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RABBI MOSES SOFER

AND

HIS RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS REFORM

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ABSTRACT

Consideration of Rabbi Moses Sofer's remarks on the question of religious reform reveals that to a great extent, Sofer's attitudes were typical of the rabbinic tradition of which he was part. Sofer's response represents a break from this tradition not so much because of the actual words which he wrote and spoke, but because of the ultimate power that he believed these words held. Sofer perceived his own role as rabbi, and the rabbinate in general, in extremely broad terms; this perception empowered his views with an enormity of significance and a range of scope that had hitherto been unknown.

RÉSUMÉ

Une considération des commentaires du rabbin Moses Sofer sur la question de la réforme religieuse révèle, qu'en grande mesure, les attitudes du rabbin Sofer étaient typiques de la tradition partie. La position rabbinique dont il faısait de Sofer une novelle dimension à l'interieur représente de cette tradition, non pas tellement à cause des paroles actuelles qu'il autilisees dans ses ecrits, mais plutot a cause de la façon dont il a percu son rôle de rabbin. Sofer a élargi l'étendue du rabbinat dans sa communauté et, dans une certaine mesure, dans l'ensemble de l'Europe centrale, et lui a donné une signifiance énorme et une influence d'une portée inconnue auparavant.

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Introduction

Rabbi Moses Sofer, the Hatam Sofer, (1762-1839) served as the rabbi of the renowned Pressburg yeshiva in Hungary, (now the Slovak, or Czechoslovak city of Bratislava) founded a large Rabbinic dynasty that is still existant today in Israel and North America and left behind an enormous literary legacy. For some, Sofer represented during his lifetime, and remains so today, the ultimate guardian of Jewish tradition, a man of tremendous faith and one of its most courageous proponents. Others, however, have viewed Sofer as an obscurantist and an extremist, a powerful leader who sought to deny the progress of time and tirelessly endeavoured to suppress any sign of change. The varied and various biographical accounts about the life of this figure are evidence of the alternate and often contradictory ways in which Rabbi Sofer has been, and continues to be, perceived. In Hut HaMeshulash, Sofer's most well known biography, written by his grandson Rabbi Shlomo Sofer, he was portrayed as a heroic figure in the war against religious reform. He is quoted as having said:

From the time that there arose the dread plague of lack of faith in which new arrivals tossed out the ancient traditions of Judaism in favour of something invented by themselves, I arose to fight for the Eternal.......

Like a warrior, I girded myself for the battle, taking the Torah and wisdom with which the Almighty has blessed me into my hands. But I shall not quarrel with those who have lost faith, for I would only be throwing out my own words inasmuch as those Jews who have become heretics are hopeless.

Shlomo Sofer, Hut HaMeshulash, quoted in The Hatam Sofer, Moses Burak, (Toronto: Beth Jacob Congregation, 1967), p.371.

This view of Rabbi Sofer was carried on well into the twentieth century. In the foreward to his 1978 biography Eliezer Katz portrayed Sofer as an "ideal leader of the new epoch, an outliner of paths, and the paver of many ways".²

Historians of the nineteenth century had a very different perception of this figure. Isaac Hirsh Weiss, the Hungarian historian, wrote in his autobiography Zikhronotai (1895) that Sofer tried to halt the progress of time, by denying the changes occuring during his lifetime. Heinrich Graetz had an even harsher view of Sofer in his work The History of the Jews. He wrote that:

Moses Sofer was a fanatical zealot and an active heretic hunter. He possessed courage and determination, knew no considerations, and might have been a useful partisan in action. But like his allies, he was at too great a distance from the scene of the action, to be able to aid in the contest, or even to set up a standard. (They) had not the slightest conception of the new tendency which the times and the Jews had developed and were entirely ignorant of the importance of the cause which they represented. They did not know the enemy who attacked them, or despised him too much to fear any danger. If a serious question or critical situation arose, they were at a loss what to do, and only employed their rusty old weapons, and damaged their own cause by revealing its weakness.4

² Eliezer Katz, <u>The Hatam Sofer</u> (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1969), Introduction.

³ Isaac Hirsh Weiss, <u>Zikhronotal</u> (Warsaw: Yakov HaCohen Ginsburg Publishers, 1895), see pages 56, 60, 20, 27.

⁴ Heinrich Graetz, <u>History of the Jews</u> Volume V (Philadelphia: J.P.S., 1967), p.606.

These appraisals of Moses Sofer fall short, for they construct merely a one dimensional image of a figure who was enormous in both influence and complexity. Both views are the product of a certain genre of biography - the first being that of the Sofer family's "in house" approach, virtually hagiographical in nature, and the second being the nineteenth century approach, one that was very critical of traditional society, and therefore, the figures who represented it.

In this paper, I will attempt to ascertain and evaluate Rabbi Moses Sofer's approach toward the subject of religious reform. It is hoped that through this consideration, a more accurate understanding of this tremendously powerful figure will emerge. In the first chapter, I will establish the historical framework for this discussion, through a consideration of the radical changes witnessed by the Jews of the Austro - Hungarian empire in the nineteenth century. The second chapter will focus on the emergence of religious reform in Germany and subsequently in Hungary. Chapter Three will attempt to reconstruct the biography of Rabbi Sofer, mainly but not exclusively through the use of his own work. Finally, Chapter Four will examine Sofer's words on the subject of reform and will make use of the words of some of his contemporaries as a basis of comparison.

Though Sofer has often been posthumously deemed responsible for establishing the foundations of the eventual religious schism which developed in Hungary in the late part of the nineteenth century, this contention will not be dealt with in this paper. It is my intent here to evaluate Rabbi Sofer's words solely in their own context, for I believe that an attempt to analyse his work

 \underline{vis} \underline{a} \underline{vis} later developments would detract from an accurate understanding of his words as they were written and spoken during his lifetime.

Chapter One

Rabbi Moses Sofer's life spanned a period of radical and remarkable change in the life of Western and Central European Jewry. For hundreds of years, the Jews had been subjected to discriminatory laws, and had been confined to the periphery of society. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries introduced the Jews to an unprecedented possibility - equality, in the form of emancipation. The Jews were not emancipated simaltaneously - the Jews of France were granted equal citizenship in September 1791, while the Prussian Edict of Toleration was issued in 1812. Neither among rulers nor among Jews was there a single vision, or unanimous opinion, on the way in which the Jew could fulfill his new role in European society. Although the emancipation of the Jews in the Austro - Hungarian empire did not occur until 1867, there were many changes in Jewish life during the reign of Joseph II. His policy of enlightened absolutism, specifically as it pertained to and affected the Jews in the Habsburg empire, is the focus of this chapter. A brief outline of the structure of Hungarian Jewry at this time serves as a valuable preface to this discussion.

In 1699, in the aftermath of the destruction and devastation left behind by the Thirty Year's War, Leopold I began to rebuild his empire. Both he and his successor, Charles III, encouraged Jews to immigrate from the west, in an attempt to regenerate and rejuvenate the country. By the early part of the eighteenth century, there were many Jewish immigrants here from Germany and Austria. Many had been expelled by Leopold I from Vienna in 1670,

while others had moved east from Bohemia and Moravia after King Charles placed restrictions on Jewish marriages in 1710. Jews also began to arrive in Hungary from Poland, in the second part of the eighteenth century. In 1735, according to the national census there were 11,600 Jews in the empire – and only five percent of them were native born. This community of emigrants lived mainly beside the Austrian, Moravian and Polish borders. The three major Jewish communities – Eisenstadt, Marchegg, and Mattersdorf, along with four smaller communities were situated in the west central areas, on both sides of the Danube, on the private estates of Count Esterhazy.

In the private cities, the Jews had a secure legal position. They were allowed to participate in business and attend fairs under the protection of the aristocracy. In crown cities however, there was a constant struggle for the rights of domicile and trade. The burghers feared the competition of the Armenians, the Turks and the Greeks, and sought to defend their local trade against foreigners. In 1783, for example, the burghers in one town complained to Hungarian authorities that they wanted the authorities to forbid the Greek and Jewish merchants from selling raw hides or exporting them out of the country. The wealthy Jews were involved in the trade of fabrics, hides, wool, wine, and the

⁵ Erno Lazslo, "Hungarian Jewry: Settlement and Demography" in <u>Hungarian Jewish Studies</u> Volume 1, (New York: New York Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1966) pp. 61 - 110, and Erno Marton, "The Family Tree of Hungarian Jewry", in the same volume, pp. 20 - 45. Cf R. Gates, Jewish Social Studies 47 1984.

⁶ Henry Marczalı, <u>Hungary in the Eighteenth Century</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), p.30

export of copper and liquor. Others were shopkeepers, and dealers in old clothes and scrap iron. Many of the poor were employed as artisans, servants, cooks, or peddlars.

The Jews'communal body, the kehilla, was very active in its regulation and organization of Jewish life. Although it was under government supervision, and although its regulations had to be ratified by a city proprieter, the kehilla did exercise a great deal of control over the Jews. It was composed of seven optimates - one leader, four associates, and two charity stewards. There were a few other members who looked after sanitation and tax collection. The system was a hierarchical one, for one could not become an optimate unless one had previously held one of the lesser positions. The community received revenues from taxes on liquor, beer, salt, meat and wine; there was also an excise on commodities, and artisans fees and wages. The Jews were bound to adhere to its decisions, for the kehilla possessed the power to punish those who did not adhere to its authority. The kehilla could also regulate the individuals' contact with the outside world. This however was not a difficult task, for at this time the average Jew was not that aware of nor interested in, non-Jewish society.

⁷ Raphael Mahler, <u>A History of Modern Jewry</u> (London: Valentine and Mitchell Ltd., 1971), pp. 268 - 278

Observes Jacob Katz:

The outside world did not overly occupy the Jewish mind; it was neither a field of social aspiration nor a source of acute spiritual danger. It was, however, a field for possible encounter in business dealings and contact with government authorities.8

This situation was to change in a substantial and profound way, with the emergence of Joseph II and his policies of enlightened absolutism. Joseph II inherited a vastly heterogenous empire from his mother Maria Theresa upon her death in 1780. The national composition of the empire was extremely complex, and was made even more complicated by the fact that not one single nationality composed a majority in any area of the land. The Jews were only one small component of the enormous, multi - national and multilingual entity known as the Habsburg empire. There were approximately 400,000 Jews in the Empire in 1780, over half of whom were in Galicia. There were 68,794 Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, and in Hungary there were 75,089.9 Over sixty percent of Hungarian Jewry lived in settlements in the countryside and at the most, fifteen percent lived in organized communities of more than five hundred people. 10

⁸ Jacob Katz, <u>Out of the Ghetto</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1978), p.26.

⁹ Raphael Mahler, A History of Modern Jewry p. 229. Michael Silber, in his article "The Historical Experience of German Jewry and Its Impact on Haskala and Reform in Hungary", in <u>Toward Modernity</u>, edited by Jacob Katz, (New York: Transaction 1987), p.108, has the figure at 80,000.

¹⁰ Michael Silber, Ibid.

Steeped in the philosophy of Voltaire and Roussseau, Joseph II did not share his mother's highly conservative outlook. He envisioned a dominion with a centralised polity, ruled on the principles of enlightened absolutism. He believed that sovereign could transform philosophical truths into life, and could create a single bureaucratic machine working on uniform administrative principles. Through the concentration government, with the help of administative organizations, those activities which benefited the state - the political unit of supreme value - could be pursued. Though a framework with classes and privleges would still be maintained, the individual classes would gradually be shorn of their autoromy. "Not surprisingly, Joseph II viewed clericalism and feudalism as the two major obstacles in his path.

Joseph II sought to eliminate particularism in the empire, and to lessen the powers of the Catholic Church. He placed it control, dissolved under imperial almost seven hundred monasteries, and instituted marriage as a civil contract. In his Peasant Patent in 1781, Joseph II assured the serfs of their freedom to leave their holdings upon payment of their dues. They were then free to marry and to send their children for training in any trade. In his Patent of Toleration of the same year, he gave the Protestants and the Greek Orthodox in his empire full freedom of worship; they were also given complete equality of civil and political rights, and were allowed admission to public office. Joseph II favoured a mercantilist system, and the

Oskar Jaszi, The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), pp.65-75.

limitation of the nobles' power. The nobles were placed under the jurisdiction of the government and court system; Joseph II curbed the autonomy of the nobles' estates, by placing these estates under strict administrative supervision.

In Hungary, Joseph II saw corruption, exploitation, an impotent Latin administration, an unchecked latifundist system, and constantly fomenting national dissention. 12 He refused to be crowned in Hungary, and during his reign the crown of St. Stephen was kept in a Viennese museum. The Hungarian nobility, long accustomed to their position of privilege in the empire, was threatened and angered by Joseph the Second's reforms — general taxation, heavy tariffs on Hungarian exports to Austria, promotion of German as the language of administration, and the administration of the empire as one giant <u>Gubernium</u>. In the words of one contemporary historian of the period, the Hungarian nation "seethed with discontent". 13

In March of 1781, Joseph II outlined in an imperial writ to the court chancellories in Austria and Hungary his revised plan for the legal position of the Jews in the empire. In the same year, edicts concerning the Jews were issued in Bohemia, Silesia, and Trieste. In early 1782, Joseph II's <u>Toleranzpatent</u> was issued in Vienna and Moravia. One followed in Hungary in 1783, and in Galicia in 1789. This edict represented a turning point for the empire and the Jews alike. The state now viewed itself

¹² Ibid.

¹³ C.A.Macartney, Hungary: A Short History (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1962), p.124.

as a kind of educational institution, whose task it was to make, through wise legislation, national groups contribute to the common good. In Joseph II's words, the Jewish nation was to be made "more useful to, and useable by, the state, principally through the better instruction and enlightenment of its youth and its employment in the sciences, arts and crafts". 14

Compulsory secular education was introduced. The Jews were ordered to attend Christian schools or establish their own, in order to learn basic skills,(i.e. reading, arithmetic and writing). Secondary schools and universities were opened to the Jews. In consultation with the Jews, offensive material from secondary school textbooks would be removed and a new emphasis would be placed on philosophy and morality. In March 1782, Joseph II allowed the Jews to write their own textbooks, wherein they

might touch upon such moral principles as bore a special relation to their religion, provided these were not in conflict with the principles of universally ordained tolerance and the citizens' duties toward each other and the state. 15

In 1783, the first government Jewish school was opened, and in the next seven years, between twenty and thirty such schools opened in the empire, despite the opposition of the nobles. 16 In

Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1973), p. 474.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Hungarian Jewry in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" (Hebrew) in The Bar Ilan Annual Vol. 2. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher 1964) p.165 has the number at twenty two. Mahler, p.232, asserts that there were "a little over thirty". As Katzburg points out in

1786, an imperial court decree stated that any Jew in the Austrian Empire who wanted a marriage licence had to possess a certificate of elementary school education.

Joseph II urged his subjects and officials to respect the Jews'rights and forbade their compulsory conversion. He abolished the humiliating Jewish badge, and changed the army's oath of allegiance to include references to the Messiah, in place of references to Jesus. By the end of 1788, the number of Jews in the army had increased to 2,500.¹⁷

In an effort to promote linguistic, and, eventually, national assimilation among the Jews, Joseph II decreed in his Letters Patent that all business and official documents had to be in either German, Latin, or Hungarian. Community records of births and deaths kept by the rabbi also had to be in one of these languages. Any document written in Hebrew or in Yiddish was invalid and Jews were ordered to adopt German last names from a selected list. In 1789, a <u>Judenpatent</u> was issued in Galicia, and would have been extended to the other provinces if Joseph II had not died shortly afterwards (1790). 18

The emperor's desire to reform the Jews' in his domain is very clear in this document. Paragraph twelve read:

his article, many of these schools were closed after the death of Joseph II, perhaps due to the fact that the nobles were not in favour of these schools. The discrepancy in the number of Josephinian schools may be due to the fact that these schools were so short lived.

¹⁷ S.K. Padover, The Revolutionary Emperor (Hamden, Conn.,: Archon Books, 1967), p.25%.

¹⁸ Michael Silber, p.112.

No young person will be allowed to study Talmud unless he can produce a certificate from the German school teacher that he has properly attended the German school and has profited from its instruction.¹⁹

The patent confirmed the existing exclusion of the Jews from certain cities and villages. Jews could rent estates only in areas where they were already living, and they were forbidden to buy estates. These restrictions were probably maintained by Joseph II in an effort not to antagonize the burghers, many of whom lived in the same, western cities of Hungary as the Jews. Motivated by the desire to improve and to extend the economic base of the country, Joseph II granted the Jews almost full liberty in commerce - Grosshandlung. Important Jewish merchants could dress like nobles, and could even carry swords. They could learn guild crafts if a Christian was willing to teach them, and were allowed to reside in the royal cities during a fair. The ban on Jewish trade in gunpowder and salt was removed, as was the special Leibmaut, (the poll tax), and the double court fees. However, other taxes were instituted, such as the special tax on kosher meat.

Raphael Mahler has observed that through Joseph II's legislation, the Jews now had all the duties of citizenship, but none of the concomitant rights. The patents, he remarks, were a "caricature of emancipation". Indeed, the Jews continued to be subjected to certain discriminatory laws, and were thus still

¹⁹ Silber, p.111.

denied access to larger society. They were still regarded with suspicion and attempts to curtail their activity continued. (In 1787, a report by statesman Joseph Urmenyi from the Nyitra district listed five reasons for the impoverishment of the area. The Jewish innkeepers' supply of drinks to the local populace was listed as the third reason.)²⁰

The edict did however provide the Jews with certain civil and social rights that had previously been denied them. The real importance of the Toleranzpatent for the Jews was the fact that they were recognized by the emperor as having a part in his enlightened empire. Despite the fact that Joseph II's aim was ultimately the complete reform of the Jews in his domain, through the acquisition of those skills and abilities so as to render them useful to society, while similtaneously removing those aspects of Jewish life that were obstacles to this endeavour, they viewed his legislation with favour. Jacob Katz remarks, "that the Jews were remembered in general legislation was seen as implicit recognition of their legal incorporation into the Christian state; the Jews were on their way to becoming de civitate, so to speak. This alone was sufficient cause for Jewish celebration".21 The chief rabbi of Prague, Yehezkel Landau, was one of these celebrants. He declared that the edict was a gracious act of the emperor "who has removed from us the stigma

²⁰ Henry Marczali, op. cit., p.30

²¹ Jacob Katz, Jewish Emancipation and Self Emancipation (New York: Jewish Publication Society 1986), p.77.

of slavery".22

The Jews' burgeoning loyalty was easily discernable from a nine article memorandum that they sent to the Landtag, the continued of their assembly, in 1790. Aware national disabilities, they requested freedom and security in the cities, the right to buy houses, and the permission to employ Christians. They spoke of their desire for brotherhood and equality, and expressed their feeling that "we have no other brothers, we have no other protection other than the laws of the state".23 The requests were granted in 1792 by Joseph's short lived successor, Leopold II.

Francis II shared none of his predecessor's ideas, and had none of his imagination. Instead, he followed the path of monarchic absolutism. For much of his reign, Hungary was never truly at peace, and rarely was the currency stable. With the counsel and aid of Count von Metternich, all institutions were centralized and controlled; censorship and repression were rampant.

Francis, however, was unable to suppress the literary and national revival that began during his reign. The Hungarian nobility promoted the development of the Magyar language; books of poetry, literature, and novels flourished. The prominent linguist, Ferencz Kazinczy (1759 - 1831), organized and enriched the Magyar language, and translated the works of Shakespeare,

Quoted by Jacob Katz, Out of the Ghetto (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p.155, from Landau's work <u>Drush</u> <u>HaZela</u>.

²³ Nathaniel Katzburg, "Internal Changes", p.167.

Lessing and Goethe, among others. Moreover, toward the end of Francis' reign, ideas of social change were gaining momentum. Count Istvan Szechenyi (1791 - 1860) spoke out against the nobility's privlege and the antiquated constitution in his works Hitel, ("Credit", 1830) and Vilag ("Light", 1831), and Stadium (1833).²⁴

Francis placed many restrictions on the Jews within his borders. He allowed the Jews to maintain the kehillot, so as to insure efficient tax collection, and stipulated that all the elders be able to speak and to write German. He placed frequent and many restrictions on the Jews' right of domicile, and in his constant and desperate search for revenues, he placed special taxes on the Jewish community. The Jews sent a memorandum to the Landtag in 1807, requesting the freedom of religion, legal status, and equality. These were not voted on, due to the growing reactionism of the government. When the Jews attempted to pay the toleration tax of 1811 in installments, the emperor responded by doubling the tax. Compulsory military service by the Jews was introduced in 1807, and severe restrictions on Jewish immigration into Hungary were instituted in 1806, and again in 1808. Anyone who sheltered an illegal immigrant was threatened

Macartney, op. cit., pp. 123 -126, and his other work, The House of Austria, (Edinburgh: University Press 1978) pp. 27 - 49. Francis was xenophobic in the extreme. He was adamantly opposed to the introduction of the railway into his empire, and exclaimed: "No, no, I will have nothing to do with it, lest the revolution might come right into the country". Quoted by Macartney, p.125. To what extent this reactionism affected Moses Sofer's attitude toward reform will be discussed in Chapter Four.

deportation.25

Despite his policy of "willed immobility", Francis was unable to erase Joseph the Second's legacy from his empire. He did not revoke the Edict of Tolerance, and its clauses concerning the education of the Jews were put into effect. In 1797, Francis issued his own <u>Judenpatent</u>. Though it was directed to the Jews of Bohemia only, it indicated a crucial change for Jewish and non-Jewish society alike, throughout the empire. Marriage and occupational restrictions remained, yet the emperor declared that the patent's purpose was:

to bring Bohemian Jewry closer to their civic destination for the benefit of the State and themselves in accordance with the accepted principles of Tolerance so that legislation may finally altogether abolish the difference that it has been compelled to maintain between Jewish and Christian subjects. If

In their attempts to divest classes of their own unique characteristics and privileges, in order to further the strength of the centralized state, the enlightened monarchs weakened the barriers among various groups, including the Jews. Social contact between the classes was still restricted, but the ideas of the Enlightenment were to be found in Hungarian society. It was, in fact, the middle nobility in Hungary who was the primary carriers of these ideas. The gentry, many of whom were members of minorities, was particularly favourable to ideas of religious toleration. Political and social thinkers at the time envisioned

²⁵ Katzburg, p.163.

²⁶ Quoted by Jacob Katz, in Out of the Ghetto p. 165.

a new society where all class and religious differences disappeared - a "neutral" society. These visions were described in various pamphlets. Between 1790 and 1791, approximately five hundred pamphlets were published, many of them dealing with precisely this topic. The Jews' role in this new society was also dealt with. (Others discussed the emancipation of women, freedom for the serfs, and governmental reform). The pamphlet attributed to Janos Nagyvathy is an interesting one, for in it the writer expressed his desire for the inclusion of the Jews as full members of society. He wrote:

Since suppression still exists (in Hungary) it means that the Hungarian nation is not yet a free nation. If we dare to found our faith upon the Jewish Bible, and if we dare, and like, to sing Jewish Psalms in our churches, we have no reason to exclude the Jewish people from society on grounds of different customs, nor to collect from them taxes for toleration of their very existence. And why (is this done)? Just because they exist. Oh, Europe! When you behave like this, are you not acting against yourself? 27

Principles of rationalism and enlightenment were also beginning to be discernable amongst a certain segment of the Jewish population, the emergent Jewish bourgeoisie. Between the end of Joseph II's reign and the mid - nineteenth century, Hungarian Jewry underwent significant changes, in demography and economics. In 1783 there were 115 Jewish communities in Hungary; between this year and 1840, 174 new communities were established. Although Jews of Polish birth tended to remain on the border

²⁷ Quoted by Bela K. Kiraly, in Hungary in the Late Eighteenth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p.168.

areas until the middle of the nineteenth century, Hungarian Jews of Bohemian and Moravian descent moved to the interior and to the economic group. 28

This newly established economic category had international business connections, frequent contact with the larger world, and increased mobility. Many of the wealthiest among them moved to Vienna. They were involved in the export of raw wool and hides to Moravia, and were wholesalers of agricultual products, imported linens, and woolens. Some had partnerships with Moravian - Jewish trading firms, and were involved in the importation of wines and fabrics. During the Napoleonic wars, the Jews provided the Habsburg army with supplies, and also extended their markets to the continent. It is not surprising, therefore, that a growing interest in the enlightenment can be found in this class. Nathaniel Katzburg observes that at the beginning of the nineteenth century " in this stratum there was a comfortable backdrop in which to acculturate new ideas, and there was a tendency to dismiss barriers between the Jews and their surroundings".29

This class began to sense a certain inconsistency - they were observant Jews, with set positions in the <u>kehilla</u>, yet they were increasingly being drawn into the company of wealthy converted Viennese Jews, and wealthy non - Jewish businessmen. In Germany, a Jewish version of the enlightened society began to emerge - one that would allow these Jews to retain certain ties to non Jews, while at the same time, pursue a special social

²⁸ Katzburg, p.163.

²⁹ Katzburg, p.165

mission of enlightenment among their fellow Jews. These "maskilim" maintained their traditional beliefs, yet were desirious of change among Jewish society. Moses Mendelssohn is the archetypal example of this new type of Jewish thinker - the maskil. Mendelssohn remained committed to Jewish tradition, yet envisioned the amelioration of the Jews' position in society through their acquisition of general knowledge in schools, and the broadening of their occupational base. Mendelssohn translated the Bible into German, (the Biur), and wrote an accompanying commentary, Netivot Hashalom. 30

In Hungary, the dissemination of the German haskalah was rapid, if not extensive. Though the Hungarian maskil Peter Beer remote village at the time of Mendelssohn's lived in a translation of the Bible, years later he was to describe the profound impression this publication made on him, stating that "a light dawned in me".31 As Michael Silber points out, the reception of German haskalah in Hungary was quite remarkable for two reasons - direct communication between the two countries was rare, as trade between them was not extensive, and secondly, as we have already seen, state censorship and restrictions were rampant, thus enforcing the insularity of Hungarian Jewry. However, close family and business ties existed between Jews in Hungary and those in Vienna and Prague. Both these cities served as conduits of books printed in Germany in the 1780s and early 1790s and briefly, in the mid 1790s as publishing centres which

 $^{^{\}scriptsize 30}$ Mendelssohn will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

³¹ Quoted by Silber, p.107.

reissued literature of the Berlin haskalah. 32

Despite the fact that the latter part of the eighteenth century saw in Hungary the development and growth of a socioeconomic class that was sympathetic to, and interested in, the haskalah, the strength of this class was still quite weak. Only fifteen percent of Hungarian Jews lived in organized Jewish communities composed of more than five hundred people, and only three communities were well off - Pressburg, Alt Ofen and Eisenstadt. Their wealth could in no way rival that of the Jews in Berlin; Hungary could not develop into a centre of patronage. Hungary's very wealthy Jews moved to Vienna, as did other Jews who were attracted to the haskalah. Consequently, foreign maskilim were rarely attracted here. Furthermore, despite the interest in the principles of enlightenment and its support by some members of society, class divisions were still too rigid to allow for the Jews' social acceptance. Thus, there was no society that the Jews could really envision joining as full and equal participants.

Although Joseph II had served to promote and realize one of the central aims of the <u>maskilim</u> - education - the <u>normalschulen</u> that had been created in every sizeable community were products of the state's imagination, and not that of the <u>maskilim</u>. For example, the Josephinian school system was primarily concerned with elementary instruction, and only the basics at that. The system also favored teaching religious studies first, and secular subjects second. This was in contrast to the vision held by among others, Naphtali Herz Wessely, one of the most vocal proponents

³² Silber, pp.107 - 109

of educational reform. He favored higher education and teaching of secular subjects first.³³

The rabbinate and the lay leadership was quite favourable to the haskalah. Wealthy learned communal heads, of whom almost all were from rabbinic families, patronized the haskalah. Members of the Jeitteles and Landau families in Prague and the Rosenthal family in Moor and Pest are examples. Observes Michael Silber:

The haskalah was welcomed without abandoning appreciation for traditional rabbinic culture — indeed, several maskilim tried their hand at writing responsa and novellae. Criticism of the rabbinate in these areas was tempered with respect, in part probably because of the relative openness of rabbinic culture to extra talmudic interests, a phenomenon that was certainly apparent by the middle of the eighteenth century. 34

The relative openness of rabbinic tigures in Hungary to interests outside the sphere of talmudic study is clearly illustrated by both the activities and the publications of various Hungarian rabbis at this time. Moses Munz, elected rabbi of Obuda in 1789, gave his approbation to the 1818 edition of Mendelssohn's translation of the Bible. Rabbi Israel Warhmann (1755 - 1826) rabbi of Pest since 1799, helped to establish a communal school here, based on advice given to him by David Frankel of Germany, the editor of Sulamith. Rabbi Azriel Brill (1778 - 1853) taught in a normalschule in Obuda, before he became a member of the rabbinical court in Pest. In 1821 he wrote a book on Hungarian geography entitled Ein Ha'aretz, and in 1827 his historic essay

A DESCRIPTION OF

³³ Silber makes this point, p.108.

³⁴ p. 113

on the Second Temple, <u>Hadrat Kodesh</u>, was published. The activities of Rabbi Moses Kunitzer, rabbi of Buda and a member of the Pest rabbinic court, clearly reveal the uncertain division between traditional rabbinic interests and the <u>haskala</u>. Kunitzer composed the first Hebrew play, <u>Beit Rabbi</u>, published in Vienna in 1805. Its preface was a biography of Rabbi Judah Hannassi. In the same city in 1815, his defense of the traditional authorship of the Zohar was published.

Other rabbinic figures in Hungary were interested in science and the promotion of its study amongst their students. Rabbi Wolf Boskowitz, the rabbi in Pest from 1795 to 1796 and a much revered talmudic scholar, instructed some of his students at yeshivot in both Hungary and Moravia in natural sciences. One of his students, Rabbi Shimon Oppenheimer, who was later to become a member of the Pest rabbinic court, wrote a book on astronomy entitled Amud Hashahar.

While it is possible to point to such activities as further evidence of Hungarian rabbis' receptiveness to ideas of the haskalah, these activities can also be understood as the continuation of the traditional rabbinic interest in science. David Fishman points out in his article "A Polish Rabbi Meets the Berlin Haskala: The Case of Rabbi Barukh Schick", that in the nineteenth century there existed a certain type of traditionalist rabbi who combined science and Torah primarily as a demonstrative apologetic act, in order to prove the wisdom and validity of Judaism. Schick, (1744 - 1808), who wrote a book on Ptolemaic astronomy entitled ...sod Olam, and a book on human anatomy entitled Tiferet Ada: (1777) was the "paradigm" for the type of

rabbi who approached science from a highly traditionalist vantage point, divorced from theological, cultural, and social concerns.³⁵

Whether Hungarian rabbinical involvement in science is understood as simply part of a certain aspect of rabbinic tradition, or alternately, as an indication of growing interest in spheres more closely associated with the haskalah, it is clear that there was a certain receptive attitude or mood in Hungary during the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Moderate in its tone, the Hungarian haskalah did not initially threaten the rabbis in Hungary. The haskalah did not initially threaten the rabbis in Hungary. The haskalah con in Hungary was muted, and thus it was not initially perceived as a threat to the traditionalists' beliefs and institutions. As Chapter Two will describe, it was the emergence of religious reforms, which followed on the heels of the haskalah, that posed this threat to the traditionalists.

³⁵ See David Fishman's article ("A Polish Rabbi Meets the Berlin Haskalah: The Case of Rabbi Barukh Schick") in <u>AJS Review</u> Volume XII No.1 Spring 1987 pp. 95 - 121 for a complete discussion of the life and career of this figure.

The beginning of religious reform in Germany and its subsequent dissemination in Hungary is the focus of this chapter. In order to discuss fully Rabbi Moses Sofer's perception of reform, it is essential to have an accurate picture of the nature of reform during his lifetime. My intent here is to touch upon the initial stages of the development of reform in Germany, and then move to a consideration of the movement's development in Hungary, so as to provide a backdrop for the discussion which appears in Chapter Four. In the constant of the movement of the discussion which appears in Chapter Four. In the constant of the discussion which appears in Chapter Four.

As Chapter One has shown, the emergence of the maskil was a Jewish life. Critical of the conformist turning point in attitudes which he found in all aspects of Jewish life and guided by the principles of rationalism and not traditionalism, the maskil possessed new visions about the organization, leadership and education of Jewish society, and its relationship to the non Jewish world. Moses Mendelssohn (1729 - 1786) and Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725 -1805) are examples par excellence of such men. Both remained observant Jews, yet as Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz observed in their history of the period, Mendelssohn and Wessely "envinced little hesitation in appropriating philosophical, aesthetic, educational and political values of the enlightenment. They vigorously maintained that the integrity of traditional Judaism was not compromised by their adoption of the

³⁶ The confines of this paper do not allow for an extensive treatment of the history and early development of reform in Germany. For an in depth study see Michael Meyer's new book, Response to Modernity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

neutral culture of the Enlightenment."³⁷ Moses Mendelssohn identified Judaism with the essential principles of natural religion, so that it could continue to play a vital role in this "neutral culture". At the same time, he sought to safeguard ritual observance by maintaining that this was incumbent upon all Jews.

Written in the same spirit, Wessely's book <u>Divre Shalom Ve'Emet</u> (1782), discussed the shared values between Jews and non Jews, which he stated were all based on universal knowledge. Like Mendelssohn, Wesseley maintained that for the Jews there existed a significant, additional component. Wessely was very concerned with the broadening of the Jews' education; he stressed the importance of geography, history and languages, and gave his preference to those subjects that he believed had value to non Jewish society - i.e. the Old Testament and Hebrew grammar.³⁸

Some scholars have divided the development of reform Judaism into three stages, and have deemed both Mendelssohn and Wesseley integral participants in the first stage, - "precursors". W.G.Plaut, in his work <u>The Rise of Reform Judaism</u>, sees the years 1780 to 1817 as the first stage, and both of these men as essential to it.³⁹ However, it is clear from their work that neither Mendelssohn nor Wesseley saw themselves as precursors of

³⁷ Paul Mendes - Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.146.

³⁸ Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p.270 -273.

³⁹ W.G. Plaut, The Rise of Reform Judaism (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), Introduction.

a new religious movement, and as recent scholarship has shown, neither did their contemporaries. Moshe Samet's study of the period indicates that the extent of the attack on Mendelssohn and on Wessely was exaggerated and inflated by earlier historians. Many rabbis supposedly hostile to Mendelssohn showed him respect, and although the opposition to Wessely was much stronger, this too was later muted. Samet identifies the opposition of such luminaries as Rabbi Landau and Rabbi Fleckless as episodic".40 Although one may disagree with the perception of the activities of Mendelssohn, Wesseley and the early maskilim as the first stage in the history of reform Judaism, it is clear that their attempts to rationalize observance changed the way in which Judaism was understood. By applying principles of rationalism to Jewish law, the absolute validity of this law was lessened. This enabled the maskilim to begin to question the role of Jewish law as the final authority in Jewish life, and thus the power of the rabbincal authorities lessened.

The emergence and development of the reform movement in Germany was gradual and did not, as Robert Liberles discusses in his book <u>Social Context of Religious Reform</u> occur quickly or uniformally. The emergence of this movement did not signify the

⁴⁰ Moshe Samet, "Mendelssohn, Weisel and the Rabbis of Their Time", in Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel edited by Gilboa, Mevorach, Rappaport and Shochat, (Tel Aviv: HaMercaz Press, 1970), p.237. Rabbi Yehezkel Landau, (1713 - 1793) was born in Poland, served as the dayan of Brody, and served as the head of the yeshiva in Prague from 1754 until his death. He was somehat favourable to certain early aspects of the haskala, noteably the opening of a Jewish school in Prague. He was not known as being tremendously strenuous in his interpretation of law, and allowed men to shave on the intermediary days of holidays. Rabbi Eleazar Fleckles (1754-1826) succeeded Rabbi Landau as head of the yeshiva in Prague and also served on this community's court of law.

immediate beginning of the end of traditional Judaism in this country; the conquest of German Jewry by reform was painfully slow. The movement did indeed pass through various stages and did not become more adamant in its demands and more militant in its means until the later part of the 1830's.41

Immediately preceeding the beginning of the movement, early Jewish journals appeared. Ha Me'assef ("The Gatherer") was put out in Koenigsberg between 1784 - 1786 by the Society of Friends of Hebrew Literature. It was dedicated to promoting the Jewish enlightenment and was devoted mainly to studies of Biblical exegesis, the revival of Hebrew in poetry and prose, and biographies of Jewish figures of the past and present. The first Jewish periodical in German, Sulamit, was published in Leipzig in 1806. Its founders were two Jewish educators from Dessau, David Frankel and Joseph Wolf; Frankel, who had at an earlier point been Mendelssohn's tutor in Dessau, was to remain editor of this journal until 1848. Sulamit's central theme was moderation, and its goal was to enlighten the Jewish nation gradually, from within, to eventually achieve the Jews' political, economic and social integration. 42

⁴¹ Robert Liberles, Social Context of Religious Reform, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), p.17-25. Liberles discusses at length the various negotiations and dealings amongst the reform and the traditional elements in Berlin. In particular he describes the complications that ensued over the ue of the synagogue in Berlin. From here, it is clear that conflict between the two groups was neither immeditate nor constant.

⁴² When it moved to Berlin in 1781 its focus shifted to more universal themes such as politics and science, and the importance of secular education. It was not published between 1790-1794, and when it was reissued in 1794 it was under the editorship of Aaron Wolfssohn. It then pursued an openly aggressive stance against the orthodox community, and was forced out of publication in 1797

This early stage of reform saw the nucleus of the first reform temple emerge in 1815, at the home of Israel Jacobson (1768 - 1828) in Berlin. (When his home became too small, the group moved to the home of the very wealthy community elder, Jacob Herz Beer). The private prayer group met for two hours every Saturday, there was a sermon ir. German as well as the recitation of certain prayers in the vernacular, as well as organ music. 43 This period also saw the formulation and development of Friedlander's (1750 -1834) ideas about the nature of Judaism. In his letter to a certain Pastor Teller in 1799, his Sendschreiben, he outlined his deistic conception of religion. He rejected both Christian dogma and Jewish rituals, and asserted that Jews and Protestants alike should unite around the eternal truths of Mosaic monotheism. Though he saw himself as the genuine disciple of Mendelssohn, 44 his theory, that all religions shared the same positive nucleus, discredited both Mendelssohn's and Wesseley's claims about the uniqueness of the Jewish religion.

due to the lack of subscribers. See Michael Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), p.116-118 for a full account of the history of these two early journals. Both are mentioned here because although neither initially advocated reform, their appearance serves as an indication of the changing intellectual climate of the time.

⁴³ Moses Samet has mentioned in his article "Mendelssohn, Weisel and the Rabbis of Thier Time" that the real impetus for the closure of the temple came from the Kaiser himself, and not, as some scholars have believed (i.e. Michael Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew, p.136) due to the complaints issued by the traditional Jews to the authorities.

⁴⁴ Michael Meyer, p.94.

The modifications in liturgy suggested and introduced by David Friedlander and Israel Jacobson were put into practice at the institution of the New Israelite Temple Association in Hamburg in December 1817. Prayers were shortened, some were in German and there was choral and organ music. Sermons were delivered in German, in lieu of the traditional drasha. Emphasis was placed on the Sabbath as the day of prayer, to the exclusion of the other days of the week.

The second period in the development of reform was characterized by the emergence of the Hamburg Prayer Book, in 1819. The prayer book read from left to right, like the Roman alphabet, and translations of the text appeared at the bottom of the page. The Hebrew was <u>Sephardic</u>, and there were omissions and modifications in the prayers which had referred to the Messiah and to the land of Israel. Jacobson solicited a Talmudic authority to prepare a defense of these changes; Eliezer Liebermann's work, <u>Noga Zedek</u>, appeared in 1818.45 The work had the approbations of four rabbis, among them two from Hungary, Rabbi Moses Kuniczer, and Rabbi Aaron Chorin of Arad, of whom more will be said later. Liebermann claimed that the introduction of an organ, the use of prayers in German, the modification of other prayers, and the emphasis on the Sabbath as the only day of

⁴⁵ Little is known of the mysterious Eliezer Liebermann. It is believed that he was the <u>dayan</u> (judge) of the northern Hungarian community of Hummene at some point, and that at a later stage converted to Christianity. The responsa of Rabbi Sofer on the subject of reform, as will be seen in Chapter Four, contains numerous references to Liebermann's two works, <u>Noga Zedek</u> and <u>Or Noga.</u> Both works were published in 1818 in Dessau.

prayer, could be substantiated by traditional sources.46

In this same period, a temple in Vienna was established, under the direction of Isaak Noah Mannheimer, (1793 - 1886), the Viennese son of a Hungarian cantor. The reforms here closely resembled those introduced in Hamburg. In 1819, Leopold Zunz (1794 - 1886) helped to establish the society for the scientific and historic approach to Judaism, the Verein Fuer Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden. In 1823, the society first published Zeitschrift Fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums, the journal dedicated to approaching Judaism from the new vantage point of scientific inquiry.

The stage identified as the "flowering" of reform did not occur until after Rabbi Sofer's death. Temples continued to open, including those in other countries in Europe (i.e. the West London Synagogue of British Jews). In 1844, another prayer book was introduced by the Association for the Reform of Judaism. Very little Hebrew was used, and the content of the prayers was further modified. The controversy between the chief rabbi of Breslau, Solomon Tiktin, (1791-1843) and Abraham Geiger, (1810-1874) the "junior" rabbi who sought to implement certain reforms in the community, (and a scholar of Zunz's Wissenschaft des Judentums) began during this period. The ten years of public debate that ensued in print are part of the history of the reform

⁴⁶ Part of Liebermann's text can be seen in Leopold Greenwald's work, One Thousand Years of Jewish Life In Hungary, (Yiddish) (Columbus, Ohio: Parish Press, 1945), p.83 The appendix to this work, Or Noga, appeared in 1818. See Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz, p. 146 - 149, for part of this text.

⁴ Plaut, Introduction.

movement that has been described as "revolutionary, exciting, grand in its sweep, immensely appealing in its surging optimism and breadth of its universalism". 48

The pattern of development and growth of the Reform movement in Germany was not imitated in Hungary. Reform was not indigenous to Hungary, rather, it arrived eastward from Vienna. There were very few direct commercial relations between Hungary and Germany in the early part of the nineteenth century. Vienna, however, played a crucial role in the cultural and economic life of Hungary.

The diffusion of reform into Hungary was facilitated by both familial and business ties. The Breisach family, for example, lived in Pressburg toward the end of the eighteenth century. Later, they branched out to Vienna and to Pest and by members of the family had managed to acquire the 1820's, important positions in these communities. Here, they became outspoken advocates of reform - Isaac Breisach (1758 - 1835) arrived in Pest in 1795 and served as one of the heads of the community here for more than twenty seven years. His son in law, Hermann Biedermann, (1774 - 1816) was active on behalf of reform in Vienna, Pressburg, and Pest. Isaac's son Wolf, (d.1827) was head of the Pressburg community for at least seven years, during which time he endeavoured to have the yeshiva here closed.

The wealthy Viennese merchant Michael Lazar Biedermann, (Hermann's brother, not surprisingly) has been dubbed the "patron

⁴⁸ Michael Meyer, "The Religious Reform Controversy in the Berlin Jewish Community 1814 -1823", in The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook #24 (London: Marin Secker and Warbrug Ltd., 1979), Introduction.

saint not only of Viennese Reform but also of Pressburg and perhaps Pest reforms". 49 He was primarily interested in educational reforms, and was one of the most vocal proponents of the establishment of a modern school in Pressburg.

It was Isaac Noah Mannheimer's view of reform that filtered into Hungary. Mannheimer became the leader of the reform congregation of Vienna in 1824; he developed the "Viennese rite" of reform, which was a more moderate version of the Hamburg precedent. Thus, it was the Viennese model of reform that was put into practice, through the work of Gabriel Ullman. Ullman was the driving force behind the establishment of the temple here, and in 1827 he and other supporters opened the Hesed Ne'urim Verein, the precursor to the Pest Chorschule. Observed a Moravian traveller about the influence of Vienna in this temple:

the local Temple here is surely a child of the Viennese; the constant traffic of local merchants with the Austrian capital has brought about the acceptance of the new mode of religious services by the local Jewry."

Rabbi Moshe Kunitz (d. 1837) was the rabbi of Buda and later, the <u>dayan</u> or judge, of Pest. He supported the introduction of reforms in the synagogue service, as is seen in his responsum which appears in <u>Noga Zedek</u>, wherein he permitted the use of an organ in the synagogue. Although he wrote three other works, <u>Beit Rabbi</u> (Vienna 1805), <u>Ben Yohai</u> (1815) and the two volume <u>HaMazref</u>

⁴⁹ Michael Silber, "The Historical Experience of German Jewry and Its Impact on Haskalah and Reform in Hungary", in Toward Modernity, p.120.

Supposed by Silber, p.123.

(Prague 1820 and Vienna 1857) these works were not concerned with religious reform. His efforts to introduce reform into Hungary were overshadowed by the activities of his peer, Aaron Chorin.

Rabbi Aaron Chorin (1766 - 1844) has been described as an "indefatigable" supporter of reform; it was he who played the pioneering role in the dissemination of German Reform in Hungary. Born in Moravia in 1766, his early education and training were highly traditional. In his youth he studied for two years at the yeshiva in Mattersdorf and later he went to study in Prague, under the tutelage of Rabbi Yehezkel Landau. Here he was exposed to the study of general philosophy, and acquired an interest in the kabbala. Considered by his contemporaries to be a halachist of some importance, he was appointed rabbi of the southern Hungarian community of Arad in 1789 and retained this position until his death.

Chorin's book <u>Emek HaShaveh</u> was published in Prague in 1803. (Written in Hebrew, a German translation appeared in 1837 under the title "Hillel"). In it he attacked those customs which he thought were without basis in Judaism - i.e. the placing of copies of the Psalms of Ascent near a woman in childbirth, and the practice of <u>kapparot</u> (redemption of one's sins through the use of a live animal). The opening chapter of the book was entitled <u>Rosh Amanah</u> (Principles of Faith). Here he discussed the

Moses Sofer studied with Rabbi Landau at approximately the same time (c.1800). Though it is possible that they did meet each other, Sofer's references to Chorin in his responsa do not, as will be seen in Chapter Four, indicate a personal acquaintance with Chorin. Furthermore, none of the biographical accounts consulted indicates any such personal knowledge.

need to reform the liturgy, so as to "restore it to its pristine simplicity", to say prayers in the "understandable language of one's country", and to make use of the organ during the service "so that harmony and order might be introduced". In 1811, a Hungarian writer reported the following about Chorin and his activities:

In our land too, there are many Israelites who have a sense and feeling for good and for betterment and who can properly appreciate the institutions of the Westphalian Consistory. A few weeks ago, for instance, R. Aaron Churiner, rabbi of Arad, performed the marriage ceremony for an Israelite couple within the synagogue after he had first held on the previous Sabbath a very appropriate public speech in which he fittingly explained the beauty and the usefulness of the Consistory's directives. 53

In his treatise entitled "Kinat ha Emet" (Zeal for Truth, Dessau 1818) Chorin supported Jacobson's reforms. Rabbi Banet of Nicholsburg (1753-1829) pressured the community of Arad to ban the treatise. Chorin was summoned to appear before the beit din (Jewish court of law) and was told that his book would be burned, and that he had to recant in writing. He did so in 1819, stating that " all my words are annulled and invalid. Besides, I am not worthy to judge and decide on this subject matter. Only the sages of Israel and their leaders of the time are justified in doing so".54

⁵² Excerpts from Chorin's work A Word in its Time can be found in Plaut's book, op. cit. p.33-34.

⁵³ Quoted by Michael Silber, p.117.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Plaut, p.256.

Shortly afterward Chorin appealed to the government and the verdict of the beit din was revoked. In his work "Davar B'ito" (A Word in its Time) of the following year, he urged his readers to disregard his recantation. Chorin again outlined the need for prayer in the vernacular, the use of an organ, and the simplification of prayers. In his own congregation, he abolished the Kol Nidre prayer, approved the use of an organ on the Sabbath, allowed riding on the Sabbath, and permitted men to pray with their heads uncovered - the first rabbi to do so.55 In this work, intended to provide a rationale for reform, he spoke of the need to "strip off the unessential additions which often forced themselves upon our noble faith as the spawn of obscure and dark ages".56 In "Iggeret Elasaf" (1826), Chorin responded to the questions of the Jews from the Kalsruhe community, and advocated further reforms. In 1828, he initiated the construction of a new synagogue and school in the community. Towards the end of his life, he wrote three works - Avak Sofer (1828), which was his notes on certain parts of the Shulchan Aruch, and two on the subject of reform, Zir Ne'eman (1831) and Yeled Zekunim (1839). He also supported the resolutions of the Conference of Reform Rabbis in Brunswick, which took place in 1844. In an essay that of a collection entitled Theologische Gutachten (Theological Opinions, 1842) it is clear that until the end of life, Chorin remained deeply committed to the ideas of his

⁵⁵ Plaut, p.33.

⁵⁶ Mendes - Flohr, op. cit. p.156.

religious reform. He stated:

The genuine spirit of Jewish religiosity has integrity only when the soul is ever free of fetters and does not impose upon our conscience any oppressive restraint..........

Each community should keep its own temple order; none of them should strive to press its opinions upon any other. Each should arrange its temple in accordance with its own taste, should formulate the prayers to assuage its own conscience - and all should treat each other as comrades of one faith, coreligionists.⁵⁷

When he died in 1844 Chorin had earned the title of "Aher" (literally, "other") from traditional rabbis, an acronym of his name that was reminiscent of the famous first century apostate Elisha ben Avuyah. 58

Although the reform movement in Hungary had Aaron Chorin as its and despite the report of the champion, Hungarian correspondent that would suggest the opposite, the majority of remained traditional during Hungarian Jews Moses Sofer's lifetime. One German Jew in Hungary observed in 1845, a few years after the rabbi's death that "there, culture had not yet reached the stage which has been attained in Germany. It is still as it was with us at the beginning of the century". 59 This quote does not imply that reform was not evident in Hungary. Rather, it underscores the fact that society in general, and the rabbinate in particular, remained highly conservative. Rabbis Kunitz and

⁵⁷ see Plaut, p.39 - 40.

⁵⁸ Leopold Greenwald, A <u>History of the Torah and Faith in Hungary</u> (Hebrew) (Siget: A. Koyfman, 1910), p.41 - 44

⁵⁹ Silber, p.125.

Chorin were certainly the exception.

Through the above consideration of the early beginnings and development of the reform movement in Germany, it becomes clear that Rabbi Sofer was never witness to Reform Judaism in its maturity, neither in his place of birth, nor in his adopted country. As a young man in Frankfurt, he was exposed to its infancy and initial expression, but by the time that the reform movement had begun to mature, Rabbi Sofer was living in Pressburg, in a country where the movement had yet to develop to the same extent. His knowledge of the path and nature of religious reform were therefore secondhand at best. As his biography that constitutes Chapter Three will illustrate, this was a factor of great significance in the development of his own approach and response to the subject of religious reform.

In the first two chapters, I concentrated on the broad, historical factors which were at play during Rabbi Moses Sofer's lifetime. In this chapter I will approach the Hatam Sofer from a much more narrow vantage point - that of a biographer. The various events and influences which contributed to his development and shaped his character will be discussed. This chapter will make use of both secondary sources and primary sources in order to reconstruct a biography. A word about the use of these primary sources in this chapter is essential.

Although he did not publish any of his work during his lifetime, Rabbi Moses Sofer left a voluminous literary legacy that was published posthumously by his children. There are two very large volumes of his speeches, <u>Drashot</u>, another smaller book of speeches entitled <u>Zikhronot</u>, two volumes of his personal will, <u>Torat Moshe</u>, a volume of personal letters entitled <u>Igeret Sofrim</u>, and commentaries on the Pentateuch and on the Talmud. He also wrote a series of works entitled <u>Hiddushe Hatam</u> <u>Sofer</u>. An essential part of Rabbi Sofer's literary legacy is his responsa,

⁶⁰ On the Pentateuch they are Hatam Sofer al Ha Torah: Bereshit, Shemot, Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim, and on the Talmud they are Hatam Sofer al Sugiot HaShas.

Lulav Ha-Gazul, Abodan Zarah, Nedarim, Shabbat, Baba Batra, Seder Nezikin, Al Sugiot, and Al Shulchan Arukh Yoreh De'ah. The name Hatam Sofer, which is frequently used instead of or in conjunction with Rabbi Sofer's full name, is an acronym taken from the title of this series, the "H" standing for "Hiddushe", the "T" for "Torat" and the "M" for "Moshe". It was common practice to name a rabbinical figure after a particular work that he had written.

She'elot U-Teshuvot, of which there are between 1,200 and 1,400.62 They are organized and titled according to the volumes of the Shulchan Aruch: Yoreh De'ah, Orah Haim, Eben HaEzer I and II, Hoshen Mishpat, Helek Shishi, and Helek Shevi'i. Though biographical information can be found in a few of these works, (namely, Sofer's Drashot, Torat Moshe, Zikhronot, and responsa) I will make use of his responsa only, for the sheer volume of Rabbi Sofer's work renders it necessary in a paper of this size to limit the use of primary sources.

Moses Sofer was born into a prestigious family and community, on Tishri 7, 5523 (September 1762).63 His great grandfather Rabbi Joseph Samuel Krakauer had served as the chief rabbi of the Frankfort community between 1689 - 1703. His grandfather married the daughter of Rabbi Samuel Schotten, the head of the Frankfort yeshiva. His father Samuel Sofer carried on the line of rabbis in the family, but was primarily engaged as a scribe. His uncle, Rabbi Moshe Frankforter, for whom he was named, was responsible for having the Talmud printed in Amsterdam. According to family traditon, Rabbi Shimon Yizchaki (Rashi) and the author of Yalkut Shimoni, Rabbi Simeon, were

⁶² Yehudah Nahshoni, in his work Rabbenu Moshe Sofer (Jerusalem: Mashavım Press 1981) has the figure at 1,377, p.143. Jacob Katz, however, ın his biographical article, "Contributions Toward a Biography of Rabbi Moses Sofer"ın Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom Scholem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1967) states that the figure "is close to 1,200." p.118.

⁶³ Jacob Katz, "Contributions Toward a Biography of Rabbi Moses Sofer", p.118.

among his ancestors.64

The Jewish community of Frankfort into which Moses Sofer was born was known as an Ir V' Em b'Yısrael, a "mother city in Israel." It was a city characterized by Torah scholarship, and was home to many dynamic and powerful rabbinical figures. Students from the surrounding communities would come to Frankfort to study, undissuaded by the high taxes imposed on them by the city council. Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk (1680-1756) headed Rabbi Schotten's yeshiva, after the latter's death. He was also the chief rabbi of the community, and was head of the beit din, until he left the community in the wake of the Eybeschuetz - Emden controversy. He was replaced by Rabbi Abraham Lissa, a figure who has been described as a "tiger" in areas of Jewish law. He himself was involved in the controversial case known as the "Cleves Divorce".

Despite the important role that Frankfort played in the world of Torah study, the city was by no means idyllic. In 1747,

⁶⁴ Moses Shimon Chones, The Chronology Book of Jewish Legalists, (Hebrew) (Warsaw: Baumritter, 1910), p.264, and S. Ehrmann, "Moses Sofer" in Jewish Leaders edited by Leo Jung, (Jerusalem: Boys Town Publishers, 1964), p.117.

⁶⁵ Quoted by Josef Unna in "Nathan HaCohen Adler", in Guardians of our Heritage, edited by Leo Jung, (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1958), p.165.

⁶⁶ A. Freimann and F. Kracauer in F<u>rankfort</u>, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1929), p.151.

⁶⁷ This case is discussed by Rabbi Moses Burak, in his book The Hatam Sofer, (Toronto: Beth Jacob Congregation, 1967), p.61. Burak emphasizes that Rabbi Lissa was alone in his opinion that the divorce was not valid; all of the rabbis of Mannheim and the much respected Rabbi Landau believed that it was valid.

shortly before Moses Sofer's birth, an anonymous writer described the condition of the Jewish ghetto thus:

Picture to yourself a long street, more than half a quarter of an hour long shut in by houses at least five or six stories high. Think of these houses as having houses back of them with scarcely enough yard space to admit daylight, every nook up to the roof full of rooms and chambers in which are together are crowded 10,000 human beings who think themselves fortunate when they leave their dens to be able to breathe the air on their dirty, damp street...There you have an approximate idea of the Jews' quarter.69

The sanitary conditions were equally as grim; pipes were poorly laid and in disrepair, and many houses did not have toilets. There was neither a yard nor a clear area where children could play; the spaces in front of the houses were used as workplaces for the adults of the ghetto. Much of the reason for the poor condition of the ghetto was the fact that within a period of ten years, it had twice been devastated by fire. In 1711, a fire that had begun in Rabbi Naphtali Cohen's home spread throughout the entire Jewish quarter, and destroyed all of the houses. And, in 1721, a fire which began in Moses Elkan's house wreaked considerable, if not equal damage.

The Jews were employed as moneylenders, bakers, butchers, tavernkeepers, and musicians. Some of the women were employed as servants, lace makers, and street vendors. A. Freimann and F. Kracauer, in their classic work on the city observe that "till well past the eighteenth century, the greater part of Frankfort

⁶⁸ Freimann and Kracauer, Frankfort, p.148.

Jewry was destitute, or had to struggle hard for their daily bread". 69 Almost one quarter of the community was unable to pay its taxes, and/or had to live on charity. The Jews, through the twelve trustees (<u>Baumeister</u>) who represented them to the government tried, to no avail, to have the crown taxes and the special <u>Opferpfennial</u> decreased. Only during the ten year period between 1759 - 1769, when the French held the city, did their taxes decrease.

The Jews were confronted with frequent opposition from the burghers, who felt threatened by their presence in the economy of the city. The burghers sent various, unsuccessful petitions to the city council, in an effort to have the Jews' activity restricted. However, the Jews remained under imperial protection.

Communal life was dominated by a few wealthy families - the Rothschilds, the Kanns, and the Schiffs. The wealthy Jews in Frankfort were bankers, military contractors, and traders in commodities (tea, sugar, coffee and brandy). Their living conditions were by no means comparable to the average Jew. The two story house of one Aaron Baer, a very wealthy merchant in the city is described as having seven bedrooms, eight other living rooms, Dutch art adorning the walls, and exquisite furniture. These families, like their wealthy counterparts in Hungary, were the first advocates of the enlightenment and of religious reform. By the end of the eighteenth century, there were many Jews in Frankfort who were influenced by the ideals of reform and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 142.

enlightenment. 70 Moses Sofer, however, was exposed to influences of a very different kind. Moses Sofer began his studies under the guidance of his father, and at the age of seven is said to have been completely versed in the Pentateuch. 71 At some point between the ages of nine and twelve, he was sent to Rabbi Nathan Adler's yeshiva; it was here that he began one of the most if not the most, significant relationships of his life.

Rabbi Adler (1741-1800) was an illustrious Torah scholar, and was thought to be an illui (child prodigy). His family had long been one of influence in the city and he, like his student, was believed to be a descendant of the author of the Yalkut Shimon: Despite the unanimous appreciation of his scholarship, Rabbi Adler was regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, and thought perhaps to be a secret kabbalist. Some of his practices differed from that of his contemporaries - he used the Lurianic rite in prayer, and used the Sephardic, not the Ashkenazic pronunciation of Hebrew. Furthermore, he recited the ancient blessing of the priests every day, not just on festivals, as was the accepted practice. He was very strict on matters pertaining to the dietary laws, and was particularly strict about the way in which an animal was to be killed. There was a certain amount of friction between his followers and the community; some of the former claimed that they could work miracles, and that they had visionary dreams. In 1779, his followers were placed under a ban by members of the community, he himself did not appear when

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 151 -160.

⁷¹ Burak, p.65.

summoned. A resolution was passed in absentia that he could no longer conduct his own services, or he too would be placed under a ban. 72

In the middle of the controversy with Rabbi Adler, Moses Sofer, at the age of either thirteen or fourteen, went to Mayence, to study with Rabbi Tevele Schiff (d.1792). By the time he was around fifteen or sixteen years old, he had successfully completed the study of the entire Talmud and had also become well versed in math, astronomy, physics, anatomy, French and Latin. 73

When Moses Sofer returned to Frankfort, Rabbi Phineas Horowitz was the new chief rabbi. He began to study with him, and also resumed his studies with Rabbi Adler. Horowitz (1730-1805), a native of Poland, was appointed the chief rabbi in 1771, and held the position until his death. He commanded much respect, and had a close relationship with Rabbi Adler, despite the fact that he had been one of the signatories of the proclamation against him. In his youth he had been a student of the hasidic leader Rabbi Dov Baer of Mezrich, (d.1772) as had his brothers, Nahum and Samuel Shmelke. The influence of hasidic thought can be seen in Rabbi Horowitz's philosophy; central to thought was the idea that the Torah should be studied in its simplest form. He believed that in this way, one could reach a spirit of communion with God. Rabbi Horowitz became involved in a controversy which surrounded the ruling of Rabbi Yehezkel Landau. Landau had

Josef Unna, "Nathan HaCohen Adler", pp.167 - 177. See also Jacob Katz's article, "Contibutions Toward a Biography of Rabbi Moses Sofer".

[&]quot; See Ehrmann, "Moses Sofer", p.118.

invalidated a bill of divorce given to a woman because it had been delivered to her by a messenger, against her will. Rabbi Horowitz insisted that the bill was valid.74

Rabbi Horowitz was adamantly opposed to the haskalah. In a sermon in 1782, entitled Tokhahat Musar ("ethical rebuke"), he spoke out against Mendelssohn's Biur. He charged that it was a "mockery ဂf teachings of the sages, an undertaking unprecedented wickedness in Israel".75 However, he did give an approbation to the German translation of a festival prayer book by Wolf Heidenheim. 76 In 1795, he banned the new secular school in Frankfort, due to fear that it would diminish Torah study. He forced to rescind this ban, under pressure from civic authorities. Towards the end of his life, he witnessed the emergence of German reading circles, a new, "model" school, and finally, the Jewish Philanthropin, in 1805.

Moses Sofer did not witness these events in Frankfort. Around 1781, he left the city, in order to follow Rabbi Adler to his new position in Boskowitz, Moravia. The story surrounding this departure is that Sofer walked for three days behind the rabbi's coach, until he eventually succeeded in getting the rabbi

⁷⁴ Jacob Katz, p.120-121.

⁷⁵ Freimann, p. 183.

Though this may seem contradictory, some rabbis did give approbations to books in the vernacular if they thought such books were of educational value and would otherwise be inaccesible. Moses Sofer himself, although he did not approve of the use of the vernacular in Torah study, gave an approbation in 1816 to a book written in Germany concerning dietary, family and candlelighting laws.

to take him. 77

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The importance of Frankfort in Moses Sofer's psyche is evidenced by Sofer's own words. He noted his attachment to the city in Orah Haim. Here he discussed the fact that his signature — Moshe HaKohen Sofer M'Frankfort D'Maim, is a testimony to the love he has for his city of birth. 78 In another letter in Orah Haim, Rabbi Sofer mentioned that he holds an annual feast on the twentieth of Adar in observance of the remembrance day of that community. 79

Frankfort was home to a rabbinical tradition of definite opinions and legalistic debate. Rabbis Falk, Lissa, and Horowitz were all involved in some sort of dispute regarding Jewish law at some point in their careers. Moses Sofer was raised in a society where these men figured prominently; although this does not necessarily mean that he grew up with a predilection for controversy or conflict, it does indicate that the expression of one's own opinions vis a vis Jewish law, even those unpopular or controversial, seemed entirely possible to Moses Sofer.

The fact that Moses Sofer was born in Frankfort, Germany, and grew to a young man there, and not in Hungary, is of considerable importance. Unlike most of the traditional Jews of

⁷⁷ Josef Unna recounts this event in Moses Sofer's life, in his article "Nathan HaCohen Adler" p. 178. He gives the source of this story - Sofer's Drashot, Part II.

⁷⁸ Moses Sofer, <u>She'elot U-Teshuvot</u>, <u>Orah Haim</u>, p.63 A. (Jerusalem: Hotza'at Hod 1972). All further reteiences to responsa are to this edition.

⁷⁹ Sofer, O<u>rah Haim,</u> letter #191, p.236 A and B.

Pressburg, Moses Sofer had already witnessed the emergence of the Reform movement in his community. He was much more familiar with the early beginnings of the Reform Movement than were his Hungarian contemporaries, due to his place of birth. His reactions to the emergence of reform must neccessarily be understood in their immediate, Hungarian context; however, their German origins must also recognized and appreciated.

Of Rabbi Horowitz, Sofer remarked that he was the "rabbi of the entire Diaspora".80 It is not known to what extent Sofer knew of Rabbi Horowitz's efforts to repress reform in Frankfort, due to his departure from the city. Jacob Katz is thinks that the words of Rabbi Horowitz against Mendelssohn's work reached Prosnitz, Dresnitz, and Mattersdorf, and thus, it is reasonable to believe that Sofer was aware of them.81 It seems quite safe to assume that Sofer both condoned and approved of this activity, for if not, he would not have spoken of Rabbi Horowitz with such veneration. The high esteem in which Sofer regarded his teacher is apparent in various responsa. In an responsum regarding kashrut, Sofer stated that he learned this particular opinion from "the gaon Rabbi Horowitz".82 In another responsum, he stated that "from my holy fathers I learned the laws of trefut".83

⁸⁰ Sofer, Ibid, #15, p.23A

⁸¹ Jacob Katz, "Contributions Toward a Biography", p. 120.

⁸² Sofer, Yorah De'ah #6, p.3A.

⁸³ Sofer, Ibid, #50, p.16A. Although he did not refer to Rabbi Horowitz explicitly, it seems obvious that the reference here is to him and to Rabbi Adler, as other responsa indicate that he shared their views on this area of Jewish law.

Moses Sofer's dedication to Rabbi Adler is clear from the fact that he followed him to Moravia and later, to Vienna. During his three years in Moravia, Sofer studied and served apprenticeship with Rabbi Adler and Rabbi Yehezkel Landau. Moravia, Rabbi Adler became involved in a dispute with the householders of Boskowitz because of his strictness in the area of ritual slaughter. He left the city, and arrived with Moses Sofer in Vienna in the Spring of 1785. Rabbi Adler soon returned to Frankfort, whereupon Moses Sofer continued to "rosnitz. Rabbi Sofer's respect and love for his teacher is evidenced by the remarks he made at his eulogy, in 1800. Here he said that he regretted " not standing at the graveside of this holy man, for then some of his spirit would have been conferred. 84 influence that this teacher had on Rabbi Sofer's practice is revealed in his own words. In Orah Haim, he spoke of Rabbi Adler with much love and respect and noted that he adopted Rabbi Adler's practice in private worship, the Nusach Ari (prayer according to the Lurianic rite.)85 In another letter, in Yoreh De'ah, he discussed the different standards varying communities have with respect to ritual slaughter. He stated that he prefers the standard observed by his teacher, Rabbi Adler.86 In a letter

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⁸⁴ Quoted by Unna, p. 178.

^{85 #191,} p.236A.

⁸⁶ Sofer, in Y<u>ore De'ah</u>, #13, p.6B and 7A stated that he accepts Rabbi Adler's strictness in these matters, and agreed that two experts must examine the knife before it is used.

written to Rabbi Israel Margolit regarding the details of erecting the temple in Jerusalem, Sofer remarked that he learned about this from "the mouth of the holy <u>hasid</u> Nathan Adler". 87 In yet another letter, in answer to a question posed to him on the way in which a Jewish decree of divorce is to be written, Sofer remarked that "and I heard this from my teacher the <u>gaon</u>, the <u>hasid</u>, Nathan Adler". 88

In Prosnitz, Moses Sofer became engaged to Sara Jerwitz, the widowed daughter of the late Rabbi Moses Jerwitz of Prosnitz. 89

The engagement period is one of much speculation; although it is believed that Sofer became engaged upon the suggestion of Rabbi Adler, it is also thought—that both he and Rabbi Horowitz did not approve of the match. There were disagreements between the bride's brother and Sofer over the terms of the dowry. Eventually the terms were settled and Sofer was promised a few years of room and board so that he could study. Sofer also experienced some difficulties with the civil authorities regarding his intended marriage. At the time, there was a certain quota on the number of marriages allowed in the Jewish community, the niederlaus. In order to marry, Sofer would have to leave the country. The "popular mythology" which surrounds this period is that Sofer wrote a letter to Rabbi Horowitz, in Frankfort, requesting a

⁸⁷ Ibid, #233, p.100A.

⁸⁸ Sofer, Eben Ha Ezer 11, #46, p.18A and B.

⁸⁹ Although they did not have children together, it is believed that she had a few daughters from her first marriage. In Yoreh De'ah #143, Sofer speaks of "our sons-in-law, takers of our daughters", p.45A.

rabbinic ruling that would allow him to break off the engagement. However, the letter was lost in the mail. Sofer mistook Rabbi Horowitz's silence as refusal, and married Sara Jerwitz in Samnetz, Hungary on May 6, 1787. Rabbi Horowitz's letter with the requested permission arrived the following day. 90

It is impossible to determine whether or not this story is true; it is, however, very revealing. Sofer's correspondence with his rabbi on so personal a matter emphasizes the close nature of their relationship. It also indicates the type of personality that has been identified by Jacob Katz as one that makes decisions based on values and feelings of personal integrity, to the lesser consideration of the final outcome of these decisions. It is clear from the existence of such a story, whether based in fact or in fiction, that Sofer was less than enthusiastic about his fiance. However, he honoured his initial decision to marry her when he thought that this was required of him.

Moses Sofer was supported by his brother-in-law for about five years. He did not make any plans to enter the rabbinate while in Prosnitz, and it is thought that perhaps he considered making a living as a tailor. When his brother in law went bankrupt and was no longer able to support them, Sofer and his wife moved to Dress. to. In Dresnitz, Sofer was certified as a

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 $^{^{90}}$ This story is recounted by Katz, pp.125 - 126, and by Burak, pp.77 -79.

⁹¹ Katz, p.127.

⁹⁷ Katz, p. 1:...

rabbi by Rabbi Banet (1753-1829), and was employed in this capacity. He did not have a yeshiva here, but within a few years he had attracted a small circle of students. Here Sofer wrote his first responsum; it was in this community that he began to be regarded as a rabbi of certain skill. Within a few years he had received an invitation from the community of Mattersdorf to serve as the chief rabbi of their community, and a similar invitation from Prosnitz was extended shortly afterward. Though the Jewish community of the latter was the larger and the more familiar community, Sofer went to to Mattersdorf, because he had already committed himself to this position. Here again Sofer's tenacious integrity is evidenced. In a letter that he sent to the community of Prosnitz, Sofer explained that "I have already told the community of Mattersdorf that I would go there. And I will not, God forbid, foresake them. I will not resort to the customary excuses".9

In 1802, a few years after he had arrived in Mattersdorf, he was invited by the community of Neustadt to serve as their head rabbi. He had already delivered his final sermon in Mattersdorf when fire broke out in the city. It devastated the Jewish quarter, and the community was in a state of crisis. Realizing that the community was in need of support, he declined the opportunity to serve as the rabbi of Neustadt, though it was the bigger and more prestigious community.

In Mattersdorf Rabbi Sofer administered a large yeshiva, and

⁹³ Reprinted in the original Hebrew by Yehudah Nahshoni, in Rabenu Moshe Sofer (Jerusalem: Mashabim Press, 1981), p.54.

wrote many responsa dealing with Jewish law. He took much personal interest in the lives of his students. He found out what they were doing in the dormitories of the yeshiva, and would visit their homes unannounced. He took an active interest in whatever they did during their spare time and according to tradition, would even peek through their windows to find out what they were reading.94

In 1806, Rabbi Sofer became the chief rabbi of Pressburg. He was to hold this position for the next thirty three years, until his death. The Jewish community of Pressburg, Hungary, had been without a rabbi since the death of Rabbi Meshullam Igra (1752-1801) who had held the post since 1793. The community had been divided on the selection of a replacement for Rabbi Igra, and Rabbi Sofer was offered the position only after a vote among the community leaders had taken place. They sent him a letter full of praise and best wishes upon his arrival in the city. 9'

Despite the eloquent letter of welcome which he received, the status of the role Rabbi Sofer was to fill had been tarnished during the five years that the community had been without a chief rabbi. Soon after his arrival in Pressburg, Rabbi Sofer was met by a group of householders who presented him with a list of innovations that they wished to enact. They wanted to shave during intermediary days of Passover, and the period between Passover and the Feast of the Tabernacles. They wanted to wear

⁹⁴ Burak, p.87.

⁹⁵ This letter can be found in its entirety in Nahshoni's biography, pp. 56 - 57.

regular clothing, and the women wanted permission to cover their heads with wigs, instead of cloths. They pointed out to Rabbi Sofer that according to the custom of the community, the rabbi did not have the right to prevent the houseowners from effecting these changes. Furthermore, they informed him that his role in the community was confined to the study of Torah, and the sphere of education. 96

During the first year that he was in the city, he was taken to the Hungarian courts, by a Jewish real estate manager who protested the Rabbi's opposition to his raising of the rents. In the same year, Rabbi Sofer tried unsuccessfully to send a Torah to the neighboring Jewish community of St. Georgien after a fire here had destroyed their synagogue. Though the members were prepared to send money, they refused to agree to Rabbi Sofer's suggestion to part with a Torah.⁹⁷

Rabbi Sofer concentrated on the development of the yeshiva in Pressburg. In three years, the yeshiva grew from 23 to 150 students. The average length of stay was two to three years. He offered classes in evenings and on the Sabbath for those who were working. Every Friday night he would deliver a <u>drasha</u>, or sermon, about the weekly Torah portion. He imposed a rigorous schedule on his students; there were weekly and final exams. His approach was that of a <u>pashtan</u>, or simplifier of texts, an approach that he

⁹⁶ This letter is quoted by Katz p.137.

⁹⁷ Recounted by Burak, p. 90.

⁹⁸ Jacob Katz, p.140. Chones, in <u>The Chronology Book of</u> Jewish Legalists, states that at one point during the Rabbi's life, there were five hundred students, p.265.

shared with his teacher Rabbi Horowitz. He stated that the essence of study was to insure that generations of Jews would know what the Torah said, and he stressed the truth in simplicity. In order to emphasize this idea, he would present his students with two different interpretations of the work of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, one very complex and clever, and the other simple and true. Rabbi Sofer also stressed the importance of ethics. At the beginning of each session of study, he would recite a passage from Luzzato's (1707-1746) ethical work, Mesillat Yesharim (Path of the Upright), and at the beginning of each term he would deliver a lecture on an ethical theme.

Moses Isserles, (1530 - 1572) author of HaMappa, the Ashkenazic gloss of the classic work of Jewish law, the Shulchan Aruch. Sofer defended his allegiance to the Rema stating on one occasion that "as to your statement that I am apparently afraid to step outside, by even a hair breadth, beyond the wall erected by our Rabbi Isserles, I say to you, that the wise man is greater than the prophet." Rabbi Sofer was adamantly opposed to reading one's own opinions into Jewish law, and warned against doing so. In a letter wherein he discussed the laws pertaining to a ritual bathhouse, he stated that the Shulchan Aruch was built on a series of precedents, and that if one does not understand the meaning of a particular code, it is nevertheless preferable to

⁹⁹ Sofer's pedagogic methods are described by Nahshoni, p.78, and by Ehrmann, pp.128 - 134.

[&]quot; Eben HaEzer I, #151, p.83A.

rely on it and not on one's own interpretation. 101 Similarily, he stated that changes in Jewish law could only occur if a set procedure was followed. He recognized that such changes had taken place in the past, but stressed the fact that only very learned rabbis, and not individuals, had evoked these changes. 102

Sofer was also opposed to innovations in the direction of greater strictness. In a response to the letter of one who had demonstrated stringency in matters pertaining to the dietary laws, Sofer demanded to know "Where did you get the right to add to trefot? And even if we do not have permission for this one from one of our great authorities, as long as you cannot prove that it is prohibited, we shall not accept your ruling." This attitude was again expressed in a letter to Rabbi Akiva Eger (1761-1837). Rabbi Eger had asked Rabbi Sofer to prohibit men from combing their earlocks. Sofer refused to join him in this prohibition, saying that such a practice is allowed by law, and that one should be cautious not to misread the words of the forefathers."

Though Rabbi Sofer opposed finding stringencies within the law, his own interpretations of Jewish law were at times seemingly very harsh. When asked by the father of a sick child whether or not the child could be sent to live in an institution,

Yoreh De'ah #216, p.91B, 92A.

¹⁰² Orah Haim #154, p.189.

¹⁰³ Yoreh De'ah #23, p.10A.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., #139, p.51A and B.

although the food he would receive there would not be kosher, Sofer replied "better for the boy to remain a fool all his life, rather than to be a wicked man before the Almighty even for one hour". 105 In another case, he refused to permit the Jewish community of Westphalia to eat kitniyot (peas and beans that Sephardic but not Ashkenazi were allowed to eat on Passover), despite the fact that there was a serious food shortage here due to the Napoleonic wars. 107

In his article, "Custom and Law in the Teaching of the Hatam Sofer", Moshe Samet observes that in many cases Sofer ruled in accordance with the existing practice, and that the custom of the community had a central place in his considerations and judgement. "Although Sofer's approach to Jewish life may seem almost contradictory - at times strict and at other times lenient, it is in actuality a singularily uniform approach which allows for the centrality of both the customs of the community and that of legal precedent. For Sofer, this was an attitude of preservation and conservation; for the observer this may appear to be an attitude of tenacity and confining conservatism.

¹⁰⁵ Orah Haim #83, p.99.

¹⁰⁶ Orah Haim # 161, p.115.

Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), p. 7. There is a certain amount of disagreement surrounding Sofer's caling on the matter of shaving during the intermediary days of Passover. Nahshoni, in his biography, asserts that Sofer is clowed this practice, p.168. The question of shaving is discovered by Sofer in Orah Haim, #154. The wording is very complex to thus a correct interpretation is very difficult.

Although the rational aspect of Rabbi Sofer's personality was very clearly developed, it coexisted with an irrational element in his psyche. Rabbi Sofer believed in miracles, portents, and prophetic dreams. In one letter, he spoke of the miracle he witnessed at his own yeshiva, when a tiny study hall suddenly expanded to fit hundreds of students. 108 In another letter, Rabbi Sofer stated that when he received a query from Rabbi Akiva Eger about the laws of mourning, he knew that it was a sign from above that someone close to him would soon die. A few days later he learned that his mother had passed away. 109 In a similar vein, the story is told that one night Sofer had a dream in which a Torah scroll appaered completely wrapped in black. Shortly afterward, Rabbi Adler died. 110

The irrational aspect of Rabbi Sofer's personality is believed by at least one of his biographers to be responsible for his actions during the Napoleonic siege of Pressburg in 1809. Rabbi Sofer hastily departed from the city at the beginning of the bombardment, and went to the neighboring community of St. Georgien, where he remained for one month. He unexpectedly returned to Pressburg while the siege continued, and subsequently became very involved in trying to help the community, by having messages of help sent to surrounding areas. His flight from the city was criticized by many of his detractors, as was his

¹⁰⁸ Yoreh De'ah #234 p.101A.

¹⁰⁹ Yoreh De'ah #346 p.150A.

 $^{^{\}rm II0}$ Recounted by Burak, p.266, from Sofer's own account in Torat Moshe II part II.

departure from the yeshiva. !!!

The city suffered extensive damage; homes were destroyed and looted, and hundreds of people were injured. The Jewish quarter was not an exception. By the time that Rabbi Sofer returned to the city, many of his yeshiva students had gone, having fled to neighboring areas in search of safety. There was an acute housing shortage; many people had no place to live and slept in the surrounding fields of the city. Peace was achieved on October 15, and a heavy fine was imposed on the city by Napoleon. This resulted in massive inflation, and the state declared itself bankrupt in 1811, at which the point the currency was devalued to one fifth of its previous worth. Parents were unable to continue to pay teachers, and as a result, many children stopped receiving a Jewish education, and fewer students were able to attend the yeshiva. 112 The desperate situation that many residents of the city found themselves in is evidenced by a letter which is found in Orah Haım. Rabbı Sofer was asked whether one may allow non-Jewish builders to work on the Sabbath. Aware of the fact that the builders would only accept a full time job, and concerned over the Jews' loss of safety and potentially, life, Sofer permitted the Jews to employ non- Jews on the Sabbath."

The community and their rabbi faced further difficulties in

III Jacob Katz, p.120. He feels that his departure from the city, his students, and his yeshiva, was based on an irrational aspect of his personality that he himself was unable to justify.

¹¹² Ehrmann, p.122.

¹¹³ Orah Haim #60, pp. 64 -66.

the next few years. In 1810, a fire destroyed much of the Jewish quarter that had so recently been rebuilt, and in the following year, Rabbi Sofer's wife died. In a letter to the head of the rabbinical court of Verboyeh, he reflected on her death, stating that he did not reply sooner to the rabbi's query because of the death of his wife, and the mourning period that followed. He wrote of this period with much feeling, remarking that "I have been much distressed". 114 In this same year, an appeal was made to the government by some of the Jews of Pressburg to open a school here that would combine secular and religious studies. Rabbi Sofer was an extremely vocal opponent of this idea, believing that such a school would detract from Torah study. He said that those who wished to open the school were porqim, "licentious". 115 In October 1812, Rabbi Sofer married Saril Eger, the widowed daughter of Rabbi Akiva Eger, the chief Rabbi of Posen. With his second wife, Rabbi Sofer had many children, among them: Rabbi Abraham Shmuel Binyamin, the "Ktav Sefer", Rabbi Shimon Sofer, the "Mihtav Sefer", and Rabbi Yosef Yossfe Sofer. 116

Despite the growth of Rabbi Sofer's yeshiva, early signs of

¹¹⁴ Yoreh De'ah, #153, p.51B.

¹¹⁵ Quoted by Katz, p.140.

These men were so called after books that they had written. Yehuda Nahshoni states that Sofer had three boys and four girls in total, two of whom died as children, p.57. Burak shares the belief that not all of Sofer's children survived childhood, but he states that Sofer had eleven children in total - four boys and seven girls. See p.113 for their names and order of birth.

reform began to manifest themselves in Pressburg. In 1820, the issue of the establishment of a secular school was raised again. In April a small secular school was opened, with ten students in attendance. Until this point, students had received extra curricular education from tutors, usually from Bohemia Moravia. The traditionalists were extremely upset by this development - the president of the community, Abraham Hirsch Lemberger observed the rites of mourning. 117 In 1825, another secular oriented school opened in Pressburg. The presence of Rabbi Sofer's yeshiva was viewed as a roadblock to advancement of secular education in the city, and one of the proponents of reforms, Wolf Breisach, succeeded major obtaining an imperial order to close the yeshiva in 1826. It remained closed for fourteen days, until two of the wealthrest men of the community, Wolf Pappenheim and Moses Bettelheim, paid 20,000 floring to have the edict revoked. 118

In March 1832, Rabbi Sofer's second wife died. Calls for reforms continued and grew louder during this time. In that same year, Rabbi Sofer requested from the Hungarian government the right to prosecute. Jews who were proponents of reforms. The request was renewed in 1833, but was not answered. He was not well during this time, but continued his duties as head of the yeshiva. He began to prepare his eldest son. Abraham Samuel

¹¹⁷ Burak, p. 121.

Experience of German Jewry and Its Impact on Haskala and Reform in Hungary" relates the amusing set of circumstances that cataputed these two figures from relative obscurity into fortune and influence in Pressburg. See page 150, n.57.

Benjamin Sofer, to succeed him as chief rabbi and head of the yeshiva. In 1839, after the High Holy Days, Rabbi Sofer became seriously ill. The community engaged in prayer and dirges, until the day of his death, the 25th of Tishrer. The traditional belief is that he died amongst the congregation, while reciting the Shema. He was buried in Pressburg and his remains are still there today. On the tombstone, Rabbi Moses Sofer is described as " a man of God, a crowning glory in his generation, a jewel among rabbis and the father of wisdom. 119

Rabbi Sofer transformed the rabbinate of Pressburg from an elected to an inherited position. In Orah Haim he stated that it is worthwhile for one's son to fill the place of one's father, unless this is completely rejected by the majority of the community. 120 In another letter in the same collection, Sofer explained the reason for this stance. He stated that the rabbi needs a lifetime position in order to protect him from the whims of the community, for a permanent contract would free the rabbi from temporary preferences and individual desires. This measure elevate and ameliorate the rabbi's position in would community; he would no longer suffer the same lack of security as employee. 121 The rabbi's role would be further regular strengthened by Sofer's suggestion that other community officials be elected on the condition that they agree to abide by the

¹¹⁹ Quoted by Y. Nahshoni, p.64.

^{120 #13,} p.17 A and B.

¹²¹ Orah Haim #206, p.252.

rabbi's judgements. 122 Furthermore, Sofer stressed the importance of paying the rabbi a decent salary, thus alleviating his need to rely on gratuities and contributions. 123

The <u>Hatam Sofer</u> sought to elevate the standards of the rabbinate. He insisted that "no community should accept a rabbi if he does not have a diploma from a well known rabbinic authority". He wrote 'at a community should refuse to accept a transient rabbi, and that if they are unable to acquire one through their own efforts, they should appeal to a rabbi in a neighboring area to find them a capable leader. 124

While strengthening and improving the role of the rabbinate, Rabbi Sofer also widened his sphere of influence and activity. In one letter, he stated that the chief rabbi need be present at all circumcisions in his own community, 12% and that he was to supervise all aspects of kashrut. 12% In the same spirit, in a letter to the rabbi of Trieste he stressed the rabbi's obligation to keep a close eye on the baking of matted-nature, and on the quality of Passover products in general. 12° He stated that there was "great

¹²² Yoreh De'ah #5, p.2A.

¹²³ Hoshen Mishpat #21, p.12B, 13A.

¹²⁴ Orah Haim #206 p.252A and B.

¹²⁵ Yoreh De'ah #13, p.6B.

¹²⁶ Yoreh De'ah #248 p.109B and 110A.

 $^{^{127}}$ Hoshen Mishr #196, p.74A, and in the same text, #22, p.13A.

sin" on the rabbi who did not make and supervise the <u>eruv</u> (physical designation of an enclosed area so as to make this area a private domain) in his own community, and that it was forbidden for the community to do this on their own. 128

Rabbi Sofer expanded and strengthened his own authority by writing frequent letters of recommendation to his neighboring rabbis and helping his own students obtain positions of leadership. In such a way, Rabbi Sofer established a network of rabbis who were both personally loyal and usually in agreement with him on matters of Jewish law. A very cursory look at the beginning of some of his letters indicate that he frequently addressed former students, many of whom have now obtained their own postions of importance. He addressed one responsum in Yoreh De'ah, to "my beloved student, loved like my soul". 120 In the same volume in the next letter, Sofer addressed himself to "my beloved student, the esteemed Rabbi Lipman, head of the court of Kaldy". 121

Rabbi Soter was involved in other activities in Pressburg that were not traditionally in the rabbi's domain. He supervised the printing press, gave frequent approbations to books, and opened a trade school in Pressburg in 1820. Regardless of the activity, Rabbi Sofer maintained an unyielding confidence that his own role was of supreme and outmost significance. He was

¹²⁸ This in response to a certain individual named "Aryeh Leib", found in Orah Haim #99, p.114.

¹²⁹ #90 p.31B.

¹³⁰ p.33A.

remembered by Rabbi Shlomo Sofer as having said the following about the nature of his role:

Know for yourself my son, that in every generation God appoints an individual as the head of the group that stands in front of them....I do not suspect that I will fail in the eyes of God, certainly he would agree to my instruction.¹³¹

The nature of this instruction, on the specific issue of reform, will be discussed in the following chapter.

¹³¹ Quoted by Nahshoni, p.147.

Chapter Four will examine the words of Rabbi Moses Sofer in an attempt to identify a general pattern of thought or uniformity of approach, vis a vis the subject of reform. 132 Three of Sofer's works will be consulted - his Ethical Will, two of his letters found in the collection of rabbinical responsa entitled Eleh Divre HaBrit, and sections of his She'elot U-Teshuvot, those being mainly but not exclusively Helek Vav. The additional consideration of the opinions of Rabbi Akiva Eger and Rabbi Mordecal Banet on the same issue, also found in Eleh Divre HaBrit, will allow for consideration of the question of to what extent, if at all, Sofer's approach was unique. The Chapter will begin with a discussion of Sofer's views on Mendelssohn's Blur and will then move on to a consideration of all three rabbis' views on reform, its advocates and its adherents. Chapter Four will not attempt to assess Sofer's words nor the words of his contemporaries in their much larger theological context, for such an endeavour would require an extensive familiarity with an enormous body of legalistic material, and would be far too complex for the confines of this paper.

Despite the fact that the haskalah and reform were slow to emerge in Hungary, by the early twenties of the nineteenth century, Mendelssohn's work had an extremely wide circulation in

consideration to Sofer's responsa. Though <u>Torat Moshe</u> also contains references to the followers of reform, i.e "the saintly will go in the way of God, but the criminals will fail" (quoted by Nahshoni, p.189), I have narrowed my focus so as to deal with Sofer's responsa in as thorough as possible a manner.

Hungary. The <u>Biur</u> was met here with respect; Zigmund Bettelheim, one of the heads of the Pressburg community during this time observed that during Sofer's lifetime, "already in the houses of the community leaders - Wolf Pappenheim, Moshe Bettelheim, and Shmuel Guttman, Mendelssohn's translation was viewed as an outstanding work of religious service." Esteemed rabbis Mordecai Banet and Moshe Mintz gave their approbations to the Vilna edition of the <u>Biur</u>, but Sofer's signature did not accompany them. In his <u>Ethical Will</u>, (1836) Rabbi Sofer advised:

In the books of Mendelssohn do not involve yourselves, and your legs will not stumble; the Tanach and the commentaries and the Torah with the commentaries of Ramban should be learned and taught to your children. 134

A story told by Rabbi Moses Shick, one of Sofer's most respected students, emphasizes this point. When Sofer once visited his student, he came across a copy of the <u>Biur</u>. He insisted that it was <u>epikorsut</u> (heresy), despite the fact that Rabbi Shick defended the work, stating that he had read through it in its entirety and had found no evidence of this. While Sofer's contemporaries were able to make a distinction between the translation of traditional texts into the vernacular and the advent of religious reforms, Sofer was not. Though the rabbis in

¹³³ Silber, "The Historical Experience" p.114.

¹³⁴ The work is reprinted in its entirety in Eliezer Katz's biography, <u>HaHatam Sofer</u>, (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad haRav Kook, 1969), pp.131 -133. This is from page 131. The Hebrew date on the text is Kislev 15, 5597.

¹³⁵ Retold by Silber, p.20.

Hungary were initially receptive to certain ideas of the haskalah, Sofer did not share the opinion held by many of his contemporaries in his adopted country.

The Ethical Will was a very short work, comprising only three pages in Hebrew. Nonetheless, Sofer managed to convey his feelings about the Jews' potential assimilation and rejection of traditional modes of worship very specifically. In addition to warning his fellow Jews against the adoption of German names, speech, and clothing, he clearly demanded that the Jews maintain their allegiance to and their belief in Jewish tradition. He exhorted:

Never say 'Times have changed.'We have an old Father - praised be his name - who has never changed and will never change...The order of prayer and synagogue shall remain forever as it had been up to now, and no one may to presume to change anything of its structure. 136

In 1819, Eleh Divre HaBrit was published in Altona. The impetus for the work came from the three rabbinical judges of Hamburg, Rabbi Baruch of Prague, Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Yaffe of Berlin and Yehiel Michael Speier, who were dismayed that their authority was being challenged and their collective voice disobeyed. The rabbis sent out letters to rabbinic authorities in Central Europe, calling on them to support and thereby strengthen their admonition of the Hamburg Temple and the reforms associated with it. They received twenty two opinions, signed by forty

¹³⁶ Sofer, quoted by E.Katz, p.132.

rabbis - Rabbis Sofer, Eger and Banet among them. 137

The volume was prefaced by a statement from the members of the court that they have decided not to remain silent for silence would be misconstrued as consent, a concept found in Jewish law known as <a href="https://shitz.com/s

The three "cardinal sins of reform" were outlined. They were, in the view of the rabbis of the period: change in worship, from the Morning prayers to all aspects of traditional liturgy, prayer in languages other than Hebrew, and the use of musical instruments in the synagogue, either on the Sabbath or on holidays, even if played by a non Jew. 139 The court had complete

¹³⁷ Michael Meyer, in his work Response to Modernity outlines other Hebrew tracts which appeared at this time attacking reform, among them Kets haYamim (The End of Days) written by Rabbi Abraham Lowenstamm of Emden. See page 59.

¹³⁸ Eleh Divre HaBrit, (Westmead: Gregg International Publishers, 1969), Freface, p.III.

¹³⁹ For a complete English translation of the transgressions listed by the Harting court see Mendes - Flor and Reinharz, pp.151-152. The critical can be found in the preface to the collection, pages III and IV.

faith in the legitimacy and the foundation of its words, stating that "our opinion here corresponds to that which the learned men of our time, may their light shine, have elaborated in their letters". Any one who does not share this belief "denies one of the fundamental tenets of our religion." The members of the court were unwilling or unable to perceive the actions of the reform as anything other than disruptive and destructive; they are men who have chosen to do "evil", men who have "chosen to disobey the Holy One of Israel and to defy the holy sages of Blessed memory, the court of their city and the vast majority of our community who are God - fearing and faithful and fulfill the commandments of God". 140

There are two letters written by Rabbi Sofer in <u>Eleh Divre HaBrit</u>, as well as a brief introduction to a letter of Rabbi Aaron Chorin. In the first letter Sofer outlined his objections to reform in an extensive manner, from the position of a legalist. Their ideas were deemed "devious schemes against the religion of our forefathers", and their actions identified thus:

One of their innovations is that their house of prayer should be tightly closed on weekdays and only open on the Sabbath. Would that even its doors be closed, for they have altered the text of the prayers, which we have received from the men of the Great Assembly, the sages of the Talmud, and our hallowed fathers. They have added to and deleted from the prayers, substituting texts of their own invention. For example, they have eliminated the Mcrning Benedictions, which are explained in Chapter Three of the tractate Berakhot, and they have also discarded the benediction for the flourishing of the House of David, our Messiah, and the rebuilding of the Holy City. Moreover, they have appointed a non - Jew to play a musical instument in their presence on the holy Sabbath,

³¹ Preface, p.V.

a matter which is forbidden to us, and significantly the majority of their prayers are in German. 141

In the same letter, Rabbi Sofer offered an extensive treatment of the history of the development of Jewish law, from the period of the sages of the Second Commonwealth. The thousands of students who lived during the periods of the Sanhedrin, the compilation of the Mishna and the Talmud were "discerning men, whose minds were full of knowledge and ideas and who possessed a profound understanding of all the sciences". Over the centuries their words have been studied and clarified, and never has anyone "dared to open his mouth to protest against them". In his lifetime however, there those have are who rısen up, "insignificant foxes", to destroy the fence. Rabbi Sofer pointed out that this is not possible, because according to Jewish law, a lower court cannot abolish the ruling of a higher court, even if the reason for the ruling is invalid. He had complete confidence in his opinion, and stated that "there is no doubt that all the learned men, the sages of our time, will concur with this prohibition. They agree and I agree in forbidding every soul in Israel to change even one detail of all that is said above."142 This does not mean that he was categorically opposed to any sort

¹⁴¹ Moses Sofer, Eleh Divre HaBrit, pp.6-7. The date at the bottom is the first day of Rosh Hodesh Tevet, Hannukah, 5579. (1819) This translation is from Paul Mendes Flohr and Yehudah Reinharz, pp.153-154.

¹⁴² Sofer, Eleh, pp.8-9.

of change in Jewish law. He did in fact believe that this was possible, if the learned men of the period would meet and agree to a change. But, in the case of the reformers, everything they do is clearly prohibited, because it was not done by the forefathers.

Many of these ideas are repeated in Sofer's volume of responsa entitled Helek Vav. In one letter in particular, letter 86, written to Rabbi Akıva Eger ın 1819 (this date is not surprising, since this was the year that the temple opened), the activites of the Hamburg Temple were discussed at length. Sofer unilaterally rejected the use of an organ, stating that such an instrument belonged in a church, and is by definition idolatrous, and pointed to a commentary of the great Biblical scholar Rashi, who stated that Tubal Cain, the father of idolatry, made this instrument for this purpose. The Jews, asserted Sofer, have no need for such musical instruments, for "we have the water of life" - the Torah is the source of all, and there is no need for anything else. He also opposed choral singing accompanying the organ, for public singing has been inappropriate since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, he stated that one is forbidden to employ a non Jew on the Sabbath in such an activity, for there are many legal problems surrounding the issue of non Jews working for Jews on the Sabbath. 143

In the same letter, he discussed the view that men do not need to pray three times a day. He stated that daily prayer is an ancient tradition, and that according to Maimonides' opinion,

¹⁴³ p.27B.

Aaron and his sons did so even in the desert. Sofer emphasized the antiquity of this practice by observing that "Daniel kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime". 144 Sofer also emphasized the point that men need to assemble publicly for these times of prayer. If a synagogue is accessible, and one simply chooses not to attend, Sofer deems him a "bad presence". Rabbi Sofer took exception to the exclusion of references to the Messiah, stating that such an action proved that the movement was one which was more concerned with the present than the future. 145 The tunes of liturgy can also not be changed, for this would confuse their meaning, so that there is neither the taste nor the smell of the Torah in them. Other nations may have other tunes, but only the Jews have the Torah. 146

Sofer stated that the changes instituted in Germany were invalid, for they had not been instituted through the proper channels, namely, a conference of the most learned figures, in a model of the Sanhedrin. Such actions can only lead to schisms, and Sofer pointed again to the words of Maimonides who said that even if an action is only a custom, two different courts should not give two different answers, for Jews "do not make groups". 147 Sofer asserted that "we cannot permit that which our fathers and

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ p.28A.

¹⁴⁶ p.27B.

¹⁴⁷ p.27B.

father's fathers were accustomed to forbidding". Sofer had faith in the wisdom of his predecessors, and remarked that "we rely on the tradition of our fathers that they did not bequeath to us lies, God forbid". 148

In another letter of the same volume, sent to Rabbi Baruch of Hamburg, Sofer warned of the dangers of instituting change. He said that changes can destroy the vineyard of Israel. Though the Jews may think that they are flattering the non Jews with the notion that they are really all alike, they are in actuality increasing the non Jews' hatred of them, and this will ultimately prepare the Jews for a terrible end. 49 Sofer discussed the necessity of maintaining references to Zion and the Messiah, and also stressed the need for the use of Hebrew in the liturgy. One must use Hebrew because it is the royal language - God created the world in Hebrew. Sofer pointed to the etymological connection between the words "Adam", the name of the first man, and "adamah", the Hebrew word for earth to prove that the world was created with the Hebrew language. 150

Like Rabbi Sofer, Rabbi Banet based his opposition to reform on Jewish law, and discussed its origins and development. He similarily outlined the transgressions of the reform, and emphasized the need for the Jews to remain faithful to the Torah - "we must go in the path of our fathers, to fear God and to have

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

^{149 #84} p.26A.

^{150 #84} p.26A.

still hearts, to follow everything in the Torah, and to live according to the Torah". 151

Rabbi Eger also identified and rejected the innovations discussed by his contemporaries, those involving Sabbath observance and the liturgy. He stated that such actions represented the destructions of the essentials of the religion, and asserted that "he who is from Israel who does not believe in these things is an epicorous". He also stressed the importance of Hebrew, the Jews' language, and observed that all men who are God fearing will not go in the way of the innovators, and that all worthy men of intelligence will be careful to stay away from new things. 152

Both Rabbis Sofer and Banet had much to say about the proponents of reform. Sofer introduced his second letter in <u>Eleh Divre HaBrit</u> with some extremely harsh words: "Herein I will make clear every deceitful word in the defected book <u>Noga Zedek</u> and <u>Or Noga</u> all of which are lies and deceit - not a blessing but a blasphemy". The letter constituted an extensive and exhaustive attack on Liebermann's work. Every innovation condoned by Lieberman was condemned - among them the use of an organ, choral music and synagogue attendance on the Sabbath only. In the same letter, Sofer refuted Lieberman's claim that in every generation the scholars of the time make decisions about what aspects of

¹⁵¹ Banet, Letter One, Eleh, pp.11-18.

¹⁵² Eger, Eleh, p.21.

¹⁵³ Moses Sofer, Second Letter, p.30.

Jewish law to be either strict or lenient on. Sofer asserted that such decisions can only be made by a high court, and because such a body does not presently exist, these changes can not be made. He ended this letter with a vision of the future when "all will know God, from the small to the large, the land will be filled with knowledge of God, they will search God, and David their king; our eyes will see beautiful and serene Zion, and a palace will be built through his judgement". 154

Other sources emphasize Sofer's personal attitude toward the advocates of reform. He wrote of the men who, devoid of respect for the Torah got together and enjoined others to build a platform (bimah) for themselves. These men are identified as Liebermann and Chorin, and both of their names are followed by the exclamation "Woe is me!" In other sources, Liebermann was refered to as one who "tried to seduce many" 15° "the enemy in our midst", and "the thorn in the vineyard". 156

Sofer was no less harsh in his treatment of Chorin. He stated that "everything written by Aaron Choriner, Rabbi of Arad,

¹⁵⁴ p.45.

¹⁵⁵ The word bimah is not a neutral one. As the podium on which the rabbi stands, its use conjures up images of authority and power.

¹⁵⁶ Helek Vav, Letter #90, p.30A.

^{157 #85,} p.26B.

^{158 #85} p.26B.

is a denial of truth"¹⁵⁹. In the same letter, sent to Rabbi Moshe of Mintz, Sofer demanded to know of Chorin "what is he?", and stated that he was unable to comment on Chorin's work Rosh Emunah because "it is not in my house, in my borders, and there is probably not one in the city, and if there is one, it is hidden from me". He added that he has hated Chorin since his days in Mattersdorf. ¹⁶⁰ In another letter to Rabbi Eger he instructed him to burn his works of "magic" and to publicize this action in Berlin, for such texts are "an embarassment". ¹⁶¹

Rabbi Banet did not view Chorin with much favour either. He stated that "of Chorin, Rabbi of Arad, God forbid that one would take words from his mouth in any matter, because this man does not have any grounding in the <u>Gemara</u> or the sages at all"."

His second letter which appeared in <u>Eleh Divre HaBrit</u> was directed against two individuals, Rabbi Shem Tov and Rabbi Yaakov Chai, men who gave their approbations to <u>Noga Zedec</u>, a book whose words are "words of distortions that place light in dark and dark in light"."

Both Rabbi Sofer and Rabbi Banet commented on those who adhered to reform. Sofer advocated complete separation between

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ #96 p.31A.

¹⁶² Banet, Letter One, Eleh, p.16.

¹⁶³ Banet, p.18.

traditional and reform minded Jews, and indicated in more that one place that they are to be viewed as sectarians. In one source he stated that "we will not let our daughters marry their sons and our sons their daughters, and their group will be as the group of the Sadducees". 164 Sofer's firm belief in the need for separation was illustrated in his parable about a king and his sick daughter. Once, a king had a sick daughter whom he wished very desperately to cure. He summoned a specialist to his kingdom, in order to restore his daughter's health. The doctor arrived carrying a sword, whereupon the shocked king asked, 'Didn't I send for you to cure my daughter?' The doctor replied that he had hoped to cure her, but that there was no remedy available. The doctor informed the king that his daughter's sickness posed a serious threat to the kingdom, and that it would therefore be necessary to kill the daughter, in order to save everyone else. 165

In the same letter to Rabbi Moshe Mintz mentioned above, Sofer spoke of the "doers of evil" and commented that "there is no vineyard without thorns". He was adamant about the need to fight against those "thorns", stating that "while we are sitting here in peace we could be fighting the war of God, for we are

^{164 #89,} p.30A. The Sadducees were one of several groups existant during the time of the second Temple; they were considered to be deviant from normative Judaism, represented by the Pharisees.

¹⁶⁵ The story is retold by Burak, The Hatam Sofer pp. 370-371. It is found in <u>Hut HaMeshulash</u> p. 126, but an original source is not noted. Although one cannot be sure that it originated in Sofer's responsa, it serves to further illustrate the theme of separation found in the above mentioned response.

fighting God's fight...from the customs of Israel we will not move". He then remarked that although he has always shied away from conflict -"though I have tried very hard not to fight with any individual and not one has ever been mentioned in my letters", he now feels that this is necessary, for "it is written that the truth fights with lies". 166

Like Rabbi Sofer, Rabbi Banet made reference to other groups in history that have altered the practice of Jewish law - the Sadducees and the Karaites among them. He pointed out that they are practically forgotten now, but that it is essential to differentiate between them and the rest of the Jews. He informed his readers that based on a response of Marmonides and of Rabbi Besalel (the "Maharal Mi Prag", 1525-1609) it was was decided that marriage with a member of one of these groups was prohibited, because they lacked the knowledge of the laws of marriage, divorce and entire area of prohibited the relationships. Rabbi Banet stated these groups "pervert and weaken the masses", and that they were "not to be listened to at all".167 It is clear that he was drawing a comparison between these groups and the innovators of his lifetime. Yet, unlike his contemporary Rabbi Sofer, he stopped short of making an explicit equation between such groups and members of the reform movement. Furthermore, Banet, unlike Sofer, did stress the inherent unity of all Jews, stating that "we are all together equals, of the

¹⁶⁶ Letter #85, p.26B.

¹⁶⁷ Banet, Letter One, pp. 13 - 15.

same pure creator, with the same tasks and commandments". 168

From the above consideration, it becomes clear that Rabbi Sofer's approach to reform both adhered to and differed from, the approach of his contemporaries. His unique stance vis a vis Mendelssohn's work is probably closely linked to the fact that Rabbi Horowitz had publicly denounced Mendelssohn's work. It is not surprising that Sofer maintained the same attitude toward Mendelssohn as did one of his mentors. Furthermore, Rabbi Sofer possessed a certain added awareness of the currents of reform in Hungary that his contemporaries lacked, for he had briefly encountered them in Germany. Though the Hungarian rabbis may have been able to regard Mendelssohn solely as a religious figure whose translation of the Bible would increase its circulation and understanding among Jews, Sofer viewed Mendelssohn's work with suspicion; for him, it signified the beginning of religious reforms in Judaism.

From <u>Eleh Divre HaBrit</u>, one sees a consensus of opinion among Rabbi Sofer and his contemporaries about the innovations introduced by the reform movement. All of them rejected the reforms on the basis that they represented an abrogation of Jewish law and thus threatened the continued unity of the Jews. From a purely legalistic stance, there is little difference among the words of Rabbis Sofer, Eger, and Banet, and the Jewish Court of Hamburg. However, an evaluation of Rabbi Sofer's approach to those individuals who adhere to and support reform illustrates a significant difference.

¹⁶⁸ Letter Two, p.20.

In the two letters of the volume, Rabbi Sofer made use of much harsher terms and much more directly combative statements than did his fellow rabbis. Indeed, Rabbi Banet refered to Rabbi Chorin in unflattering terms, and expressed serious doubt on the extent of Chorin's erudition. Furthermore, Rabbi Eger did state emphatically that one who does not believe in the words of the Torah is an epicorous. However, these remarks referred to specific individuals, and did not cast a general blanket of condemnation over a collective group. Rabbi Banet refered to dissenting groups in the past, as a warning, or as a lesson to be learned; he made use of history to reaffirm the Jews' shared destiny and uniformity of purpose. Rabbi Sofer, by contrast, made use of history in order to find an appropriate place for members of the reform movement, and thus they were relegated to a marginal existence amongst the sectarian movements of the Jews' past, and denied any part of the Jewish present.

It is difficult to determine the rationale behind Sofer's acute antagonism; there are undoubtedly a variety of factors which compelled Moses Sofer to approach the issue with such hostility, and not one single reason. Firstly, it is essential to be aware of the fact that Moses Sofer possessed a very specific and individualistic writing style. In much of his responsa, one finds many terse, abrupt statements. For instance, when replying to the question of whether or not a man had to wear a head covering, he simply replied "any man who does not cover his head is a criminal (poshe'a)". 169 It seems implausible that Rabbi

¹⁶⁹ Quoted by Nahshoni, Our Rabbi Moses Sofer, p.160. From Sofer's work <u>Hiddusnes</u> <u>Nedarim</u>.

Sofer really meant to convey the idea that such a man was guilty of a crime. It is far more possible that this statement meant to indicate the importance of fulfilling this precept. Although one might be prepared to admit that his words seem somewhat harsher than he himself intended, allowances for Rabbi Sofer's writing style seem valid only until a certain point. It would be far too simplistic to attribute the differences between his words and those of his contemporaries to his personality - deeming Rabbis Eger and Banet as somehow more tolerant, or possessed of a more pleasant tone, than Rabbi Sofer.

One might be able to find the source for Sofer's attitude in some of the biographical information presented in Chapter Three. Here it was shown that Sofer came from a background that allowed for disagreement, even if such disagreement created conflict within the community. Furthermore, his biography indicated that Sofer believed very strongly in the integrity of his words, while at times not being completely aware of their implications. Though this might serve to explain the volume of his words and to a certain extent, their tone, Sofer nonetheless would have been able to make his views known without resorting to personal invective; the words of Rabbis Eger and Banet make it clear that this was possible.

It is tempting to understand Sofer's views on reform as part of the larger climate of reactionism that existed in the Austro-Hungarian empire during Sofer's lifetime. As the first two chapters indicated, Sofer lived during a period of repression and rigidity; Francis' rule was characterized by extreme immobility and reluctance to change. It is evident from his responsa that

Sofer did accept and respect the concept of monarchical rule; thus it is possible that the attitude of the ruling monarch did have a certain, if only minimal, affect on Sofer. 170 However, Francis was opposed to any indication of change, including the introduction of technology, and such was not the case with Sofer. Though not discussed to any discernable degree in his responsa, some other sources do indicate that Sofer did not oppose certain aspects of modern society, i.e. trade, industry, and commerce. Though he thought that it was wrong for people to place too much value on money and its acquisition, for it took away from the pursuit of greater values, and he viewed participation in it as having less merit and status than agriculture, for agriculture was the basis of society, he was not opposed to these activities on principle. 171

Thus, Sofer may have been influenced to a limited degree by the political climate of his lifetime, but he did not adopt all of the monarch's views. It would be inaccurate, therefore, to view Sofer's attitudes as a simple reflection of those belonging to Francis. One can only conclude that there was something about the issue of reform that Rabbi Sofer felt necessitated this type of response - a response that his contemporaries clearly did not see the need for.

¹⁷⁰ #86, p.28B.

¹⁷¹ Eliezer Katz discusses Sofer's attitudes towards such issues in his book The Hatam Sofer, pp.120-122. The sources given for discussion of these issues are Torat Moshe and Drashot. Sofer had very strong views on the subjects of emancipation and the way that this would affect Jewish life.(see Torat Moshe volume two, Parshat Balak, p.45A-50A.)

As noted earlier, the members of the Hamburg Court stated that they felt the need to respond to Liebermann's work, because they feared that their silence could be misconstrued as consent. Thus, their words were primarily aimed at the advocates of reform, making it completely clear to them that they did not condone their actions. Though part of this same volume, and sharing the objective, Rabbi Sofer's letters here may have been composed with an added objective, and may have been primarily directed at a different audience of readers. Sofer's approach to the adherents of reform was a consistent one, and did not vary from Helek Vav to Eleh Divre HaBrit. (As seen above, his "Will" dıd address the issue of reform but did not discuss its followers). That the words of Helek Vav were directed toward a traditional readership goes without saying, for such is the very nature of responsa. That the choice of words, concepts, and ultimately, approach to the subject is the same in Eleh Divre HaBrit seems to incicate that so is its intention; Sofer's words were aimed at the same audience - the traditionalists.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Sofer saw his role as a broad one, and within it was his self perception that he was the defender of the existant, of the status quo, in his own community. Thus, his words can be viewed as defensive in nature, not offensive - the insults and attacks heaped on the reform were about them, but not directed primarily to them. Rather, they were as part of the protective fortress which Rabbi Sofer hoped to erect during his lifetime. It seems logical to believe that Rabbi Sofer directed his letters toward the Jews in his own community so as to instill fear in those who have remained traditional.

Like his contemporaries, he was fully aware of the actions and the extent of the reform in Germany. Unlike his contemporaries, he retained a considerable amount of control in a community where the majority of the Jews were still observant. His letters may be addressed to these Jews - the Jews he knows he can still reach. They are not really meant for the Jews who have already altered their religious practice - for of what practical good can come of Rabbi Sofer's remarks to them that they are not longer part of the body of Judaism?

Though I believe that much of Sofer's words were directed toward a traditional audience, there can be no denying that the words he expressed represented the development of a new concept in Jewish life. He advocated distance and the limitation of contact with that which he believed was deviant and threatening to the body of Judaism; these instructions to limit contact with other Jews go far beyond the traditional exclusion of certain unwanted individuals through a ban or herem. Sofer's idea was a far more radical one - that within one community, one body of Jews has the power to determine the suitability of another body of fellow Jews. In this case, the limitation of contact and the exclusion of certain members stemmed from the authority of one single individual - Rabbi Moses Sofer. Sofer's words, in effect, served as the source for the establishment of a smaller, self contained community, that had little or no contact with the other body.

It is essential to appreciate Sofer's response as an integral part of his own perception of his role as rabbi and leader of the Jewish community. In Sofer's view, he was not just

another rabbi voicing his disapproval, simply slandering those with whom he did not agree. As Chapter Three revealed, Sofer widened the significance of his role and the importance of his function in Jewish life and attempted to define the singular way in which his fellow Jews were to lead their lives. His words were not merely words of a halachic authority - they were the words of an individual who set himself up as organizer, arbiter, and ultimately, defender of Jewish life as he believed it was to be lived. Though in his lifetime his very presence made such a role possible, his death denied the possibility that this role could be filled by anyone else, for it was so closely intertwined with Sofer's own identity. Thus, Rabbi Moses Sofer left behind an agenda that he himself had set in motion, but that no one else could follow

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to identify Rabbi Sofer's attitude toward religious reform. It has pointed to the various changes in nineteenth century Jewish life that lead to its emergence, and has discussed its development and extension into Hungary. Through this consideration, it has become clear that the threat of which Rabbi Sofer spoke was indeed a legitimate one, and one that as a traditional figure with a large following among his peers and students, Sofer naturally addressed. What has emerged from this consideration is that Sofer's objections to the activities of the advocates of reform on legal grounds were similar, if not identical, to his contemporaries. Regarding this issue Sofer's opinions were indistinguishable from those of Rabbis Banet and Eger. Thus, the charge that Sofer was extremist in his interpretation of Jewish law seems unfounded.

Sofer perceived the function of his role as rabbi in a way in which his contemporaries did not, and his response to reform must be understood within the context of his own self perception. Sofer broadened the sphere of influence of the rabbinate, and among other things, gave it the authority to evaluate and delineate members of Jewish society in terms of their conformity to a certain standard.

Sofer was an undeniably powerful, complex and charismatic figure, and thus it is not surprising that he was, and continues to be, perceived as a righteous guardian of the faith, and alternately, as an unyielding traditionalist unwilling and unable to accept change. It seems certain that both of these seemingly

contradictory views will continue to co-exist for a long time, for both contain a certain element of truth.

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 Introduction