

From Purism to Expansionism: A Chapter in the Early History of Modern Hebrew

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I

The preoccupation of the maskilim of the 18th and 19th centuries with the problems of the Hebrew language, how to both purify and expand it, was not entirely an innovation of their own. At least as far as purism is concerned, it was a characteristic of long standing of the Italian Hebraists of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods. In his esthetic analysis of the Bible, *Nofeth Şufim*, of the second half of the 15th century, R' Yehudah Messer Leon devoted a whole chapter to "Purity and its Kinds,"¹ stressing the importance of adhering to the rules of logic and grammar in both writing and speech and of observing the Biblical forms and idioms.

More than a century afterwards, these ideas were elaborated upon by R' Samuel Archivolti (1515–1611), one of the leading Hebrew grammarians and rhymesters of the 16th century. In his *Sefer 'Arugath ha-Bosem* (Venezia, 1602) he insisted on a separation of Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew:

If the sages of the Mishnah used words not to be found in the Bible, you must pay them respect and use them in the very same language they used them. For instance: *Sukkah shehamatah merubbah mişillatah* [M. Sukkah, 1:1]. Though it appears it should have been proper to say *mişillah*, because the word *şel* in the Bible is always masculine, yet it should be pleasant for writers to use the idiom exactly. On the other hand, one must not mix such a usage with Biblical words, for instance: *beşillath kenafekha*.²

While obviously not objecting to the "language of the sages" in general, Archivolti restricted Hebrew poetry to the use of Biblical Hebrew alone:

Whatever verb you may want to use in a poem, you must first see if that verb is to be found in the Bible and in that specific conjugation. . . . Otherwise we shall become inventors of words, for which there is no foundation whatsoever, and Hebrew will become like an unwallled breached city.³

1 Chap. 14: "Haşahuth u-minehah."

2 *'Arugath Ha-bosem* (Amsterdam, 1730), chap. 28, p. 90.

3 *Ibid.*, 102.

Referring to the view expressed several times in the Talmud, that Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew ought to be kept apart from each other,⁴ Archivolti warned against mixing Hebrew and Aramaic⁵ and against embracing the innovations of the *payyetaanim*.⁶

A follower of Archivolti's views on Hebrew was his disciple, Yehudah Aryeh Modena (1571–1648), the famous rabbi and preacher of Venice. Like Archivolti, he emphasized the importance of the study of Bible and Hebrew grammar;⁷ however, he was more extreme than his master in his criticism of the *piyyut*, condemning it as mere "prattle"⁸ which should altogether be eliminated and replaced by psalms and short prayers recalling the sacrificial cult in the Temple.⁹

Menahem ben Yehudah Lonzano, a grammarian, rhymester and Cabbalist of the 16th–17th centuries, also emphasized the importance of the study of Bible and grammar, as against an exclusive absorption with the Talmud.¹⁰

Such also was the attitude of the eminent Hebrew poet of the 17th century, Immanuel Frances. In one of his poems he advises an aspiring poet:

Study first of all grammar, its general rules and particulars. . . the foundations of which are in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. Read these books at all times until they are as current on your lips as the *shema*. Only then may you begin rhetoric and rhyming.¹¹

The clearest expression of purism in Italy was given by R' Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto (1707–1747), who concluded his youthful work on Hebrew rhetoric, *Sefer Leshon Limmudim* (Mantua, 1727; Jerusalem, 1950), by suggesting that one may choose in Hebrew any of three styles:

One may either draw from the 24 Books of the Bible. . . take parts of verses verbatim and combine them in such a manner as to create the impression that they all are one whole rather than a piecemeal composition. . . Or, one may use the "language of the sages," i.e. that of the Talmud, including even passages of the *targum*. . . provided again they are used verbatim. . . Both ways will give pleasure to readers or listeners who are well-versed in the sayings and phrases of both sources. . . [Finally] one may pick words and expressions from the Bible, but combine them according to one's own will and choice.¹²

4 "לשון חכמים ולשון חכמים לעצמה" *BT* Qiddushin 37b; Avodah Zarah 58b; Hullin 137b.

5 *Arugath Ha-bosem*, 77b.

6 *Ibid.*, 89, 102.

7 *Diwan LeRabbi Yehudah Aryeh mi-Modena*, ed. and intr. by S. Bernstein (Philadelphia, 1932), poem no. 38; no. 112 (p. 144); idem, *Beth Yehudah* (Venezia, 1635), Qiddushin, chap. 1, p. 12b.

8 "פיוט פטפוטים." He uses this expression in both his *Beth Yehudah*, 5a (on Berakhoth, 29), as well as in *Qol Sakhal*. See *Behinath Ha-Qabbalah* (Gorizia, 1852), 42.

9 *Loc. cit.*

10 *Shtei Yadoth* (Venezia, 1618), 120–21.

11 *Diwan LeR' Immanu'el ben David Frances*, ed. S. Bernstein (Tel Aviv, 1932), poem no. 16. For further references to this subject in Italian Hebrew literature, see "Iggereth Musar leQalonimus ben Qalonimus," ed. by Sonne, *Qoveš 'al Yad* (1930), 93–110, mainly 106–07; M. Güdemann, *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens*, trans. by A. S. Friedberg, *Sefer Ha-torah Veha-hayyim Bearsoth Ha-ma'arav Bi-mei Ha-beinayim*, II (Warsaw, 1898), chap. 7; S. Asaf, ed., *Meqoroth L'toledoth Ha-hinnukh Beyisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1931), 2:118–19, 124, 137–38, 139, 186–87, 211.

12 *Sefer Leshon Limmudim*, ed. A. M. Haberman (Jerusalem, 1950), 171–72.

Ramḥal adduces examples for each of the three styles; however, the reader acquainted with his work may find much superior examples of the various styles in the work of *Ramḥal* himself. While his three dramas were all written in the purest and loftiest of Biblical styles, his philosophical or ethical tracts, above all his *Mesillath Yesharim*, were written in the exact and classical, yet popular and warm, style of the Mishnah.

Whatever one's view of *Ramḥal* and his place in the history of Hebrew letters, relegating him either to medieval times or considering him as heralding the modern age, as far as his view of the Hebrew language is concerned, his clear-cut purism is an indication of a backward rather than a forward-looking philosophy of Hebrew, and is, indeed, in the best tradition of Italian Renaissance purism. Although "Meḥqar," one of the leading characters of his allegorical play, *La-Yesharim Tehillah* (1742), displays a receptivity for and a responsiveness to the scientific and mathematical tendencies of the age,¹³ this does not seem to have led Luzzatto to a more dynamic and expansionist view of Hebrew. Even in the description of natural phenomena, detailing states of realia, he did not feel the need of an expanded vocabulary beyond that of the Bible. In short, the idea of the expansion of Hebrew in order to make it expressive of modern culture did not occur to him, nor to any of his compatriots either of the Renaissance or post-Renaissance days. Indeed, this idea did not arise before the age of the Berlin Haskalah.

The first of the 18th century *maskilim* to whom Hebrew had become a problem was Gumpel Schnaber, a physician with an interest in mathematics and the sciences.¹⁴ In 1771 he published in London his *Ma'amar ha-Torah voha-Hokhmah* in which he presented, in the space of some 170 pages, an encyclopedic survey of the various branches of mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences. It was not the first work of its kind in Hebrew,¹⁵ but it was among the earliest. No wonder its style was heavy and awkward and its author totally helpless with some elementary words and terms—so much so that he felt compelled to attach at the end of his volume a list of some 250 foreign words that he used. It is not the work *per se* that is of interest to us in this context, but the author's awareness of the inadequacy of Hebrew for the task he undertook. He writes:

I saw another great evil. . . While all the nations around us keep on composing books and expanding their languages. . . our language remains poor and deficient. There is no one among us who knows how to call a thing by its name in Hebrew, or to describe it, unless it is found in the Torah or Prophets. How few are those among us whose language is pure and whose speech—pleasant, perhaps one in a town and two in a whole nation.¹⁶

13 See especially *dibbur aleph* and *beth* in Act II of *La-yesharim Tehillah*, ed. Y. Zemorah (Jerusalem, 1949), 38–40, 42–46.

14 See on him, Moshe Pelli. *The Age of Haskalah* (Leiden, 1979), 131–50.

15 Cf. J. Eschelbacher, "Die Anfänge allgemeiner Bildung unter den deutschen Juden vor Mendelssohn," *Festschrift zum siebenzigsten Geburtstage Martin Philipppsons* (Leipzig, 1916), 168–77; I. Eisenstein-Barzilay, "The Background of the Berlin Haskalah," *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought* (New York, 1959), 184–87.

16 *Ma'amar Ha-torah Veba-hokhmah*, 5–6.

While there is nothing new in Schnaber's criticizing Hebrew for its lack of purity or beauty, there is an element of novelty in his complaint about its poverty and inadequacy for subjects that are extraneous to the Bible. Obviously implied in that criticism, though not explicitly stated, is his view about the necessity of expanding the language.

The first to stress the need for expanding Hebrew and to suggest its realization by legalizing Mishnaic Hebrew and declaring it on a par with Biblical Hebrew was R' Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814), best known for his elegy *Aggadath Arba^c Kosoth* (Berlin, 1790; Tel Aviv University, 1967). In 1784 there appeared the first part of his *Yeri^coth Shlomo* (Dehrenfurt, 1784) on the synonyms of time, space, and motion in Hebrew. It is a philosophical-philological study of a subject which, since it was first introduced into modern Hebrew literature by N. Wessely's *Gan Na^cul* of the mid-sixties,¹⁷ began to attract much attention.¹⁸ In his introduction to this work, Pappenheim writes that he is puzzled that in a language as poor as Hebrew there should be such extravagances as synonyms, two or three words for one item or concept. The problem, he writes, is further compounded by the opinion of some scholars, that even the limited vocabulary of the Bible is not wholly Hebrew but contains words from "Aramaic, Egyptian, Edomite, Greek, Phoenician, and Hittite, leaving to pure Hebrew only a little that belongs to it." Pappenheim, however, rejects this view:

It is not Hebrew that is poor. . . but we whose knowledge is inadequate. We are ignorant of the many books that perished. the "Histories of the Kings," for instance, the "Midrashim of the Prophets" and their like, all of which were written in Hebrew. In addition, after Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language, parts of it. . . were forgotten and equally lost.

He further declares that, "with the exception of a few Aramaic words," all the vocabulary of the Bible is pure Hebrew. Moreover, "also the language of the Mishnah, all of it or most of it, is pure Hebrew, even though it is not to be found in the Bible." Mishnaic Hebrew, in his view, is not a new dialect, nor even a new phase in the development of Hebrew. Indeed, it is the very same language as that of the Bible, and the fact that some of its words are not to be found there is only accidental, simply "because the necessity for their use has not arisen. However, if we could see those lost books of the Bible, we would find many of them there." Once we agree, Pappenheim concludes, that Mishnaic Hebrew is also Hebrew, Hebrew would no longer be a poor language, but, on the contrary, as rich as any other language and perhaps richer.¹⁹ This view about the essential unity of Hebrew notwithstanding, in his own writings Pappenheim did not develop a homogeneous Hebrew style, but practiced a stylistic dualism. While in his *Arba^c Kosoth* he used a lofty Biblical Hebrew, in the speculative *Yeri^coth Shlomo* his Hebrew was close to that of the medieval Jewish philosophers.

17 Pt. I (Amsterdam, 1765); Pt. II (Amsterdam, 1766).

18 Numerous studies of the subject were published in both *Ha-me^aassef* and *Bikkurei Ha-^cittim*. Prominent was that of S. D. Luzzatto in *Bikkurei Ha-^cittim*, (1825). See S. Spiegel, "Midrash Ha-nirdafim Besifrutenu," *Leshonenu* 7 (1935), 11-46.

19 "Haqdamah," *Yeri^coth Shlomo*, 4.

Pappenheim's view on Mishnaic Hebrew and his demand to consider it as pure Hebrew soon found at least one supporter, "the humble Ḥayyim Keslin of Berlin." Without mentioning Pappenheim by name, he wrote an article in *Ha-Me'assef* adopting his views. Interesting is the occasion for that article. In 1785 Isaac Satanow (1732–1805), one of the leading *maskilim*, published a new edition of the *Seliḥoth* with notes and commentaries. In it he pointed out all the words and expressions that were not Biblical but Mishnaic or Midrashic. Though he left these words intact, he seems to have shown a preference for a purely Biblical rendition of the prayers.²⁰ It was this puristic attitude to prayers by Satanow which was the direct cause of Keslin's article and not Satanow's alleged "positive and respectful" attitude to Mishnaic Hebrew, as claimed by J. Klausner.²¹ In that article, Keslin not only reiterated Pappenheim's view about the loss of parts of the Bible as responsible for the poverty of Hebrew, but also his more specific view about Mishnaic Hebrew being synonymous with Biblical Hebrew and therefore to be considered an integral part of the Hebrew language. He further argued that the interpretation given to the talmudic saying לשון תורה לעצמה ולשון חכמים לעצמה (see n. 4 above), as if implying that the two styles were entirely different from each other, was not a correct interpretation. In Keslin's view, these words merely express the wish of the sages that certain words, which assumed a specific meaning in their vocabulary, should be retained in that meaning and not be tampered with, although they may have a different meaning in the Bible. In all other instances, however, whenever the sages use words that are in consonance with the rules of Biblical Hebrew, although they may not be found in the Bible at all, or they use them in forms other than those in the Bible—in such instances, the sages must be relied upon, their knowledge accepted as perfectly trustworthy, and their verbs considered as remnants of the language which survived beside the Bible. They must all be incorporated in Hebrew so that the language will gain in strength and beauty.²²

Two years separate the appearance of that article and Satanow's reply to it.²³ Although this reply has the signature of Satanow's son, "Shaima Shlomo," it is no doubt of the pen of Satanow himself and constitutes an important contribution to the discussion of Hebrew during the first generation of the Haskalah. In his reply Satanow expresses full agreement with his critic—though never mentioning him by name—that Mishnaic Hebrew ought to be considered Hebrew, "since our sages who established its rules and who used it were Hebrews."²⁴ He rejects, however, his contention that that

20 We write "it seems" because it is an inference based on the articles of Keslin and Satanow soon to be discussed, rather than on a reading of the *Seliḥoth*, which was unavailable in New York City.

21 Cf. J. Klausner, "Meḥqarim Betoledoth Ha-sifrut Ha-ivrit Ha-ḥadashah," *Kitvei Ha-universita Ha-ivrit Bi-yerushalayim, Madda'ei Ha-yahaduth* (Jerusalem, 1926), 1:164.

22 "Be'er Reḥovoth," *Ha-me'assef*, 1786, Teveth תקס"ו, 51–60; reprinted in *Bikkurei Ha-ittim* (Wien, 1824, ה'תקפ"ה), 16–24.

23 "Midarkhei Ha-lashon V'ha-meliṣah," *Ha-me'assef*, (1788, ח'תקס"ח), 82–95; reprinted in *Bikkurei Ha-ittim* (1827), "Mivḥar Ha-me'assef," 71–79.

24 *Ibid.* 74.

Hebrew is synonymous with Biblical Hebrew. Such a view, he declares, is in violation of what is “obvious and well-known,” namely, that there are many substantial differences between the two in terms of both vocabulary and grammar.²⁵

As for the language of prayers, which was the direct cause of the controversy in the first place, Satanow maintains that since prayers were first institutionalized by Ezra “and his group,” who were well-versed in Scripture and who preceded the sages of the Mishnah by many years, there is little doubt that their prayers must have been in pure Biblical Hebrew. Hence that language is still preferable and “it should only be proper to substitute every Mishnaic word with a Biblical one.” However, as indicated earlier, Satanow did not act on his conclusion and, beside pointing out these late words, he left them intact in the text.²⁶

Interesting as all this is, the importance of Satanow’s article lies in two other aspects, namely, its fearless description of the deplorable state of Jewish culture at the time on the one hand, and its strong plea for the expansion of Hebrew on the other. Movingly and dramatically Satanow describes the plight of Hebrew in the modern age: whereas all the languages expand their vocabularies to accommodate the growth of science and technology, Hebrew alone remains stationary and barren. No wonder that

our best authors go begging for words and terms from other languages whenever they want to discuss the new sciences and the arts. This is, indeed, a shameful situation. I wish the sages of Israel would undertake to remove that shame by adding new verbs, nouns and words, and by integrating them into the Hebrew language, in accordance with its spirit and usage.²⁷

There are several other ideas in Satanow’s writings concerning language in general and Hebrew in particular which deserve attention. He emphasizes the direct link between the general level of a nation’s life and the level of its language: the richer, the more varied and developed a nation’s social, economic, and cultural texture is, the richer its language. In ancient times, he writes, Hebrew was both pure and rich, as may be inferred from its numerous synonyms, as well as from its abundant vocabulary for all kinds of crafts mentioned, for instance, in the description of the Tabernacle. Exile,

²⁵ As regards vocabulary, he points out that:

the roots of Biblical Hebrew are unique to the Hebrews alone and only a few of them are borrowed from other languages; contrariwise, most of the roots of Mishnaic Hebrew are taken from foreign languages,

Aramaic, Greek and Latin. As for the grammatical differences, he indicates a few of them. Thus, in Biblical Hebrew, in the infinitive with the *lamed*, the *pe-nun* verbs either retain the *nun* (*lindor*, *linʿor*), or altogether drop it (*lageshet*, *lataʿat*), but never is it assimilated in the *dagesh* as is always the case in Mishnaic Hebrew. The two also differ with regard to the infinitive of *pe-yod*, *lamed-aleph* and *lamed-he* verbs, and with regard to a great deal more. The fact, he concludes, that both languages have many, and perhaps most, verbs in common is in itself an insufficient reason to consider them identical. By such reasoning one may also claim the identity of Hebrew and Aramaic, loc. cit.

²⁶ Ibid., 76–77.

²⁷ Ibid. 73. The inference that the late Professor J. Klausner drew from the above passage, namely, that Satanow not only embraced the idea of the expansion of Hebrew but also the admission of foreign words in it, is obviously uncertain. See his “Mehqarim Betoledoth Ha-sifrut,” (*supra*, n. 21), 164.

however, brought decline to the nation as a whole and played havoc with its language, too. "Since the nations barred us from many arts and crafts, the wisdom of our wise perished, and under the stress of the times the language shrank and grew poorer."²⁸ Though Satanow does not consider the long period of the exile as entirely barren, he has no respect for the kind of creativity the nation displayed then. He is especially critical of the *piyyut* which, in his view, was a major contributor to the growing loss of any sense of order and beauty among the Jews, the neglect of grammar, and the decline of the Hebrew language.

Worth noting finally is Satanow's forecast of Hebrew's future. Parallel to the link he establishes between the exile and the decline of the language, he establishes a similar link between the anticipated rebirth of the nation and its language. He sounds almost prophetic when he writes:

There is only one hope left to Hebrew, namely, the restoration of Israel to Zion, when its rebuilders will gather and along with them the *maskilim* of Judah who will heal and revive the language from the ruins of its perversion. Its purity will then be restored and its creativity renewed. New verbs and nouns will abundantly sprout forth from its roots, and as a result wisdom will regain its former strength in Israel.²⁹

It may not be out of context to remark here, that whatever one's view of the Haskalah in general, conceiving of it as either "nationalist" or "assimilationist," at least as far as one can judge from Satanow's views on the Hebrew language, they clearly indicate his strong "national" orientation and commitment. Hebrew to him, and for that matter also to most other contemporary Hebraists, was not a mere tool for Haskalah which could be discarded once the goal was reached,³⁰ but a goal in itself, a vehicle for communicating cultural values and ideas, which, once expressed in the national medium—irrespective of their origin and character—become an integral part of the national culture.

II

Among the most important *maskilim* of the Berlin School was Yehudah Leib Benzev (1764–1814) who, since his arrival in Berlin soon after the death of Moses Mendelssohn (1786), became one of the prolific scholars of the age, reediting and commenting on Sa'adyah Ga'on's *Emunoth Vede'oth* (1789), translating the apocryphal Ecclesiasticus (1798) and the Scroll of Judith (1799), and composing a chrestomathy for the study of Hebrew, *Beth Ha-sefer* (1802), an Introduction to the Bible, *Mavo 'el Miqra'ei Ha-qodesh* (1810), and a catechism, *Yesodei Ha-dath* (1811). His most important achievement, however, was in the field of Hebrew language, its grammar and lexicography. His *Talmud Lashon 'Ivri* (1796), which appeared in twelve editions in the course of the 19th century, was the first modern grammar of Hebrew, and his *'Oṣar Ha-shorashim* (1807)—the first Hebrew-German and German-Hebrew dictionary.

²⁸ *Mishlei Asaf*, I (Berlin, 1789), chap. 25:1, commentary.

²⁹ *Sefer Ha-midot* (Berlin, 1784), 88b.

³⁰ H. N. Schapira gave such an interpretation of the Hebraic zeal of the Berlin *maskilim* in his *Toledoth Ha-sifrut Ha-'ivrit Ha-ḥadashah*, (Tel Aviv, n.d.), 1:8-9.

Benzev's views on Hebrew indicate the influences of both Satanow and Pappenheim. Like Satanow, he emphasized the direct relationship between the fate of the nation and its language:

As long as a nation maintains its independence and its people live in peace in their own land, following their own political and ethical norms—wisdom and the arts multiply among them, giving rise to thinkers and artists, scientists and writers, rhetoricians, poets, and authors of books on all kinds of subjects. As a result, the language expands. . . gaining the capacity to express any idea. Indeed, the beauty of the language and its perfection are then taken as an indication of the perfection of the nation.³¹

Such was also the lot of Hebrew. However, in the wake of the exile, when the Jews assimilated to the languages of the various peoples and Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language, it declined and was greatly impoverished. According to Benzev, the language reached its ebb in the last three centuries, “the years of darkness,” when the sciences died out among the Jews and the study of Torah became perverted by mystical reveries on the one hand, and legalistic casuistry on the other. In consequence, the study of grammar and the Bible were completely neglected, and the Hebrew language fell into decay. Benzev, it appears, entertained little hope for the future of Hebrew. “I know,” he wrote, “the language will not revive unless God would restore His people from their captivity.”³² Yet, this notwithstanding, his own literary and scholarly activity offers ample proof of his great faith in the future of Hebrew and its growth.

Benzev was also influenced by Pappenheim, especially with regard to his view on post-Biblical Hebrew. At the end of the introduction to his dictionary he writes:

I have also tried to include among the Hebrew roots words and expressions from the Talmud which I thought belonged to the remnants of Hebrew that survived among our people and which accidentally have not become part of the Bible.

With these words Benzev seemed to allude to Pappenheim's view that Mishnaic Hebrew, or at least parts of it, belonged to Biblical Hebrew and that it was only by accident that it was not represented in the Bible.

Again, like Pappenheim and Satanow, Benzev was both a purist and an expansionist. Though pure Hebrew to him was only Biblical, he also considered the subsequent phases of the language an integral part of it, and essential to an enhanced expressiveness. He indicated this in the introduction to the German-Hebrew part of his dictionary, where he wrote:

The composition of this part of the Thesaurus was more difficult for me, though more gratifying, than the preceding part [i.e. the Hebrew-German, I. B.], its usefulness being greater to more people than the first part. Most people, for whom I composed it, are more interested in the translation of a German word to Hebrew than in the reverse. As for the first part, there are very few people whose knowledge of Hebrew is sufficient to enable them to find a word by its root. . . . What made the composition of this part more difficult is the great difference between the two languages, the abundant German on the one hand, and the meager Hebrew on the other. Unlike the Western

31 “Haqdamah,” *Talmud Lashon Ivri* (Wien, 1807).

32 Beginning of “haqdamah,” *ibid.*

languages, which are alive, Hebrew ceased to be a spoken language for almost two thousand years. I therefore doubted whether, with its limited vocabulary, it could altogether do justice to German . . . In view of this difficulty I almost gave up the idea. Having completed the first part, however, I could not suppress my desire . . . to add to it a second part, imperfect though it may turn out to be . . . To accomplish it, however, I could not adhere to pure Hebrew alone, but I had to add many words and idioms from the Talmud and even later writers, words and expressions that are similar to Hebrew or close to it. Frequently I even included foreign words from the Talmud, borrowed from Aramaic, Egyptian, Greek or Latin. My reason for this is that I did not compose this work for those of pure speech and flowery language (*meliṣah*)—they will find their portion in the first part . . . —but for the mass of plain people, some of whom write all kinds of business notes³³ and to whom it is convenient to be able to find adequate (Hebrew) words to express their intention, if only these words are ever mentioned by any Hebrew writer . . . Obviously, one who is particular about the purity of his Hebrew should keep away from this part. However, one who is not concerned with this may use it, since its words are found in the Talmud and in subsequent literature.

The informed reader has only to recall Wessely's view of a generation earlier vis-à-vis the roles he foresaw for Hebrew and German in the modern age, restricting the first to "matters of the holy faith and Torah" and leaving to the second the wide area of daily life and secular culture,³⁴ to realize how much closer Benzev's view was to that which was to prevail in the post-Haskalah period. Whereas Wessely limited the use of Hebrew to religious matters alone, Benzev treated it as a full-fledged language, potentially adequate to meet all secular needs, too. In support of such an interpretation of Benzev, one may also cite the many popular sayings and idioms which are scattered throughout his German-Hebrew dictionary, leaving the student of Hebrew with the impression that, to Benzev at least, Hebrew was not only very much alive but also flexible and popular. To cite only a few random examples: He renders the rather crudely expressed German observation, "Wenn die Huren nicht mehr können werden sie Betschwestern,"³⁵ by the more bland Aramaic, "הַסְרִיחַ לִנְנָב נַפְשִׁיהָ לְשִׁלְמָא נְקִימָא,"³⁶ "Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamme"³⁷ he renders by what apparently is a creation of his own, "הַגִּנְוָה נִפְלֵא אַחַר" "הַעֲקָרָה,"³⁸ or by the Talmudic idiom "בְּרֵיחַ הָאֲבוֹהָהּ"³⁹ or by the midrashic observation "מִכְלָבָא בִישָׁא גִירָא טַבָּא לֹא נַפִּיק"⁴⁰ While the above idioms appear natural and indigenous to both languages, this is not the case with other idioms.⁴¹

33 שְׂמֵרֵי הַדְּיוֹטוֹת.

34 *Divrei Shalom Ve'emeth* (Berlin, 1782), chap. 7.

35 To put it in somewhat poetic form: "When the whores can do it no more, they offer prayers by the score." *Oṣar*, III, s.v. הַיִּרְעָה, p. 456.

36 "When courage fails the thief he becomes virtuous" (BT Sanh. 22a), loc. cit.

37 "The apple falls not far from the stem," *ibid.*, s. v. פֶּאֶלְלֵעֵן, p. 83a.

38 "The branches go after the root," *ibid.*

39 "Like father like son," loc. cit. The version in BT Eruvin 70a is יִרְשֵׁהוּ בְּרֵיחַ הָאֲבוֹהָהּ.

40 "From a vicious dog no gentle cub will come forth," *ibid.* In *Leviticus Rabba* 19:6, the version is slightly different: "גִּירָא טַבָּא מִכְלָבָא בִישָׁא לֹא תִרְבִּי" "raise not a gentle cub of a vicious dog."

41 Thus, the German "manches alte Kamel trägt die Haut seiner Jungen zum Markt" (sometimes an old camel will carry the hides of its young to market), *ibid.*, s. v. הַיִּיט, p. 46a, does not sound indigenously German, but its Aramaic counterpart: נַפְיִישׁוּ גִמְלֵי סַבִּי דְמַעְנֵי מַשְׁכַּח דְּהוֹנֵנִי (Sanh. 25a: "many an old camel is laden with the hides of the younger ones") does sound natural and indigenous. This is even more pronounced in the following idiom. The German reads: "Ich habe eine Ehe-Sache mit meinem Manne" (I

It is pertinent to notice here that five years after the appearance of the dictionary, the much younger Shlomo Levisohn (1789–1821), a leading Hebraist, poet, and scholar, also expressed the view that a language is not complete unless it contains some popular proverbs and sayings that are current among the people and reflect its character and history. Although he suggested overcoming this deficiency of Biblical Hebrew by borrowing from Talmudic literature, in contradiction to Benzev, he limited such borrowings to only those of pure Hebrew.⁴²

III

A final link in the chain of early Hebraists whose views and activities were of consequence for the future of Hebrew was Menaḥem Mendel Lefin (=Lewin) of Satanow (Satanower) (1749–1826). In his youth he spent several years in Berlin, where he frequented the home of Moses Mendelssohn and came under the influence of the Haskalah. Upon returning to his native Poland he became a disseminator of a conservative and pragmatic rationalism. He was not a creative writer, nor was he an original thinker. He either translated, paraphrased, or commented on works by others. Nevertheless he is important in the development of modern Hebrew. In a generation that witnessed a great revival of Biblical Hebrew, he was the only one who never used it, but wrote all his works in the post-Biblical, mainly Mishnaic, style. “It appears,” writes Klausner, “that he resolutely objected to the flowery style of the Biblical purists, who were held then in the highest esteem.”⁴³ He adopted that style as early as the 1780’s, when he translated the first four chapters of the famous book on popular medicine by the Swiss physician Tissot.⁴⁴ He continued to use that style in all his other works: *Sefer Heshbon Ha-nefesh* (Lemberg, 1808; Wilno, 1844), a translation-paraphrase of Benjamin Franklin’s *The Way to Wealth* (*Poor Richard’s Almanack*),⁴⁵ commentaries on some books of the Bible, which he attached to his Yiddish translations of those books,⁴⁶ and finally in his translation of Maimonides’ *Guide* which he completed a few weeks before his death.⁴⁷

have some matrimonial matter with my husband), which is neither idiomatic nor proverbial. Contrariwise, each of the three alleged Hebrew-Aramaic equivalents is indigenously idiomatic. They are: שָׁמַיִם בֵּינִי לְבֵינֶךָ (heaven is between me and him, see Sanh. 90b, Rashi); אֵינְנִי יוֹרֵה כֹּחַ (his ejaculation is without strength, Nedarim. 91a); אֵין לוֹ כֹּחַ נְבִרָה (he is impotent, Hullin, 107a), *Oṣar*, s. v. עָהָע p. 73b. It is obvious from the above, that (a) Benzev’s mastery of Hebrew-Aramaic was by far greater than his mastery of German, and (b) although he allegedly was writing a German-Hebrew dictionary, he actually was doing the opposite, namely, attempting to find German equivalents for Hebrew or Aramaic idioms. Be that as it may, it is clear that Benzev treated Hebrew as a live language and, his purism notwithstanding, considered post-Biblical Hebrew an integral part of it.

42 See his “Beth Ha-’Osef” in *Mehqarei Lashon*, reed. by I. Zemorah (Tel Aviv, 1947), 76–77.

43 *Historiah shel Ha-sifrut Ha-’ivrit Ha-ḥadashah*, (1930), 1:214.

44 That translation, entitled “Sefer Refu’oth Ha-’am,” was warmly endorsed by Mendelssohn and together with Lefin’s “Iggeroth Ha-ḥokhmah,” mainly on natural science, was published in Berlin in 1789 under the title *Moda’ La-binah*. The full translation of *Refu’oth Ha-’am* appeared in Zolkiew in 1794.

45 Klausner, *Historiyah*, I, 206–11.

46 See *Sefer Koheleth Shlomo* . . . (1819; not pag.), new ed. by YIWO (Wilno, 1930); for Proverbs, see “Liqqūṭim” in *Sefer Heshbon Ha-nefesh* (Wilno, 1844); see also Klausner, *Historiyah*, I, 212–18.

47 See “Haqdamath Ha-mevi Leveth Ha-defus,” *Sefer Moreh Nevukhim* . . . Meturgam Bilshon Ha-mishnah . . . ‘al pi . . . Mendel Lefin (Zolkiew, 1829).

There seems to have existed a direct relationship between the socio-national goals Lefin had set for himself in his works and the style he adopted. His writings were all meant for the benefit of the Jews of Eastern Europe. As the *Refu'oth Ha'am* was prompted by his concern for their physical well-being, so was his *Heshbon Ha-nefesh* prompted by a concern for their mental-ethical health. Equally were his Yiddish translations of the Bible meant for their edification. Even in his translation of Maimonides' *Guide* into the idiom of the Mishnah he strove to popularize that classical monument of Jewish thought and make it accessible to wider segments of the people. Lefin must have felt that, although "impure," the exact and earthy "language of the sages" would be a more adequate and pliable linguistic tool for his kind of writing than the lofty and aristocratic "language of the prophets." The pietist wrapping of his works notwithstanding, Lefin was a rationalist and a man of positive interests and tendencies. He admired natural science and was well aware of the political and social problems facing the Jewry of his day. His preoccupation with the realities of the world and human society required a vocabulary that was both realistic and exact.

Be that as it may, Lefin was not only the first who introduced Mishnaic Hebrew into modern Hebrew literature, but also the first who coined new words. Three of these survived in contemporary Hebrew: *beḥilah* (nausea), *ḥoqen* (enema) and *shi'ul* (a cough). Though his Hebrew is not flawless and free of errors, it is distinguished by both clarity and simplicity, and his writing is imbued with a feeling of warmth and concern for the reader. In his introduction to Lefin's translation of the *Guide*, Mordekhai Suchostawer (1790–1880), his disciple and editor of that translation, succinctly described his master's linguistic achievement:

Here too, as in his other precious works, he blazed a new trail for himself. Unlike the new authors and translators who, bound as they feel by the twenty-four books of the Bible—books rich in ideas but poor in words—innovate words and expressions that are solely based on those books and as a result introduce words which no Hebrew ear has ever heard and which simply are offensive to the sensitive reader, Lefin chose a different path. He laid bare the treasures of the two Talmudim, the midrashim and the Aggadah, opening up an inexhaustible source for any subject, be it philosophical or technological.⁴⁸

The subsequent chapter in the history of Hebrew during the 19th century lies beyond the confines of this study. It is worth noting, however, that it too is, initially at least, linked with the name of Lefin. In 1858, when Eliezer Zweifel (1815–1888), a disciple of Suchostawer and like him an instructor in the rabbinical Seminary of Zhytomir, made his literary debut with his somewhat strange compilation *Minnim Ve'ugav* (Wilno, 1858), it was as a disciple of Lefin, in whose footsteps he declared himself to be walking, that he threw down the gauntlet at the Biblical purists of his day, asserting that from now on "He will be wearing a new language-crown, one that is mixed of Bible, Mishnah and Talmud."⁴⁹ About ten years later, when he published his epoch-making *Shalom 'Al Yisra'el* (Zhytomir, 1868–1872), written in Mishnaic Hebrew, the way for a new composite literary style in Hebrew was wide open.

48 Loc. cit.

49 *Minnim Ve'ugav*, 16–17.

IV

By now we may more clearly define both purism and expansionism and see the relationship that evolved between them during the age of Haskalah. Stimulated by contacts with the cultural milieu of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason, small groups of Jewish intellectuals became esthetically sensitive and, turning their attention to their own literature, began to preach a restoration of order and beauty in it by observing the rules of logic and grammar, style and syntax.

The fact that such demands became louder and more frequent during the age of the Haskalah must be understood against the background of the appalling decline Hebrew experienced during the three centuries that preceded the rise of the Haskalah. Though the core of the language remained healthy and vital, its rules and norms were neglected and violated. Like a spreading disease this neglect affected the entire body of Hebrew letters, Halakhah, Cabbalah, Hasidism, and even Haskalah. Indeed, one could hardly find in those centuries a Hebrew book the language of which was entirely free of errors and distortions of one kind or another. This situation was further aggravated by the conceptual confusion which prevailed in the wake of the impact of Cabbalah and subsequently Hasidism.

That the Italian purists of the Renaissance and post-Renaissance periods singled out Biblical Hebrew for emulation may, partly at least, be explained in the framework of the general return of that age to the traditions of the Ancients. During the Haskalah period, this tendency further gained in strength as it was seen to reflect the universalism of the age and its critical attitude toward religion. To emphasize the Bible meant to de-emphasize the Talmud, or to draw away from what seemed a parochial and legalistic conception of Judaism in favor of a humanitarian-ethical one.

Purism, however, was not the only aspect of Hebrew under discussion at the time. Simultaneously, the question of the expansion of the language arose. It was brought about by an awakened awareness on the part of the *maskilim* that in its present condition Hebrew was inadequate for the modern age. That feeling seems to have been general among them, irrespective of their literary predilections and tendencies. Thus, while Gumpel Shnaber, Isaac Satanow, and Lefin emphasized the need for an expanded Hebrew vocabulary to accommodate the recent developments in science, mathematics, and medicine, Yehudah Benzev was on the lookout for popular sayings and idioms that would endow Hebrew with greater naturalness and flexibility. The need for expansion was also keenly felt by the creative writers of the time. The humanitarianism of the age with its concern for the individual, an elation with nature, and above all the prevailing mundane and hedonistic tendencies, opened new avenues for a richer human experience and, in consequence, the need was felt for a new idiom that would give literary expression to it.

It was no doubt the growing realization of this situation among the *maskilim* which explains their intensive preoccupation with the subject of synonyms, beginning with Wessely in the 1760's, through Pappenheim and the *Me'assefim* of the eighties and nineties, down to the extensive study of the subject by S. D. Luzzatto and other scholars in the *Bikkurei Ha-'ittim* of the 1820's. This prolonged effort to arrive at the subtle distinctions among the nuances of verbs, nouns, and other words was, no doubt, stimulated by a hope and desire to increase the expressive capacity of the language.

This hope was also frequently articulated in the other Hebrew writings of the time. Indeed, most writers felt that by their mere secular use of the language they were automatically expanding and transforming it into a vehicle of modern communication and expression. To cite only a few examples: Isaac Euchel (1758–1804) published his alleged travel-letters to his disciple, Michael Friedländer, “just to show that Hebrew was adequate for any subject, big or small.”⁵⁰ The poet Yoseph Ha’efrati Metroplowitz (1770–1804) asserted that his only purpose in writing the Biblical drama *Melukhath Sha’ul* (1794) was “to expand our language which we lost a long time ago.”⁵¹ In the “Foreword” to his collection of Biblical poetry, *Matta’ei Qedem* (*Al Admath Safon*),⁵² Scholem Hacoheh (1771–1845)—a leading Hebraist during the second generation of the German-Austrian Haskalah—wrote in a similar vein that what he wanted to demonstrate in that work was “how much the ancient Hebrew tongue yields to expansion and revival through a proper use of the rules of grammar.” Equally, Shlomo Levisohn expressed the hope that as a result of his investigations of Hebrew grammar the language would expand.⁵³

It is obvious, theoretically at least, that all the *maskilim* were expansionists, fully convinced of the necessity for Hebrew to grow in order to meet the cultural needs of the modern Jew. However, at the same time they were also purists and could not, with the exception of only a few, conceive of that growth but in the framework of the Bible alone. Having revolted against the hybrid style of the rabbis, they were loath to accept that style as part of a reborn Hebrew, ardently believing that once puristic standards are enforced, the language would respond and by itself yield its inner resources. The language did respond and to such masters as Wessely, Efrati, Levisohn, Scholem Hacoheh, *Adam*, Michal, and Mapu did open its treasures. As a result of their creative genius and effort, Biblical Hebrew gained in strength and fluency. It was not enough, however, and when in the 1850’s Haskalah finally reached larger segments of the Jews of Eastern Europe and, under the pressure of realism, the Hebrew language was called upon to deal with the daily realities of life, the language was as helpless then as it was at the inception of Haskalah three generations earlier. The solution, however, was no longer far-away, and it lay in the realization which finally had dawned on some Hebrew writers, that a line must be drawn between one’s attitude toward the Jewish tradition and toward its language, and that a rejection of the former does not *ipso facto* mean a rejection of the latter. Once this was realized, the psychological barrier preventing the full use of the past resources of Hebrew was removed and the way was opened for the expansion and growth of the Hebrew language.

50 *Ha-Me’assef*, II (1785), אייר תקמ"ה:

“אנרות יצחק אייכל לתלמידו הבחור יוקר מיכל פרידלענדר בהלכנו למסענו ביתה אבותיו לקופנהגן.”

See also M. H. Letteris, “Toledoth He-hakham R’ Itzek Euchel” in his re-edition of *Ha-Me’assef*, I (1784), (Wien, 1862), 42.

51 “Haqamah U-mavo Ha-sefer.”

52 Berlin, 1800; Rödelheim, 1807.

53 “Siḥah Be’olam Ha-neshamoth” in his *Mehqarei Lashon*, reed. by I. Zemorah (Tel Aviv, 1947), 3.