

# Benjamin Franklin in Jewish Eastern Europe: Cultural Appropriation in the Age of the Enlightenment

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In 1808 an anonymous Hebrew chapbook detailing a behaviorist guide to moral education and self-improvement appeared in Lemberg, Austrian Galicia. Composed by Mendel Lefin of Satanów, an enlightened Polish Jew (*maskil* in the Hebrew terminology of the period), *Moral Accounting* (*Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh*) was a crucial weapon in Lefin's lifelong literary war against Hasidism, the new Jewish pietistic movement which had captured the hearts and souls of much of eighteenth-century Polish Jewry.<sup>1</sup> The core of *Moral Accounting* was a boxed grid, seven lines by thirteen, which correlated, respectively, to the days of the week and to thirteen virtues in need of improvement. The grid was to be used daily throughout a thirteen-week cycle which repeated four times during the course of a year. Addressing a traditionally-educated Jewish audience, Mendel Lefin did not disclose the gentile source of the method of moral self-reform, but he did acknowledge that it was not his innovation: "Several years ago a new method was revealed, and it is [such] a wonderful invention for this [kind] of [moral] education that it seems that its renown will spread as quickly, if God desires it, as that of the invention of printing which brought light to the

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<sup>1</sup> Hillel Levine, "Between Hasidism and Haskalah: On a Disguised anti-Hasidic Polemic," (Hebrew), *Perakim be-Toldot ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit bimei ha-Beinayim uve-Et ha-Hadashah*, eds. I. Etkes and J. Salmon (Jerusalem, 1980), 182-91.

<sup>2</sup> [Lefin], *Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh* (Lemberg, 1808), par. 20. On the view of the printing press as an exceptional tool for the emancipation of mankind during the Enlightenment, see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (London, 1990), 40; and Jeremy D. Popkin, "Periodical Publication

world.”<sup>2</sup> The creator of this “wonderful invention” was none other than Benjamin Franklin, whose “Rules of Conduct” first appeared in 1791 in the second part of his English *Autobiography*.<sup>3</sup>

There has been a noticeable interest recently among historians of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) to map carefully, region by region, the nuances and varieties of the Jewish encounter with modernity.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, *Haskalah* scholars have generally regarded Mendel Lefin’s use of Franklin’s technique as a confirmation of their view that the impetus for the *Haskalah* among East European Jewry lay in its exposure to the West in general and to the Berlin *Haskalah*’s Western orientation in particular.<sup>5</sup> They have viewed *Moral Accounting* as merely a translation of yet another text of the European and American Enlightenments into Hebrew, and they have paid little attention to the Polish context and orientation of Lefin’s work.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in this view, too, was the problematic assumption that translation of a text is an uncritical, acquiescent act. Mendel Lefin’s wholesale adoption of Franklin’s “Rules of Conduct,” implied, first, a static, unidirectional influence of a Western text on an East European and, second, that Franklin’s work itself had a fixed, absolute meaning which Lefin simply appended to his Hebrew book. Yet the appearance of the

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and the Nature of Knowledge in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” *The Shapes of Knowledge from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, eds. Donald R. Kelley and Richard H. Popkin (London, 1991), 203-14.

<sup>3</sup> In an unpublished fragment to a lost philosophic work, however, Lefin indicated his debt to Franklin. See the citation in Israel Weinstock, “Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów” (Hebrew), *Ha-Olam*, 13 (1925), 800. The Hebrew title of Lefin’s book, *Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh*, formed a perfect pun on the “accounting” (*heshbon*) implicit in Franklin’s method. I would like to thank Elisheva Carlebach for suggesting *Moral Accounting* as a more fitting rendering of Lefin’s title than the oft-used *Moral Stocktaking*.

Franklin himself never entitled his four-part memoirs an *Autobiography*. See Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text*, eds. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall (Knoxville, 1981), xix, xlvii, footnote 69. A complete French translation of Franklin’s work was made in 1791 by Louis Guillaume Le Veillard, Franklin’s close friend, but the second section was only published in 1798.

<sup>4</sup> *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, ed. Jacob Katz (New Brunswick, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> The historiography in Hebrew, German, and English on the Jewish Enlightenment in Berlin is voluminous. Classic treatments include Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn* (University, AL, 1983), Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit, 1979), and Azriel Shohat, *Im Hilufei Tekufot* (Jerusalem, 1960).

<sup>6</sup> Hillel Levine pointed out that most Hebrew literary historians had erred in regarding *Moral Accounting* as a translation of Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanac* or of the entire *Autobiography*. See Hillel Levine, “Menachem Mendel Lefin: A Case Study of Judaism and Modernization” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1974), 56, footnote 59; also Eisig Silberschlag, “The English Factor in our New Literature: First Contacts” (Hebrew), *Divrei ha-Kongres ha-Olam ha-Revi’i le-Mada’i ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1969), 71-75.

“Rules of Conduct” in Hebrew and Lefin’s use of other Western and non-Jewish texts were anything but mechanical.<sup>7</sup>

Not only Lefin’s Jewishness but his Polish origins and Polish orientation make the assumption of passivity particularly acute. Effaced from the map of Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, Poland’s history has not been integrated into general historical treatments of the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup> Just as studies of the Jewish Enlightenment describe a trajectory from Berlin to Austrian Galicia to Russia, so do general interpretations of the European Enlightenment draw a line from Germany and France to Russia, bypassing Poland. For example, in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich’s important book, *The Enlightenment in National Context*, Poland is nowhere to be found.<sup>9</sup> Yet Poland, too, had an Enlightenment (*Oświecenie*), beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, which was stimulated by many of the same forces that spurred change in the West: the desire to reform antiquated political systems, to liberate education from religious dogma, and to create a rational state apparatus. In Poland the Enlightenment had its own national coloring; it was sponsored not by a rising bourgeois class but by royal and noble circles (and thus lacked the social critique of the Enlightenment in the West), in particular by the efforts of the last Polish king, Stanisław Augustus Poniatowski and his cousin, Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski.<sup>10</sup>

It is ironic that late eighteenth-century Poles and Jews, dissimilar in so many respects, have both been viewed in the historiography of the European Enlightenment as passive recipients of whatever political and cultural currents befell them. Mendel Lefin’s *Moral Accounting*, a striking example of what Roger Chartier has called cultural appropriation, illuminates the fallaciousness of the assumption of Jewish and Polish passivity. Moreover, Lefin’s work belies the assumption of a unilateral West to East movement of ideas in several ways.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Anthony Grafton, “Introduction: Notes from Underground on Cultural Transmission,” *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anthony Grafton and Ann Blair (Philadelphia, 1990), 1-7.

<sup>8</sup> Piotr S. Wandycz, “Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Poland,” *American Historical Review*, 97 (1992), 1011-25. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> *The Enlightenment in National Context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1981); and see Raphael Mahler, *Divrei Yemei Yisra’el* (Rehavia, 1956), I:4, 71-72 and Bernhard Wachstein, *Die Hebräische Publizistik in Wien* (Vienna, 1930), xvii.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Grochulska, “The Place of the Enlightenment in Polish Social History,” *A Republic of Nobles: Studies in Polish History to 1864*, ed. J. K. Fedorowicz (Cambridge, 1982), 239-57; Mieczysław Klimowicz, “Polnische Literatur und Kunst im Zeitalter der Aufklärung,” *Polen und Deutschland im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, ed. Rainer Riemenschneider (Braunschweig, 1981), 97-107; Emanuel Rostworowski, “Polens Stellung in Europa im Zeitalter der Aufklärung,” *op cit.*, 11-21; Andrzej Walicki, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood: Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kościuszko* (Notre Dame, 1989), and his *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland* (New York, 1982); Jerzy Dobrzycki, “The Scientific Revolution in Poland,” *The Scientific Revolution in National Context*, eds. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1992), 150-57.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practice and Representations* (Ithaca, 1988).

First, the text illustrates the selective (hence, active) openness to European (and American) ideas on the part of Jewish intelligentsia living east of the Oder River. Second, *Moral Accounting* reveals the dynamism inherent in any act of translation for Lefin used Franklin's moral accounting system for his own, very distinct goals of reforming Polish-Jewish society. Although what is reproduced textually in *Moral Accounting* is almost a mirror image of Franklin's "Rules of Conduct," what is produced is not a mirror image in meaning.<sup>12</sup> Third, *Moral Accounting* underscores the connection between the Jews in Polish lands and their Polish hosts, an association recently explored in the works of M. J. Rosman and Gershon Hundert.<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Franklin's moral philosophy did, indeed, reach the Jews of Eastern Europe through Mendel Lefin's *Moral Accounting*; but the connective tissue between the American and the East European Jew was the Polish magnate republican, Prince Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski.

Born in 1749 in Satanów, a large town on the eastern bank of the Zbrucz River in Podolia, Ukraine, Mendel Lefin was raised in a traditional Jewish family. Little is known about his formative years, but later generations of enlightened Jews described Lefin hagiographically as a Talmudic protégé who fortuitously discovered the world beyond traditional Jewish study through a work of seventeenth-century Jewish science, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo's *Sefer Elim*.<sup>14</sup> Ostensibly seeking a cure for his near-blindness, Lefin set out for Berlin, the center of the Jewish Enlightenment, in his early 30s, arriving sometime in 1780. In the Prussian capital Lefin met Moses Mendelssohn, Simon Veit, and David Friedländer, and became an active participant in the Berlin *Haskalah*. These men, known as *maskilim*, and others were actively engaged in a programmatic critique of early modern Ashkenazic Jewish culture in an effort to rejuvenate it. They focused on educational reform, the acquisition of non-Jewish knowledge, and the revival of the Hebrew language in an effort to end what they believed

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>13</sup> M. J. Rosman, *The Lords' Jews: Magnate-Jewish Relations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Rosman, "Jewish Perceptions of Insecurity and Powerlessness in 16th-18th Century Poland," *Polin*, 4 (1989), 19-27; Gershon David Hundert, *The Jews in a Polish Private Town: The Case of Opatow in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1992); Gershon Hundert, "Some Basic Characteristics of the Jewish Experience in Poland," *Polin*, 1 (1986), 28-34.

<sup>14</sup> Most of the primary biographical material about Mendel Lefin comes from later generations of enlightened East European Jews. See, for example, Abraham Ber Gottlober, *Zikhronot u-Masa'ot*, 2, ed. Reuben Goldberg (Jerusalem, 1976), 197-208 and Samuel Joseph [RaSHi] Fuenn, *Kiryah Ne'emanah* (Vilna, 1860), 271-73. Secondary literature on Lefin includes Yosef Klausner, *Historiyah shel ha-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Hadashah* (Jerusalem, 1930), I, 201-22; Mahler, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael*, 71-72; Israel Weinlös, "Mendel Lefin Satanower: A Biographical Study from Manuscript Material" (Yiddish), *YIVO Bleter*, II (1932), 334-57 and "Menachem Mendel Lefin of Satanów" (Hebrew), *Ha-Olam*, 13 (1925), 778-79, 799-800, 819-20, 839-40; Israel Zinberg, *A History of Jewish Literature*, 6 (New York, 1975), 275.

was the cultural isolation of the Jews.<sup>15</sup> Lefin only stayed in the West for a short period of time. In 1784 he returned to Podolia and remained in the region for most of his life, leaving to settle in Austrian Galicia sometime in the second decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Both lifelong proximity to the important centers of Podolian Hasidism and the experience of observing the radicalization of the Jewish Enlightenment in Berlin indelibly colored Lefin's formulation of the *Haskalah*, which he defined as the moderate midpoint between the extremes of Hasidism and atheistic rationalism.<sup>17</sup>

When Lefin returned to Podolia, he settled in Mikołajów, a private town between Międzybóž and Satanów under the authority of Prince Czartoryski. Czartoryski was not only one of the wealthiest magnates in Poland, owning estates in Central Poland, Lithuania, Przemyśl, and Podolia, and the General of Podolia, but he was also a leading supporter of the Polish Enlightenment, which had begun to flourish in 1764 under the reign of King Poniatowski.<sup>18</sup> Poniatowski and Czartoryski fostered the Polish Enlightenment by creating institutions, the new Knights School, the Polish Education Commission, and the didactic moral weekly, *Monitor*, which promoted a critique of the Polish nobility's mythic sense of self and ways of life, called Sarmatianism, that subordinated the public good to noble self-interest. The Polish nobility had historically regarded itself as descendants of a race of "heroic Sarmatians" who had defeated Rome. Invested in a self-definition that assumed their uniqueness from other European nobilities, the Polish *szlachta* (nobility) mythologized their liberties, privileges, religion, culture, and economic structure. Enlightened Poles—known as "magnate republicans" or "aristocratic liberals" because the majority hailed from the noble order—excoriated their noble compatriots' excessive pride, stubborn independence, disdain for urban and commercial activity, and reluctance to cede any of their privileges.<sup>19</sup> Czartoryski, eschewing political office, spent his life actively

<sup>15</sup> David Sorkin, "From Context to Comparison: The German Haskalah and Reform Catholicism," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 20 (1991), 23-58, and Shmuel Feiner, "Defining the Haskalah," in *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, eds. David Sorkin and Shmuel Feiner (The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> For various accounts, see Meir Letteris, *Zikaron ba-Sefer* (Vienna, 1868-69), 38, Mahler, *Divrei Yemei Yisra'el*, 72, and Mahler, *A History of Modern Jewry, 1780-1815* (New York, 1971), 588-89. Documentary evidence situates Lefin in Mikołajów from 1805 to 1808 and in Austrian Galicia, at the Czartoryski palace in Sieniawa, in 1815. See the Joseph Perl Archive, folder 8, Jewish National and University Library Archives, Jerusalem (henceforth, JNULA); the Abraham Schwadron Collection, Mendel Lefin papers, and the Joseph Perl Archive, appendix, JNULA.

<sup>17</sup> See Steven Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770-1830* (New York, 1994) and Shmuel Feiner, "The Pseudo-Enlightenment and the Question of Jewish Modernization," *Jewish Social Studies* (new series), 3:1 (Fall 1996), 62-86.

<sup>18</sup> W. H. Zawadzki, *A Man of Honour: Adam [Jerzy] Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland, 1795-1831* (Oxford, 1993), 8 and *The Cambridge History of Poland*, eds. W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, R. Dyboski (2 vols.; New York, 1971), II, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Jerzy Lukowski, *Liberty's Folly: The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century, 1697-1795* (New York, 1991), 20-22, 77, and 222-23. On the social origins of enlightened Poles, see Grochulska, *op cit*.

cultivating all kinds of knowledge both for his own edification and for the advancement of Poland. He was an accomplished linguist and was interested in literature, history, the arts, natural sciences, chemistry, political economy, and military strategy. Puławy, the Czartoryski estate on the Vistula about 110 kilometers south of Warsaw, became one of eighteenth-century Poland's most vital cultural and intellectual centers. There, Czartoryski surrounded himself with talented men, such as Józef Szymanowski, a poet, lawyer, and official in the government Treasury Commission; Jan Jawornicki, a liberal estate commissioner; Feliks Bernatowicz, a novelist and playwright; and Mendel Lefin. All these men were generously financed by the prince.<sup>20</sup> Czartoryski's patronage of Mendel Lefin, which began soon after his settlement in Mikolajów, was a crucial influence upon the latter's specific suggestions for reforming the Jews of Poland and his practical ability to write and publish works of the *Haskalah*. First hiring Lefin to tutor his sons in mathematics and philosophy, Czartoryski provided him with a lifelong stipend, ensured that his beneficiary found comfortable lodgings in which to work, and later helped to publish his political and literary works.<sup>21</sup>

Lefin's works, written in Hebrew, Yiddish, French, German, and Judeo-German (German written in Hebrew characters) span the wide range of Enlightenment genres: popular essays on natural science, translation of a popular Swiss medical text, proposals for the cultural and economic reform of the Jewish community, adaptation of German travelogues into Hebrew, Yiddish translations of Scripture, and translation of medieval Jewish rationalist philosophy.<sup>22</sup> The vari-

<sup>20</sup> Jean Fabre, *Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et L'Europe des Lumières* (Strasbourg, 1952), 148. See, too, Zawadzki, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Evidence of Lefin's stipend from Czartoryski appears in Majer Bałaban, "Mendel Lewin i książę Adam Czartoryski," *Chwila*, niedziela, 7 stycznia 1934, nr. 5313, 10 and Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, March 19, 1803, 6285 EW 1046 (copied in the 1880s into 6338 IV, MS EW 1503), the Czartoryski Library, Kraków.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example [Mendel Lefin], *Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs* (Warsaw [1791]), in *Materiały do Dziejów Sejmu Czteroletniego*, 6, eds. Artur Eisenbach, Jerzy Michałski, Emanuel Rostworowski, and Janusz Wolinski (Wrocław/Warszawa/Kraków, 1969), 409-21; Mendel Lefin, "Likkutei Kelalim (*Collections of Rules*) in N. M. Gelber, "Mendel Lefin-Satanover's Proposals for the Improvement of Jewish Community Life Presented to the Great Polish Sejm (1788-1792)" (Hebrew), *The Abraham Weiss Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1964), 287-305; Mendel Lefin, *Masa'ot ha-Yam* (*Journeys by Sea*) (Zólkiew, 1818; Vilna, 1823; Lemberg, 1859); Mendel Lefin, *Modale Binah* (*Insight to Understanding*) (Berlin, 1789); *Moreh Nevukhim* of Moses Maimonides, tr. Mendel Lefin (Zólkiew, 1829); Mendel Lefin, *Sefer Kohelet im Tirgum u-Vi'ur* (*Ecclesiastes with a [Yiddish] Translation and [Hebrew] Commentary*) (Odessa, 1873); [Mendel Lefin], *Sefer Mishlei Shelomo im Perush Kazar ve-Ha'atakah Hadashah Bilshon Ashkenaz le-To'elet Aheinu Beit Yisra'el be-Arztot Polin* (*Proverbs with a Short Commentary and a New Translation in the Language of Ashkenaz for the Benefit of the House of Israel in the Lands of Poland*) (Tarnopol, 1814); *Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am* (*The Book of Popular Healing*), tr. Mendel Lefin (Zólkiew, 1794; Lwów, 1851); Mendel Lefin, *Elon Moreh* (Introduction to the translation of Maimonides' *Guide*), a supplement to *Ha-Meliz* (Odessa, 1867). Many of Lefin's works remained in manuscript and several, including a treatise on Kantian philosophy and two anti-Hasidic satires, were lost, except for fragments, in the interwar years.

ety of languages and genres that comprise Lefin's lifework may be startling but should not obscure their clear didactic purpose. All of Lefin's writings were informed by his battle against the Jewish pietism indigenous to his native Podolia.

Mendel Lefin's conception of the Jewish Enlightenment was a form of "religious Enlightenment," reflecting the decisive influence of the Leibnizian-Wolffian school within the *Aufklärung*, which proved particularly attractive in Central Europe, Russia, and Poland. This school preserved the traditional dichotomy between metaphysics and physics, thus making possible the pursuit of the new values of tolerance and reason in the service of revealed religion. The theological Wolffians professed a rationalism rooted in faith.<sup>23</sup> The Wolffian interpretation of natural law, which downplayed the individualism of the British Enlightenment and emphasized obligation and duty as requirements of individual rights, was welcomed by conservative elites in absolutist Russia. Poles educated in German universities were the source of the spread of Wolff's influence as early as the reign of August III.<sup>24</sup> Rejecting the implacable hostility of the later skeptical French Enlightenment to religion and clericalism, Lefin saw no inconsistency between the intellectual exploration of Western, non-Jewish ideas and fidelity to traditional rabbinic culture.

Lefin was not a practicing scientist, as was an enlightened Galician Jew like Abraham Stern, who invented an adding machine, and the rabbinic figure Barukh Schick, a chemist who translated Euclid into Hebrew<sup>25</sup>; yet he shared with many eighteenth-century figures the view that "truth [was] revealed not in God's word but in his work[s]."<sup>26</sup> Lefin supported scientific exploration of the natural world as a means to bolster belief in God's creative power. His earliest publications, such as *Insight to Understanding*, *Letters of Wisdom*, and *The Book of Popular Healing*, all strove to enhance traditional piety through the study of science.<sup>27</sup> This effort was consonant with eighteenth-century natural philosophy, which promoted scientific experimentation and its popularization for understanding

<sup>23</sup> David Sorkin, "The Case for Comparison: Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment," *Modern Judaism*, 14 (1994), 121-38 and Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Marc Raeff, "The Enlightenment in Russia and Russian Thought in the Enlightenment," *The Eighteenth Century in Russia*, ed. J. G. Garrard (Oxford, 1973), 25-47, and Klimowicz, *op. cit.* For a recent discussion of the ways in which traditional Jews engaged in scientific thinking in the early modern period, see David Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Ephraim Kupfer, "From Far and Near," (Hebrew), in *Sefer Zikaron Mugash le-N. M. Gelber* (Tel Aviv, 1963), 218, and David Fishman, "A Polish Rabbi Meets the Berlin Haskalah: The Case of R. Barukh Schick," *AJS Review*, 12 (1987), 95-121.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Boston, 1962), 43.

<sup>27</sup> Mendel Lefin, *Moda le-Binah*, including selections from *Iggerot Hokhmah* (Berlin, 1789), and *Sefer Refu'ot ha-Am*, tr. Mendel Lefin (Zólkiew, 1794).

the ways of Providence and improving society.<sup>28</sup> The “religious Enlightenment” of Central and Eastern Europe was compatible with the “moderate Enlightenment” of colonial America.<sup>29</sup>

Benjamin Franklin typified the eighteenth-century natural philosopher; discoverer of the lightning rod and of the Pennsylvania fireplace, he believed in the practical application and moral utility of his experiments, maintaining that a heightened sense of God’s creative power could not but result from scientific observation. One of his private pupils, Polly Stevenson, affirmed the efficacy of scientific knowledge in underscoring God’s purpose when she told Franklin, “If the *Knowledge* I gain from your Instructions is small, I am certain to receive one Advantage, I shall be taught to pay a grateful Adoration to the Great Creator whose Wisdom and Goodness are so manifest in the Operations of Nature.”<sup>30</sup> Lefin’s interest in such disparate topics as natural science, German travelogues, biblical translations, ethical treatises, and transcendental philosophy, all of which he regarded as a means to strengthen traditional rabbinic religious values, fit well into the broad scope of eighteenth-century natural philosophy, whose participants included inventors, practicing scientists, literary figures, professors, and travelers. The eighteenth-century natural philosopher was not a specialist, but rather, like Lefin and Franklin, a man with catholic interests and passions.<sup>31</sup>

While Mendel Lefin may have encountered Benjamin Franklin’s writings when he was still in Berlin, Czartoryski’s esteem for the American natural philosopher no doubt sealed Lefin’s interest.<sup>32</sup> The first American to be elected to the Russian Academy of Sciences, Franklin had a tremendous reputation in all of Europe, including Russia and Poland.<sup>33</sup> Czartoryski knew Franklin personally; both men were freemasons, belonging to the Parisian Lodge, “Les Neuf Soeurs,” which, established in 1776, elected Franklin as “Venerable” in 1781. The membership of the Lodge’s interest in educational reform and Czartoryski’s respect for Franklin influenced the former’s choice of the civic catechism for the new Polish Knights School.<sup>34</sup> In 1786 Adam Kazimierz described Franklin rev-

<sup>28</sup> J. L. Heilbron, “Franklin As an Enlightened Natural Philosopher,” in *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (London, 1993), 196-220.

<sup>29</sup> Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford, 1976), introduction and 5-101.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Heilbron, 205.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 196, and Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York, 1966-69), 14.

<sup>32</sup> Three volumes of Franklin’s works were translated into German as early as 1780; see Silberschlag, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Eufrosina Dvoichenko-Markov, “Benjamin Franklin and Leo Tolstoy,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 96:2 (1952), 120.

<sup>34</sup> Nicholas Hans, “UNESCO of the 18th Century: La Loge des Neuf Soeurs and its Venerable Master, Benjamin Franklin,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 97 (1953), 513-24. And see Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1991); on the catechism for the Cadets Schools, see Fabre, 147, 156.



erently to his son, Adam Jerzy, as “one of a number of rare men whom inspires pride in oneself for having had the opportunity to meet.”<sup>35</sup>

Lefin employed Benjamin Franklin’s method of moral self-reform because the American natural philosopher had likewise come to the conclusion that a practical program of behavior modification was necessary to effect individual change. Writing in 1784 from Passy, France, Franklin explained:

It was about this time that I conceiv’d the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish’d to live without committing any fault at any time; I would conquer all that either natural inclination, custom, or company might lead me into. As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other. But I soon found I had undertaken a task of more difficulty than I had imagined.... *I concluded, at length, that the mere speculative conviction that it was our interest to be completely virtuous, was not sufficient to prevent our slipping*, and that contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established, before we can have any dependence on a steady, uniform rectitude of conduct.<sup>36</sup>

Franklin concluded that self-improvement required a structured plan of behavior modification, which, if properly implemented, would result in the inculcation of habitually moral behavior. Because he believed that an individual was best served by short-term concentration on one virtue at a time in order to acquire the “habitude” of all the desired virtues, he devised a personal accounting system which correlated thirteen virtues (i.e., temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity and humility) with thirteen weeks.<sup>37</sup> Franklin’s behaviorist innovation lay in his design of a moral accounting book, in which each page was devoted to one virtue. Each day’s failings would be marked in the box corresponding to that week’s virtue. At the end of the week Franklin examined the markings to see how he had progressed, or lapsed, in the cultivation of that week’s particular virtue. Franklin ordered his virtues in a progression such that temperance would make the cultivation of “silence” easier, which in turn would allow him to “order” his day and make it more productive, etc. The thirteen-week cycle of weekly reflec-

<sup>35</sup> Adam Kazimierz to Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, 23 October 1776(?). See 6285 II, EW 1046, the Czartoryski Library, Kraków. The letter, copied in the late nineteenth century from the original, is misdated. Adam Jerzy first went abroad with his mother, Izabela Fleming Czartoryska, in 1786, the year in which the letter, I believe, was written. And see Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, *Memoirs of Prince Adam Czartoryski and his Correspondence with Alexander I*, ed. Adam Gielgud (Orono, Maine, 1968), I, 45-49.

<sup>36</sup> Franklin, 78. My emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

tion and accounting repeated four times to round out the year when, Franklin hoped, the individual would view a “clean book” with “encouraging pleasure.”<sup>38</sup>

Lefin borrowed Franklin’s accounting system in its entirety for *Moral Accounting*. He followed Franklin’s suggestions that the individual select a “short precept” that would encapsulate the week’s virtue and create a special accounting book with the aforementioned grid. Lefin specified that the journal should be nine pages with eighteen sides, that the individual should use a lead pencil for the daily marks, but write the sums at the end of the week using a pen. He even borrowed most of Franklin’s virtues; Lefin’s original list of thirteen virtues included calmness (*menuhah*), patience (*savlanut*), order (*seder*), stubbornness (*akshanut*), cleanliness (*nekiyut*), humility (*anavah*), justice (*zedek*), frugality (*kimuz*), diligence (*zerizut*), silence (*shetikah*), tranquility (*nihuta*), truth (*emet*) and asceticism (*perishut*). Lefin, too, articulated the hope that repetition would result in a “book wiped clean of all its spots.”<sup>39</sup>

Lefin not only borrowed Franklin’s method but completed the task that the latter had described in his *Autobiography*: composing a handbook for individual use. Franklin intended to write an entire book, to be called *The Art of Virtue*, devoted to the subject of individual moral self-improvement, which would have finally provided the means to put his program of self-reflection into practice.<sup>40</sup> Franklin never completed the task because he saw it in relation to “a great and extensive project,” the creation of a United Party for Virtue which would bring together virtuous men from all nations to oversee the affairs of the world.<sup>41</sup> While Franklin and Lefin shared the belief in the possibility of individual moral self-improvement, their use of the “Rules of Conduct” indicated different agendas. Franklin directed his efforts toward a universal political program while Lefin strove to remake the Polish-Jewish community of his day.

Attracted to Franklin’s instrumental ethics, which divorced morality from metaphysics, Lefin clearly shared with Franklin the primary goal of anchoring morality in the individual and the consonant ability to change behavior within the rational power of the self.<sup>42</sup> Yet while Franklin conceived of his behaviorist

<sup>38</sup> Franklin, 82.

<sup>39</sup> [Lefin], par. 26. Later editions of *Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh* substitute *harizut* (industry) for the fourth virtue (stubbornness).

<sup>40</sup> Franklin, 89.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92; on Junto, the club Franklin created in 1726 devoted to discussion of popular morality, see Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 74-75. According to Abraham Ber Gottlob, youth groups formed in Podolia and Galicia which modelled their behavior after the program in *Moral Accounting*. See Mahler, *Divrei Yemei Yisra’el*, 77. If this anecdote is true then Lefin succeeded not only in completing Franklin’s *Art of Virtue* but in establishing the voluntary societies that Franklin believed would form the core group of the United Party of Virtue.

<sup>42</sup> Herbert W. Schneider, “The Significance of Benjamin Franklin’s Moral Philosophy,” *Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York, 1925), II, 298-304.

*Form of the Pages*

TEMPERANCE.							
<i>Eat not to Dulness.</i> <i>Drink not to Elevation.</i>							
	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
T							
S	• •	•		•			
O	•	•	•		•	•	•
R						•	
F		•					
I							
S							
J							
M							
Cl.							
T							
Ch							
H							

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Figure 1: Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text*, 81.  
By permission of the University of Tennessee Press.

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## MÉMOIRES

## FORME DES PAGES.

## TEMPÉRANCE.

NE MANGEZ PAS JUSQU'À ÊTRE APPESANTI; NE  
BUVEZ PAS JUSQU'À VOUS ÉTOURDIR.

	DIM.	LUN.	MAR.	MER.	JEU.	VEN.	SAM.
TEMP.							
SIL.	*	*		*			
ORD.	*	*			*	*	*
RÉS.		*				*	
ÉCON.		*				*	
TRAV.			*				
SINC.							
JUST.							
MOD.							
PROP.							
TRAN.							
CHAS.							
HUM.							

Figure 2: Benjamin Franklin, *Mémoires sur la Vie de Benjamin Franklin*  
(Paris, 1828), 194.

שבוע א מנוחת הנפש טז

התגבר על מאורעות פחוחי סערך רעות או  
טובות • שאינם כדאי לבלבל מנוחת נפשך :

רמזים	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז
מנוחה							
סבלנות							
סדר							
עקשנות							
נקיות							
ענוה							
צדק							
קיבוץ							
זריזות							
שתיקה							
ניחותא							
אמת							
פרישות							

Figure 3: [Mendel Lefin], *Sefer Heshbon ha-Nefesh* (Lemberg, 1808), 49.  
By permission of The British Library.

technique as an innovative way to improve individual character for the creation of an international political party, Lefin appropriated Franklin's method because he believed it efficacious in his battle against Hasidism.<sup>43</sup> Initiated in Podolia in the second quarter of the eighteenth century by Israel ben Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov, the man later called the *Besht*, Hasidism, with its emphasis on ecstatic prayer, new rituals, social separatism, and charismatic leadership, threatened to undermine traditional rabbinic authority.<sup>44</sup> As in his other writings in Jewish languages, Lefin deliberately concealed the anti-Hasidism in *Moral Accounting*, constructing it to fit into the traditional genre of *musar* (ethical) literature, texts devoted to instructing a Jew how to live a truly pious life beyond the boundaries set in legal (*halakhic*) writings.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Franklin, who lacked a specific antagonist or religious authority to counter, Lefin had to provide justification within the Jewish tradition for creating a new method of moral reflection and reform. *Moral Accounting* merited twelve rabbinic approbations upon its initial appearance and was peppered with numerous biblical and rabbinic textual supports, which conveyed an overall impression of fidelity to the classical rabbinic tradition.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the conservative format of *Moral Accounting*, however, Lefin explicitly broke with traditional ethical writing, as he tells his readers, because it was inadequate to address the moral dilemmas of the day.<sup>47</sup> The traditional exhortations to act morally depended upon external rewards and punishments, whose authority, he implied, was no longer as binding as it once had been.<sup>48</sup> Rousseau's developmental model of education made a noticeable impact on *Moral Accounting*, in which Lefin took for granted the French philosopher's description in *Émile* of the heightened passions of puberty. Contemporary Jewish adolescents, whom Lefin felt were at a psychologically perilous age, were in need of a new

<sup>43</sup> Franklin, 89, 91-92.

<sup>44</sup> The classic treatment of Hasidism's challenge to traditional Ashkenazic rabbinic culture is Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York, 1993<sup>2</sup>); and see Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> On other examples of Lefin's anti-Hasidism, see Chone Shmeruk, "Regarding Several Principles of Mendel Lefin's Translation of Proverbs" (Hebrew), *Sifrut Yidish be-Folin: Mehkarim ve-Iyunim Historiyim*, ed. Chone Shmeruk (Jerusalem, 1981), 165-83 and Nancy Sinkoff, "Strategy and Ruse in the Haskalah of Mendel Lefin of Satanów," *New Perspectives on the Haskalah*, *op cit.*; also Immanuel Etkes, "The Question of the Precursors of the Haskalah in Eastern Europe" (Hebrew), *Ha-Dat ve-ha-Hayim: Tenu'at ha-Haskalah ha-Yehudit be-Mizrah Eiropa*, ed. Immanuel Etkes (Jerusalem, 1993), 25-44; and Joseph Dan, *Sifrut ha-Musar ve-ha-Derush* (Jerusalem, 1975).

<sup>46</sup> See David Roskies, "The Medium and the Message of the Maskilic Chapbook," *Jewish Social Studies*, 41 (1979), 275-90 and Chone Shmeruk, "Moses Markuse from Slonim and the Source of His Book, *Ezer Yisroel* (Hebrew)," in Shmeruk, *op cit.*, 184-203.

<sup>47</sup> [Lefin], pars. 12-14 and 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 18. See James Van Horn Melton's *Absolutism and the Eighteenth-Century Origins of Compulsory Schooling in Prussia and Austria* (New York, 1988).

way to achieve self-control.<sup>49</sup> Lacking the motivation to change their behavior on their own, Lefin urged the traditional, non-Hasidic rabbinate to spur their adolescent charges toward the behaviorist method of self-reflection and self-control detailed in the book. As Lefin succinctly stated, “ethics without instruction is not sufficient at all.”<sup>50</sup> He hoped this new method of internalized, individual moral reform would prove more attractive to East European adolescents than Hasidic methods and techniques for expiating sin.

The covert anti-Hasidism of *Moral Accounting* pervaded both the content and form of the work. The first virtue enumerated in Lefin’s work, *menuhah* (calmness), permeates the entire text. A sense of inner calm and emotional balance—the development of moderate temperament—is necessary for the successful completion of Lefin’s program. Calmness was likewise imperative to render proper service to God in accordance with the idealized rationalist version of traditional, rabbinic Judaism favored by Lefin and other enlightened Jews. In Lefin’s view moderation was the remedy for an extremist tendency, and this moderation could best be achieved through the use of Benjamin Franklin’s method of cultivating the virtues slowly, habitually, week by week, over four cycles of the year. Lefin wrote, “There is no question that the majority of cases of [moral] illnesses can only be healed through moderation.”<sup>51</sup> His reiteration throughout *Moral Accounting* of words such as *metinut* (moderation), *yishuv ha-da’at* (consideration), as well as *menuhah* and *menuhat hanefesh*, illustrate his belief that the cultivation of these virtues represented an alternative to the Hasidic emphasis on unbridled emotion and ecstatic worship.

Already with this virtue we can see the transformation of Franklin’s text in Lefin’s hands. Franklin began his chart of self-introspection with the virtue of “temperance” and the brief phrases underneath explicating the virtue emphasize the physical, cautioning readers not to eat or drink in excess. The explanatory phrases under “calmness,” the first virtue in Lefin’s chart, stressed the realm of the soul, counseling the audience not to let petty events, whether positive or negative, distract its calm.<sup>52</sup> Although Franklin included “moderation” as the ninth virtue in his table, he did not accord it the preeminent value assumed by Lefin. While Lefin’s debt to Franklin is clear, in his quest to strengthen the rational component of the soul Lefin also borrowed from the great Jewish medi-

<sup>49</sup> For Lefin’s interest in Rousseau, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers, and the Joseph Perl Archive, folder 128d, JNULA. For studies on the relationship of the demographic explosion in eighteenth-century Poland and the rise of Hasidism and Haskalah, see Gershon Hundert, “Approaches to the History of the Jewish Family in Early Modern Poland-Lithuania,” *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality*, eds. Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman (New York, 1986), 17-28 and David Biale, “Childhood, Marriage and the Family in the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment,” *op cit.*, 45-62.

<sup>50</sup> [Lefin], par. 49.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, par. 70.

<sup>52</sup> Franklin, 81 and Figure 1.

eval philosopher, Moses Maimonides. In Maimonides' *Eight Chapters*, a discrete treatise on the soul, its constituent faculties, and the appropriate method of healing its imbalance or illness, the philosopher stated his famous harmonization of the Aristotelian "golden mean" with a life lived in observance of Jewish commandments: "Good deeds are such as are equibalanced, maintaining the mean between two equally bad extremes, the too much and the too little. Virtues are psychic conditions and dispositions which are midway between two reprehensible extremes, one of which is characterized by an exaggeration, the other by a deficiency."<sup>53</sup> For Lefin as well as for other enlightened Jews, the persona of the medieval master loomed large as the ideal antidote to Hasidism.<sup>54</sup> Lefin believed that spread of a Maimonidean perspective among Polish Jewry would revitalize its inner life by turning it away from Hasidism and mysticism toward an idealized rationalist past. To that end Lefin began a translation of Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed* into mishnaic Hebrew from the medieval Hebrew translation by Samuel ibn Tibbon in the 1790s.<sup>55</sup>

Lefin's belief that emotional moderation was the "sine qua non" of a pious life is most explicit in his discussions of prayer.<sup>56</sup> In a parable at the beginning of *Moral Accounting* Lefin warned the East European Jewish youths for whom he intended his work against the dangers of mistaking extreme ardor—*hitlahavut* is the technical term in Hasidic thought—for appropriate forms of devotion.<sup>57</sup> The Hasidic claim that ecstasy in prayer was more important than habitual prayer at the appointed times was a well-known target of the opponents of Hasidism.<sup>58</sup> The risks of extreme enthusiasm were fatal in Lefin's view, and he urged his

<sup>53</sup> In the fourth chapter of the *Eight Chapters*, Maimonides stated that only "frequent repetition of acts ... practiced during a long period of time" can accustom the individual to finding the proper mean. Both citations are from Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (New York, 1972), 367-68. In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides' major philosophic work, the philosopher attributed "excess" to be the cause of "all corporeal and psychical diseases and ailments." See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), II, 445.

<sup>54</sup> James Lehmann, "Maimonides, Mendelssohn, and *Me'asfim*: Philosophy and Biographical Imagination in the Early Haskalah," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* (1975), 87-108.

<sup>55</sup> Shmuel Werses, "Hasidism in the Perspective of Haskalah Literature: From the Polemics of the Galician Haskalah," in Werses, *Megamot ve-Zurot be-Sifrut ha-Haskalah* (Jerusalem, 1990), 106.

<sup>56</sup> Lefin's preoccupation with emotional moderation as a fundamental component of enlightened religion was shared by eighteenth-century mainstream Protestants in both England and America. See Michael Heyd, "*Be Sober and Reasonable*": *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden and New York, 1995), and David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

<sup>57</sup> On *hitlahavut* in Hasidic prayer, see Gershom Scholem, "Hasidism: The Latest Phase," *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem, 1941), 335. On the parable, see Levine, "On a Disguised," 168.

<sup>58</sup> Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim u-Mitnaggedim: Le-Toldot ha-Pulmus she-beineihem ba-Shanim 1772-1795* (Jerusalem, 1970), I, 38-41, 45, 50, 54, 75; II, 253-338.



readers instead to approach prayer in a moderate, conventional fashion. In 1823 Meir Reich, an enlightened contemporary of Lefin, warned his son, Benjamin, of the dangers raised in *Moral Accounting*:

You should slowly acquire habit at the beginning of your study, then the end will truly flourish, not like those who are inflamed with desire at the beginning of their study and who weary immediately of finding the path to wisdom, thus making it loathsome in their mouths. Indeed, the enlightened ones are forbearing and profit doubly in the health of their bodies and the delight of their study.... Your prayer should be short and [performed] with intention.<sup>59</sup>

Reich expressed concern, as had Lefin, that Hasidic prayer represented a deviation from the carefully structured liturgical formulae of traditional rabbinic Judaism, their content as well as their fixed time-bound daily schedule. Rabbinic Judaism properly understood, they believed, provided clear guidelines for the moderate acquisition of good moral habits and the temperate fulfillment of service to God.

The method of *Moral Accounting* was likewise central to Lefin's anti-Hasidic critique. Lefin turned to Benjamin Franklin's individualistic behaviorist technique for moral self-improvement because of his harsh assessment of the institution of the *zaddik* (rebbe), Hasidism's new model of Jewish leadership which appeared to offer East European Jewry a satisfying way of dealing with sin and immorality. The consolidation of the role of the rebbe as a spiritual guide and mediator—a "channel" in the mystical terminology of the believers—between the supernal and mundane worlds defined the maturation of Hasidism at the end of the eighteenth century. Hasidim viewed their rebbes as having both a unique ability to connect with the Divine and a special responsibility to them to effect their expiation and spiritual growth.<sup>60</sup> In contrast Mendel Lefin argued that the

<sup>59</sup> Meir ha-Cohen Reich to Benjamin Reich, Bar, 1823, transcribed in the *maskil* Jacob Samuel Bik's private journal. For the journal, see the Merzbacher manuscript found in the municipal library of Frankfurt-on-the-Main, 64, Ms. hebr. fol. 11, 39b. A microfilm of the manuscript is held in the Department of Photographed Manuscripts and Archives, JNULA. In 1808, Lefin sent Meir ha-Cohen Reich a copy of *Moral Accounting* for his opinion. See Mendel Lefin to Jacob Meshullam Orenstein, Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers, JNULA.

<sup>60</sup> On the role of the *zaddik* see Shimon Dubnow, *Torat ha-Hasidut* (Tel Aviv, 1930); Rachel Elior, *The Paradoxical Ascent to God: The Kabbalistic Theosophy of Habad Hasidism*, tr. Jeffrey M. Green (Albany, 1993); Isaiah Tishby and Joseph Dan, "Hasidic Thought and Literature," in *Perakim be-Torat ha-Hasidut uve-Toldoteihah*, ed. Avraham Rubinstein (Jerusalem, 1977), 250-315; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "God and the Zaddik as the Two Focal Points of Hasidic Worship," in *Essential Papers on Hasidism*, ed. Gershon David Hundert (New York, 1991), 299-329.

institution of the rebbe unfairly and deceitfully arrogated a unique relationship to God for Hasidism's initiates, excluding average, rabbinic Jews.<sup>61</sup>

Lefin elaborated on his critique of Hasidic exclusivity in *Moral Accounting's* seventh chapter (justice), consciously playing on the aural consonance and orthographic similarity of the Hebrew terms for justice (ZeDek) and rebbe (ZaDDiK). For Lefin, a truly righteous man (*zaddik*) performed God's will by fulfilling the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 18:19), meaning: respecting his fellow Jews (if not rational non-Jews) and doing good for all of Creation, particularly man. Lefin stated that the Sages considered this commandment to be "the foundation of the whole Torah." Respecting one's fellow Jews was the essence of authentic Jewish faith (*emunah*) intended by the prophet Habakuk, when he expressed that "a righteous man (*zaddik*) shall live by his faith (*emunah*)" (Habakuk 2:4).<sup>62</sup> Lefin undoubtedly knew of the Hasidic interpretation of this verse from Habakuk, in which the intransitive *yihyeh* (will live) was read as a transitive verb *yehayeh* (will vitalize). In the Hasidic reading the verse emphasized the rebbe's singular power to mediate his followers' spiritual life: "a rebbe will vitalize [his followers] through his faith."<sup>63</sup> Reliance on the *zaddik's* monopoly on faith was antithetical, wrote Lefin, consciously alluding to his enemies, to the positive commandment of *gemilut hasidim* (being charitable to others). Lefin viewed the practice among Hasidim to support their rebbes with donations (*pidyonot*) as a form of economic exploitation which violated "commandments between man and his fellow man, such as the prohibition against stealing and robbery, injustice and trickery." Lefin, again, well aware of the traditional Jewish exegetical practice of encoding letters with numerical value (*gematriyah*), deliberately placed the comment comparing the "true" meaning of *zedek* (justice) to the false exploitation of the *zaddik* in his book's ninetieth paragraph; in Hebrew the number 90 is written simply with the eighteenth letter of the alphabet, the *zaddik/zadi*.<sup>64</sup>

For Lefin the belief among Hasidim that they had an exceptional relationship to the Divine through their rebbes not only relegated other, non-Hasidic Jews to a subordinate spiritual status. The inherent, ontological dependence of the Hasidic believers upon their leadership struck at the very core of the Enlightenment project to liberate the self. Disturbed by the tendency within Hasidism to view the rebbe in a quasi-Divine manner, Mendel Lefin felt it imperative to find a method of behavior change that would re-anchor morality within the individual. Just as traditional ethical exhortation was inadequate to the task of in-

<sup>61</sup> See [Lefin], *Essai d'un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d'éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs*, sections 22-24 and notes 5 and 6 to those sections, 409-10, sections 14-16 and sections 25-26, 411-12.

<sup>62</sup> [Lefin], par. 90.

<sup>63</sup> Tishy and Dan, 267.

<sup>64</sup> [Lefin], par. 90.

stilling the virtue of self-control, so it could not stem the appeal of Hasidism. Franklin's technique firmly secured the process of controlling one's appetite and perfecting one's morals in the individual. No intercessor or mediator was necessary for the successful practice of the technique in *Moral Accounting*; all that was required was a self-conscious person with a notebook.

Mendel Lefin's seamless appropriation of Benjamin Franklin's "Rules of Conduct" in *Moral Accounting* challenges the putative borders between Jewish and non-Jewish, Western and Eastern European, internal and external culture in the age of the Enlightenment.<sup>65</sup> Lefin consciously employed the ideas of enlightened West European non-Jews in his work and translated non-Jewish texts for East European Jews in an effort to disseminate his conception of a moderate, religious *Haskalah*. He was of course well aware of the distinct provenance of his sources and knew that not all men who professed Enlightenment ideology were tolerant of the Jews.<sup>66</sup> It was Franklin's avowed ecumenicism and reputation as a defender of religious tolerance which made it possible for Lefin—and his disciples later in the nineteenth century—to incorporate the American's technique into *Moral Accounting*.<sup>67</sup> Lefin frequently cited the classical saying of the Rabbinic Sages, " 'Who is wise?' 'The one who learns from every man' "<sup>68</sup> ... 'whether from a non-Jew or from Israel or from a slave or from a handmaid, the Holy Spirit rests upon him according to his deeds,' "<sup>69</sup> as justification for his cultural borrowing. Incorporating classical Jewish aphorisms not only gave Lefin's work a traditional cast, but expressed his ardent belief that there was nothing incompatible between a rationalized, renewed Judaism and the universal values common to all men. While Lefin acknowledged the distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish texts, in his identity as an enlightened Jew he drew from both kinds of sources. His conception of the moderate, religious Enlightenment was at one and the same time specifically Jewish and universally European.

Lefin shared many Enlightenment values with men like Benjamin Franklin, Joachim Heinrich Campe, Helvétius, Immanuel Kant, David Hartley, Mont-

<sup>65</sup> See Amos Funkenstein, "The Dialectics of Assimilation," *Jewish Social Studies* (new series), 1:2 (Winter, 1995), 1-14.

<sup>66</sup> See the discussion of Lefin's use of Voltaire and Montesquieu in Sinkoff, *op cit.*

<sup>67</sup> See Franklin, 76 and 92. Nachman Krochmal, a Jewish philosopher steeped in Hegelian idealism, translated a parable on religious tolerance attributed to Franklin in which the patriarch Abraham is rebuked by God for being inhospitable to a pagan. Jacob Samuel Bik praised Lefin's use of Franklin's method by citing Mishnah Shabbat, 16:8, "Israel can make use of a light [on the Sabbath] kindled by a gentile." See Alexander Kohut, "Abraham's Lesson in Tolerance," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 15 (1903), 104-11; Joseph Klausner, " 'Ethical Fable,' of R. Nachman Krochmal" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 1 (1930), 131-35; Shmuel Werses, "The Original, Unknown Version of Jacob Samuel Bik's Letter to Tobias Feder" (Hebrew), in Werses, *op cit.*, 350-51.

<sup>68</sup> Mishnah Avot, 4:1.

<sup>69</sup> Tana De-Beit Elijah Rabbah, *parashah 10*, chapter 1.

esquieu, and John Locke—all of whose writings inform Lefin’s work—such as the battle against superstition and ignorance and the effort to liberate the human soul from metaphysical dogma—and yet he was highly selective in how he employed their works.<sup>70</sup> The context for Lefin’s project was always the spiritual condition of Polish Jewry; singular to *Moral Accounting* as an Enlightenment text was Lefin’s specific struggle against Hasidism for the souls of East European Jewish youth. For Lefin, Franklin’s technique provided a vehicle by which young men on the brink of a turn to Hasidism would remain within the traditional fold. *Moral Accounting* attempted to undermine the appeal of Hasidism while offering an individualized program for moral self-improvement consonant with traditional values of devotion to God and to Jewish law. At all times Lefin strove to balance the innovation of the Enlightenment’s emphasis on the self with the continuity of traditional rabbinic Judaism. Lefin exhorted his imagined reader that mastery of Franklin’s method of moral self-reform would free him “to serve God with joy for the rest of your life until you return to dust.”<sup>71</sup> Engaged in the cultural ferment of the late eighteenth century which had penetrated east into Polish magnate holdings, Mendel Lefin’s appropriation of Franklin’s method was never passive. Implicit in his selection of ideas from the enlightened European cultural realm was the transformation of Polish Jewry.

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<sup>70</sup> For Lefin’s reference to Leonhard Euler, see his unpublished journal, the Joseph Perl Archive, folder 130, JNULA; to Helvétius, see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers, documents b, d and e, JNULA, and the Joseph Perl Archive, folders 6 and 128d, JNULA; to Campe, see Lefin’s *Masa’ot ha-Yam*; to Kant, see the Joseph Perl Archive, folders 128a, b, c, d, and e, JNULA; to Hartley’s theories of “vibrations” and “the association of ideas,” see the Abraham Schwadron Collection of Jewish Autographs and Portraits, Mendel Lefin papers, document c, paragraph 25, JNULA and [Lefin], paragraph 67 with its footnote, and paragraph 78; to Montesquieu, see [Lefin], *Essai d’un plan de réforme ayant pour objet d’éclairer la Nation Juive en Pologne et de redresser par là ses mœurs*, *op cit.*

<sup>71</sup> [Lefin], par. 26.