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SHOLEM ASCH

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Statement

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Lecture at Columbia University,  
N.Y. October, 1952



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## THE BOOK REPORT

# Sholem Asch: Up From Oblivion

BY ROBERT KIRSCH  
Times Book Critic

Sholem Asch is hardly remembered nowadays, condemned to an undeserved oblivion, partly by a change in reading taste, more so because at the end of his long career he incurred the wrath of powerful Yiddish critics and newspapers for writing a series of historical novels in which Jesus, Paul and Mary were sympathetically portrayed, which emphasized and explored the religious ties linking Jews and Christians.

Such an ecumenical view was premature. Asch was accused of apostasy, a charge so ludicrously wrong that after Asch's death in 1957, the newspapers which had once exoriated him, the Yiddish Daily Forward and The Day, paid him tribute. "He contributed to our literature much that is rich and lovely. Against that Asch," an editorial in The Day ran, "we have sinned more than he sinned against us. All the stories that were spread about his apostasy were lies." Even the Forward, which under Abraham Cahan had lacerated Asch for his "Christianizing" books, carried a memorial tribute.

Too little, too late. But Asch is posthumously fortunate to receive the attention of a scholar of Ben Siegel's abilities. Dr. Siegel, who teaches literature at Cal Poly Pomona, has written the first critical biography of the author, **The Controversial Sholem Asch: An Introduction to His Fiction** (Bowling Green University Popular Press, Bowling Green, Ohio 43404: \$4.95, paperback; \$12.95, hardbound) with scrupulous fairness and some considerable empathy.

This is, as the subtitle indicates, only a beginning of possible studies of this prolific writer, perhaps the first Yiddish writer to find a substantial English-speaking audience. I hope this book will recruit a new generation of readers for the man who has been called the "Yiddish Dickens," the "Yiddish Maupassant," even the "Yiddish Gorky," who was proposed as worthy of the Nobel Prize for literature by no less a critic than Clifton Fadiman. Only a few of his novels are still in print, "Three Cities," "Salvation," "Moses," and one of his plays, "God of Vengeance," which with its harsh evocation of the seamy side of Jewish life stirred the first resentment of Jewish circles.

It wasn't the last. The self-proclaimed judges of what was acceptable or unacceptable in the canon of Jewish

literature were, most of them, not religious Jews at all. They could not pronounce any sort of *cherem* (excommunication) on Asch but they held the power of the Yiddish press and during a time of persecution and tension they did not hesitate to use it. Asch could not, after the bestselling "The Nazarene" (1939), stem the tide of attack. With "The Apostle" (1943) and "Mary" (1949), his journalistic enemies denied him any outlet in their pages.

He wrote some pieces for the *Freiheit*, a Communist paper, although he himself was not a Communist or even sympathetic to communism, and this brought him under attack by another would-be arbiter of expression, Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who pressed Asch repeatedly. "Somewhere I had to be printed," he said. "After all, I am a Yiddish writer."

### Extraordinary Success

He was a vigorous, vivid, prolific writer, a born storyteller, fascinated by every aspect of life, generous, brave, outspoken. "It is the spirit of the Jewish faith kept alive through the ages that I must describe," he wrote. And he accepted without reservation the obligation of the storyteller to engage, entertain, satisfy his readers.

It is fair to say, as Siegel does, that much of the attack in editorials, pulpits and magazines came from rancor and envy. Asch was extraordinarily successful in every form he tried—novels, plays, short stories, essays. His subject matter was both realistic and romantic, bridged the gap between the great Yiddish writers of the golden age, Sholom Aleichem and Peretz, and the literature of the larger world. He was the first Yiddish novelist to gain a reputation outside the Yiddish community. The only other writer comparable in that sense is Isaac Bashevis Singer.

He wanted recognition. And when rejection came instead, it embittered him. He wandered in his later years to England, to Israel, harassed and unhappy. But he never stopped writing or defending himself against the charge of apostasy. Outraged and broken, he wrote to a faithful friend, "I shall be grateful all my life to everybody who helps to destroy the terrible apostasy libel against me." Dr. Siegel does that effectively, and gives Asch a balanced judgment on his literary attainments. "Much maligned and undervalued in life, Sholem Asch, as man and artist, merits—if not accolades—at least respectful attention from present readers and critics."

And Asch speaks effectively in his own defense: ". . . I have no other ambition than those which are purely literary and artistic. . . . I do not choose the themes that inspire me . . . They come looking for me. If you like, call it the holy spirit. I don't believe you can write books without the holy spirit . . . Who will forbid me to give expression to the great artistic vision that dominates me when I see what the Jewish spirit has created?"

The deepest issue is one which writers and artists of all minority groups must face, service to their art or service to a cause. Asch instinctively opted for the route of a free expression even if it led "into fields which Jews have not been accustomed to tread." In exploring this tabooed ground he served the cause of Jewish literature far better than any of his critics.

## SHOLEM ASCH — Statement

It is my deepest belief that just as I have a share in the God of Israel through my faith in Him, that I stand under His authority and am included in the promise of redemption, so my Christian brother has his equal share in the God of Israel, stands equally under the authority and is included equally in the promise of redemption. For he is the son of Israel equally with me; his faith has made him a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; my rights are his; and I have a share in his religious values as he has a share in mine. Basing (?) themselves on this concept of equality, the sons of every faith must justify themselves in works. Man's ladder to God is a ladder of works; God must be the ultimate expression of our relationship with each other on earth.

It is my deepest belief that man has been chosen by God's grace from among all creatures. Apart from the intelligence which nature has given to every creature, and which is included in (its ?) nature and limited to its objective and condition, man alone among creatures possesses a soul which is a part of the endowment from above. Through his soul man stands in mystic contact with heaven. By means of his soul man can acquire an intellectual initiative (and) pause which are outside the competence of nature. Drives from the highest inspiration of the Divinity, are not remedied (?) to the objective and condition. God guides every individual destiny through the inspiration of the soul. This soul-inspiration is given to each one and not only to the elect, so that every one may, in the exercise of his free will, reach to the higher reason which is the supreme level of the Holy Spirit.

Besides this point of view, it is further my profoundest conviction that the democratic principle, in the social system not less than in faith, is God's especial gift to man. In the light, in the act of grace, which God performed for man, in choosing him among all creatures, the democratic principle is interwoven with faith and cannot be separated from God. In having been chosen by God, we became the children of God; our sons are (yea of) the law of God, all of us and not just a few individuals. Any other relationship, as between us and God, or as between ourselves, would contradict the will of the Divinity and would be incompatible with all that has been given to the Jews by Moses and the prophets and all that has been given to the Christians by Jews and the Apostles. The democratic principle is all the law fulfilled in one word, even in these: You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Galations 5:14). This is the foundation which, together with the love to our God, was given through Moses, the prophets, the sages, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Apostles. Thy neighbor as thyself, does not mean that you must be mild in your dominion over him; it means that you shall not have dominion over him. He is a son of liberty, not less than you. The relationship between you and him, can be built only in a system which assumes the identity of your rights. This is the democratic principle. And as the democratic principle is the will of God in the relationship between man and man, it is equally His will in the relationship between man and God.

It is not in the heavens; the Divine law was not given to the angels but for us who are of the earth. It lies before us like a moth-eaten book. The measure is in our hands. It has not been confined to the spiritual autocrats who arrogate to themselves the right to intercept God for all others and to attribute their selfness to Him so that he may be a participant in their sins. Not faith speaks but works, and in accordance with them will be judged.

Hence I believe profoundly that there is no love of God without love of man. Service to mankind, it is in my view, the highest service to the Divinity. But service to mankind

must not be seen in the throwing of crumbs to the poor; because we are equal in our faith in God, so we must be equal in our faith in man. We must work out a world order which shall rest upon equal distribution of labor and rewards. The right to have this, must not remain an empty gesture in our Declaration of Independence. It must be incorporated in the administrative duties of the state. It must be interpreted in the material sense to which men are bound to their nature. In food, in clothing, in shelter, in the care of the aged, in our regard for widows, for the sick and the weak, all these must become a cardinal obligation for the state in its administration. The inner security of our citizen must become the cornerstone of our independence and freedom. It must become an obligation like external security, not because we regard such an injustice as the most potent instrument of the devil, though it is indeed exactly that; but because without that obligation our professions of faith are as empty as... oaths.

This further, my profoundest belief: that we must lead a life in faith; that is, we must become God which we undertook to be, a holy people. We can be a holy people only in a pure ethical life, a life ruled by laws and commandments. But no law and commandment, though they have a thousand eyes and though they seem to control all our acts can purify and sanctify us if the heart of man does not sanctify his life. The heart of man is a filter for all his acts and thoughts. If the heart is sound, man knows that his eyes joy, his bonds are not with dissoluteness and the free play of unconquerable passion, but with purity, with modesty and with restraint. There is no level of corruption from which man cannot redeem himself (by) the exercise of his free will; and whenever he makes an effort at such a redemption, he can be certain of help from above. For God's act of creation was not single and unique; it is a continuity of relationship through the individual destiny.

I believe therefore that for every individual there is salvation no matter how low he has sunk. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, said the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and life (Ezekiel 18:23)? The heart of man is bound to Divinity, to the relationship of Divinity. To the darkest and most horrible retreats to which man has withdrawn from the Divinity, a ray of the Divinity penetrates. And for this reason, we must never despair of a man, much less of a group which is temporarily lost to the Divinity. However deep a group has sunk, we must continue to pray for it and to help it with our desires and sympathies. And no matter how deeply we feel that we have been wronged by such a group, we must exhort ourselves to purify our hearts from bitterness.

We live once in our physical creation; we have become human in our hunger for the Divinity. The drink of God which was lifted to our lips by the Authority has enabled us to mount the ladder of Jacob which rises from earth to heaven. If we will endure and continue the upward path, we will attain the true salvation of a world which stands under the authority of God through a single universal redeemer. The renewal of faith in the divine force of our moral values as our sole hope in the darkness of our night, is what I would wish to submit to a suffering humanity.

It is America, which has been safe from the worst terrors of the night, which has not been corrupted with the cynicism which has been the undoing of Europe. It is America, young and powerful, blossoming in the virginity of fate, which must become the leading spirit among the nations. It is America, the land which has taken me in among the many other homeless ones as a child of her own, which I would like to see as a light to the Gentiles, leading the world back out of the night into the authority of the one and only God.

## SHOLEM ASCH — Part 1

Before I tell you what I have to tell you—I don't know what—I would like to ask you two favors, two big favors. First thing, you should have patience with me. It happens I started to write in my own language, in Yiddish, very early in my youth, when I was twenty years old. All my thinking, all that I see, all that I can grasp and digest, is in my own language. A language for a writer is his instrument. You can be a composer only for one instrument. If you play the same thing on a piano or on a fiddle, you are not a composer; a composer has to be only in one. My Yiddish language is my instrument! I am thinking in Yiddish; and I have to translate my ideas and my thoughts into English; and I am not used to speak in English. Please, probably it will be that I will not be able to express myself; I will make mistakes. Have patience with me.

Secondly, I don't know whether you are religious or not. I came here tonight with a prayer in my heart. My prayer was: My God, don't let me speak tonight in spite,

I do not owe you a thing! (In Hebrew...) "I didn't take from you a nut that small" (Samuel). I don't owe you a thing! I don't owe you, the Jewish people a thing! Nobody has taught me to be a writer. My father didn't send me to universities. What I am, I am—everybody knows. I didn't hide a thing. And I stay by every word that I have spoken in my books—in The Nazarene and in The Apostle and in Mary. Take it or leave it. I don't need to apologize to anybody.

I wrote these books, you know why? Because I wanted to write; I must write: I had to write; and no court could have forbidden me to write! I paid the sole penalty for it; and I have been prepared to pay more! They have spread against me a whispering campaign: I baptized! I wrote these books because I wanted to gain money and to get recognition from the goyim (non-Jews).

All Jewry, especially in America, has been sitting and counting my accounts; how much money I'm making from these books. My dear friend from my childhood, Avrum Reisin, the great Jewish poet, told me he was sitting in a cafe and he said: "You know that Sholem Asch is a millionaire; he has ten thousand dollars in the bank." (Laughter) My friends, I have never made a living from Yiddish literature. I have been recognized by the goyim not for The Nazarene, but for my first book that I wrote, Shtetle (The Little Town). I was recognized by the great Russian literature—probably there are people here who remember these times—and my books have been published in Temanya (?), in Zhikovnik (?), together with Gorky, with Andreyev, with Chekhov. My plays, from the beginning—The Day of Zion, God of Revenge (God of Vengeance)—they were played all over Russia, all over Germany—Max Reinhardt—all over the world.

It was only one short time that I was dependent on Jewish literature. This was in the War, in the First World War. My connections were cut off with Germany and with Russia; and I had to come to America. I didn't want to come to America! And I had to work in the Forward (a Yiddish language newspaper); and Abe Cahan, (in Hebrew) blessed be his memory, was my boss. I had a wife and four children; I had to make a living. Besides, I was interested in relief work: I was the Vice-president of the People's Relief Committee, The Joint Distribution Committee, like everybody knows; and I had to make a living from the Forward.

I brought with me and I started to write, when I came to America, in 1914, the beginning of my book, Mottke the Thief. When the War broke out in 1914, I felt that the War was in everyone of us; and I wanted to write a book how the world wants to make war with a child. The book was published in the Forward, and it made a success with the readers. And my dear friend, Mr. Cahan insisted I should write another Mottke Ganef and another Mottke Ganef.

In 1918 I was sent by the "Joint" as a commissioner to Europe; the great Ukrainian pogroms had started and I had witnessed some. I came back with an idea that it's the time

of...in the 16th Century,—the 17th Century—of the great pogroms; and two great writers wrote of these things. The great Russian writer, Gogol, wrote Taras Bulba, in which he tells of this period and in an awful anti-semitic way he shows how the Jews have, in an awful way—. And Sintevitch, the great Polish writer, wrote of this same period, and has given the picture of the Poles. So I thought, I am not Gogol, and I am not Sintevitch; I will write the Jewish point of view of this period; and I started to write Kiddush Ha-Shem (for the Glory of the Name of God).

I remember my books used to be published in installments in the Forward every Shabbath (Saturday). All of a sudden the installment doesn't come in; it was not published. I went to the Forward. Mr. Cahan has invited me to his cabinet and asked me, "Why this foolish writing of the 'alter sheinitz'? Why are you writing about those old things to outsiders?" And I tell him, "I'm tired of these office things"; and he stopped the publication. Then it was protested and he published it in pieces (installments). The book became a classic among the Jewish people. And I'll teach, I'll be allowed to Jerusalem—to Palestine—even with all the rumors that I'm baptized. The books are taught in every school in Israel, published by Divir (publishing house) with funds for children's editions. Veiter (in Yiddish: proceed)! And if I had to remain in America, I saw that it's dangerous for me to stay in America. I had to make a living. I was dependent on the Forward. You have to make a living in America (laughter). You have a right to be hungry in Europe. I know many people, very great artists, who don't make a living. Here they have to make a living (laughter). And Cahan demanded from me Mottke Ganef, and I couldn't deliver Mottke Ganef. So in 1919 I left America, Thank God, thank God, thank God! I went back to Europe and I started to renew my relation with Fischer Verlag in Berlin. In Russia was Bolshevism; and they demanded from me the same thing that Cahan had demanded—I should write books with a hand machine. But my books—I had settled in Europe—and in Europe from 1920, '21, until 1935, I wrote the Three Cities, Salvation, The War Goes On, and the Waters (probably The Song of the Valley). I had put the foundation of my literary career. And if I would have remained in America, probably I would have ended with another Mottke Ganef. So you see that here is a very dangerous place for an artist, for a writer. I wanted to give you a little picture of how things have developed.

In '37, after Munchen, after what we call Munich, I saw that Europe is no place any more; I expected the Second War. With Hitler's arriving. I started to write The Nazarene—I'll speak about this later.

I came back to America, and I brought with me a half of the book, The Nazarene. I finished it here and I brought it again to the Forward, having been connected with the Forward. And Cahan read a part of it, and the others, and he called me again in and he said, "Sholem Asch, you should take the manuscript and burn it." "Why?" "No good; you have to burn it." "And if I do not burn it?" "You cannot stay with us; you have to leave the job." "Good bye." I published it. I finished it and I published it.

Now my friends, if you believe that a Jew who writes in jargon (for many people Yiddish is still jargon), writes a book of the life of Jesus, and that not only the Jews will not be enthusiastic about it; the goyim will also not be enthusiastic about it. When I brought this book to my publishers, Putnam, in jargon (they don't know Yiddish), thank God that my publishers are goyim because I will tell you a little story. I couldn't get a hearing in America when Three Cities was published in ten languages in Europe; still it couldn't be published here in America. The book was open to a Jewish publisher in English—I don't want to mention the name—but the letter which he wrote me is a document today in the library of Yale University; I kept it in my records (laughter). And in his letter this Jewish publisher has advised me I should take out the Jewishness of Three Cities. I should take out Warsaw—I don't know if you know Three Cities; but Warsaw, the middle book, is Jewish—and everything that has to do with

Jews; I should make a *goyishke* book (laughter). Yes. I tell him I'm a Yiddish writer. And Mr. Balch from Putnam, when he read the book in English, I tell him probably you will not publish the book because it is a Jewish book; so he tells me this (is) what we and the whole world are waiting for. You are a Jewish writer, no? You should write Jewish, right? So you see—ethics!

So I went to this publisher and I told him, here I wrote a book of the life of Jesus. He says to me, I know the book will not sell, but I'm going to publish it. As a matter of fact, when Putnam advertised the book *Nazarene* in '39, in the *Publisher's Weekly*, he got hundreds and hundreds of letters from Christian booksellers and brokers: what in the hell has a Jew to write the life of Jesus and you are publishing it? Well, you can see from this I didn't expect to make a fortune of *The Nazarene!* (laughter) And I didn't write this book for the glory sake, you understand, because it was mentioned I should lose my position with the *Forward* and I should not have a publisher even.

Why did I write this book? I've been asked many times all different questions. I tell you. The first reason and the main reason and the second reason, is because I wanted it. I wanted to write it! (laughter)

For instance, if somebody should come to me—and it happened like this only three years ago—a man came over to me, a Jewish man, with very good intentions, and offered me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars I should write a book, a Jewish book also, a certain book, whatever. I didn't write it. I wanted the money but I didn't write it. (laughter) Because I didn't want it and I could not write it. A writer can only write things what he wants to write and if he don't want to write, it's bad. He can have money from it; he can have everything; but he hasn't got any pleasure; and he hasn't got any spiritual satisfaction; and the book is bad. This is the main reason. Secondly, it was other reasons!... (in Hebrew ... In a section of the Jewish civil and religious code of laws), was said like this: Once in a time... (Hebrew) there came out laws against Israel, I mean against Israel very bad laws. And a bad time came to Israel. What did Detama Yehuda ben Shemua (?) and his colleague do? They went to Rome to a certain 'Matranisa'—'Matranisa' means a lady from the higher, from the highest Roman hierarchy; and there were many Roman 'Matranisas' that in secret went over to Judaism and kept friendship with the rabbis. And when it was something trouble, the rabbis went to these ladies and demanded what they can do; and they ask them, what they should do. So this 'Matranisa' told them, "Go in the streets and cry and call to the people, 'All heaven, aren't we brothers of yours? Aren't we children of one Father? Children from one Mother? Or are we others from other nations? Why do you persecute us?'"

This was also a reason for my books. I have been asked many times, why did you select such a time when the Jewish people were persecuted, in the time when they killed Jews you have been sitting and writing these books? Anathema! There are two reasons why I wrote Yiddishkeit. First thing, God didn't send me down to this earth in another time; He sent me down in this time! I'm living in this time. (laughter) I have not selected this time. If I could select it, I'd not select *die schwartzte Jahren* (black years). (laughter and applause) Did I select it? I am here. And if I do not write in this time, I cannot write it any more and I will die.

Secondly, because of this time, because they have persecuted, because of Hitler, I wrote these books in this time. I ask myself this question: People that know Europe, that know Germany, they know very well that the German people hated the Poles, The Polaks, a thousand times worse than they hated the Jews. There was not a real hatredness among the German people to the Jews: they made fun of them; they made something like this. With the Poles they had a struggle for five hundred years, a bloody struggle. Why did Hitler kill the Jews? Why didn't he kill the Poles? The answer is very simple: If Hitler had started to kill the Poles, the world would not say that he killed Poles: he kills Catholics; he

kills Catholics... (in Polish). Our people they are killing; and you should see how the whole Catholic world would have got up like one man to stop Hitler; he kills Catholics; he kills Christians; he's a Christian killer!

I consider that our greatest misfortune in history, today and even for Israel, is that we have no allies. We are alone; we are a nation alone; one nation. Yes, there are other nations; for instance, the Arabs—they are not a Christian religion—or some others, some others; but they are sitting in the desert; they are far away among them(selves). We are a part of Europe, of Western culture. We are demanding all the privileges that western culture offers us. Our ancestors, our fathers, sitting in the ghetto, they have took on themselves the old *Mah Ha Shemayim* (the worship of the Lord) *Ba-Hava* with love. They have known why they are suffering and they could stand it. My father was not insulted that a *goy* called him a... Jew, or even made fun of him: it was something he wasn't in control of it. He wasn't insulted. I am insulted! You are insulted! We, the Jewish people living in the western culture, in Europe, or here in America, still are separate and secret among ourselves and we haven't any connection with other people, with the Christians! You should see yourself if you want to find out really where you are; you... realistic. You cannot see yourself only from your point of view; you have to consider how other people see you; what you are in the eyes of other people.

The Jewish people, in the eyes of the other people, are something, a separate thing,—not Gypsies,—well, they are not 'us'; they are not 'us'. And if they kill a Jew and do something to a Jew, yes, they kill a Jew; they didn't kill a Christian. Didn't Roosevelt and Churchill, in the highest time of the war, when it was very bad, they started to speak of saving the Christian civilization—Christian civilization; but ours—where are we? Are we coming into this Christian civilization which the world is going to save? Or are we outside the Christian civilization?...

Well, here is a question, and another thing. Since the Jewish people started to emancipate, from the time of Lessing a hundred and fifty years ago, from the time of Mendelsohn, and then later with Napoleon—Napoleon was one of the greatest liberators of the Jews because he burned the ghettos every place he came—since the Jewish people started to emancipate, so the clever of us, the intelligent of us, the intelligentsia of us, they saw one thing, especially the German Jews. The Jewish man can come into every branch of spiritual and cultural life with other people. He can be a writer, he can become an actor; he can become a very great industrialist; he can become a manufacturer.

## SHOLEM ASCH — Part 2

If we will abolish Judaism and we will see it that they should forget and abolish Christianity, there will be enough morale for Jew and Gentile to come together; and we will be brothers and there will not be any upstart. This was (sensed) unconsciously and later consciously by all intelligentsia of Europe. As the religion is an obstacle to bring together these two people, then the best thing is to fight against it and to abolish it. What happened? And came Hitler and he has created a myth: There is, my dear God, absolutely, a race that couldn't come in; and he has the Senate and they are out.

I believe and I think it is a possibility of a nearing, of an understanding, of a kinship, of a relationship, a familiar relationship between Jews and Christians. It's not by abolishing religion; not by maintaining religion,—through religion, by religion! When, why, if we are not Jews and they are not Christians,—this means, if we are not children of one Father, coming all from one source, even bringing all the bitterness that is among us—if we haven't got any spiritual relation, well, what are we? What is our contribution towards world civilization; what did we do? We are a nation of three thousand years. Well, only for the last hundred years, maybe a hundred and fifty—if you want it you can take in Spinoza, which was only a unit. But we have something: world civili-

zation. We cannot sell the goyim the Talmud (the traditional compilation of Jewish law) if we couldn't sell him Isaiah—because in any religious feeling, in any religious relationship...there must be something of Isaiah...and in this... let me tell you, the Egyptians are beautiful. The Babylonian had finished—and as I'm afraid to say, every people's critic knows about it—there are in the Babylonian literature psalms—would you believe they are being rewritten from the Hebrew or the Hebrews have written from them? There is the Bible—no not Bible—Israel's sovereign...literature; every nation has it. If there is a possibility to bring to our religion an understanding of our law, if you want to bring it (about) that the Christian should work (out) the anger, the bitterness if he's touching a Jew, he should cry out all the purposes (?) as if he done it to a Christian...it's the only true religion—only true religion.

This was one of the points why I wrote these books. I wanted to show Jew and Christian alike, the kinship, the relationship, the brotherhood: you are not a stranger to me; I am a relative of yours; you are a relative of mine—and thank God I succeeded! I succeeded among Jews and among Christians. With all the bitterness against me, with all the rumors against me, let me tell you there are hundreds and thousands of young Jewish people that have become proud to be Jews on account of my books. I will conquer in religion, in life, the millions. My books are translated into twenty-three languages, selling year after year. There are hundreds and hundreds of schools here in this country, I tell you, religious schools, where my books are required reading!

I didn't do a novel of the Jewish people; a rabbi has asked me about this. I don't know if some of you have read my book Kiddush Ha-Shem, it's a very popular book. In Kiddush Ha-Shem I have a scene, there is a market day in Lublin. You know what a market day is; the Jews from all over the province came to Lublin and they have their goods, their stalls; one is selling shoes, and others selling fur coats, and others selling all kinds of other things. The little Jew came into the market place. He opened also a stall. He opened among these booths also a booth. The word, it was not merchandise; he wrote down that he was selling fake (in Yiddish: Betruchen in Gott). You know what this Betruchen means? Trust! Betruchen (is always) in (part of) our Jewish people, that is always in danger and anxiousness. They are always afraid and the only thing that they have is "Betruchen in Gott"—trust in God. God will help you.

Well, he opened a little stall and he sold Betruchen. The rabbi said, what are you selling? I am selling Betruchen, I am selling fake; I am selling mitzvas and mazel-tov (in Yiddish: good deeds and good luck). So the rabbi asked me, "You, Sholem Asch, what you wrote this holy book, and you made this little tailor selling Betruchen for the Jews—how did you come to write these other books." So I told him, when I was a young man and I wrote this Kiddush Ha-Shem, I opened a little stall to sell Betruchen to the Jews. Now I am a big man! I wrote for magazines (stores) to sell Betruchen for the whole world, for Jew and Christian alike.

My dear friends, when I am staying here and I am speaking to you, it is always my prayer to God not to let me be bitter, not to quarrel with my people; that I can temper my temperament. Because I am bitter; and I haven't, no I haven't become a Christian. And there's been a very great approach. There has been very great pressure; there is being very great pressure. It is because, not that I consider it a crime if a Jew, if he is absolutely convinced that Christianity is a better religion from the Jewish religion, or that he loves Jesus, I don't consider it a crime if he is following the voice of his heart. And nobody has a right to mix in with the experience between a human being and his God. If we are demanding tolerance in this country for others, we should have tolerance for others; and not every Jew that became a Christian is.... (in Yiddish, a derogatory term for a convert to Christianity). I have known Jews who became Christian and are... (in Yiddish, righteous men). And I have realized, known, Jews who haven't got anything with their lives except Christianity;

and still they didn't become Christians. Men like Berthel (?); he died a Jew. I saw him die; and he told me, "I remained a Jew." I have known Bertzel (?) when he was living, who was the greatest admiration of the Catholic world; and he remained a Jew. I do believe if salvation will come to the Jews, it will come only through the synagogue and not through the church. I have never preached, and I never wanted to bring the Jewish people into a church. Go Out! Yes, I love Jesus Christ; and I like very much that Jesus Christ come into the synagogue, and not that the Jews came to the church. This is my belief. If you want it, leave it or take it; that's all. We have to solve our problem, not to go in a ready-made church; we have a synagogue. Our synagogue, our Judaism is so rich, so rich that it can satisfy spirituality, spiritually to every demand that the human being has, if you know it.

Now what else? If you want me, want to ask questions, I will ask myself one question. Do I believe that Jesus is God? No. I do not believe Jesus is God. I never said it. I believe in the God of Israel. I have three loyalties and I have been guided, guided in all my work, in all my life by these three loyalties. My first loyalty in my life is to the God of Israel. And when I say God of Israel, I mean in the sense as Judaism has accepted Him, then by Maimonides, by Shiloh Yehuda, absolutely in His wholeness and his Oneness, with no... (Yiddish), with no other thing. Something more, something more—when I say God of Israel, I mean the selection of the human being, the greatest desire of the human being, is to come to God. And I see in Him this ideal of which Moses had put the foundation. My greatest inspiration what I had in my life, was this chapter when I wrote (my book) Moses, when Moses goes up on Mount Sinai. I see in Moses the greatest helpfulness, spiritual helpfulness, which humanity has produced. I see in the prophets—if you will let me, I don't know yet, stop me—I see in the prophets the only sign that there's existence of God. It's a pity, it's a pity and a ferbrechen—how do you call ferbrechen?—a crime—that our youth, young, our youth didn't have our koved (unpretentious inner respect) koved-druchen; and they don't have this richness, and they don't have this great spiritual richness. But the Jew who knows, who loves Judaism, (understands) what Judaism can give to you.

When I say the Koved, let me a little—I wanted to speak about the prophets—the remarkable thing—I presume there are some people here that know the Bible. If you study the Bible, the prophets especially, you'll see that there are two types of prophets. The first three prophets, they are the prophets of Israel. Do you know that the kingdom, they divided between Israel and Jehuda (Judea); there are two of them. I don't consider Eliyahu Elijah—how do you say Eliyahu in English? Lija? lija? By me is Eliyahu.—I don't consider Elijah as a great prophet. I feel he's a typical seer, a typical seer what every nation had. Every nation, every other nation, had it. The Egyptians had it and the Syrians had it, all of them. They made the miracles in very narrow, narrow nationalism, killing people. And they bring fire from himmel (heaven) and walls of water from himmel. Every, every nation has it. Elijah became our beloved, and he became our saint. I loved Eliyahu, the prophet what he became later, in my childhood,—you know, the helper of Israel, as he is in the Bible. The second one is his disciple, Elisha. Now Elisha was absolutely a typical politician. He was a kind of courtier. He made the revolution, as you know. He went to a general, and made him as a king; and the general has killed this awful woman; and he made a court revolution. He was a man of power, a man of act. He has done great things.

The first real prophet that comes from Israel is Amos—Amos, what struggles with evil, the shepherd, the shepherd, you know. He is the voice of God. The first time you hear the voice of God, the real voice of humanity, the real voice of human suffering, of human desire. And he had visions. No, not strong visions; he had the visions from a time that will come, that I will give the Torah in your heart. No, he

believes... (in Hebrew) you die on an unclean land—I don't remember it all. Only the Jews, I know, said "God," from all the nations. He (Amos) had not this cosmopolitan, this universal; he was standing at his Jewishness. And comes the first real prophet, the prophet that not Babylon, not Assyria, that not Egypt, that not any other nation has produced; only the Jewish spirit has produced. When you (are) walking in here, in the Metropolitan (Museum), you come in the door; you see the Egyptian gods. And then you come in and you see the Syrian big—how do you call them—friezes; and then you see the Greeks and the Romans. And the king then was a prophet, Isaiah. First what was Isaiah? You cannot separate the prophets from the time that surrounded them, from the rest of the world. Isaiah started his prophesies by the king Amo—I mean Ahaz; this was one of the worst kings that the Jewish people had. The Jewish people haven't got any luck with the king (laughter). No luck to the Jews. It started from Shloma Meleh (King Solomon) and until the last one. They are charlatans, lethal tyrants; this was one of the worst. He took his own child and burned it alive for the god Baal. He burned his child for the god of Baal; and when the prophet asked him why are you doing it, he says, look on Damascus; see what Baal has done to the Syrians; what has Jehovah done for us?

I believe, when Isaiah saw these things, when a king burns his child as a sacrifice to this awful god Baal, he (Isaiah) starts a revolt, for the first time a revolt against sacrifice; he don't want a sacrifice. If Sholem Asch had said it today, they'd kill him for it. (laughter) He had made a revolt against sacrifice... And he looked, he looked for salvation; he I looked for something to come and save the world, not only the Jewish people. And here for the first time is this great Assyrian kingdom; Nineveh, Nineveh, has taken over all middle Asia. And he (Isaiah) came to the conclusion that the Jews cannot be a separate island in a world of sin and rishis (prejudice); that the whole world, all humanity, has to come to God; and he started, it is the first time that you hear the voice of universalism. There's no anymore any salvation for the Jews alone; there's salvation for the world; and (for) that salvation of the world, he looks for a savior. He looks for somebody that will come and bring all these nations to the God of Israel... (Hebrew), that will change the nature of human beings and even of beasts. And he dreams a messianic dream of a messiah. The first messianic idea comes from Isaiah! And this is our greatest contribution to humanity.

And you will see that his disciples, his disciples, the little ones, sometimes they even use his language; they repeat his words, now with such a passion, with such a love for humanity that I am proud. I am proud that we have given to the world these prophets. This is my Judaism.

My Judaism is the second Isaiah, the greatest prophet that has ever been living, the greatest nationalist poet. Let me tell you that I do not believe that anything in... (Hebrew) Israel, and... (Hebrew) Israel, in... (Hebrew) Israel, in the hope of Israel, has come after Isaiah the second. As a fact, Yehudah rises up with Isaiah the second. If you will see it in this spirit, Jehudah is in fact Isaiah the second! Bialik is Isaiah the second! Anything that you want to love in Israel, that you want to love in Zion, has no other expression except in Isaiah the second.

Here the great troubador, a living expression of Israel, he lives in Babylon. There are around fifty or fifty-five years of exile in Babylon. He dreams, he dreams of coming back to Zion. He dreams to bring back Israel to Zion and not only to Zion. He is the first to express God as a Father, God as a Mother, who keeps you like a mother keeps her child. He has the greatest hope of Cyrus, of the king, of the Persian

king, who sent in... the fifth column to Babylon; they couldn't take Babylon by force; they couldn't take it. And he brings the hope to the Jews that he will bring them back to Zion. The prophet is full of enthusiasm; and he even calls Cyrus a messiah, the messianic idea. Then what happened? We found it now, only forty, fifty years ago: we found it in Nineveh, we found it in Babylon. When Cyrus took Babylon, the prophet has belief that now Cyrus will make the declaration, that he took Babylon by the force and by the spirit of the Jewish God Jehovah; he believed it—and Cyrus comes out, brings back the gods of Babylon. But the Babylonians took them out and hid them; he brings him (the old god) back with very great power, back to Babylon. And he declares—we have this stone still today in the British museum; you can read it—that he has done all these things by the force and by the spirit of Yokton (?), the god of Babylon. He declared and he worshipped the god of Babylon and brought to other nations that everybody should worship the god of Babylon. And the prophet got disappointed; he got disappointed in the king; he got disappointed and he saw that not a king, no, not he will bring the messiah, the relief, salvation to humanity. He starts to dream of the man of sorrow; and he writes in chapter fifty-three the greatest suffering which he prophesied five hundred and thirty-five years (beforehand) of a man of sorrows that will come.

He has done one thing: we do not realize it. Not the Babylonians and not the Egyptians and not the Greeks and not the Romans have got any pity for a cripple or for a child that is born a cripple; when a child was born a cripple they disposed of it. With the Romans when a child was born they brought it to the father, put it down on his feet: if the father accepted it, he became the son of the house; if the father didn't accept it, the slave took the child and they threw it into the river. They didn't consider the crippled man or the man who was not affluent, the poor man, the man who was sick; his cause was forgot. Only the healthy man, the taller man, the man who is beautiful, the man who is fortunate, the man who is strong, the athletic man, he is protected by God. And the Jewish people had also this conception. Moses had this conception: if you will behave, if you will be good, God will be good to you... (in Hebrew). If you will be bad, if you will be not good, God will punish you. And it was considered that every sickness and every illness and every sorrow of man is a punishment from God. And here comes a man who proclaims that the man of sorrow the man of Tsuris (troubles), the poor man, the broken man, he's elected by God.

And this is the conception that European, that western civilization has taken today. He is the first western man. He—and it is a remarkable thing; he prophesied at the same time as the great Greeks, Plato et al,—and you see here absolutely the same incentive (shared) between Plato and Isaiah II. You see here the incentive of the modern western civilization; you see here the incentive of Jefferson, of our American freedom, of our American civilization. We built the cornerstone here, with Isaiah II. So I see Judaism.

I can tell you more. But, my friends, I haven't any strength more. I made a certain statement when I came to Jerusalem, when I left Jerusalem. And there were Jewish writers. Some of the religious Jews have... (in Yiddish), but they didn't make an end of publishing my books. Let me tell you something. A Hebrew publisher is publishing now The Nazarene in Hebrew... if you want me, I will read you the statement and you will have me all as I am; and you can take me or leave me. I did the best I can. (great applause!)

*Transcribed by Isabel and John Asch from original tapes and discs.*