Sabato Morais, Social Activist

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Professor Corré, of blessed memory, was Emeritus Professor of Hebrew Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He served for eight years as spiritual leader of Congregation Mikveh Israel. This essay is based on the thirteenth Fromkin Memorial Lecture, delivered by Professor Corré in Milwaukee, on October 28, 1982. Research is based on the Sabato Morais Papers, in the archives of Congregation Mikveh Israel. This article appears in issue 3 of Conversations, the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. It also appears in issue 21 of Conversations.

A commercial house has collapsed; a savings fund has sunk; a mechanics' bank has burst, a life insurance company has become insolvent.... Men noted for their self possession appear bewildered. You asked for the reason of so painful a change, and the invariable answer was: "The stringency of the money market, brought about by unforeseen failures among us and abroad. That is enough to upset people's minds."

But for the Victorian language, this might have been written in 2008. In fact, it was declaimed in the Fall of 1893, and is the beginning of a sermon by Sabato Morais, minister of the Portuguese Jewish congregation Mikveh Israel in the city of Philadelphia. Morais is mainly remembered today as the Founder and first President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, but his place in American life has been somewhat neglected. The reason for this may be the fact that he cannot quite fit the role of hero of any of the major branches of American Jewish life today, Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform. Orthodox as he was in practice, he does not fulfill the role model of the talmudic sage, and has about him a somewhat assimilated air at which the strictly Orthodox might well look askance. For the Conservative, he is insufficiently innovative, too unwilling to take religious risks. And of Reform he was a lifelong opponent. Max Nussenbaum justly

called him a “champion of Orthodox Judaism” in his 1964 doctoral dissertation at Yeshiva University.

Morais was born in Leghorn, Italy in 1823 to a family of Sephardic Portuguese-Jewish descent, the third of nine children and the oldest son. His native language was Italian, and he acquired also a good knowledge of Spanish and French early in life; a great many of the two thousand extant letters addressed to him are in Italian. He was a favorite pupil of Abraham Baruch Piperno, one of the Jewish sages of Leghorn, and at the age of twenty-two was an applicant for the post of Hazzan, or cantor to the Sephardic congregation of London. The Hazzan among the Portuguese Jews was not required to have the quasi-operatic voice favored by the Ashkenazic German and Polish Jews. A sweet voice sufficed, but he was expected to have an intimate knowledge of the complex Jewish liturgy of which every word was individually chanted, and in particular to learn the tradition of his congregation so that he did not deviate from it in the slightest degree. He also had to have a high degree of expertise in the reading of the sacred scrolls. Such memorization normally took years of devoted effort, and few individuals had the skill and patience demanded. The young Morais was unsuccessful, since his lack of English told against him, but he made a great impression even so. The following is an excerpt from a letter sent by the authorities of the English congregation under date of November 18, 1845 to his Italian mentors, couched in the typical Victorian epistolary style:

The departure of Mr. S. Morais demands from us our best acknowledgment to you for having recommended to our notice so worthy, deserving an individual, for although he has not been the successful candidate for the office to which he aspired Justice claims of us that we should bear testimony to the very great satisfaction he afforded the congregation on the occasion of his public trial, and that he has from his general conduct and unassuming manners whilst here entitled himself not only to the regard of those who were interested in his favor but of all without exception.... he would do credit to any appointment which could be conferred upon him.

The London community did not forget him. A year later, a position opened for a teacher in their orphan school and they invited the young Italian to fill the post. He did so. In London he got to know and admire the Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini, and when the latter wished to travel to Europe in 1847, Morais lent him his passport so that Mazzini might avoid detection by the continental police. Of course, there were no photographs in those days. He soon developed a full command of the English language, and was prepared when a call came from the

Philadelphia congregation in 1850. The following year, Morais went to Philadelphia, where he served congregation Mikveh Israel for forty-seven years until his death in 1898. He became a much loved figure, and was in the habit of instructing young people without charge in Hebrew language and literature, as he had been instructed himself. Three of his pupils, Solomon Solis-Cohen, Cyrus Sulzberger and Cyrus Adler became prominent community leaders. All wrote to him and of him with warm affection.

Adler, who was a founder of the Jewish Publication Society, the American Jewish Historical Society, and the American Jewish Committee, and who served simultaneously as President of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and Dropsie College in Philadelphia, wrote to him in 1887:

The more the boys [of JTS] know you, the better for them ... I will receive a Ph.D. degree next Tuesday, an end impossible but for the help which you have given me from boyhood and which I never think of but with gratitude.

Solis-Cohen addressed him: "Dear friend and teacher" and signs: "affectionately your pupil." A San Francisco admirer sent his "respect and affection" to "my earliest friend in this country."

In everything he writes and does, Morais comes across as a warm, loving, eminently humane individual with self respect, yet remarkably free of egotism for a man in public life who was the recipient of much honor, including an honorary degree from the University of Pennsylvania. At no time does he bask in his Sephardic ancestry, as some of his brethren were wont to do, nor does he lay stress on Sephardic tradition in his addresses. Morais looked upon himself as a Jew without qualifiers, one who revered and loved the Jewish tradition and desired greatly to perpetuate it.

Clearly he came from a close, loving family, and its impress stayed with him all his life. Among a vast family correspondence, an extant letter from his father in Italian, written shortly before his death reads: "If I do not write to you it is not of my volition, but I suffer from irregularity of the pulse ... I send you all my paternal benediction."

Morais' considerateness is attested to by his finding time to send some stamps for the collection of a little great-niece, who responds with a charming letter in French. All sorts of unfortunates direct their appeals to him: a tubercular youth in the state penitentiary, a Corfiot woman seeking the vanished son of a friend, an Italian transient in the Pennsylvania hospital suffering from "a small mental

aberration." Morais threw nothing away. Referring to this epistolary flood he writes in 1894:

To acknowledge numerous letters is also a task not infrequently irksome. Still, in order not to appear rude, I have imposed upon myself the obligation of invariably answering them all, either verbally or in writing.

Morais was conscious of walking a tightrope vis-a-vis the public.

If he [the minister] is modest and reserved, he is styled unsociable; if he is accessible and easy, he is charged with too great a familiarity. If he is sincere and open, he is taxed with imprudence. If he denounces public transgressions he is too austere; if he deems it expedient to barely hint at them he is pusillanimous ... however elevated may be the character of the minister of religion, it is shapen in a human mould.

On a number of his addresses he writes self-deprecatory notes, for example, "Like all my early lectures it is faulty in diction and ideas." On another address he writes in Hebrew "I regret having composed it." Not infrequently he recycles old material; thus one is marked "altered, abridged, and corrected from an old lecture delivered twenty years before." Morais was also aware that his lectures, eloquent though they were, did not give universal satisfaction.

During nine months of the year, I give weekly instruction from this pulpit ... When the summer season begins, I generally cease speaking in the vernacular, and confine myself to the reading of the established ritual. That some would prefer my following the last named course at all times, I have reason to believe.

Despite Morais' polish and discretion, not too many years passed before he got into hot water in Philadelphia. In 1858 the Jewish world was shocked by the news that an Italian Jewish child, surreptitiously baptized by his nurse, had been kidnapped and taken off to be raised as a Christian. Appeals to the Pope met with the response: Non possumus, We can do nothing. The baptismal waters could not be wiped away, and Edoardo Mortara must be raised as a Christian despite his parents' pleas. Appeals were then made to the President of the United States to intervene and use his influence. The President refused, on the ground that this was an internal matter of a foreign power, involving foreign nationals. On the next Sabbath, when the point in the service was reached when the traditional prayer was recited for the President and the U.S. government, Morais pointedly omitted it. Apparently he felt that a President who would not stand up for civil rights was not worth praying for. The congregation was scandalized. The adjunta, as the

governing body of the synagogue is still called, met the very next day and demanded that he restore the prayer for the government, whether he agreed with their actions or not. On December 2, 1858, A. Finzi wrote him a letter marked "strictly private" alluding to "your refusal to recite the prayer for the members of the Government as you have hitherto done." He demonstrates rather tediously that the U.S. government is not dependent for its welfare on Morais' prayers and having exhausted that argument, turns nasty:

You are aware that the Adjunta can suspend you from office, which would only be a step to discharge ... You know that the Board can command a majority to any measure their wisdom may induce them to think correct ... are you prepared to be hurled from a position of pecuniary independence ... to one of unrequited labor in which you might find it difficult to earn a pittance?

After this affair blew over, and the President again got his prayerful due, Morais' penchant for expressing himself on civil rights again got him into trouble. On Thanksgiving, 1864, he gave an address in which he referred critically to the institution of slavery. I was unable to find his precise wording, but it seems that he expressed satisfaction at the absence of threats of sedition and secession in the North. Morais was clearly amazed at the violence of the reaction. The synagogue adjunta would brook no reference to this issue which had the country bitterly divided, and decreed that "henceforth all English lectures or discourses be dispensed with, except by particular agreement of the Parnas [President] made in writing." Despite Morais' protests, the gag rule held for about two months. Then some members petitioned the board, and on February 5, 1865, the board voted that the Revd. S. Morais deliver a religious discourse (the word religious is underlined!) on one Sabbath of each month, and any holiday. Immediately before the Passover that year Morais wrote: "I would now respectfully ask that you allow me to address the Congregation whenever I deem it fit." Morais never again indulged in grand gestures as in the Mortara case, but he did establish his freedom to speak on social justice in the pulpit, and he did so frequently. Morais was addressing the most influential Jews in a major American city, and he extended that forum through reports of his addresses which were frequently published, and, as we shall see, he involved himself directly in other ways too. Morais' stand on slavery was rewarded by an honorary membership in the Union League of Philadelphia.

Two major areas of social justice concerned him deeply. One was the issue of religious and racial prejudice and its natural follower, oppression. This included both crass discrimination, and the subtler pressures involved in the movement to

make America a Christian country not only notionally, but as a matter of law. Paradoxically, Morais sometimes took a stronger stand on discrimination against non-Jewish groups than Jewish. Why this was may be seen in the notorious Hilton-Seligman affair of 1877. On May 31, 1877, the wealthy Jewish banker, Joseph Seligman went to the Grand Union Hotel at Saratoga for the tenth consecutive year. On requesting his room he was told: "Mr. Seligman, I am required to inform you that Mr. Hilton has given instructions that no Israelites shall be permitted to stop at this hotel." Seligman wrote a stinging letter to Hilton advising him to get out of the hotel business, since he was losing money, not because Jews were staying in his hotels, but because he did not know how to run them. A loud clamor broke out in the press. Morais was asked to speak up, but in this instance he was ambivalent. Yes, discrimination was bad. But the eastern watering places were full of ostentation and display, not to mention the infraction of the Jewish Sabbath and dietary laws that accompanied these unbecoming qualities. Moreover, Seligman had had associations with the Ethical Culture movement which made his Jewish affiliation questionable. Morais was not alone in his feelings. I. M. Wise's mouthpiece in Cincinnati, the American Israelite declared:

If he wants no Jews, let him have none ... keep away from Saratoga, keep away from Long Beach ... they cannot imagine in Europe that the watering places here are the elysium of empty heads and shattered brains, and hearing of the intolerance and stupidity they must be led to think we are a nation of fools and madmen. Stay away from those places, save with your honor also the honor of the American republic.

For once, the arch-reformer Wise and the traditionalist Morais saw eye-to-eye. Quite different and unequivocal was Morais' reaction to the Chinese question. Morais, gentle soul, observed that the Mosaic law prohibited muzzling an ox while it worked to avoid causing it pain. How then, he wondered, can human beings inflict deliberate suffering on one another? The address that Morais gave on this subject is extant among his papers, but it has some pages missing and it is best to quote it as it was reported in the press. The report conveys well the passion of this remarkable statement:

He animadverted upon the conduct of the lawless towards the unfortunate aliens of the Mongolian race on the Pacific coast. He termed that demeanor atrocious and the conniving of local officials infamous. He saw in every drop of blood of the Chinese spilt by ruffians a blot of the escutcheon of Liberty. In his mind a racial persecution in this country was a deep humiliation and an insult to the great of old who labored and fought to establish a government broad enough to cover

every human being that seeks its protection. Mr. Morais alluded to the Restrictive act limiting the admission of Chinese. He considered it an outrage against a nation of three hundred millions with whom we are at peace, and the bill now said to be in course of preparation to forbid the Unites States to Chinese altogether he stigmatized as an indignity revolting to every right thinking man. He held that if even all the inhabitants of Central Asia who come to our shores ... were as depraved as their enemies describe them, no justification could be found for the barbarities to which they are subjected ... he knew that the writings of [China's] philosophers and moralists do not suffer in comparison with those of nations which claim to be the sole representatives of civilization.

In the original sermon Morais censures by name President Chester Arthur for sanctioning prejudice in yielding to pressure from unscrupulous politicians. The newspaper report doubtless deemed it discreet to omit this. There is no doubt that Morais had established his right to speak out. It is clear moreover that Reform Judaism did not have a corner on the issue of social justice, despite the grandiloquence of the "Pittsburgh Platform," which laid great stress on this matter and was promulgated at this time. Morais spoke too on the sufferings of the Armenians. After pointing out that there were conflicting reports as to what had happened, he continues:

We cannot too strongly condemn a barbarity that pushes a people into the Mosque at the point of the bayonet. I have read protests from Christendom. I have noticed likewise that in Chicago Rabbis have made their voices swell the sound of these protests against the ruthlessness of the Turks. Nothing new. Jews will always side with the persecuted, and not only side with them, but try speedily to come to their deliverance.

He goes on to cite Moses Montefiore's help for the Maronites in 1860, and Baron de Hirsch's help for both sides in the Russo-Turkish war of 1878. He then protests reports that President Cleveland's intervention was because America is a Christian country. America should support all the oppressed. He continues:

Much as I wish to wipe off from memory words that pierced like a pointed steel, I cannot forget that on a day when by invitation, I pleaded before the members of the Episcopal brotherhood the cause of my oppressed brethren in Russia, I received a most cutting rebuff. I was relating how a Jewish lad had his face and hands burnt with hot irons for having stolen an apple, when the Reverend Dr. McConnel ... most uncharitably remarked that in a Christian country, a minority that keeps aloof from the majority must expect persecution. What a companionable guest at the table of Ximenes and Torquemada that Episcopal

clergyman would make! How palatable the repast seasoned with invectives against those stiffnecked Jews who need the thumb screw and the hot iron to bring them to the foot of the cross!

Ah, my brethren, I say it again. Take care of your own. For prejudice is stalking abroad and would tread on us ... Still be on the alert by reason of ineradicable prejudice. Take care of your own, my brethren!

The attitude of the Reverend Dr. McConnel was not at all uncommon. As the author of Black Like Me declared: "The first rule of racism is to blame the victim."

Morais concerned himself actively with the weal of Jews in foreign lands. A letter to Charles Emory Smith, minister to Russia from 1890 to 1892, elicited a courteous reply assuring him that the imperial government intended no new repressive measures against the Jews. He declared that Morais' representations were on "a subject in which no representative of the United States could fail to feel a deep interest." He concludes: "I recall our personal meetings with great pleasure and well remember your high standing among your people."

Morais was also in touch with Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, a New York Sephardic Jew, who was appointed U.S. consul in Bucharest in 1870 and attempted to further the emancipation which had been promised to Rumanian Jews by the 1856 Treaty of Paris. On January 27, 1874, he wrote to Morais:

I am happy to tell you that my heavy task appears to be in a more promising prospect than ever, and that I cherish the firm belief before very long of accomplishing the emancipation of our long suffering brethren.

Peixotto left Bucharest two years later, his firm belief still unfulfilled.

Another aspect of religious problems was the desire on the part of many believing Christians to emphasize the Christian character of the United States, despite the efforts of the founding fathers to separate Church and State. Jacob Ezekiel, a friend of Morais who later moved to Cincinnati and served as secretary of the Hebrew Union College, took President John Tyler to task in 1841 for using the phrase "Christian people" in a proclamation on the death of President Harrison. Tyler sent him a courteous reply in which he disavowed any intention to offend, and told Ezekiel that "your voice and the voices of all your brethren will ascend to our common father."

Morais was seriously disturbed by efforts to have Sunday recognized in the Constitution as a day of rest, as well he might be, since the provisions of the

proposed amendment, which he quotes, were very severe. This decreed that "no person or corporation shall perform any secular labor, nor ... engage in any play, game, amusement or recreation on that day." All assemblies, except for religious worship, were to be forbidden. Penalties were to range up to one thousand dollars, and if one allows for a century of inflation, it appears that the penalty was stiff indeed. Morais condemned the attempt to "chain the State to the clogging wheels of the Church." He declared that the Constitution "will cover beneath her ample folds all that seek protection from the abuse of power, but never will she dictate tyrannical terms to those whom she has promised shelter ... Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

The republican sentiments that were his in his youth came flooding back when he heard statements such as: "official positions and public trusts should be restricted by constitutional enactment to persons in sympathy with the high moral aims of the government." Such thinking, in his view could make "America a scourge in the hands of the crafty to tear the lives of the powerless, whether they be Jews or Christians."

Morais was greatly incensed also by attempts to convert Jewish children to Christianity by deception. This became a particular problem when large numbers of Russian and Polish Jews arrived in Philadelphia in the 1880s and subsequently, in the wake of deteriorating conditions in Eastern Europe, settling in the southern part of the city. Missionaries saw the possibility of evangelizing among these poor, Yiddish-speaking Jews, sometimes using means that were less than totally honest. In one instance, a school was set up which purported to be a Jewish school in which Hebrew was taught, and the children were offered rewards for attendance. While there, unknown to their parents who did not speak English, the children were indoctrinated in the tenets of Christianity. Morais decided to investigate. Accompanied by a friend who knew his way around, Morais slipped into the school and observed what was occurring. The principal of the school became aware of his presence and was furious. She termed it an intolerable intrusion, and threatened to call the police. Morais withdrew. "I did not put her to the test," he comments. "In that instance I considered discretion the better part of valor." Morais then took to waiting outside the school, asking the children their names, and alerting the parents to the fact that the school was not what they thought it was. This avoidance of confrontation was typical of Morais, and stood in the mainstream of a long tradition of Jewish quietism. He was ready to persuade and to cajole, but always wanted to avoid violence, or what he termed "scandal."

The Russian immigrants brought other problems in their train. Although Philadelphia prided itself on being the "city of homes" and did not have the tenements typical of New York City, sweated labor became commonplace in Philadelphia too. Morais declared:

Iniquity alone could have conceived the sweating system, so prolific of evils—a system stunting the growth of children employed under it, bending with premature old age men and women in the prime of life, tainting the atmosphere with foul vapors ... Families vegetating in holes, poisoned with pestilential air, stitching and stitching and stitching, twelve or fourteen hours a day to receive what does not suffice to procure a scanty meal.

Morais' solution for these severe social problems was, it must be confessed, simplistic. The worker should give a fair day's labor and the employer should pay a reasonable wage. Morais was convinced of the ennobling character of labor, and horrified at the thought of the socialist and anarchist tendencies, all too patently linked to atheism, which were unseen riders on the immigrant ships. "Communism!" he cries out at one point. "Horror of horrors! Communism!" Morais' attitude to work was demonstrated by his strong support of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, founded by French Jews in 1860, one of the main aims of which was to give useful work training to young Jews in backward countries. In an unusual outburst, Morais condemns bitterly the action of the Rebbe of the Belz sect of the Hasidim ("miscalled" according to Morais) for making a special trip to Vienna to ask the authorities to keep out these secular schools:

Such is the profanation of the name of God brought about by a pretentious sect that assumes the appellation of "pious" and gives their chief the title of "righteous." A piety which hugs the chains of ignorance, a righteousness which invites persecution.

From our standpoint we can see that the Rebbe of Belz knew very well what he was about. Schools of this type brought with them the French language and secular culture. In North Africa they brought about a rapid destruction of the traditional religious orientation of the community, and this was precisely what the Rebbe wanted to avoid. It is interesting to observe too, that in his fervor Morais slipped into a kind of thinking not unlike the Episcopalian reverend gentleman he condemned. "A righteousness which invites persecution" comes perilously close to condemning the victim who wanted above all to preserve his culture intact.

Arguments over the merits of secular and trade schools were purely academic for the immigrant workers of South Philadelphia. Ankle deep in half-sewn pantaloons

they wanted only to improve their miserable lot. In 1886 there was a strike widespread in the United States in an attempt to secure an eight-hour workday. Two years later a Jewish Tailors' and Operators' Association was organized in Philadelphia and painful events followed. Their first strike was a fiasco, collapsing in two days. Before the strikers were permitted to return to work, they were required to take an oath on the Bible that they would never again strike. Morais became deeply involved in efforts to act as an honest broker in subsequent strike action. Morais' son, Henry S. Morais, asserts that his father settled the 1890 strike with the help of George Randorf, a young man who had useful language skills. Henry Morais hints darkly at the doctrinaire background of the strike:

The cause of the unfortunate workers has, invariably, been injured by the domination of labor agitators, some of whom are rabid Anarchists, and would instil poisonous views into the minds of the untutored.

Max Whiteman, the historian of Philadelphia Jewry, gives a very positive assessment of Morais' beneficent influence on the strike. Able to bridge the gap between manufacturer and worker, he

disarmed the anarchists with compassion and thereby gained so much support among the Jewish workers that the anarchists were reluctant to outrage Jewish sensibilities further by irreligious activities such as a projected pork feast at a Yom Kippur Ball.

Morais saw little help for the oppression of Jews in the incipient Zionist movement. He does indeed defend Theodor Herzl, the father of Political Zionism, who, he says, is neither a Utopian nor a fanatic. One can see the struggles he had with Herzl's plan to obtain land in Palestine by the changes he made in his text. First he wrote as follows:

to go in search of means to facilitate the acquisition of a spot where the systematically degraded of Abraham's progeny may breathe freely is a philanthropic design.

Apparently he was unhappy with the choice of the word "acquisition" because, I suggest, it might militate against his idea, firmly rooted in tradition, that Israel was to wait for the Messiah, and not hasten the end. So he toned down "acquisition" to "securing." But this was still too strong, implying perhaps (God forbid!) some kind of violent action, and so he substituted "recognized purchase." But then, he must have asked himself, can Jews be safe with a recognized purchase? And so he settled on "guaranteed purchase," which apparently fulfilled

his criteria of security and non-violence. Morais normally did not make fair copies of his addresses, and when he gets into sensitive areas, it is possible to see him painfully arriving at a position in his erasures and alterations. Whether one regards this as an honest striving for a consistent viewpoint, or a difficulty in making up his mind, is a question. It seems that Morais' ultimate conclusion was that Zionism was a pipe dream. In response to a Zionist lecture delivered by Dr. Friedenwald of Baltimore to the Mikveh Israel Association in Philadelphia he declares: "We still believe that the renationalization of our people is still in the remote future."

In contrast to his modern viewpoint on racial discrimination, Morais is very traditional in his attitude to women. He explains the Orthodox separation of men and women in the synagogue as "solely and simply an endeavor to allow the mind to be centered on the worship, and prevent, as far as possible, its being directed to human objects mutually attractive." It is interesting that Morais stresses the mutual nature of the attraction, since it raises the question why women should not officiate and men be the onlookers, but perhaps it is too much to expect him even to entertain such a radical idea. In another address he comments that

Woman occupies a station, which, unless she forfeits it by urging it to extremes, will ever, as at present, enable her to carry into practice the distinguishing traits of her character, scattering around the path she treads the seeds of knowledge and charity.

He here utters a clear warning that woman should not exceed the bounds that nature has laid down.

Morais tried throughout his life to follow his principles of adherence to humanity, justice, and true religion as he saw it. Yet, as he felt death draw near, he was not happy. Just ten months before he died, he declares in a letter, "Life has never been to me a delightful gift from my parents, and that for reasons which it were idle and foolish to relate." On the face of it Morais' unhappiness may appear strange. One might say his life had been rather successful. He was widely respected, honored, and loved. He had children who looked up to him, the fruit of a seemingly happy marriage. He retained his mental faculties unimpaired until he had a stroke which took him with merciful speed. I should like to offer some tentative reasons for his depression, recognizing that there can be no guarantee of their accuracy.

I must preface my suggestions by outlining what seems to me to have been the Jewish recipe for survival during the long night of the Diaspora. Jewish militarism

died in Masada, destroyed by the superior might of Rome. It was replaced, it seems to me, by a threefold strategy. The first was a devotion to a literary legacy including especially, but not exclusively, the Talmud, which buoyed the spirits of the Jew under next to impossible circumstances, and which assured him of his special relationship with God, interrupted, but not ended, and ensured him a glorious restoration at some imminent date. This was the theoretical underpinning of Jewish survival. The Jew might be spat upon in the street, but he had a secret which kept his ego intact and his will unbent, and which he daily mulled over in his books. Despite all appearances to the contrary he could declare with the Bible of Israel:

Who is like unto thee?

A people saved of the Lord

Who is thy helpful shield

And glorious sword.

Though thine enemies are deceitful to thee,

Thou shalt tread on their high places. (Deuteronomy 33:29)

Second, the Jew maintained a low profile. The stooping gait which is characteristic of the Jewish stereotype was not because of a burden of care or worn out observances, but rather to avoid any missiles that might be whizzing overhead. Third, the Jew learned to make himself useful, if not indispensable, by honing skills in language, communications and commerce which permitted his oppressor to hate him as much as he pleased, but tolerate him because he had to. As we well know, this threefold strategy did not always work—the long list of massacres of Jews is testimony to that—but it was the best that could be done under the circumstances.

Now Morais was no innovator; he hewed faithfully to these principles. He evinced and tried to inculcate in others a deep love of Jewish sacred literature and espoused the life style which it displayed as a model. He avoided scandal and confrontation and tried, like Moses Montefiore, whom he greatly admired, to improve the lot of his fellows by persuasion and cajoling. He believed firmly that the Jew should be a useful, productive citizen and supported efforts to train young Jews in appropriate skills.

During his life in Philadelphia, Morais witnessed the total breakdown of this millennial strategy for Jewish survival. He saw the loved Talmud burned, not literally by non-Jews as had so often happened in the past ineffectually, but metaphorically by Jews. The Reform movement in Judaism which he had always opposed, without scandal of course, was riding high, destroying the first pillar of the survival strategy I have delineated. He cries out:

Forty-one years I have labored to raise a generation of consistent Israelites, but now that I have seen the departure from earth of nearly all whom I first met in March of 1851, I hear their successors call Moses antiquated, and the rabbis besotted ... Alas for the ears doomed to listen to profanity ... Oh for a reaction, oh for a reawakening of the Jewish spirit.

It pained him deeply that a Jewish convention held in Milwaukee flouted dietary laws, and he expressed satisfaction that such things did not happen in Philadelphia.

Moreover the pillars of low profile and usefulness were not functioning any more either. With the sharp decline in religious clout under the onslaught of Darwinism and new scientific discoveries, which seemed to attack the very foundations of religion, the charter of anti-Jewish feelings was rewritten. The writings of such racist theoreticians as Wilhelm Marr and Houston Stewart Chamberlain diverted these feelings from their religious context, and took away from the Jew the escape route through conversion that he had previously had. Judaism could no longer be shaken off. It was as undeniable as the color of one's skin. It was a racial characteristic. The Dreyfus trial, which was an active issue in the last years of Morais' life, symbolized the crumbling of these two pillars of Jewish survival. Here was a Jew of modest attainments and even more modest ambitions, who wanted nothing more than to be a useful, docile servant of the French Republic. Despite that, he was broken simply because he was a Jew, and all who rose in his defense, including Emile Zola, were mercilessly disposed of. One must, I think, read some of the anti-Semitic French writing of that period to comprehend the degree to which human beings are capable of detesting other human beings whom they do not even know. Only in this context can we understand the logical outcomes of these events, the Nazi Holocaust of the 1940s on the one hand, and the new kind of Jewish activism and intransigence which have so shocked a world still used to the type of Jewish quietism that Morais symbolizes.

I would speculate, then, that Morais' bitterness of soul was due to his realization that the traditional paths to which he had devoted his life could be trodden no longer. The social justice for which he longed was not to be achieved by

passionate but always gentlemanly admonitions, and waiting patiently for the Messiah. It was to be done through strikes and boycotts and flaming headlines screaming "J'accuse!" and through the "renationalization of our people," as he called it. These measures were to be coupled with grim confrontations with others who had their own claims to the Jewish patrimony.

Whether the patient, moderate voice of a Morais has any place in our own time is perhaps one of the major questions we face. Let me conclude with his comment on the biblical injunction to "let thy brother live with thee." He declares:

The common adage "Live and let live" ... may seem liberal enough to some, perhaps too liberal in this age of unscrupulous competition, but it falls far below the mark when measured by the Jewish standard of righteousness ... When I am asked to "let my brother live with me" I understand that I may not push him aside, so that I may walk more at large, but that I must make room for him ... "

Morais understood that the bedrock of social justice is the brotherhood of mankind, and that this recognition carries with it the positive duty to make room actively for our fellow human beings. It is a message that has lost none of its freshness, and it speaks as much to our generation as to his.