICAL STATEMENT

This paper is a report from the section studying East European Jews of the Columbia University project, Research in Contemporary Cultures, which was inaugurated by the late Professor Ruth Benedict in 1947 under a grant from the Office of Naval Research.

The project employs some standard procedures of cultural anthropology, draws upon some methods of clinical psychology, and has developed some additional lines of research.

The interviewing techniques of field anthropology and clinical psychology are checked and augmented by findings secured through projective testing on the one hand and, on the other, through intensive analysis of selected written materials, films, photographs, and other data. Interview data are analyzed with a view to building up a systematic picture of regularities in the characters developed by individuals within the culture. These regularities are viewed in their relation to the institutions of the societies that produced them.

Cultural anthropology provides the methods used to check the findings, drawn from intensive interviewing, against the formal patterns of a culture, and also furnishes methods for analyzing folklore, social organization, ritual behavior, and similar problems.

Clinical psychology provides the methods used to interpret the dynamics of the character patterns revealed by intensive personal interviewing, and to systematize our understanding of the way in which specific child rearing practices perpetuate a given culture. During the last ten years these methods have been used effectively in the United States for study of contemporary cultures which were inaccessible to field study because of wartime conditions.

The methods described are necessarily inappropriate for the establishment of statistical frequencies of any sort. They are concerned with main regularities in character structure, not with establishing to what degree some particular facet of these regularities is manifested in any given group, or at any particular time. Nevertheless, they may be used as the basis of testable predictions.

The present study is based on intensive interviewing of informants directly or indirectly familiar with East European Jewish culture – including individuals who have grown up in East Europe, or have lived there, and individuals whose parents were natives of East Europe–and on intensive analysis of selected written materials, films, photographs, and other data. In its present formulation it applies only to the East European Jews of the late prewar period, in the selected groups discussed.

The system of transliteration followed is that used by the Yiddish Scientific Institute in New York.

I. Focus on Learning*

The centuries of Jewish history are centuries of study–millenia of study, in fact, for the cult of scholarship was well established before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. To the tradition-steeped Jew, the great landmarks of his history are closely associated with the pursuit of learning. Jerusalem, Yabneh, Babylon, Pumbadita, Spain, Wolozhin, Mir, Slobodka, and Lublin are linked in his mind not only with dramatic events but also with the study of the Law. When the Romans destroyed Jewish national independence, the first thing that Rabbi Jokhanan Ben Zakai did in order to preserve the Jewish tradition was to create the school in Yabneh. When the Japanese organized the Jewish ghetto in Shanghai, in 1942, one of the first things the Jews did was to organize a *yeshiva* (school), and reprint a full set of Jewish scholarly classics. A Jewish community is unthinkable without a center of learning, be it a *kheder* where the youngest children study, a *talmud tora* for those whose parents cannot pay tuition, a yeshiva for higher studies, or a *bes hamidrash* for prayers as well as for study.

The values and patterns discussed here are the ones characteristic of the *shtetl*–the Jewish community in the small town or village of Eastern Europe,[1] i.e., in Ukraine, Poland (Galicia and Russian Poland), Lithuania, Romania (Bessarabia and Bukovina), Hungary, and Carpatho-Russia. Their effects and their traces are also perceptible among Jews in Eastern Europe, and even among highly acculturated Jews in the United States.

Study is the duty, the privilege, and the joy of the shtetl Jew. Young and old, rich and poor, businessmen and manual workers, devote themselves to it. The bes hamidrash is never empty, whether it be in the Eastern European shtetl, the Lower East Side of New York, or in Brownsville, Brooklyn. In any community that adheres strictly to Jewish tradition, some men are always engaged in fulfilling the divinely decreed obligation of learning. If his occupation does not permit a Jew to devote himself entirely to study, he will study in the

*The author is indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth G. Herzog for her close collaboration and to Dr. Conrad M. Arensberg for stimulating suggestions, as well as to the entire group engaged in study of Eastern European Jewish culture: Dr. S. Benet, Dr. T. Bienenstok, Miss N. Chaitman, Dr. N. F. Joffe, and Miss I. Rozeney.

[1]When the present tense is used in describing the shtetl culture, for purposes of this article it is to be regarded as the historical present, referring to the period preceding 1939. The general picture given here is based on conditions in Ukrainian Jewish communities before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and in the Polish, Hungarian, or Romanian villages or small towns before their destruction in the years 1939-45. Nevertheless, despite the profound changes brought by war and revolution, enough of the basic attitudes and usages persist to make a clearly defined historical present more accurate than a straight past tense.

morning before work or in the evening after work, or he will devote at least one day a week—the Sabbath—to study.

Study is twice prescribed. In order to be a good Jew one has to follow the commandments of the Scripture. In order to follow them one has to know them. In order to know them one has to study. Moreover, to study is a *mitsva,* that is, a deed commanded by God. To share one's learning is also a mitsva.

A Jew without learning is incomplete. He is an ignoramus, an *amorets;* and an ignoramus is the most despised member of the community. There is a saying in the Talmud, "Better a learned bastard than an ignorant priest."

The language itself is amazingly rich in terms for referring to a learned man: *lerner, masmid, kharif, talmid khokhom, ben tora, iluy, lamdan* are only a few of the terms used in everyday speech.[2] Many more refined and complicated ones are used in writing, to describe the precise degree of knowledge of a learned Jew.

Learning gives prestige, respect, authority, and status. It is, in fact, the primary basis for social stratification, at least in principle. In the shtetl, Jewish society is divided into two main groups: the *Proste Yidn* and the *Sheyne Yidn,* literally translated the common Jews and the beautiful Jews, although the beauty is based on spiritual values rather than on physical appearance.

The Sheyne Yidn are the "representative" Jews, the "Faces" (*pney*) of the community. They are the ones who are given the seats of honor in the synagogue, at the Eastern wall which the Jews face during their prayers because it is in the direction of Jerusalem. The Proste Yidn, the common Jews, are artisans, workmen—people who in the synagogue are seated further and further from the East wall until the very last ones are at the West wall, the place for beggars and strangers.

The learned man belongs automatically to the Sheyne Yidn, since the most important basis for social stratification is learning. A really learned man, a talmid khokhom, cannot be a Proster Yid; but a very rich man may be one, if he lacks the background of learning. The three main criteria of status are (1) learning, (2) *ikhus,* or family status, and (3) money. In theory, money is by far the least of these, although in practice it may be given more weight. The ideal combination is learning and wealth—these two together assure ikhus. The typical mother's daydream, as expressed in folksong, is to have her son "a talmid khokhom and also a clever business man."

As a learned man he will enjoy all honor in the community. Besides having a seat at the Eastern wall, he will be called more often than others to the weekly reading of the Tora, and he will receive those portions of the reading which are valued most. At social gatherings he will have the place of honor. When he is invited to *seuda,*

[2]Lerner, studious one; masmid, one who is always bending over his books; kharif, the acute, especially one who excels in *pilpul* (cf. p. 97); talmid khokhom, wise student, learned one; ben tora, son of the law, scholar; iluy, genius, superior or accomplished person; lamdan, erudite one; *gaon,* genius; *oker horim,* "uprooter of mountains," one who excels in pilpul.

a feast to celebrate some family occasion, the host will give him his own place at the table, and he will be served first. When he speaks, he will be listened to with deference, and not interrupted. In synagogue, during the periods between two prayers, he will always be surrounded by a group respectfully listening to his comments on some passage in the Talmud, or on events in the life of the community, or even on political problems. When invited to a circumcision, he will often have the honor of *mtsutsa,* that is, of sucking out the first drop of blood.

The learned man is the pride of the community, and still more of the family. "May he be raised for the Tora, for the wedding, and for doing good deeds," is the wish uttered at the birth of a son. The more learned men a family includes—whether by birth or by marriage—the greater is its ikhus. Ikhus may be defined as the sum total of all the values that set the social status of the family, including origin, genealogy, provenience. Among these values the most important is the number of learned men in the past and in the present.

Jewish parents dream of marrying off their daughter to a learned youth, or their son to the daughter of a learned father. The *shadkhen,* or marriage broker, who is a very important institution in the shtetl, has in his notebook, under the names of the boys and girls, detailed accounts of their ikhus, including the enumeration of all the learned men in their family. The greater the background of learning, the better the match. The sages have said, "A man should sell all he has in order to get for his son a bride who is the daughter of a scholar."

The dowry of a girl is proportional to the scholarship of the prospective bridegroom. Very rich Jews used to go to the yeshiva and ask the Head for the best student, whom they would then seek as a son-in-law. An outstanding student would receive not only a rich dowry, but a given number of years of *kest*—that is, of board at the home of his parents-in-law so that he might continue his studies.

"Tora is di beste skhore," ("The Tora is the best commodity") is a popular saying among Eastern European Jews. The father will support his son, the sisters, their brother, the father-in-law, his son-in-law, in order to give opportunity for study. Moreover, it is correct for the wife of a gifted scholar to earn a livelihood for the family while he remains with his books, and for the community to subsidize the poor student. If a man were not devoting himself to study, he would be scorned as a ne'er-do-well for letting his wife support him, and he would be despised as a beggar if he lived on the community.

Parents seek a learned son-in-law or the daughter of a learned father, not only because of a desire to augment the ikhus of the family, but also because of a genuine admiration and relish for intellectual prowess. In addition, learning is viewed as a guarantee of high moral and social standards. An amorets, an ignoramus, is not only an unlearned man. He is also a man who does not know how to behave socially, one with low ethical principles, who will treat his wife without due respect, and may even beat her. And, above all, he is a

man who would not know how to bring up his children.

It is assumed that the child of an amorets will probably be an amorets also, and that a learned man will be a good husband and father. Jewish ethics are learned. One of the basic principles of Jewish education is that the mere fact of learning the rules of behavior causes one to behave accordingly. The wife of a learned man will be treated according to the rules of conjugal relations which are in the holy books. The children will grow up to be learned people. A girl who comes from a family of learned men will be a good wife and a good mother. She will be modest and well behaved and, most important of all, she will put her husband's learning above everything else because she understands the value of learning.

There is still another advantage in seeking a learned husband for one's daughter. Learning assures the future life, the *Olam Habo.* A woman by herself has little hope of gaining Olam Habo. She is inferior to men, who daily give thanks to God that they were not created women. Moreover, she does not study—learning is for men only. She, however, reaps part of her husband's Olam Habo. If she is a good wife, especially if she facilitates his studies by taking over such humdrum cares as running the house and earning a living, she will be recompensed for it by a share in her husband's eternal happiness.

All these considerations stimulate parents to dream of a son-in-law who will be a talmid khokhom, a dream expressed in a lullaby for girls:

Under (Baby's[3]) cradle
Stands a snow-white kid
The kid went off to trade
With raisins and almonds
But what is the best trade?
(Baby's) bride-groom will learn
Tora he will learn
Holy books will he write
And good and pious
Shall (Baby) remain.

The prestige that is linked with learning can be observed also in the relationship between adults and children, for learning erases the difference in age that is so important in Jewish social life. Usually there is a definite separation according to years, and seniority is given all honor. A child is an incomplete member of society, and as such he gets little attention from the male adult. Grown-ups not only tolerate the presence of children at the synagogue, but even insist on it, because the atmosphere is essential to a Jewish education. But a child is "only a child" and no one expects from him any reasonable, goal-conscious action or attitude.

As long as the child is small the father pays little attention to his life and activities. But the whole relationship changes as soon as the boy begins to learn, and his prestige increases in proportion to his progress in his studies. The first real mark of respect a boy receives is when he passes the first elementary studies and enters the next stage, the *gemara kheder.*

A boy who is studying the Talmud is considered almost an adult, especially when he shows special aptitude. He may participate in all the debates of adults and his opinion carries equal weight. A bearded Jew

[3]The name of the girl is filled in.

will not be ashamed to bring some difficult talmudic question to a young boy of thirteen or fourteen who is known as a future talmid khokhom. A boy who is known as a genius, iluy, will be shown the same deference as a learned adult. I have witnessed, for example, the respect shown to a child of eight, son of a famous Ukrainian Rabbi, because the little boy knew by heart all the prayers and two complete books of the Pentateuch, together with the accompanying commentary of Rashi.[4]

The Jewish ideal of male beauty again reflects the emphasis on intellect. A man who has *hadras ponim*, a distinguished, beautiful face, ideally has a long beard—symbol of age and therefore of wisdom, a high forehead indicating highly developed mental abilities, pale complexion—revealing long hours spent over books at night, thick eyebrows—showing penetration, that jut out over deep-set, semi-closed eyes—indicating weariness from constant poring over books—eyes that shine and sparkle with wit as soon as an intellectual problem is discussed. Very important are the small, pale hands, confirming the fact that the owner is not engaged in any manual trade but has devoted his life to study.

A talmid khokhom is easily recognizable in the streets of the shtetl. He walks slowly, sedately, absorbed in his thoughts. His speech is calm, rich in quotations from the Bible or the Talmud. A great deal is said by a sound, an allusion, a slight wink, grimace, or gesture.

When he walks he is greeted first by other members of the community, in deference to his high position. Not only the poor but also the wealthy greet him first, if they are less learned than he. His answer to the greeting will correspond to the intellectual status of the person. If the salutation comes from an amorets, there will be just a slight imperceptible wink—and sometimes even that is omitted. If the other person is considered more or less an intellectual equal, there will be an inclination of the head.

A learned man seldom laughs. Excessive laughter is considered the mark of an amorets. For the most part he will react to a joke or a witty saying by a smile, or a very short and restrained chuckle. The talmid khokhom must indicate his position in the community by his behavior and his appearance.

In view of the advantages attached to scholarship—status, prestige, a rich wife, the joy of study itself—it is natural that to be a scholar is considered the most desirable career of all. From infancy the boy is guided and prodded toward scholarship. In the cradle he will listen to his mother's lullabies:

Sleep soundly at night and learn
Tora by day
And thou'lt be a Rabbi when I
have grown grey.

[4]The persistence and antiquity of this pattern is suggested by an episode in the life of Christ, described by the Evangelist Luke (Luke 2, 41-52). The twelve-year old Jesus was found in the temple discussing the Law and confounding bearded scholars by his scholarly and penetrating questions. The situation—depicted in well-known paintings by Dürer, Van Dyck, Botticelli, and others—bears striking similarity to the treatment and behavior of a young iluy in the Eastern European shtetl.

or

My Yankele shall learn the Law
The Law shall baby learn
Great books shall my Yankele write
Much money shall he earn.

or

A boy who'll study the Gemara
The father will listen with happiness and joy
A boy who grows to be a talmid khokhom. . .

The whole family, mother, aunts, sisters, everyone who is in close contact with the baby, will watch for anything in his behavior that could be interpreted as a sign of intellectual precocity. A smile, an unexpected gesture, an imitation of an adult's expression will be considered a *khokhme* expression of exceptional intelligence—and parents and neighbors will exclaim about the little prodigy.

As soon as the baby starts to talk, his mother teaches him religious blessings and sometimes a few simple Hebrew words. More important, however, the child is steeped in the atmosphere and the spirit of learning. Most of the father's time at home is spent over his books. While the father studies, he will take the little boy, even before the child is able to talk, on his lap to make him familiar with the *shwartse pintelekh,* the black points, or letters. The child becomes used to the melody of learning—the *nigumor* chant always uttered as the scholar reads—to the father's continual swaying as he studies, to the general aspect of a book.

The father does not object if the child turns the page, if he closes or opens the book; but one thing is strictly prohibited—to damage the book or throw it on the floor. From the very beginning the child is taught to respect a book, even to hold it in awe. He is taught to respect the whole process of learning. When father is studying, he must be quiet. No noisy games are allowed, because "Father is studying." He sees his mother and the other members of the family avoid the least noise because "Father is studying," "Father is looking into a book."

When a learned member of the family comes into the house, the child sees the respect shown to him, and a mother will never forget to tell her son, "When you grow up, you must be a talmid khokhom like him." As the boy is usually named after some prominent deceased member of the family, he is always reminded to follow his example and become a lamdan, a ben tora, a talmid khokhom. Thus learning is a frequent topic of family conversation, of mother's lullabies, of blessings, of wishes, and of exhortations that the child receives from day to day.

Once he starts to school, the boy is the "jewel" of the family. Every Saturday the father will examine him, while the teacher sits by and the mother looks on tensely. Each new step in the curriculum is an occasion for family celebration, at home and in the Synagogue. At such celebrations the boy must show his intellectual mettle and his progress by some original interpretation of a sentence from the Bible.

If the boy shows ability and enthusiasm the family is happy and the parents are proud. If he is indifferent or incompetent, they will reproach him, painting his future in appalling colors: "What will you be? A tailor?

A shoemaker? An amorets!" The father will try to stimulate his intellect by threats, by punishments, by beating. As one informant said, "When my father beat me for playing hookey from kheder, he would say, 'You'll become a talmid khokhom even if I have to kill you!' "

II. A Lifelong Program of Study

Formal education begins between the ages of three and five, when the boy is first taken to the kheder. It is a curriculum that has a beginning but no end. Jewish learning never finishes because, as the proverb says, "The Tora has no bottom."

Entrance into the kheder is a painful moment in a child's life. A mere baby, he is taken away from his mother's familiar presence to spend ten or twelve hours a day at study. The child cries, the mother has tears in her eyes, but as I. I. Singer says in his memoirs, "No power could oppose the commandment to teach Tora to a boy who is already three years old."[5]

To make the new experience more pleasant, a special assistant of the *melamed,* or teacher, will carry the child to and from school for a number of weeks. This assistant is called the *belfer.* To stimulate the child's interest, at the first lesson candies or coins are thrown from above him onto the open prayer book from which he is learning his first letters—the letters that spell the Hebrew word for "Eternal" and "Truth." And the melamed will tell him, "Those are angels watching a Jewish boy start his study, and they are throwing the reward from Heaven."

But the first steps on the lifelong path of learning are very difficult, both emotionally and intellectually. The belfer who carries the small children to and from kheder is usually very rough with them and has to be bribed with the sweets and pennies he receives from their mothers. The room in which they study from eight to six, five and a half days a week, is small and poorly furnished, crowded with fifteen or twenty children of assorted ages.

Their teacher, the melamed, for the most part, is not himself a learned man and has fallen into his profession because he failed elsewhere. He barely manages to live on the meager payment he receives; he and his family are chronically underfed. He seldom has any pedagogical ability or any interest in teaching, is always gloomy and angry because of his miserable life, and never misses a chance to vent his spleen by severe, often sadistic punishments.

The method of teaching demands of the child tremendous intellectual effort. The candies thrown on his first lesson-book sweeten only the very first hour of learning. Thereafter there is no attempt to sugar-coat the subject matter. No textbooks with pictures, no story telling, no educational games are used. The only guides to lead the child into *Shaarey Tora,* the Gates of the Tora, are dingy, tattered prayer books with incomprehensible letters and words, and old Bibles used over and over again. The centuries old method is followed of endlessly repeating the incomprehensible Hebrew words, memorizing each letter, each word, the meaning of each word and of the sentence. Yet little by little the child does learn to read and to translate.

[5] *Fun a velt vos is nishto mer,* New York, 1946.

The method of teaching by mechanical repetition and memorizing does not demand any understanding of the text. That will come later. Words in the sentences are translated separately, without any reference to grammar or etymology. Sometimes even the true meaning of the word is neglected, especially when in reading the Bible the boy comes across some botanical or zoological name. In these cases, instead of translating the word exactly, the melamed (who himself does not always know the meaning) will say, *"A min fish* (a kind of fish), *A min khaye* (a kind of beast), *A min boym* (a kind of tree)."

Swaying as one reads, and chanting the words in a fixed melody, *nigun,* are considered necessary for successful study. Movement and melody are automatically acquired by imitation, as are the appropriate gestures with the index finger and the thumb, sweeping the finger through an arc of inquiry and nailing the point down with a thrust of the thumb. Above all, the students are trained to be attentive to the words of the melamed and ready to repeat the reading or the translation of a word the moment he indicates it with the pointer. Inattention and absent-mindedness are severely punished and very often interest is stimulated by the teacher's cat-o'-nine-tails.

In this small, ill-lit, ill-ventilated room, packed with childish misery, are nourished the roots that will eventually blossom into a veritable passion for study, one in which zest is conspicuous. And from the uncomprehending rote repetition of syllables and words will develop an exuberant virtuosity in interpretation and endless analysis.

The kheder is viewed as a training period for the real learning that is to come. In the most elementary, the *dardaki kheder,* or small children's kheder, the pupils learn the elements of reading, and the prayers. After a few months when the child has mastered *ivri*—the mechanics of reading, as differentiated from *ivri taytsh,* or "true" reading with translation—he begins to study the Pentateuch or *khumash.* But he does not begin with the first book, Genesis, which could give some joy through its legends and stories. He starts with Leviticus, the dull and difficult theory of sacrifices.

Study of the Pentateuch is combined with study of commentary of Rashi.[6] It is not enough for the child of four to six to understand and to translate the text of the Bible; there must be comment and interpretation. The words and sentences have, in addition to their simple, direct meaning, another special significance, and in order to understand them it is necessary to study the commentary of Rashi. For example, the Bible says: "When Sarah died her age was a hundred and twenty and seven years." According to Rashi, the question must be asked, "Why the repetition of the 'and'?" The answer is that not only at the time of her death was she a hundred twenty-seven years old, but also that at this age she looked as beautiful and young as at the age of twenty; and that at the age of twenty she looked as beautiful and young as at the age of seven years. Thus from the *khumash kheder* the child becomes acquainted not only with di-

[6] I.e., of R. Salomon Itskhaki, the most popular commentator of the Tora and the Talmud, who lived in the 11th century, A.D.

rect understanding of direct statements, but also with involved interpretations and the search for hidden meanings.

But khumash and Rashi represent the most elementary phases of study, in which pupils are taught directly by the melamed, as befits small children and beginners. In the *gemara kheder,* the highest kheder, where Talmud studies are the main subject, that sort of instruction is gradually replaced by the principle of independent study under the guidance of the teacher.

Talmudic study is a continuous discussion, commentary and interpretation, with the help of innumerable commentators and interpreters, of the most varied aspects and problems of Jewish life, ancient and contemporary, religious and secular. With equal concentration the child of eight or nine has to study the holiday ritual in the Temple, the problems of man-to-man dealings, the laws of divorce, or the rules governing behavior during menstruation.

It is with the talmudic studies that the true joy of learning is born. In the dardaki kheder and the khumash kheder the work was routine, mechanical, boring, repetitious, without much understanding, and without the true joy of learning. The Talmud opens the opportunity to exercise individual capacities, imagination, to show one's intellectual quality.

The beginning of the talmudic studies, although it is not celebrated so spectacularly as the beginning of the khumash, has a tremendous importance for the boy's future. In the gemara kheder the boy begins to study the main code of Jewish wisdom. It is here that his abilities meet the real test and it becomes evident whether he will become a talmid khokhom, a wise student. Here the boy of ten or eleven begins to display the real caliber of his memory, and his power to spend long hours over a difficult problem, using the numerous commentaries and interpretations with penetration and understanding.

The opinion of the teacher about the boy's capacities is not enough. The father may take him from time to time, on a Sabbath, to be examined by some member of the family who is known as erudite, a lamdan, or to any famous scholar in the community, and anxiously wait for an opinion. When a learned guest from out of town visits the family, the father will provoke a scholarly discussion in order to find out what the guest thinks about his son's endowment. The whole family listens to the discourse, especially the mother, because the opinion of a learned man means a great deal for the future of the boy. The great question is: Is he qualified to devote his life to his studies, or should he interrupt them and go into trade or business?

If the boy is judged capable of becoming a talmid khokhom, he is sent from the Gemara kheder to the highest institution of learning, the yeshiva. There, among hundreds of boys from different towns and provinces, under the guidance of eminent scholars, he will devote all his days and a great part of his nights to study.

The general principle of the yeshiva is independence and self-reliance. There is no definite program of studies, no set course. Each student is privileged to study the part of Jewish

wisdom that appeals to him most. If he is attracted by mystical problems, he will study the *kabala;* if philosophy is his field, the works of Maimonides are at his disposal; if he is interested in legal questions, he will work on the Talmud. But in all cases the approach is the same: commentary, interpretation, referring of the different texts to the ultimate Biblical quotation.

Talmudic study is often called *pilpul,* meaning pepper, and it is as sharp, as spicy, as stimulating as its name implies. It means comparison of different interpretations, analysis of all possible and impossible aspects of the given problem, and—through an ingenious intellectual combination —the final solution of an almost insoluble problem. Penetration, scholarship, imagination, memory, logic, wit, subtlety—all are called into play for solving a talmudic question. The ideal solution is the *khidush,* a new, original synthesis, one that has never before been offered. This mental activity combines the pleasures and satisfactions of high scholarship and of high sport. It is a delight both to the performer and to his audience. Both enjoy the vigor of the exercise and the adroitness of the accomplishment. And at the same time, both relish demonstrating their ability to perform on such a lofty and esoteric level.

In the yeshiva the teacher is strictly a guide. He will give an assignment from the Talmud, usually some difficult, contradictory problem, which the students have to work out, making use of different commentators and discussing the problem among themselves by way of rehearsal for classwork. The recitation period will be a discussion of the problem between students and teacher, an exercise in which the teacher as well as the student will try to excel. Such assignments are apart from the individual work of the students, already mentioned.

An eye witness describes a lesson in the yeshiva as follows:

> Everyone of [the students] tries to place himself as near as possible to the platform [where the teacher stands] in order to be able to hear the explanation as clearly as possible. They are standing almost on top of each other. . . The *shiyur* (lesson) usually took two hours but was interrupted many times. . . Almost every sentence was challenged by the pupils who were placed higher than the others and who were shouting in order to contradict the words of the teacher who seemed to them to be an Angel of God. They did not behave with the *derekh erets* (deference) which forbids several people to speak at once and to interrupt. On the contrary, sometimes they attacked the teacher in groups in order to fight him, and it seemed as if the subject concerned them personally and they wanted to fight him in a struggle which knew no bounds. At this time the great teacher sat calmly and quietly without saying a word, as if he were thinking, 'Go ahead, children, go ahead!' He did not like those pupils who were quiet and silent.

In order to be able to devote his life to study, the *yeshiva bakhur,* or yeshiva boy, has to be assured of material subsistence. *"Eyn kemakh, eyn Tora,"* says the proverb, "without flour (bread) there is no study." Very few of the students have parents who can support them, however. The solution of this problem once more demonstrates the importance attached

to learning—the community takes over the burden of supporting, not only the yeshiva itself, but each individual student.

Deputies travel in cities and towns of Eastern Europe raising money to support the yeshiva; and members of the community where a yeshiva is established board the individual students. At the beginning of the semester each member of the community offers to feed a student one day each week. The great majority of the students subsist by these "eating days" with different members of the community, and it is said that the dream of a yeshiva bakhur is: "a house seven floors high; on each floor lives a *nogid* (rich man); and with each nogid I'll have a 'day'."

Each member offers "days" according to his economic status. A rich man offers several days to several students, a poor man only a scanty meal one day each week to one student. Some, who for one reason or another are unable to feed the student at home, replace the meal by coins to buy food—not always enough. Everyone in some way must fulfill the mitsva to support the study of the Law among the people of Israel.

It is, of course, only a small minority who attend the yeshiva, that special élite drawn from the outstanding students of the gemara kheder. The number is further limited by the distance of many towns and cities from the centers where the yeshiva are located. An additional obstacle to sending even very gifted boys to the yeshiva is membership of the parents in the Chassidic movement, which views the yeshiva as a center of opposition to Chassidism.

For all those unable to continue their studies in the yeshiva, the place for post-kheder study is the bes hamidrash, the House of Study. It is usually a local synagogue, for the synagogue is as much a house of study as a house of prayer. In the bes hamidrash, after the periods of daily prayers, students, old and young, study the same subjects pursued in the yeshiva, under the same methods of independent and individual study. One of the learned men in the community adopts the role of teacher, helping the students in their work. Since the teacher's role is minimal in advanced studies, the work does not lag or suffer, even when the bes hamidrash students are completely deprived of a teacher.

In the bes hamidrash, as in the yeshiva, poor students are supported by the community through "eating days." The students in the bes hamidrash, however, include some not found in the yeshiva. One group is composed of men who have interrupted their yeshiva studies because of marriage. Supported by their fathers-in-law, they continue their studies in the local bes hamidrash. To this group belong also Jews who are devoting their time to study while their wives earn the living for the family. Another group of students consists of workmen, businessmen, tradesmen, who, after their daily work, still strive toward learning, even though they do not belong to the learned men of the community. These non-scholarly students, who are not qualified to study independently, are grouped in associations or teams called *khevras*. Each khevra studies a definite segment of Jewish lore, according to the background and

training of its members, and each has a name corresponding to the subject studied. There will be a *Khevra Mishnayes* which studies only the Mishna, or Code of Law without the Talmudic commentary; a *Khevra Shulkhan Arukh,* which studies only the digest of Jewish laws, etc. The members of the khevra frequently hire a melamed who helps them through the difficulties encountered in their studies. Often the melamed will be a young boy who is famous for his knowledge and learning. Such a boy does not lose caste because he is not making a profession of teaching.

The three institutions of learning —kheder, yeshiva, and bes hamidrash, and in some larger Jewish communities the talmud tora, embrace almost the total male Jewish population of the community, from three-year-old boys to venerable greybeards. The normal expectation for a boy born in the shtetl is that from the kheder to the grave he will devote some portion of his time to study. No matter how long a man lives he can continue to explore new wonders in the limitless intricacies and vistas of the Law. During his middle years he must spend part of his time making a living—unless he is one of the scholarly elite. But after retirement he may once more devote all his waking hours to study.

Not every Eastern European Jew is a scholar or even a learned man. But intellectual achievement is the universally accepted goal. There are few Jews from Eastern Europe who have not attended the kheder, at least for a short time. Even those who have almost completely abandoned the traditional pattern still speak with pride about their childhood in the kheder.

III. The Nature of Jewish Learning

In the traditional Jewish pattern, study is not an optional activity left to the choice of the individual. It is a mitsva, a divine command. To observe a mitsva is blessed; to violate one is to invite disaster in this life and later. The mitsva of learning is stated in the Bible: "Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down and when thou risest up."

Six hundred and thirteen mitsvos comprise the totality of obligations, fulfillment of which is the essence of Judaism. The first ten define the direct obligations toward God; the eleventh is the mitsva of learning, just quoted.

Not all, or nearly all, of the mitsvos are fulfilled even by orthodox Jews. Some are impossible because they presuppose the existence of the ritual in the Temple of Jerusalem and the national independence of a theocratic Jewish state. Some are neglected because their observance is too difficult for even the most devoutly orthodox. But those which constitute the main base of Jewish cultural behavior—ethical rules, social duties, religious beliefs, dietary regulations—remain in force. Among these the mitsva of learning has never lost its strong position. On the contrary, during the long centuries of exile its importance has increased, at least for the Jews of Eastern Europe. The persistence and vitality of the emphasis on learn-

ing can be understood partly through analysis of its content, its characteristics, and its social significance.

The traditional Jewish concept of learning partakes of infinity and of paradox, leaping the limits of time and space, and joining apparent opposites. The process of study itself does not aim at any concrete or immediately utilitarian product. Moreover, it is far from admirable or prestigeful to make a living from one's learning. A Jew looks with scorn upon one who sells knowledge rather than giving or sharing it. To share one's knowledge is among the most "beautiful" of deeds; to sell it is unworthy. The melamed who teaches the elementary kheder is despised as a symbol of failure, because that is the only way he has found to support himself and his family. Almost every Jew knows enough to be a melamed, to teach small children the elements of the Law. But almost any Jew would prefer to carry his own studies further, and make his living at some other occupation. Even the Rabbi in Eastern Europe does not receive payment for dispensing his knowledge of the Law. The arrangements in the United States, where a Rabbi receives a salary for expounding the word of God, are surprising and distasteful to the immigrant from the shtetl.

The amount of knowledge amassed through continuous study is not officially measured or evaluated. There is no degree marking the completion of a certain phase of study, for such completion does not exist—"the Tora has no bottom." The diploma the student receives after a few years in the yeshiva indicates only that he has the right to exercise the function of Rabbi. He does not receive with it a special scholarly title. On the contrary, every Jew, from the tailor who studies a chapter of the Talmud weekly in the bes hamidrash to the most learned of savants, is called *Reb,* my teacher, so that this form of address has become equivalent to our "Mister." When scholars use other forms of address, they describe the degree and quality of intellectual excellence, and not the amount of knowledge. The title *Rov,* or Rabbi, is functional rather than academic, and is acquired only when a man begins to serve in that capacity.

When a Jew has completed a reading of the Talmud, he has a celebration, or *siyum,* usually in the bes hamidrash. Then he begins all over again. To describe a man's scholarship, people will tell how many times he has gone through the Talmud. The study of the Holy Books may be interrupted, or may diminish in intensity, but it never stops.

Just as there is no limit to learning, so there is no set curriculum. Everyone studies according to his own capacities and background, concentrating on the area most congenial to him. One will study a chapter of the Pentateuch with its commentary, another a portion of *Mishna,* a third a page in the Gemara, with the most difficult commentaries. Each is equally proud of the fact that he is studying. Each will have a siyum to celebrate the completion of a portion of his work whether it be quite elementary or highly advanced.

Nor are there any special textbooks for study. There are merely a few editions of the Bible, the Talmud, the *Shulkhan Arukh,* which differ

only in the amount of commentary added to the original text.

Rigid distinctions of time are blurred and blended in the tradition of Jewish learning. Past and present are linked together. In the bes hamidrash in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, the Jew will discuss the sacrificing of a lamb on a holiday in the Temple. and which parts are due to the High Priest. It is of no moment to him that the situation was actually two thousand years ago, that there is no more Temple, nor sacrifices, nor Priests. The problem has not lost its intellectual reality.

In the yeshiva the student participates in the discussions between Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shamai who both lived in the first century A.D., examines the arguments of a seventeenth century Rabbi which support one against the other, and arrives at his own original conclusions. There are no dates in Jewish learning, but rather a continuum which embraces and links together Rabbi Akiba, Rashi, Rabbi Joseph Caro, and the student from the yeshiva in Brownsville. The *responsa* of the medieval Rabbis are used to solve problems dealing with contemporary business transactions.

Not only the past and the present are interwoven in the learning-continuum. In the days to come, when the Messiah brings together all the Jews and rebuilds the Temple, the learned Jews will study the Tora together, and the Lord himself will discuss and give the final solution for the difficult problems which could not be mastered and were left pending "until the coming of the Messiah."

Jewish learning effaces the limits of space as well as of time. A page of the Gemara looks the same now as two hundred years ago, and the same in Vilna as in Shanghai. All over the world, Jews are studying the same Tora, the same Talmud; and with the same talmudic chant, the nigun. Little children are reciting the same text as they begin their study of the Mishna: *"Shnayim okhsim b'tales. . ."* "Two have grasped a piece of cloth." No matter where the shtetl Jew wanders, if he finds a traditional community at all, he will find the same studies being pursued, the same problems being debated with the same zeal and zest, the same texts, the same type of school, the same emphasis on study.

The learned tradition, then, serves not only to transmit Jewish culture, it is also a prime factor of cohesion, maintaining unity and continuity in time and space. Deprived of common territory and common national history since the Diaspora, the Jews have maintained a stable realm in the domain of the intellect. When a Jew takes a scholarly book, a *sefer*, into his hand, he immerses himself in the tradition that reaches from the far past into the living present. Through study he escapes from the dark reality, from home troubles, from persecution, and finds the joy of identification with his own background and his own group.

The content and the command of traditional Jewish learning also defy clearcut boundary lines. The Tora—which means not only the Holy Scrolls but all of Jewish wisdom—contains the whole Jewish Truth, which is the only truth. Through continuous study of the same texts, over and over,

one comes closer and closer to an understanding of Divine Law, which is Truth. It is hard, very hard to understand the whole truth. Only through analysis of each sentence, each word, through commentary and interpretation, through searching out hidden meanings, can one come gradually, step by step, nearer and nearer to the goal. Yet he never achieves full understanding.

Since no one can claim to have mastered the whole of wisdom, there is no final authority. On the other hand, everyone who studies is able to come closer and closer to understanding, and so through his own efforts to become a relative authority; each student or scholar is potentially an expert. Each strives toward a khidush, a new and original interpretation, and in doing so each relies greatly on his own intellectual ability.

Accordingly, learning is not an exclusive privilege of one social class. It may be achieved by the rich or the poor. Every Jew may hope to have his son become a scholar, every Jew in the community is a student, every Jew is potentially a teacher. Moreover the prestige brought by learning makes an individual only *primus inter pares.* There is no scholar so wise that his words will not be weighed, examined, and questioned.

The Talmud that the boy begins to study in the kheder, and continues studying until the end of his days, embraces all of Jewish life. It is more than a code of laws; it is also a code of ethics and a handbook of daily behavior. Every detail—social, religious, economic, moral—is examined and discussed, and a definite rule and prescription is set for it. To be a good Jew a man must learn these norms and rulings; if he is unable to learn by himself, he has to be taught by those who have learned. If "culture is learned behavior," in the shtetl community this definition takes on the meaning of "learned from books."

A tremendous part of this monumental work is devoted to the problems of the relationship between man and man. Situations which cannot be regulated by decree are discussed in the Talmud—situations involving honesty, love, the ties between man and wife, parents and children. All the Jewish mores and folkways, in fact the whole of Jewish culture is the subject of Jewish learning. Thus the content as well as the nature of the process confirms the Jewish tradition. All that the student learns in his daily life is reaffirmed by the Holy Books, so that study is a continual reinforcement and reintegration of his own culture.

No subject is too large and none is too small to be included in the all-embracing attention of the scholars. Since the basic rules are held to govern all details of life, none is too trivial to merit exercise of the scholar's virtuosity. For example, the Bible prohibits working on Sabbath and the Talmud interprets this prohibition as forbidding even the indirect causing of work activity on that day. In good Talmudic spirit, a contemporary Rabbi may implement this decree by ruling against opening the refrigerator on the Sabbath, because through opening it one causes the motor to work. It is noteworthy that rulings are adapted not only to modern inventions but also to cur-

rent conditions. Thus, the laws of divorce and re-marriage are studied and interpreted in the light of special circumstances caused by the breaking up and destruction of millions of Jewish families during the Nazi invasion.

The learned man becomes the arbiter in the problem of adjustment which history has made a constant and crucial problem for the Jews. It is his task to facilitate adjustment by an appropriate interpretation of eternal law in the light of ephemeral conditions. If the interpretation is clever enough it can eliminate hardship for all concerned. Such cleverness can go to great lengths without imposing any sense of disrespect to the Law, for to help humanity is an absolute good. For example, a Jew is forbidden to own flour during the eight days of Passover and accordingly must sell all his stock before Passover begins. This problem is solved by a fictive sales contract with a non-Jew, carried out in the presence of the Rabbi and effective for the holiday period only. Thus the commandment is fulfilled and the Jewish dealer does not suffer.

This human editing of divine precept often appears paradoxical to a mind not schooled in the tradition of Jewish learning. On the one hand there is a legalistic preoccupation with the letter of the law, a verbalistic exercise that reaches extremes of virtuosity, until often it seems to be pursued largely *pour le sport*. On the other hand, there is an underlying concern for the spirit of the law as expressed in the Holy Books. One may twist and reinterpret divine decree about Sabbath day usage, until one appears almost a scriptural shyster. At the same time, there is a profound belief that the divine will is actuated by intelligence and reasonableness, and that under extreme exigency it is necessary to modify the letter of the law in order to conform to the spirit which dictates always the preservation of human life and the fostering of human welfare.

Clearly, although Jewish learning overrides the limits of time and space, it is by no means abstract. Every discussion is geared to a concrete situation, one which may be improbable or imaginary, but is never impossible. When an extreme effort of imagination is needed in order to understand a given problem, an example, a parable, even a legend will be used to lend concreteness. When a Jewish student studies a problem concerning sacrifices, it is not an abstraction for him, but a concrete situation which has occurred and may occur again when the Temple is rebuilt.

This extreme concreteness again may appear paradoxical in conjunction with the unperturbed disregard of conventional time and space criteria. The assumption is, however, that the essential unity of the tradition is stronger than any break in physical or temporal continuity. If one accepts this assumption, the whole orientation of Jewish learning is seen as practical and realistic rather than abstract and theoretical.

A learned Jew has scant regard for pure science, pure literature, pure poetry. He can see in such studies no *takhlis*—that is, no direct goal. It is immaterial whether you apply them now or in the days to come, in actual dealings with people, or in under-

standing the motive of an imaginary deed, but they must be applied. There is no pure philosophy, pure esthetics, pure mathematics in Jewish learning. Mathematics is studied in connection with agricultural or architectural problems, esthetics in connection with applied arts in the decoration of the temple, and philosophy in direct correlation with ethics or with understanding the nature of God.

Similarly, a piece of fiction must have a *musar heskl,* a moral. It must be told or written in order to teach. Poetry is not just an esthetic arrangement of words and sentences, but a beautifully phrased expression of praise for the Lord, or of some moral idea. The Song of Songs is not regarded as a poetic description of pure love, but as an allegorical presentation of the relationship between the Lord and His people, Israel. Solely as a paean of love, the Song of Songs would have no takhlis.

In the shtetl orientation, the usual distinction between secular and non-secular hardly applies, for Jewish law and the behavior it governs combine in one entity the religious and secular elements. Strictly speaking, there are no secular elements, since there is no realm of life divorced from the Truth and the Law embodied in the Holy Books. The Talmud includes subjects not connected with religion among many other groups, but they are always supported by a religious reference.

For the shtetl Jew, the opposition is not between secular and non-secular, but between Jewish and non-Jewish. When he opposes his learning to the curriculum of schools and colleges, he does not condemn their studies for being secular, but for being incomplete, superficial, and lacking in fundamental truth—as all studies must be that do not stem from the Holy Books. When an orthodox father forbids his son or daughter to attend a secular school, his arguments are: What can they teach you that we do not have in our Talmud? Aren't our scholars greater, deeper, and don't ours have more knowledge than "theirs"? "Their" science, "their" knowledge originates in colleges and universities. It is human science, while our science comes directly from Mount Sinai, from God. Nothing can be learned in the schools, according to this viewpoint, which has not been said long ago by the Jewish seers.

A different and rather contradictory factor may also be present in the opposition to non-Jewish science, namely a defense against acculturation. Many traditional Jews—even some who may admit the possibility of learning something new in the schools—see in such curricula a danger to the Jewish tradition. An immature boy does not yet have a strong enough core to withstand the temptations of a learning that lacks the basic enlightenment. As a matter of fact, one principle in Jewish education is that adolescents who have not gone through the Talmudic preparation are forbidden to study those works of Jewish scholars which may misguide and mislead—such as *Guide for the Perplexed,* by Maimonides.

The tradition of learning has contributed to segregation as well as to continuity. Devout belief in the completeness and authenticity of the truth embodied in the Holy Books—and consequent scorn for those who

neither knew nor believed—reinforced from the Jewish side the separation enforced by the majority group. In Eastern Europe the intellectual activity of the shtetl Jews was contrasted with the illiteracy of the Polish and Russian peasants. Feelings of intellectual and spiritual superiority over those who rejected truth were strengthened by the intellectual backwardness of the non-Jews—the *Goyim*—who, to the Jewish minority group, represented ruthless, blind physical force. In this situation, under conditions of persecution, the tendency to identify intellect and virtue were magnified.

Conversely, a rise in the intellectual standards of the local non-Jewish population may coincide with impulses toward assimilation. The centrifugal cultural trends that began with the "Enlightenment," *Haskala,* and in great cultural centers of Eastern Europe sometimes led toward complete assimilation of the Jews, coincided with the rise of the intellectual standards of the non-Jewish population.

The prevailing orientation toward learning is brought out in the evolution of the Chassidic movement, which began as a revolt of the unlearned against the bookish doctrine. The salient feature of Chassidism was a love for the common man, the *Proster Yid.* Nevertheless, in the course of its development Chassidism began to produce a literature of commentary and interpretation based on the sayings and parables of the *Tsadikim,* or Holy Men, the leaders of Chassidism. In time the followers came to vaunt the greatness of their Rabbi by telling about his knowledge of such books—although this knowledge was viewed as a result, not of studies in the yeshiva, but of direct communication with God. During the further development of Chassidism, this attitude changed so that again knowledge was viewed as being based on book learning. The child of Chassidic parents would receive the same education and attitudes towards learning as any Jewish child.

In their attitude toward authority, these rebels against the cult of book learning provide an interesting sidelight on the pattern that has grown up about it. The Chassidim, the one anti-learning group, are the only group of Jews for whom the religious leader represents absolute and indisputable authority. While the *Misnagdim* or non-Chassidic Jews would feel free to discuss and to question any statement of any person, the Chassid would accept categorically and without hesitation any act or statement of their leader, the Tsadik.

Interviews, life stories, and literature obtained from Eastern European Jews reveal attitudes and thought habits that are obviously related to the learning tradition just described. One of these traits is commonly referred to as Talmudistic. The legalistic interpretation and analysis of rules and prescriptions, the elaborate word play built about them, the ability to reinterpret them according to the exigencies of the moment are popularly associated with Talmudic training.

Also evident in the interviews and written material (obtained chiefly from non-Chassidic Eastern European Jews) is the anti-authoritarian at-

titude. There is no final and absolute dictum to be accepted without question. Each individual has to weigh every problem himself, using his own judgment and his own brains. He is little impressed by authorities, but is always ready to probe the statement of an expert and to compare it with his own opinions or those of another expert.

There is, too, a reluctance to indulge in easy generalizations. Each problem must be analyzed in its own terms and the solution is not necessarily simple. By using innumerable "if's" all possible pro's and con's are weighed before a solution is accepted. A statement must not be taken at face value; it may hold a second, secret meaning. Accordingly, every item has to be discussed and interpreted. In politics and in business, the meetings of co-workers or of partners show considerable resemblance to the discussion of a problem in the yeshiva.

Bound up with this approach is a relativistic rather than a positivistic attitude. Truth, as perceived by the imperfect human mind, is never single and simple; it is never *the* Truth, and is always subject to interpretation. The only absolute Truth is the Tora, the Divine Law—and that is inaccessible in full to even the most powerful human intellect. This relativistic and provisional approach fosters a tendency to analyze, to probe, to discuss every problem, every phenomenon; to see it not in one aspect but in multiple aspects. There is not the classic opposition between "yes" and "no." Everything contains both elements, negation and affirmation. It is proverbial in Eastern Europe that a Jew will never answer a question by a direct affirmation or negation. The answer has a conditional character. For, according to his tradition, it is the business of the thinker to recognize and to reconcile incompatibles or opposites, in the realm of the spirit and in the practical world —realms which themselves are indivisible.

The learned Jew in Eastern Europe is known also for allusive speech, when he is conversing with his intellectual peers. Incomplete sentences, a hint, a gesture, may replace a whole paragraph. The listener is expected to understand the full meaning on the basis of a word or even a sound. This habit, in contrast to the fluency displayed under other circumstances, is a direct product of the traditional studies. It is assumed that a truly learned Jew is familiar not only with quotations from the Bible and Talmud, but also with the trend that comment or interpretation would be apt to take. Accordingly, in speaking or writing, a scholarly Jew may say only the first few words of a sentence, expecting his hearer to complete it in his mind. Such a conversation, prolonged and animated, may be completely incomprehensible to one not steeped in traditional learning. The pattern may also be embarrassing to younger men who are less learned —or more acculturated—than their elders assume, and who find themselves unable to fill in the gaps as the speaker expects them to do.

IV. Outside of the Shtetl

The pattern of learning has been described as it appears in its clearest form in the Eastern European shtetl,

and secondarily in concentrated settlements in European or American cities. Further study will be required to follow the course of the pattern under the impact of acculturation in the United States. It is obvious that certain features remain and certain changes appear. Both the survivals and the changes need to be studied in relation to the old and the new cultures. Fresh insight into the old culture may be gained by analyzing the features of the new that are most readily adopted, and the ones that are most strongly resisted. Certain points may be made on the basis of present observations, however. It is clear, for example, that the emphasis on learning, which is so strong in the life of the traditional Jew, has diminished little in intensity on different levels of acculturation.

The objectives of learning and the fields of learning do change, but the keen striving toward intellectual activity remains. Just as the shtetl parents-in-law supported their sons-in-law during several years of study at the yeshiva or bes hamidrash, so the wealthy acculturated families in Russia or Poland supported their sons-in-law at the universities.

In the United States, parents do not necessarily save their money in order to send their children to the kheder or the yeshiva, but they may struggle and sacrifice in order to provide a college or university education. The professional man, who is by definition highly educated, takes the place of the talmid khokhom as the ideal son or son-in-law. There is the pattern, too, of a whole family concentrating its effort on training one son for an intellectual career, while the others go into business. Usually the choice falls on either the oldest or the youngest.

Parallel to the institution of kest (see page 90), here as in Europe, parents-in-law support the young couple so that the son-in-law may continue his studies. In many cases the wife works so that her husband can complete his undergraduate or graduate degree. This pattern, too, is in line with the shtetl practice. Since it is also found with increasing frequency among non-Jews, however, it cannot be attributed directly to the old tradition.

Acculturation was, of course, already under way in Europe. From one angle, in fact, the history of the Jews since the Diaspora might be regarded as a history of acculturation. If one views the shtetl as the East European culture base, there are still strong elements of acculturation, not only among Jews who have gone to the city but also within the shtetl itself.

The inter-action and merging of old and new patterns can be seen in the status accorded to learned professions, as well as in the professions that are classed as learned. In the cities of Eastern Europe, any profession which requires special education is regarded as an intellectual calling, by non-Jews as well as by Jews. The dentist, the veterinary surgeon are professionals and intellectuals. They have studied at a university and so are educated people.

Even within the shtetl these professions command honor. As long as one is not involved in the strict tradition of Jewish learning, it is correct and prestigeful for him to ex-

ploit his intellectual achievement for money profit, although it is contemptible to capitalize on the study of the Law.

In the United States, Jews from the shtetl continue to group the veterinary and the dentist with the doctor and the lawyer as professionals and intellectuals. Even a practitioner in a beauty parlor shares the aura that distinguishes one whose profession requires a special education and degree.

Within the professional category there is a distinct hierarchy of prestige. An *Emeser* (real) doctor or "doctor doctor" rates higher than a Ph.D., as does a lawyer; a dentist outranks a veterinary surgeon. Among women a school teacher would outrank a nurse and either would rate above a secretary or cosmetician.

The learning pattern of the shtetl, already influenced by European contacts, has combined no less readily with the American success pattern. In the basic shtetl culture, learning was for its own sake and it was contemptible to exploit this mitsva in order to gain one's daily bread. In the United States, intellectual activity is used to enable one to earn money in an honorific way— a way that itself is a badge of academic accomplishment. The same tendency would be observed in Germany, where Jews occupied an important place among the professional group.

The tendency to guide one's children into intellectual careers or marriage with an "intellectual" is illustrated by the reports of the most satisfied parents among informants. A father summarized the careers of his children as follows: one daughter teaches music, another has a beauty parlor; the others are married to a dentist, a veterinary, and a businessman. One son studied journalism, another graduated from a technical High School. The father wanted the youngest boy to continue in the Jewish tradition, so he was sent to a talmud tora for six years. Then he left and continued his studies at Cornell University, where he became a veterinary.

Another man had seven sons and one daughter, of whom one became a business man and one a salesman while the others became physician, dentist, graphic artist, teacher of Spanish in High School. Others write with pride: "My eldest son got his M.A. from Florida University, the second son is studying chemistry in Florida, a daughter is still in High School."[7] "My eldest son got his diploma (dentistry). Despite the bad material situation we have sent him money to give him the chance to study. So did his brother (a railway mail clerk) and his girl-friend."[8]

In blending the American success pattern with the shtetl emphasis on book learning, something of the early veneration appears to have remained. It is not merely that to work with the head carries more status than to work with the hands. There is also a feeling that intellectual activity is better than manual activity in the sense of being more enjoyable and also of being morally superior.

In the shtetl, the Tora was the fountain of all truth, and very good Jew was obliged to come as close

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[7] Life Stories of Yiddish Immigrants (in Yiddish), from Archives of Yiddish Scientific Institute. Yivo.

[8] *Ibid.*

to the truth as he possibly could. Among highly acculturated Jews in the United States, social significance may predominate over religious significance. Nevertheless, the concept of learning is surrounded not only with considerations of prestige, status, and pecuniary gain; it also bears the stamp of human nobility. It is still felt that the learned man has the best opportunity to become the best kind of human being.