

Moses Mendelssohn and The Jewish Historical Clock

Disruptive Forces in Judaism of the 18th Century by Chronologies of Rabbi Families

To be given at the Conference of Jewish Genealogy in London 2001
By Michael Honey

I have drawn nine diagrams by the method I call The Jewish Historical Clock. The genealogy of the Mendelssohn family is the tenth. I drew this specifically for this conference and talk. The diagram illustrates the intertwining of relationships of Rabbi families over the last 600 years.

My own family genealogy is also illustrated. It is centred around the publishing of a Hebrew book 'Megale Amukot al Hatora' which was published in Lvov in 1795. The work of editing this book was done from a library in Brody of R. Efraim Zalman Margalioth. The book has ten testimonials and most of these Rabbis are shown with a green background for ease of identification. The Megale Amukot or Rabbi Nathan Nata Shpiro with his direct descendants in the 17th century are also highlighted with green backgrounds. The numbers shown in the yellow band are the estimated years when the individuals in that generation were born. For those who have not seen the diagrams of The Jewish Historical Clock before, let me briefly explain what they are.

The Jewish Historical Clock is a system for drawing family trees on e-drmannfly

I will describe to you the linkage of the Mendelssohn family branch to the network of orthodox rabbis. Moses Mendelssohn 1729-1786 was in his time the greatest Jewish philosopher. He was one of the first Jews to write in a modern language, German and thus opened the doors to Jewish emancipation so desired by the Jewish masses. He advocated reform and many polemics on this theme were published. He had opposition from orthodox circles dubbed the Mitnagdim (Opposers). At the time they considered that they were beleaguered by five main disruptive influences within Jewry;

- Shabbateanism
- Chassidism
- Reform
- Emancipation
- The Blandishments of Conversion

These can be thought of as the centrifugal forces disrupting the Jewish nation. And there are elements of this still influencing modern life, both in the Golah and in the State of Israel.

Three years ago I gave a similar talk at the genealogy conference in Los Angeles and in this I talked mainly about two of the above headings;

- Shabbateanism
- Chassidism

This talk illustrates the subsequent headings;

- Reform
- Emancipation
- The Blandishments of Conversion

Through the history of the Mendelssohn connected families.

Here in Gen.12 we have R. Yonatan Eibeschutz. Now if Yichus were measured in pounds weight then R. Yonatan would have a ton because you see here that on his father's side he is the great great grandson of R. Nathan Nata Shpiro the great Wunderrabbi 'Megale Amukot' for whom I have drawn a diagram showing many thousands of connections. And by his great grandmother he is also the great great grandson R. Yona Teomim Fränkel whom we have related to the great Horowitz family for which I have traced the family history in the Horowitz diagram of the Jewish Historical Clock. Throughout his life R. Yonatan Eibeschutz was unable to purge his connection to the Kabbalist culture which surrounded him in Moravia and Bohemia during his youth. By 1755 the Prague Jewish community elected as its Chief Rabbi R. Yechezkiel Landau, Gen.12, a known Mitnaged.

We have here R. Tzvi Hirsh Ashkenazi, the 'Chacham Tzvi' in Gen.14. He was born in Moravia 1658, went to a Yeshiva in Skopje and by 1705 was in Amsterdam. You can see that the Chacham Tzvi is another Rabbi who has Yichus by the ton, for R. Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, Gen.17 was his uncle twice removed, or put it another way his grandmother was the sister of the R. Avraham Yehoshua Heshel. By this route he was a descendant of the Weil family, illustrated in another of the diagrams of The Jewish Historical Clock. In 1713 the Chacham Tzvi came to London serving the Ashkenazi community established circa 1690, then in the Great Synagogue. In 1714 he went to Lvov, where he died in 1718. In Gen. 11 we have his grandson R. Tzvi Hirsch Berlin, he also lived in London where he used the name Hart Lyon. Prior to this in Mannheim and Berlin he was called Tzvi Hirsch ben Arie. But on his retirement in Lvov he called himself Tzvi Hirsch Berlin. His son used the name R. Shaul Berliner, you can see that we are at the beginning of surnames being used more generally. Whilst in Berlin R. Tzvi Hirsch ben Arie worked on the publishing of several books with Moses Mendelssohn including a German translation of the bible. The son of R. Tzvi Hirsch, R. Shaul (later called Berliner) became influenced by the reforms which Mendelssohn advocated. There was a universal desire by Jewry to break out of the Ghetto environment and its attitudes.

R. Shaul visited Levy family relatives in Italy who gave him a manuscript which they claimed had been held in the family and which was handed down from the RO"SH, R. Asher ben Yechiel, a middle ages Rabbi. R. Shaul started to work on the RO"SH manuscript. To his surprise he found several judgements listed there which seemed to be in accord with the philosophy now advocated by Mendelssohn. R. Shaul wrote a book 'Chassa D'Harsana (Fish Stew)' highlighting these parallels thereby suggesting that the judgements of the RO"SH written in the 13th century supported the reform philosophy of Mendelssohn in the 18th century, some 500 years later. There was a furore among orthodox Rabbis after 'Chassa D'Harsana' was published. Several rebuttals appeared in print some so sharp that they called R. Shaul a liar and the manuscript on which R. Shaul based 'Chassa D'Harsana' was declared a forgery. R. Tzvi Hirsch Berlin wrote letters from Lvov in support of his son but to no avail. R. Shaul Berliner was very upset by the accusations and took these to heart. His disappointment was total in that it seemed as if his book, which was meant to smooth the path for the reforms of Mendelssohn, in fact had the effect of focusing and indeed exacerbating the divisions in Jewry. He returned to London where his younger brother was Chief Rabbi of England, namely the Rabbi Solomon Herschel. The dispute surrounding R. Shaul probably had the effect that R. Solomon Herschel did not use the Berlin or the Berliner surname. R. Shaul is said to have been found dead in Epping Forest here to the north east of London having undertaken a fast in penitence during which he died.

We now turn to 1725 when the 1st Cherem (Anathema) of Prague was declared. The first signatory was the R. Yonatan Eibeschütz, and the last signatory of this Cherem was R. Aron Ber Wehle who was probably the grandfather of the leader of the Frankist Shabbateans one Aron Ber Wehle two generations later (see 'The Militant Messiah' by Arthur Mandel). During the time of this grandson Aron Ber Wehle there was a 2nd Cherem in Prague in 1799. It was read in all synagogues in Bohemia and Moravia at the Yom Kipur services of 1800. The 2nd Cherem signatories were the three Rabbis, R. Eleazar Fleckeles, R. Shmuel Segal Landau ben Yechezkiel

Landau and R. Michael Bachrach ben Shmuel Zanwil Bachrach. There were riots in the Prague ghetto and at the Jewish market place. The disturbances started at a funeral of one Mendel Gitchin who was suspected to have been a Frankist Shabbatean. The Chevra Kadisha (Burial Society) refused to turn out and to give him a burial. The civil police chief representing the Keiser of Austro Hungary started an enquiry into the disturbances. The grandson Aron Ber Wehle was said to have been the leader of the Prague Frankist Shabbateans. His brother Jonas Ber Wehle had a son-in-law, one Löw Enoch Hönig von Hönigsberg who submitted a written rebuff of the 2nd Cherem. It is a remarkable document. Hönig von Hönigsberg drew extensively from the writings of Moses Mendelssohn and established, at least in the eyes of the non Jewish members of the enquiry, that the Rabbis had created the discord because of their intransigence. The police chief threw R. Eleazar Fleckeles into jail for three days. He made it clear that the Rabbis were responsible for maintaining the peace in their communities and the Rabbis had to draw back and curtail their zeal. Public demonstrations would not be tolerated by the civil authorities. We are familiar today with intransigent religious Rabbis who attempt similarly to influence public policy. Mixing religion into public administration even when fully justified, it appears, was never a success.

Among the first batch of members of the JGSGB we had a member called Evelyn Wayley. She was from the Anglo-Jewish family Wayley Cohen (there was even a Lord Wayley Cohen). She had traced her family to a Samuel Wehle son of R. Aron Ber Wehle of Prague. Samuel Wehle came to Portsmouth and was a slopseller in 1787. She asked me, did I know how to connect him to a rabbi Aron Ber Wehle in Prague? The Wehle and Hönigsberg families were joined by several marriages and there is no doubt that they were Frankist Shabbateans.

When I excitedly tried to telephone Evelyn Wayley in December 1997 that I seem to have found the Prague connection I was told that she died a couple of weeks beforehand. I was too late, for whilst the connection was found to her ancestry she was already there with her ancestors.

The problem we face in the 21st century is highlighted by the genealogy of the Mendelssohn family, for a few generations later almost all of them converted to become Christians. We are all the products of their emancipation, which started in the 18th century, but this does not ensure our continuity as a nation. When I gave one of my first talks to the JGSGB in 1992/93 a lady member, Bella Fox brought to my attention a paper; Die Ahnen des Komponisten Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy by Gerhard Ballin from the journal *Genealogie, Deutsche Zeitschrift für Familienkunde*, Heft 3, März 1967. It took some nine years to subject this paper to the analysis you see in the new Mendelssohn diagram which I display here. Bella Fox was researching the connection of one of her families Wasserman to the Meisels, is she in the audience?

Moses Mendelssohn is shown in Gen. 11 of the Mendelssohn diagram. His frame is coloured red as he is a descendant of R. Shaul Wahl Juditch, 1540/1617, Venice/Brisk/Krakov, the reputed King of Poland for a day. The relationship is that of Mendelssohn's mother Rachel Sara Wahl, who is the great granddaughter of R. Meir Wahl, the eldest son of R. Shaul Wahl. By this relationship she is also related to the Horowitz family. These connections are derived from the Megale

Amukot and Horowitz diagrams of the Jewish Historical Clock. We do not know of the family connection of Mendelssohn's father Mendel, from whom the surname Mendelssohn is derived. Nor do we know how a scribe and teacher came to make such a well 'connected' match.

The in laws of Mendelssohn's son Abraham are from the family Jaiteles from Prague who figure on the MAHARA" L diagram and they connect to R. Yeshia Liberls, Gen. 16, Dayan of the Meisel Schul in Prague who d. there in 1644 also in that diagram. It is not too fanciful to assume that there is a connection between the Natan Feitel from Vienna in Gen. 15 and the R. Natan Feitel who wrote Drushim Lekol Chafetzim, I have shown him here in Gen. 17 and it is likely that the latter is the grandfather of the former. The R. Natan Feitel who wrote Drushim Lekol Chafetzim figures as a descendant of the Teomim family on the Horowitz diagram.

The same in laws of Mendelssohn's son Abraham are connected to the family of Wulffes and this brings us to the ancestor which Bella Fox and I have in common. He is R. Shimon Wolf Wilner, Gen. 16, in Dessau called Simcha Bonems Wilner, or as I originally listed him on the Megale Amukot Diagram as R. Zeev Wolf Maizels, b. Pinsk 1615, Vilnius 1640, 1655 escaped Moscowitim Pogrom to Hamburg and Halberstadt. In Dessau he became Elder of Jewish Council and d. 15.12.1682. His grandfather was R. Simcha Bonem Meizels who was the son-in-law of the famous RAM" A R. Moses Isserlis of Krakov. Here the paper gives details of the death of Golda, the RAM" A's first wife. This is additional information not previously known to me and leads to a correction of timing of the whole Meizel descendancy who move over one generation to the right. This also corrects anomalies on the Megale Amukot diagram and make R. Moshe Charif also move from Gen. 19 to Gen. 18. Similarly R. Efraim Zalman Shor of Shebershin also moves from Gen. 19 to Gen. 18. These corrections still have to be put right on the Megale Amukot diagram.

The discipline of adding the time dimension to generations each time not only improves the knowledge about these individuals, but it also means that I look at the individuals in the context of the time they lived in. R. Shimon Wolf Wilner is a 17th century man. Jews were affected by three seminal events that century;

1. The Chmelnitzki Pogrom in the Ukraine in the year 1648
2. The Swedish war of 1656
3. The Shabbatean fervour of 1666

R. Shimon Wolf Wilner was affected by the second and third event. In Vilnius he was known as R. Zeev Wulf Maizels, father-in-law of the SHA" CH, R. Shabbatei Katz, Gen. 15. Both flee with their families. The former to Dessau, the latter to Holeshov in Moravia. In Dessau the former converts to Christianity, we do not know the circumstances. The latter became the rabbi of Holeshov. It is not surprising that the SHA" CH now does not mention his father-in-law, the father of my ancestress Yente Maizels. The father-in-law prospers as a Christian but around 1664 when the Shabbatean fervour started he reconverts to Judaism and becomes R. Shimon Wulf Wilner adopting the toponym of the place he came from. He now marries again a widow and

awaits the day of messianic salvation. His conversion back to Judaism can be understood only in the context of the misguided Shabbatean fervour. For those of you who are interested more deeply in these statements I would recommend reading;

Shabbatei Sevi by prof. Gershon Sholem

Without an understanding of the history of that time it is difficult to understand the motives of the R. Shimon Wulf Wilner. But it puts into perspective the motives of Moses Mendelssohn some hundred years later. I come here to compare my cousin ancestor, the pathfinder, so to speak, of the Reform Movement in Judaism. Mendelssohn, the emancipator, He translated the bible into German for his sons in order that they should grow up understanding the concepts using a modern language of the country in which they lived. This brings me to the people highlighted on this diagram with green backgrounds. Indeed as they are also highlighted on the Megale Amukot diagram. One in particular is R. Tzvi Hirsch Berlin, Gen 11. I described him in some detail in my talk at the Los Angeles conference in July 1998. He was the grandson of the Chacham Tzvi, R. Tzvi Hirsch Ashkenazi, Gen 14. R. Tzvi Hirsch Berlin or Hart Lyon as he was known in London wrote testimonials both for the Mendelssohn translation and for the book which my great great grandfather R. Shlomo Honigwachs edited in the library of R. Efraim Zalman Margaliot, Gen.10 which was a book on the Gimatriot of the Megale Amukot who lived some 160 years earlier. These two books reveal a peculiar attitude to testimonials by R. Tzvi Hirsch Berlin. For he could not have held both as meriting a testimonial as they reveal a diametrically opposite view of Judaism. I am confused by my misguided ancestors for Mendelssohn was severely criticised for his translation of the bible by Mitnaged rabbis.

See Alexander Altman, Moses Mendelssohn a Biographical Study p. 482 et al.

Mendelssohn felt that the German translation was insufficient to render the flavour of meaning contained in the Hebrew original. He therefore hired a Hebrew teacher for his sons, R. Salomon Dubno who was commissioned to write a commentary in Hebrew of the translation. For the commentary written by R Salomon Dubno the famous chief R. of Prague R. Ezekiel Landau wrote a testimonial. When the Mitnaged rabbis remonstrated with R. Ezekiel Landau, he replied that Mendelssohn did not ask him to write a testimonial for the German translation but had he done so the testimonial would have been refused. Moses Mendelssohn was also criticised from the left, for some hundred years late Karl Marks referred to him as a Seichbeutel, a shallow purse. Here we are talking in English, all of us products of the emancipation which started in Mendelsssohn's time. What relevance has this to us today?

I came out of the camps of Germany in 1945 aged 16. I was very lucky to join my father in London, at least I had half a family. He too was a Shlomo Honigwachs, Gen. 4. I was sixteen and had not been to school for six years. After some six months we had a conversation about my education. And I outlined a programme of seven years, the primary problem was to learn English in order to be able to matriculate and enter university. My father let me explain at length saying:

“You will also have to learn Hebrew!”

I replied incredulously: “Why is that important at this stage, when I seem to have a mountain to climb.” And my father said:

“So you could say Kaddish after me!”

I have to say that I could not have produced *The Jewish Historical Clock* without the knowledge of Hebrew into which my wise father steered me.

I give below the references used for this talk:

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M. Honey, Gen. 3, July 2001