Chapter three

Rituals: New, old, and invented

Liberty gives everyone the power to do what he or she wants, unless it harms someone else in his or her rights. This natural regulation contains the statement: “One should not treat others in ways that one would not like to be treated,” and this a general rule from our holy Torah. [art.3].

The above citation is part of an attempt by Chief Rabbi Moses Löwenstamm’s loyal assistant, Haim, to prevent the proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the fundamental document of the French Revolution, in the synagogue. Spurred by the revolutionary spirit of the new Batavian Republic, Dutch patriots and maskilim welcomed this document that granted every citizen inalienable natural rights and freedom from religious coercion. They wished it to be proclaimed in the synagogue to demonstrate the victory of reason over religion and good government over oppression. However, the Ashkenazi community, under the guidance of Löwenstamm, resisted this infringement on their authority and the subordination of the Jewish religion to inalienable natural rights. By reworking the universal and secularizing content of the Declaration, Haim turned its meaning on its head. In the reworked version, the text supported the observance of Jewish religion and fostered the sovereignty of the Jewish community. Haim’s version is an example of how the Jewish community Judaized the secularizing messages of the government and how it tried to incorporate politics into a Jewish framework.

This chapter analyzes how political objectives secularized Jewish rituals and how the Jews sacralized the newly invented state rituals. Purim productions and the sermons commemorating national events serve as case studies of how Jewish factions as well as the government imbued the rituals with political and social objectives. In these performances, discourses on religion, citizenship, and Jewishness blended. Besides the political use of Jewish rituals, newly invented civic rituals were introduced by the

government to foster national identity. Jews used the new state rituals, such as the Declaration and the events surrounding the gunpowder explosion in Leiden, to develop responses to the new reality of citizenship. This chapter identifies various Jewish responses to the pressures of secular discourse. As will become apparent, the new discourse on national identity influenced Jews across the religious spectrum. Jews used both secularizing and sacralizing strategies to construct their Judaisms. As such, Jews displayed agency in the redrawing of the boundaries between the religious and the secular.

1. Judaizing the state ritual: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen is an example of how Jews from both ends of the spectrum engaged with the state’s new foundations and how they incorporated secular discourse into their idea of Judaism. The reorganization of society along the lines of liberty, equality, and fraternity compelled the Jewish community to restate its relation to the state. The Declaration was the state’s foundation as well as its legitimation. The revolutionaries distributed and proclaimed the Declaration, forcing Dutch inhabitants to abide by it. One characteristic of this document was its universal appeal in demanding citizen participation. With the implementation of the Declaration, inalienable human rights became a common basis for all of the nation-state’s inhabitants. This declaration, created during the French Revolution, replaced the former religious foundation of citizenship with a secular one. It can be regarded as the epitome of secularism, as it pushed aside religion as an authoritative factor. Citizens should swear allegiance to the state, making religion a private matter. This new document, which was one of the first efforts of the Batavian Republic to impose a new, unifying national identity, became a focal point of strife between Jews who saw the new rule as an opportunity for emancipation and those who opposed the new state ritual as a threat to the existing religious order. The engagement of Jews with this document shows different strategies for Judaizing its secular content.

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The period between 1795 and 1796 can be characterized by the efforts of the maskilim and supporters of the Batavian Republic to declare the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in the lion’s den: the synagogue. From the beginning of the occupation on 17 January 1795, Felix Libertate members tried to convince the parnasim to proclaim the Declaration. Because of the parnasim’s refusal to meet with them, they submitted their requests to the newly installed Committee van Waakzaamheid (Committee of Vigilance) and later, on March 17, to the new revolutionary government in The Hague.\(^4\) In the Diskursn of the naye kille, the maskilim defended their support for the revolution by pointing at the possible benefits for Jews. In order to reach every Jew, Felix Libertate members translated the Declaration (see appendices) into Yiddish.\(^5\)

But what was the consequence of it all? The French did want to make peace with us, but we had to accept the Rights of Man, as you have seen. Also, they immediately started to say “Citizen” and on all the posters, the government put “Equality, Liberty, Fraternity.” The clever Jews understood this and founded a club, which they called Felix Libertate. And immediately they started to tell the government (in the way Moushe fon Blerekom says :) “Keep your word. We are people and inhabitants too. We went through all the troubles with you. When there is something good to be had in the country, we also deserve it. The whole country is free and equal. The French gave freedom to the Jews as well as to the Christians.\(^6\)

Interestingly enough, the Committee of Vigilance asked only the Jewish community, and not any other religious congregation, to attach to each synagogue entrance the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This was probably because the Catholics and the Protestants were already considered citizens, unlike the Jews who, according to some, still belonged to another nation.\(^7\)

**The Additional Declaration**

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\(^6\) Michman and Aptroot, *Storm in the Community*, 104.

Together with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, an additional declaration was drafted by the Committee of Vigilance, wherein the Jews would state their allegiance to the Batavian Revolution, admit their former deviation, and express their willingness to bear arms on the Sabbath. The Additional Declaration began with an appeal to join the revolution’s quest and to admit their former folly, namely their support of the Orange Party. 

Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Brothers of Israel, from the previous Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, every word is honest and fair. We will enjoy our rights and we will no longer be excluded from their privileges. The foundation is already there, and everyone should bring the building blocks. It will be a home for everyone; the joy of liberty, equality, and fraternity is holy and of incomprehensible value for you. You will enjoy its fruits, which were taken from you so wrongly, godlessly withheld from you by tyrants; open up your conscience, acknowledge that you were lost and deceived by the mask of hypocrisy, and honestly repent of your former behavior and enjoy with all of mankind the greatest happiness.

This additional statement can be understood as an interpretation of the concepts of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Obtaining each of these common goods depended first on adherence to the revolution. Each of these three basic principles was interpreted in a particular way. For instance, liberty refers here to the possibility to be free of former political bonds. It is a positive freedom; the Jews had to break their former alliance with the Orange Party. They must “open up” their “conscience” and “acknowledge” that they were lost and “deceived by the mask of hypocrisy,” and they need to “honestly repent of former behavior.” Only when they support the revolution will they be worthy to receive

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8 During the eighteenth century, many quarrels occurred between patriots and Jews. Patriots accused the Jews of violating the guilds’ rules by working in the professions forbidden to them. At the end of the eighteenth century, the patriots also condemned the Jews for their support of the Orange Party and their reluctance to support the Batavian Revolution. For disputes between guild members and Jews, see Leo Fuks, De zeven provinciën in beroering. Hoofdstukken uit een Jiddische kroniek over de jaren 1740–1752 van Abraham Chaim Braatbard (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1960), 106–122. For Jewish support of the Orange Party, see Bart Wallet, “Belgian independence, Orangism, and Jewish identity: The Jewish communities in Belgium during the Belgian Revolution (1830–39)” in Borders and Boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish History, edited by Judith Frishman, David J. Wertheim, Ido de Haan, Joël Cahen (Amsterdam 2011), 167–181; Joseph Michman, Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period: Gothic Turrets on a Corinthian Building 1787–1815, 1–22. For the idea that Jewry did not traditionally belong to the Orange Party, see Odette Vlessing, “The Jewish Community in Transition; from Acceptance to Emancipation,” Studia Rosenthaliana 1 (1996).

the common good, ‘liberty’. Their liberty will thus only be realized when they understand their erroneous former conduct.

In addition, the concept of equality was conditional. Renouncing the enemy, namely the Orange Party, was necessary in order to be eligible for citizenship. “Promote the good peace and unity, and bear with all of your fellow citizens your burden of the necessary preservation of your beloved fatherland.” Commended are the “exemplary youths of your community, who already bear arms, and...keep the city’s peace on the Sabbath.” Bearing arms on the Sabbath symbolized true equality, as the Jews would thus put love of the fatherland before observance of Jewish law. Love for the fatherland and the willingness to bear arms is a prerequisite for receiving the respect of fellow citizens; only then “no one would be ashamed to be a Jew. He would be proud and declare: ‘I am a Jew, a lover of the fatherland, a caretaker.’”

Fraternity referred to a collective adherence to the fatherland. Only when Jews supported the fatherland and acted as fellow citizens could they receive respect. According to the Additional Declaration, to be brothers meant to behave similarly. Moreover, in the last sentence of the Declaration, the request changes into a command, because if you do not “give respect and encourage them, you will make yourself punishable.” In this “if you are not with us, you are against us” line of argumentation, renouncing the former religious bond and ‘actively’ supporting the revolution had become compulsory. By supporting the revolution, the Jews could prove themselves worthy of equal rights.

The Additional Declaration, with its emphasis on bearing arms on the Sabbath, urged the parnasim and Chief Rabbi Moses Löwenstamm to seek a solution, because both declarations conflicted with the political structure and religion of the Jewish community. Furthermore, Felix Libertate members had begun a media campaign for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen to be proclaimed in the synagogue and for the conscription of Jews for the Civil Guard. Because of the precarious situation, the parnasim sought an alliance with the Sephardic community. Both communities decided that they would proclaim neither the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen nor the Additional ‘Jewish’ Declaration and that they would try to avoid and delay their implementation. However, they would refrain from using “the same means
[to halt the Declaration], as it would bring upon them the suspicion that they had conspired together.”

**Rabbi Moses Löwenstamm’s resistance**

In an attempt to delay both declarations, the chief rabbi together with the *shamash* (beadle) Haim went to the Committee of Vigilance to express their concern. Upon their arrival, the chief rabbi addressed the members of the committee in Hebrew with the biblical Psalm 122:8–9: “For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say: ‘Peace is within thee’. For the sake of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.” Haim then translated the verses into Dutch and continued the discussion, since the chief rabbi was not well versed in Dutch. Haim convinced them that “bearing arms on the Sabbath was against the Jewish religion and that they could not declare such a thing.” The committee then agreed that this particular sentence could be removed from the Additional Declaration. However, the text from the other declaration, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, could not be changed, but the Jewish community was allowed to change the order of the text and add additional sentences.

The renewed declaration would become a complete reversal of the initial intentions of the revolutionary Committee of Vigilance. Haim twisted the text and added so many biblical citations that the original meaning vanished. In his swirl of biblical words, the revolutionary and secular intentions disappeared. Both the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as well as the Additional Declaration had been altered in such a way that, instead of heralding the new national order, they replaced it with allegiance to God. Haim’s alterations praised the status quo and made observance of Jewish law compulsory, turning secularism into Judaism. In a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish, the reworked additional declaration began:

One of the points is that everyone has the right to profess his religion and to worship God with all his heart. Therefore, sons of Israel, “ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day” (Deuteronomy 4:4). “The kings of the earth

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10 Sluys, “Uit Bange Dagen. Het begin van den Franschen tijd.”
11 Sluys, “Uit Bange Dagen. Het begin van den Franschen tijd.”
12 Ibid.
13 Felix Libertate members protested ferociously against Haim’s reworked version in their proclamation of 27 March 1795, “Een adres van eenige Joodse burger tegen de voorgevende qualificatie van den Coster Haim Moses Cohen,” copied into Protocolbuch IV, 143–147.
rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed” (Psalms 2:2). We come forward united with the covenant of the Eternal, your God, and make a contract to confirm our godly law. We will obey the law and the rules, and will not turn from any obligation, right or left, so that no one whose heart has been turned away from God can imagine that he would live in prosperity. Gentlemen, highly esteemed citizens of the Committee of Vigilance have recommended to the parnasim to bring to their fellow believers this publication that obliges everyone who carries the name of Israelite to observe the Jewish law.  

Besides the many biblical citations, Haim incorporated the liberal rights of liberty, equality, and fraternity into the Jewish tradition and claimed they depended on religious observance. By blending religious and secular discourses, Haim Judaized the ideals of the French Revolution. Haim’s strategy made these natural rights a reward for proper Jewish conduct instead of an inalienable right. Also, the intentions of the Committee of Vigilance were twisted in such a way that it seemed that the Committee had ordered religious obedience. Only proper Jewish behavior would lead to respect, and not, as the initial declaration had stated, allegiance to the fatherland. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen received a similar treatment by Haim, who altered the Declaration’s first articles:

The natural human rights are equality, liberty, safety, property, and resistance against oppression, because all humanity is born with equal rights [art.2], as the word of Job said: “And he said; naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). He decides who shall be elevated and who shall be humiliated, who will be rich and who will be poor. Consequently, no one can take away the natural rights of somebody else [art.1].

Haim’s alterations reversed the text’s original meaning with regard to religious freedom and the obligation to support the revolution. By adding sentences and reversing the order of the Declaration’s articles, Haim was able to construct a text supporting the religious structures of Jewish society. Based on a Jewish textual tradition of adding

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additional interpretations and statements, he pacified the initial secular meaning and reversed it in such a way that, instead of proclaiming that every man is born equal, he made it conditional on God’s will. This play with Jewish literary genres, interestingly enough, also reappears throughout the centuries in various Jewish parodies. In this instance, the word play and imitation of biblical language in Haim’s declaration was not intended humorously but rather as a means to legitimize and authorize his version. “Only He decides who is rich and who is poor.” By quoting Job, Haim makes God responsible for social differences, not the general good, as is stated in the Declaration. Because it is God who bestows the natural rights in the first place, they cannot be taken away. Here, the Additional Declaration’s conditional liberty moves from the government to God. Allegiance to the government and freedom from religion are not prerequisites for obtaining natural rights. It is God who gives and takes, and not the government.

In the initial Article 3, the claim that “the principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation” was probably a bit hard to tackle. Haim omitted it and listed Article 4, stating that “Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else” under Article 3. Also, this article was, according to him, directly taken from Leviticus, and Haim changed the limitations of that right from the nation’s law to the Torah. In Article 18, Haim highlights the fact that the sovereignty of the people does not mean that one group can claim dominance. He implicitly criticizes the claim made by revolutionaries that they represent the people as a whole. Also, in Article 11, the confiscation by the French of ecclesial property is indirectly addressed: a fair and just government should compensate the loss of property.

In rewriting both declarations, Haim replaced the authority of the people or natural law with the Torah. Haim’s solution of Judaizing secular law shows how Jews actively engaged with the pressure of secularism and tried to formulate their own answers. According to Haim’s version, everything derives from Torah and is present in Torah. By subordinating the sovereignty of the people to this authoritative text, the initial revolutionary meaning evaporates. Furthermore, instead of demanding the support of the Jews for the revolution, the Jews are ordered to observe Jewish law, as he states in Article 4: “Fear God and keep his commandments.” Additionally, the contradiction between the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and the

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Additional Declaration is exposed when Haim highlights the fact that liberty is not simply doing what you want but consists of being able to choose in favor of the revolution. In other words, liberty is a positive freedom. Haim adopts the use of positive freedom by the revolutionaries for his own benefit and regards liberty as enabling people to choose in favor of Jewish law. As such, Haim exposes that the revolutionaries’ liberty was not liberty at all.

The “For the Sake of Heaven” petition

Haim’s point of view was widely supported by the petition of March 1795, wherein the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was aligned with religious deviance. This petition, signed by 600 community members, was called Lema’an shamayim (For the Sake of Heaven). Naming the petition “For the Sake of Heaven” insinuated that the Declaration was anti-religious. However, the naye kille regarded the Declaration as perfectly in line with existing Jewish tradition and defended it in their Diskursn: “Does having equal rights make it impossible to be a good Jew?”

According to the naye kille, the petition was a fraud. The majority of signatures came from Jews who could not read or write and were obviously fabricated. In the words of the character Gumpel:

I didn’t sign because I can't write. But as I come onto the Houtmarkt, my relative Sender meets me. So he says to me: “Aren’t you going to the community’s office to sign up for Jewishness?” I tell him I can’t sign. So he says: “Just go, Reb Khayim Shames, signs for people like that.” I go upstairs. Who is sitting there? Moushe of Avrom Oubener and Reb Khayim Shames, may he rest in peace. He knew me from the New Synagogue. As he sees me he says to me: “You can go in the name of God. I already put your name down.” He did the same for fifty others. I also saw children signing their names themselves. But before I left I asked: “That’s for Jewishness, Reb Khayim. Isn’t it?” He was too busy, so Moushe Oubener nodded with his head in agreement, and I left.

18 Protocolbuch IV, 137.
19 Michman and Aptroot, Storm in the Community, 106.
20 Ibid.
According to the *naye kille*, the Jewish majority accepted the Declaration. Those who rejected it did so out of ignorance and not on the basis of a rational decision. The *parnasim* simply tricked Jews into signing.

Now think about it yourself. When someone must sign something, it should at least be read to him. So when they said to the government: “This was signed by so many people,” it was a lie. No one knew what it was about. And what was the result? [The Declaration of Human Rights] wasn’t allowed to be announced in synagogue that everyone can and should have equal rights.\(^{21}\)

Moreover, the *naye kille* questioned the *parnasim’s* integrity. According to them, the drafted petition unjustly strengthened the *parnasim’s* authority. Under the guise of religion, they sought to secure their own positions. The criticism directed at the *parnasim* resembled the general enlightened critique of religious leaders’ abuse of power. “Yes, and you’re not even mentioning the biggest evil. [The *parnasim*] may have spent ten thousand guilders on legal advisors and on other expenses....Reb Yousef Prints and Reb Lipman Rintel have understood that it was ‘For the Sake of Heaven,’ but the money is for the sake of demons.”\(^{22}\) The *naye kille* took the opportunity provided by the Declaration to portray themselves as a community which stood up for the interests of the Jewish lower classes.

*The naye kille’s support for the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*

Contrary to the Judaizing strategies of Haim, the *naye kille* worked the other way around and integrated state laws into their version of Jewish tradition. The incorporation of secular law into Jewish law characterized the *naye kille’s* response. As a result of this strategy, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen became the founding text of the *naye kille*. By merging this document with its community regulations, the *naye kille* wed the state to their religious framework. In fact, the *naye kille* justified their secession in 1797 by referring to the right to change or improve the government, which was an article from the Declaration. Equality and freedom of worship became pivotal

\(^{21}\) Michman and Aptroot, *Storm in the Community*, 106.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 88.
values of their new services. In the naye kille’s liturgy compilation, the Melitz Yosher explains the foundation of these regulations:

The following matters have we, the holy community of Adat Yeshurun, committed to uphold in the service of the house of God, because the old community violated the law. Her regulations are based on the oppression and robbery of the poor, as her meat hallmeat hall and similar matters demonstrate. Because of that and other matters that are in operation with them, and because of the sanctions [against us], we are obliged to act against our will in prayer and godly prescriptions. Now that the sanctions are withdrawn, we have taken it upon ourselves to create a community, to secede from them, and to formulate regulations on the basis of the law and the laws of the country, wherein the privileges mentioned and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen come first. And the regulations for the synagogue service will be in accordance with the provisions below and with the law and justice.23

For the naye kille, the basis of their regulations was the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and so the sovereignty of their religion was placed in both Jewish and secular law. By integrating citizen’s rights into their new version of a Jewish community, they sacralized the Declaration and also secularized their religious regulations. With their hybrid regulations, they tried to formulate an answer to the pressing Jewish question of poverty and the resulting religious inequality.

The naye kille legitimized their incorporation of a secular document into their religious framework by pointing out the benefits for the Jewish community. Citizen’s rights were, according to the naye kille, essential in the elevation of the Jews and their liberation from the suppression of the parnasim. Consequently, the naye kille emphasized the positive implications of the Declaration for the Jewish religion. In their Diskursn, they propagated equality in religious services and offices while at the same time condemning religious coercion, such as excommunication and the imposition of fines. This idea of religion without authority was ridiculed by the alte kille. Moreover, they feared that religious freedom would ultimately lead to a decline in religious observance. Gumpel remarks on the naye kille’s services: “I only went to pray there for fun. Just to see what kind of people pray there during the week. So I asked the rabbi how

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23 Translation from the Dutch, D.M. Sluys, “Het reglement van de Adath Jeshurun (De ‘Neie K’hilloh’) te Amsterdam” (1931) (first published in Nieuw Israëlitisch Weekblad 12 and 19 June 1931, nr. 5 and 6), 3–4. See, Israel Graanboom, Sefer Melitz Yosher (Amsterdam, 1809).
it could be that there still wasn’t a minyen for the prayers. He replied that according to
the Rights of Man, no one can be forced.” It seems that the alte kille had a more
pessimistic view of faith among the Jews; without firm control, they would deviate and
renounce religious obligation. The alte kille denied that religion was a matter of
individual choice.

The naye kille regarded the proclamation of the Declaration as the first step in
solving the problem of Jewish poverty and argued that its annulment would prevent the
Jews from achieving social mobility. According to the naye kille, the parnasim hindered
the Jewish community’s civic improvement. The parnasim kept the Jews backward and
poor. Moreover, the naye kille argued that the rights were compatible with Jewish
religion; the parnasim rejected the Declaration in order to maintain their positions of
power. “Can’t we still – thank God – be good Jews [and also believe in the Declaration]?
And by means of that [the parnasim] wanted to make it clear that we Jews are not useful
for anything: not for offices or anything else.” Rejecting the Declaration, they argued,
served the interests of the parnasim, as the Declaration rendered their ‘punitive’ powers
obsolete.

In a dialogue between Yankev and Anshel, the naye kille attempted to unmask the
parnasim’s dishonest intentions and greed for power. Yankev explains: “[I]t’s written:
everyone may serve his God in the manner he wants or doesn’t want. Now for the pious
man that’s quite good, because he gets the full right as a person to serve God in the
manner he wants.” According to Anshel, the parnasim feared loss of power and
becoming accountable. Moreover, the parnasim hid behind the cloak of religion in order
to maintain their power. The naye kille tried to argue that the rights were not at all
against religion, but rather served the interests of the faithful Jew. In fact, the
Declaration even enabled the Jew to be religious.

Excuse me, Yankev. You are not getting to the point. At the end of the Rights of Man,
the following is written: “Everyone may change or improve the government and
appoint others, if the present leaders aren’t good. The government is accountable to
the people.” There is the problem, brother. If the common man has the right to that,

24 Michman and Aptroot, Storm in the Community, 188.
25 Ibid., 86.
26 Ibid., 106.
[the community's leaders] lie with their behinds exposed! They will be thrown out of the community offices if they abuse power. [The parnasim] say that anyone who argues with them is a criminal. But the Declaration of the Rights of Man proves the situation to be completely different: we don’t have to let violence be done to us. That’s why they drove the congregation crazy. It was ostensibly "For the Sake of Heaven."

But it was for their own sake. Do you get it, Citizen, do you?27

In the naye kille’s view, the parnasim abused religion, and their greed for power caused their rejection of the Declaration. For the naye kille, it all circled around the question of authority and the democratizing aspects of the Declaration. In the alte kille, only the few Jews who could pay the community taxes had the right to elect the parnasim. With the Declaration, however, if the Jews felt that the parnasim were not doing a good job, they could be overthrown by the common Jew. The abandonment of social distinction in the Declaration was what really bothered the parnasim, as the naye kille argued. By pointing to those aspects, the naye kille represented itself as the best solution for the worries of the common, religious Jew.

In sum, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen divided the Jewish community. The naye kille incorporated the rights within their new religious framework, while the alte kille went to great lengths to prevent its implementation. What is interesting in their handling of the Declaration is that both communities used it to serve their own interests. For the naye kille, its proclamation heralded a new era, as it legitimized their rejection of the parnasim’s rule and placed authority with the people. For the alte kille, it was the other way around. They used their altered version of the Declaration to foster and consolidate their power; the Declaration’s propositions were nothing more than a restatement of their version of Judaism.

2. The politicalized Jewish ritual: Purim productions

Purim’s religious framework became a dispositive for discourses on Jewishness and national identity. The carnivalesque elements of Purim, such as the temporary suspension of hierarchy, provided the maskilim with instruments to criticize Jewish authority and disseminate their enlightened ideals as well as their reform proposals.28 In

27 Ibid., 106–108.
28 For how Carnival consolidated unity, emphasized equality, and temporarily suspended hierarchy, see M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.
the *maskilic* use of Purim, religious and political objectives became entangled. Moreover, its format of turning the world upside down and permitting the grotesque exchange between the profane and the sacred enabled *maskilim* not only to address thorny issues but also to reach the common person through comedy.

Traditionally, Purim productions such as *purimshpieln* and *purimkrantn* (humorous papers distributed during Purim) spouted criticism, consolidated the social order, and made no distinction between the secular and the religious. The *purimshpiel* secured society’s moral structures by ridiculing the reversal and temporarily providing the people a reprieve from the rigid, hierarchical world. The majority of the *purimshpieln* were an elaboration on the Purim story, where Esther saves the Jews from destruction by convincing King Asheverus of the wickedness of Haman. In content as well as in language, the *purimshpiel* played with conventions. It was unstructured, full of transvestism and obscenities. For instance, the pious man Mordechai sings while addressing the king: “Happy New Year, stinking eggs. May the king’s balls grow and swell.”

Men played Esther’s part, inverting her supposed beauty into grotesqueness, comparing her to a frog and calling her the daughter of a whore. By reversing the social order and showing the ridiculousness of deviation, subversive behavior was pacified. Many Jews enjoyed the Purim festivities, and its literature served many purposes, from a temporal relief from social order to a tongue-in-cheek *pilpul*. However, at the end of the eighteenth century, the new discursive formations on Jewishness came to imbue the Purim productions, making them a tool to communicate what Jewishness was all about.

*Addressing ‘the Jewish question’*

In addition, non-Jewish eighteenth-century theatre analyzed society, promoted social elevation, and disseminated enlightened ideals. For instance, Lessing’s play *Nathan the Wise* sought to foster tolerance between different religions both through the parable of the ring and by letting a Jew play the role of the honorable and enlightened Nathan. Also, Jewish enlighteners such as Isaac Euchel (1756–1804), with his play *Reb Henoch Oder were tut me damit* in 1793, and Aaron Wolfsohn (1754/1756–1835), with his play *Leichtsinn und Frömmelei: Ein Familiengemälde in drei Aufzügen*, used the theatre to

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address issues; however, instead of blaming society for Jewry’s inferior position, as Lessing did, they critiqued the Jews for their inability to cope with the new times. The plays by Wolfsohn and Euchel describe the crisis of bourgeois German Jewry, with its generational conflict and sexual deviance, as well as the response of orthodoxy, with its rigidity toward anything new such as modern headwear and the maskilic study of and emphasis on (biblical) Hebrew grammar. For Shmuel Feiner, the themes developed in both plays exemplify the Kulturkampf between the orthodoxy and the maskilim with their different sets of rules and culture.³¹ The plays exposed and ridiculed tensions within Jewish society as well as introducing Enlightenment thought to a broad audience.

**Jewish poverty**

In the Netherlands, the Kulturkampf between the maskilim and the orthodox centered on the immense poverty of the Jewish community, which was, according to the maskilim, caused by inequality and usurpation. Because the majority of Jews lacked financial resources, the price of food and clothing were import themes in Dutch Purim productions. During times of war, such as the fourth war with England (1780–84) and later the French invasion (1795), the cost of living increased. The Amsterdam Yiddish chronicles from Braatbard, Prints, and Wing constantly refer to economic decline.³² The chroniclers repeatedly mention the prices of various (food) items during their descriptions of events happening in the Republic as well as in their own Jewish community. For them, food prices were significant, and they imposed no hierarchy between questions of politics and daily maintenance.

In addition to the general economic decline in the Netherlands, the Ashkenazi community continually struggled with its finances, and its minutes are full of references to the enormous number of poor Jews. During Pesach, the majority of them received matzes because the parnasim deemed the Jewish requirement to abstain from leavened bread extremely important. As scholars tend to count amongst the poor all of the Jews eligible for the matze distribution, the number of Jews eligible for poor relief is uncertain. According to the calculations in the Pinkas, poor relief peaked in 1799 at 87%.

³¹ Feiner, The Jewish Enlightenment, 357.
³² For an elaborate discussion of those chronicles, see Bart Wallet, Links in a Chain: Early Modern Yiddish Historiography from the Northern Netherlands, 1743–1812 (2012), 216–237.
of the Jews. However, according to Marco van Leeuwen, only 10% of the Jewish community was on structural poor relief, which included peat in the winter and a small allowance. Notwithstanding the exact numbers, Jews portrayed themselves as poverty-stricken.

Not surprisingly, prices are important in the Purim productions. In a purimkrant written by Shloume Duikelaar, Di naye purim-krant: beshraybung fun di dray berumte sokhrim (The New Purim Paper: Description of the Three Famous Merchants), one of the humorous elements in the piece is devoted to a fictional pricelist, wherein worthless items are listed with absurdly high prices. For instance, one of the items on the list reads: “43 sleeveless shirts, torn in front, shit upon in the back, 40 Reichstaler, 4 baize skirts with fleas, ditto white ones with shlemazl [misfortune] in them.” Other issues concerning the deplorable state of the Jews were also addressed in various purimkrantn. For instance, in one of the purimkrantn, A naye purim lukh (The New Purim Calendar), the author claims to have had a conversation with the sun where they discussed the four principles of life, namely hunger, thirst, bad housing, and lack of peat for the winter. In Di naye befrorene Purim krant (The New Frozen Purim Paper), the problem of winter inspires the author to write the following verse:

What can we write about wintertime, dear folk?
That we carried the yoke.
This year there was a lot of snowfall,
And also wind and squall.
For the poor, the winter has never been so bad,
And a bit of mercy we have not had.
The people amused themselves this wintertime,
And to us poor folk were not benign.
Winter is good, they say;

33 Michman, Beem, and Michman, Pinkas, 59.
34 See for instance the many references to the Ashkenazi communities’ poverty in the Protocolbuchen, in the Diskursn, and in Wing’s chronicle.
35 ROS, YidNed 450.
36 EH, 20B 67 (1) A naye purim lukh (The New Purim Calendar). In 20B 67 (10) the author speaks of the nine elements of life.
But our goods and chattel, we have eaten away.\textsuperscript{37}

In this production, Duikelaar pities the poor in their desolation: “[A]nd I have thought about the poor with no food and no goods. A household with small children, no bread to eat or fire to warm. And nebbich [pity] them all winter without earnings, and when I think of that my joy disappears.”\textsuperscript{38} Of course an important reason to include the winter hardships in the purimkrantn was largely connected to the date of Purim, which takes place somewhere between February and March.

Poverty and the corresponding inability to repair or renew the Jewish communities’ facilities or collect taxes is also addressed in the play Alz der sof iz gut, allez iz gut (All is Well that Ends Well).\textsuperscript{39} This play was performed at the house of Chief Rabbi Moses Löwenstamm somewhere between 1794 and 1798. The play deviates from the biblical storyline of other purimshpieln and instead shares more similarities with Dutch comedies, such as Den bedroge bedrieger (The Betrayed Liar, 1683). In those plays, the plot focuses on revealing the truth and exposing the imposter, which is reflected in telling adjectives such as disguised, betrayed, deceived, etc.\textsuperscript{40} Likewise in this anonymous Yiddish play, the plot revolves around the unmasking of several characters.\textsuperscript{41}

The play commences with a request to the Amsterdam Ashkenazi community to donate on behalf of the poverty-stricken community of Solnek in Poland. Their eruv (ritual enclosure) and keys to the mikveh are stolen, and because “there is no money, not in our pockets, not in our houses, and everything costs money, we send a young man

\textsuperscript{38} EH, 20B67 (5)
\textsuperscript{39} This name was given by its founder and translator into the West-Yiddish, Leo Fuks.
\textsuperscript{40} Leo Fuks, All is Well that Ends Well or The Uncovered Three-Fold Deceit: A Comedy in Three Acts. An Anonymous Yiddish Comedy from the End of the 18th Century, Introduction, notes, and modernized Yiddish version (Paris, 1955), XI–XII.
\textsuperscript{41} The comedy commences with the arrival of Yerushalmi at the house of the parnas of Amsterdam, Reb Lipman. Yerushalmi pretends to be a money collector for Jerusalem, who only speaks broken Hebrew. However in reality he is a swindler from Galicia and has tricked his wife, Lipke Yentes, by sending her a letter confirming his death. Yerushalmi is accompanied by a girl dressed as a boy, who he deceived into leaving her father’s house. Because Lipke Yentes presumes her husband is dead, she marries Reb Yoksh, a miracle-working rabbi from Galicia and a friend of Yerushalmi. Reb Yoksh, in his turn, also deserts Lipke Yentes and moves to Amsterdam. In the meantime, Lipke Yentes travels after him. In the house of Parnas Lipman, where eventually all the characters gather, the imposters are exposed. Yerushalmi returns to his wife Yentes, and Reb Yoksh marries the girls disguised as a boy who was the servant of Yerushalmi.
who shall visit cities and villages to collect money."\textsuperscript{42} The first lines of the play show the tension between observance of the Jewish law and money. This critique reverberates in the \textit{naye kille}'s condemnation of the \textit{parnasim} for maintaining the difference between rich and poor, especially in the observance of Jewish law.\textsuperscript{43} Because only paying members were entitled to perform religious honorary functions (in the synagogue), and since membership was expensive, this meant that the poor were excluded.

However, the writers of the \textit{alte kille}'s \textit{Diskursn} denied the \textit{parnasim}'s responsibility for the Jews' deplorable state. According to them, poverty was a constant factor and an inevitable evil. They defended inequality by claiming that it resulted in conspicuous religious consumption, which was taxed and therefore benefitted the community funds. The \textit{alte kille} used the example of how Jews tried to prevent their interment at the Jewish cemetery at Zeeburg, which was predominantly used for the poor, so that they could be buried at the much more prestigious cemetery at Muiderberg.

Imagine that the community supports about 900 households at its expense, and all have received poor relief. As a matter of course, when such people come to die, they have to be buried at the expense of the community, which would have cost the poor relief fund a lot of money every year if they had all been brought to the cemetery at Muiderberg. They didn't have a choice and bought this cemetery at Zeeburg, which is nearby, in order to save the great expense. And do you think that no good people have been buried there? Believe me, important people and great scholars of the world. And the result was also a financial gain: this cemetery has kept many people back because they didn't want to lose their privilege [of being buried] at Muiderberg, so they went to extreme trouble in order not to go on the poor relief list. This also produced a lot of money for the community over the course of time.\textsuperscript{44}

This critique of the price tag on Jewish law recurs in the \textit{Diskursn} and is clearly explained in the bilingual \textit{yontef-bletter} from Duikelaar, \textit{Nayen yors und ekstra simkhes-toure kurrant benign Lekere Kheritkhe. Dialogue tussen rebe Henokh en eyshes khayel Gerritje} (New Year's and Special Simhat Torah Paper to the Tune of \textit{Lekkere Gerritje}. Dialogue between Reb Henokh and His Accomplished Wife Gerritje). In this poem, Reb Henokh complains about the expenses of the High Holidays. He mentions, among other

\textsuperscript{42} Fuks, \textit{All is Well}, 1.
\textsuperscript{43} See for instance \textit{Diskursn 1} of the \textit{naye kille}; Michman and Aptroot, \textit{Storm in the Community}, passim.
\textsuperscript{44} Michman and Aptroot, \textit{Storm in the Community}, 354.
things, especially the costs connected with the observance of Jewish law. Thus he sighs about the price of “honey and sweet apples for Rosh Hashanah, the grapes to say Shehehiyanu [a special blessing of thanks] over, kosher wine for the Kiddush, a lulav [bundle of palm tree, myrtle, and willow] and etrog [lemon] for Sukkot.”45 This relation between religion and money is a beloved maskilic theme, as it provides an example of how inequality violates the self-realization of Jews.

**Jewish unproductivity**

Another subject in purimshpieln that is connected with poverty is the question of Jewish productivity. The concern over Jewish labor productivity also comes to the fore in various proposals for the elevation of the Jews, such as the one from von Dohm and from Abbe Grégoire. They readily admit that discrimination and exclusion of Jews from the gilden contributed to Jewish over-representation in unskilled jobs, jobs that required no education. The inability for (Dutch) Jews to work in manufacturing starkly decreased their economic opportunities. This meant that the majority of the Jewish community was employed in unskilled labor, as porters, traders in second-hand goods, or peddlers.46

Duikelaar addresses this issue of unproductivity in Antvert an Shloyme Duikelaar. He describes how he tried many trades in order to provide for his family. The brochure starts with Duikelaar’s attempt to cash in a lottery ticket in strange places and continues with his employment in widely divergent professions. “I began with another job, namely corn cutter [i.e., corns of the feet] (all feet are filthy). The first [corn] I cut with a sharp knife until [the patient] was completely cut up at my hands[...]. An apothecary and a doctor had to help. What was my luck? That I escaped quickly!”47 Duikelaar comically blended the inability of Jews to focus on one job and a supposedly Jewish ‘monkey business’ into this piece.

According to Dessauer, the overrepresentation of Jews in trade was responsible for the Jewish community’s poverty.48 In a narrative song with the revealing name Arbeit

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45 YidNed 523, fol. 2a.
47 Yid, 480.
48 Because of the shift in content and language and the lack of humor, both Fuks and Aptroot do not regard two brochures by Dessauer as proper Purim productions, even though Dessauer himself labelled them as purim productions. Fuks, “Van Poerimspelen tot Poerimkranten,” 176; Marion Aptroot, “Western Yiddish
und Fleiss, Dessauer encourages the Jews to learn a craft, and he explicitly addresses the question of Jewish productivity. In this song, two sisters are in search of an appropriate marriage candidate. Both a shoemaker and a tailor propose themselves. However, the sisters are reluctant, as they do not consider them honorable and eligible for marriage. “Oh no tailor, a tailor and a shoemaker, do you despise us? No, we want to marry merchants.” As the reaction of the sisters demonstrates, professions such as shoemaker and tailor were frowned upon. To boost the esteem of artisans, Dessauer lets the tailor answer the sisters. “The craftsman is just as good as any one else. If there were no craftsman, there would be no merchants.” And the shoemaker continues: “A human is a human being when he is human and honest. The world is divided under various stars. We cannot become everything.” Then the choir responds with the much-cited solution to ‘Jewish’ productivity: “We cannot all live from trade and live as merchants; variation in conduct can give us nourishment.” With this musical piece, Dessauer clearly intended to convince the Jews that working in crafts provided food and was therefore just as honorable as working in trade. Apparently, Jews were reluctant to try other professions, and as social mobility numbers demonstrated, Jews predominantly remained working in trade; their choice of these professions thus had as much to with culture as with exclusion.

Towards the end of the song, the women are finally convinced of the respectability of the artisans and happily proclaim:

No, no, no, I will no longer tarry
I should quickly marry
As a woman ages
Her appearance changes
And if she doesn’t have a lot of capital
A husband she will not get at all


49 YidNed 497, Dessauer, Arbeit und Fleiss, 2.
50 Ibid., 3.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
Therefore an artisan it will be
As he can provide for me
Better one than none.  

In the last couplets, Dessauer explicitly connects the artisan's productivity with usefulness. Being productive characterized many Enlightenment endeavors, and this preoccupation with utility is reflected in various civil associations. The word usefulness appears in names, institutions, and various writings, and it typifies the pivotal role attributed to civil society for social change. Things were only valuable if they benefitted humanity. For instance, the most important association aiming to civilize the masses was called the Association for the Benefit of the Common Good (Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen). In the same manner as the enlightened founders, Dessauer praises the products of the various crafts: “[S]o the carpenter hammers, the weaver weaves, and the cook cooks. They are respectable vocations as they all bring ‘bread to the table’.” In the final couplet, the link between respectability and usefulness is once again expressed when the choir sings: “Being useful is our goal... and the greatest art stays small when she is of no use to the world.”

The Diskursn of the naye kille likewise draws a link between the inability to work in the crafts and Jewish backwardness. “I want to serve this country in which I have a share. And for my household, too, by making a living in an honorable way. If you have a trade, buy yourself into a guild. If you have a shop that isn’t free, buy yourself into a guild. Become a man. Don’t remain a Jew in abjection.” Here Dessauer presents manual labor as a cure for Jewish illness. The physical labor and the material result could turn the Jew into a citizen and a human being.

The negative representation of Jewish breadwinning was further fostered by Jewish (circular) migration as a result of the shrinking opportunities for Jews to settle and earn a living in Eastern Europe and the German countries. Some Jews even joined gangs, and in the eighteenth century several of these were almost exclusively Jewish.

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54 Dessauer, Arbeit und Fleiss, 4.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 5.
57 Michman and Aptroot, Storm in the Community, 136.
58 For instance, Frederik II of Prussia issued a decree in 1744 restricting the settlement of Jews in Breslau, and in Russia Jews could only reside in the pale of settlement.
This, coupled with a large group of betteljuden, added to the already negative image of the Jew.\(^6^0\) The strong image of the dishonorable Jew moving from one city to another is reproduced in two characters in the play *Alz der sof iz gut, iz allez gut*. One is Reb Yoksh, a *baal-shem* (miracle-working rabbi) from Galicia, and the other is the swindler posing as a *shadar* (or a *shaliach derabanan*, a legal emissary for the collection of settlements in distress or in the Holy Land), Yerushalmi. Both characters represent the wandering Jewish Eastern European immigrant. They do not have a craft or product, but instead pray on the goodness and naiveté of others. Reb Yoksh, for instance, is in search of a lucrative position as a teacher and extensively quotes from rabbinic literature, which he quite often twists to his own benefit. Thus when the host, *Parnas* Lipman, reacts a bit suspiciously and questions Reb Yoksh’s real intentions, Reb Yoksh changes the usual explanation “let another man praise thee, but not thine own mouth” (Proverbs 27:2) into:

> Who is allowed to praise me? No more, no: it is written, let other men praise thee; that means a stranger who does not know you, he is allowed to praise. From that we derive that if a man knows someone, that is to say someone like you, who no doubt has heard of me, he is not allowed to praise. Therefore, if a man fulfills this obligation, he does not praise. I obey this rule and praise only myself.\(^6^1\)

This rather bizarre explanation of the verse shows the capability of the writer to play with traditional Jewish texts and theological reasoning, while at the same time criticizing those who use Jewish religious sources for their own gain. Moreover, Yerushalmi symbolizes here the dishonest Jewish trader and his illogical chatter, behavior that prevented the Jews from becoming real citizens

**Critique of the Jewish religion in the character of Yerushalmi**

Besides representing the Jewish reluctance to become productive, the character of Yerushalmi also exposes the abuse of religion.\(^6^2\) The *shadar* was a highly respected

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\(^6^0\) Michman and Aptroot, *Storm in the Community*, 136.

\(^6^1\) Fuks, *All is Well*, 4.

figure in the Jewish world, and this appointment was bestowed on outstanding scholars with a fair knowledge of foreign languages because the shadar visited various countries to collect funds. The shadar was a well-known figure, treated with respect, and Jews were urged to donate to communities in distress. Yerushalmi symbolized how religious authority figures abused the naiveté of the Jewish community and how they exploited their status for their own benefit. Abuse by religious authorities was a beloved enlightened theme, and Voltaire, for instance, devoted many pages to the injustice of the Catholic Church. Likewise, the maskilim condemned the rabbinate for deceiving and exploiting the Jewish community for their own gain.

The figure of the shadar is related to the commandment of tsedakah (giving charity), as he collects money either for communities in distress in Eastern Europe or for Jewish religious settlements in the Holy Land (yishuvim). In the light of tsedakah, requests for help from the Jewish community were generously supported. Yerushalmi thus reminds the community of their Jewish responsibility of tsedakah and emphasizes that their gift will enable the Jews of Solnek to fulfill their religious obligations. “God will give you and your family a long life. Because there is no greater mitzvah then to repair the eruv and netilat yadayim (ritual washing of the hands), and to realize it, we hand over everything that you own, as it is written: 'when you go, you shall not go empty' (Ex. 3:21).” Withholding alms from the Jews of Solnek hindered them in fulfilling their Jewish duties; Yerushalmi makes their observance of Jewish law dependant upon the generosity of the Amsterdam community. Moreover, in his plea he reminds the community of the promised riches and liberation from the Egyptians in the Bible. By quoting this particular verse, he reminds the community of their shared history as well as Jewish responsibility; charity was a matter of solidarity.

Trust lay at the foundation of this system of Jewish charity. However, with so many requests, it was difficult to tell if the intensions of every agent were honest. Thus in the play parnas Lipman sighs: “Nowadays, there have never been so many shlachim [legal emissaries]. One collects for the [victims] of an evil edict, another for the pidyon

63 See for instance a pogrom-stricken Brisek in Lithuania (Protocolbuch II, 44) and a collection for the yishuv in Jerusalem (Hebron and Safed, Protocolbuch IV, 6).
64 Cf. Michman, Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period, 180–183; and Michmanei Yosef, 'Foundation of the institution Pekidim ve-Amarkelim of the Holy cities in Amsterdam,’ 229–44.[Hebrew].
65 For instance, the edict of the Archduchess of Austria, Maria Theresa, in 1745 prohibited Jewish settlement in Bohemia.
shvuyim [redemption of captives]. Who knows if they are honest with so many swindlers in the world?"66 distrust about the honest distribution of collected money was also one of the reasons for the Ashkenazi community to discontinue their joint collection efforts with the Sephardim for the yishuv in the Holy Land. The Ashkenazim established the organization Pekidim ve-Amarkalim (Officials and Administrators), with Hirsch Lehren as the leading figure. Because of its sacred nature, both the Lehrens and the Ashkenazi community regarded assistance to Jews studying in the Holy Land as more important than supporting their local students.67

Another issue that was also related to the abuse of religious legal structures was that of the woman trapped in her marriage, the agunah. Whenever a husband did not return from his travels or disappeared, the wife remained married, because in order to divorce the man had to write a letter (get) stating that he wanted to divorce his wife. Without such a letter, the woman was stuck. She could not remarry, and if she would have children with another man, they would be bastards (mamzerim), cursed for seven generations and only able to marry other mamzerim. For the maskilim, the agunah epitomized the errors and failures of the rabbinic system. In a famous poem by the Russian maskil Yehuda Leyb Gordon (1830–1892) titled Kotzo Shel Yod (The Point on Top of the Yod), the author ridicules the rabbinate for disapproving a get because it left out the letter yod, leaving the woman poor and miserable.68 This concern with freeing the Jewish woman from the bonds of orthodoxy is especially prominent in the late-nineteenth-century writings of Eastern European maskilim such as S. An-Sky (Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport 1863–1920) and Isaac Leyb Peretz (1852–1915).69

The issue of the agunah also appears in the play Alz der sof iz gut, iz allez gut, but here it is connected to the supposedly libelous behavior of the vanished husband. Travel was a major part of Jewish life, as many moved from one city to another to sell goods, study, or migrate. Yet travel also enabled husbands to disregard their responsibilities at

66 Fuks, All is Well, 2.
67 Michman, Dutch Jewry during the Emancipation Period, 180.
In the play, Lipke Yentes, the deserted wife of the so-called miracle-working rabbi Reb Yonkesh, left Poland in search of her lost husband in order to obtain a *get* so she could marry another man, Reb Getz. She finds her Reb Yonkesh in the house of Reb Liepman and demands a *get*. “Ah, you bastard. This time I found you, rue your cries. You left me there in Poland, suffering, while you fled to Ashkenaz. You would have let me be an *agunah*.” She convinces Reb Liepman, the host, to help her, and she eventually acquires her letter of divorce. The issue of the *agunah* is another example of how in this play Jewish religious concerns, such as the *tsedakah*, *yishuv*, or *pidyon shvuyim*, blended with popular theatrical themes. As such, this play exemplifies how the themes of Dutch theatre were integrated into a Jewish framework.

Purim shows how the boundaries between the secular and the religious were more of an ideal inspired by the doctrine of secularism than something that could be applied to this Jewish tradition. The *maskilim* used this platform of social critique to infuse a religious festival with their secular ideals. Consequently, the Purim productions began to address issues related to ‘the Jewish question’. The combined frivolity and seriousness of the genre enabled the *maskilim* to reach the common man. Instead of merely reversing the social order, and thus emphasizing the ridiculousness of change, the focal point became the aspects of Jewish life that the *maskilim* wanted to reform. The themes of Jewish unproductivity and the cost of observing Jewish law entered and enriched the genre. In other words, religious and secular discourses entangled with the dispositive of Purim. Therefore, references to the differences between husband and wife, fictional images, and scatological humor blended with critique of the Jewish lifestyle. As a result, socio-political objectives became embedded within the religious framework of Purim. Critique of the differences between rich and poor, the price tag on Jewish observance, and the issue of Jewish productivity formed a discursive knot within the contemporary Purim tradition. In addition, local issues such as the collection for the *yishuvim*, the attractiveness of Amsterdam for *betteljuden*, and the harsh winters also found their way into the genre. It became a dispositive to educate the Jews on citizenship. But to say that Purim was hijacked by the *maskilim* would be a great

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71 Fuks, *All is Well*, 7, line 19–22.  
exaggeration, as the rituals both fostered the social order and renegotiated power relations.

3. The politicalized Jewish ritual: The sermon

In the nineteenth century, the sermon was an important dispositive for discourses on Dutch nationality and Jewishness. Patriotic and moral responsibility became essential virtues in the modern nation, which, now that the Jews had become citizens, had to be learned and internalized. Beginning with the French occupation, the government issued regulations regarding the content of sermons, and as a result, the sermon became imbued with nationalistic propaganda. The Supreme Committee for Israelite Affairs deemed the government’s message so imperative that in 1814 it decreed that the sermon’s purpose was to instill love for the fatherland and educate the Jew into becoming a good citizen. It stated: “The rabbis or assessors are obliged to instill in their flock, by means of their sermons, love for the fatherland, their sovereign, and the professions and an aversion to laziness and begging.” This dispositive blended the enlightened ideal of utility with discourses on citizenship and religion. With this regulation, the rabbis became a vehicle for the promotion of national virtues.

The sermon was originally not a significant part of the Ashkenazic liturgy. However, under the influence of both Sephardic and Christian traditions, it gained a foothold in Jewish life. Previously, the chief rabbi was only obliged to deliver a sermon twice a year, namely on the Sabbath preceding Pesach and on Yom Kippur. Special occasions such as national disasters, Jewish festivities, or requests from the government

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74 In chapter three of his book, Peter van Rooden discusses how the idea of love for the fatherland became intertwined with the concept of appropriate religious behaviour in the government-decreed bededagen (days of fasting and thanksgiving). See van Rooden, *Religieuze Regimes*, 78–120.

75 I argue that nationalism imbued the ritual, which is contrary to Eric Hobsbawm, who regarded nationalism as a substitute for social cohesion through religion. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-producing traditions in Europe, 1870–1914”, in *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 303. NA, HC, inv. 33 1813

76 SCIA, inv.1. nr. 2b.


were also reasons to write sermons. During the nineteenth century, thirty-three Ashkenazi and Sephardi sermons were written or translated into Dutch and printed. Reasons for this, besides the endorsement of the use of Dutch, include the display of Jewish loyalty to the sovereign and their worthiness of citizenship.

The gunpowder tragedy in Leiden

The tragic event of the gunpowder explosion in Leiden became the symbol of the nation’s unity, a moment wherein the provinces presented themselves as part of one nation. The emotional appeal to the inhabitants of the Netherlands to help the victims spurred the feeling of mutual belonging as well as uniting Dutch citizens in their effort to relieve the burden. King Louis Napoleon (1778–1846) took the opportunity of the tragedy to present himself as the leader and the savior-king. He portrayed himself as a hero with little regard for his own safety as he supposedly rescued the victims from the devastating fire and comforted the destitute. The king became a role model. For the Ashkenazi community it was a moment to demonstrate their loyalty and commitment to the well-being of the nation. The Dutch chief rabbis used the tragedy to foster their own image as loyal subjects, praising the king and his efforts. The gunpowder explosion presented an excellent opportunity for self-promotion for both the king and the Jewish religious leaders.

The tragedy happened on 13 January 1807, when a ship containing gunpowder exploded in the center of Leiden. The explosion killed about 165 inhabitants and injured an additional 2,000. Only a few hours after the explosion, King Louis Napoleon Bonaparte visited the area to inspect the damage and to support the victims. Numerous journals reported on the disaster and artists and writers commemorated the explosion in writing and painting. Among the casualties were several Jewish children, since their

80 Ibid., 169.
elementary school was located near the explosion. The schoolteacher, David Haagens, lost his wife and four of his children. Another eleven children were killed, and three others were reported missing.84 The disaster left a deep impression on the Amsterdam Ashkenazi community, as the chronicler Wing reports: “[L]uckily David Haagens was spared because he had escorted children to their home. In addition, many leading figures and professors were killed. The synagogue was severely damaged, although – thank God – the aron hakodesh and the Torah scrolls were saved.”85

On the national authorities’ request, the Ashkenazi Community of Amsterdam organized a collection in its synagogues.

On 24 January, the parnasim received a request from the government to announce in every synagogue that everyone is invited to contribute, according to their ability, to relieve the burden of the disaster in Leiden. Next week in the community’s meeting hall daily from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m., a parnas together with the municipal committee and a member of the municipal board accompanied by two other Christians will be present to collect the contributions. For those who know what they want to donate, a sign-up list will be present, while for those who want to donate anonymously, a box will be there to collect the amount.86

Moreover, because of the disaster’s national character and the many Jewish casualties, the Jewish rabbinate felt obliged to express their empathy. In a sermon given on Sunday 25 January, Rabbi Moses Löwenstamm laments the losses of “the lofty city of Leiden.” Wing refers to this sermon as “an appropriate sermon to urge the community members toward generous financial contributions, each according to their own ability.”87 According to Löwenstamm, “God” and “his compassion” saved the city from total destruction. “And if the fire had not been extinguished by God’s mercy, it would have completely destroyed the city.” The king, according to Löwenstamm, served as God’s instrument. He heralds the efforts of King Louis as he jeopardized his life by rescuing people from the fire as well as extinguishing it. “His made these efforts with diligence

84 Wing reports two children missing. See Roest, “Uittreksel uit eene kronijk van de jaren 1795–1812,” 198.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid. A national collection ordered by the king was organized for the benefit of the victims. See Hugo Landheer, “Nederlands eerst nationale collecte. De financiële hulpverlening aan de slachtoffers van de buskruitramp,” in Het fataal evenement, edited by Ponsen and van der List, 293–265.
87 Ibid.
and not with laziness.” Moreover, he continues to praise the king as he urges the community to help: “it is not time to complain but to help.” By praising the king’s actions and by depicting him as a hero who, with complete disregard for his own safety, rescued the inhabitants of Leiden from the devastating flames, Löwenstamm fostered the image of the savior-king as well as demonstrating his allegiance to this representative of God.88

In addition, his son-in-law Samuel Berenstein, at that time chief rabbi in Groningen and Leeuwarden, wrote a special sermon to commemorate the victims of the gunpowder explosion. Löwenstamm and Berenstein differed in their views of the future of Dutch Jewry, but nonetheless found each other in their wish to show Jewish loyalty to the king. Berenstein’s wish to announce his support for the king and the compassion he felt for the victims of the explosion was so great that he ordered a Dutch translation of his sermon, which was printed shortly after the disaster.89 In the introduction to the sermon, Berenstein excuses himself for his inability to deliver the speech directly in Dutch. He emphasizes the importance of the spiritual leader as a moral guide, leading his flock on the righteous path. Furthermore, he states that a rabbi should advise and comfort the community with love and words. Moreover, he expands on how he perceived the members of the community and how a sermon should be preached. Berenstein clearly took the opportunity of the national disaster to set out his own reform plans.

Like his father-in-law, Moses Löwenstamm, Berenstein used his speech to praise the king for his contributions in Leiden. The sermon elaborates on Psalm 112 verse 9: “He hath scattered abroad, he hath given to the needy; his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted in honor.” Charity and love for one’s neighbor are the main subjects of the sermon. According to Berenstein, compassion was not only part of human nature but of nature itself. In addition, because it was inherent in nature, it was perfectly compatible with, if not inseparable from, pure reason and wisdom.90 Therefore, it was against nature and the human condition to be miserly. Not being compassionate

89 His German was, however, written with Hebrew characters. ACA, 1241, 137.
toward human beings was not only one of the biggest deviations from the right path, but also caused much greater sins, such as the murder of Abel by Cain.\textsuperscript{91}

In the sermon, Berenstein used the king’s charity as an example for all Jews. By emphasizing the king’s good character and praising his honest intentions, Berenstein endorsed the king’s rule.

Behold! On the wings of love comes forward as a saving angel our beloved and benevolent king to the horrifying place, as a loving father among his children. With the speed of an arrow, we see our lovely father hasten to the sorrowful area. Clearly, he shows that he only wishes to reign in the hearts of the citizens.\textsuperscript{92}

Berenstein further employs lofty psalms to praise his actions. Using the king as a role model for virtuous behavior emphasized Jewish support for the king and his government.\textsuperscript{93} Like the gunpowder tragedy, the sermon commemorating the Belgian Revolt provides Berenstein with an excellent opportunity to represent the Jews as loyal subjects of the state.\textsuperscript{94} The Belgian Revolt started in 1830 and lead to the independence of Belgium, a direct result of the unifying and nationalizing efforts of Willem I. Condemnation of Belgium served as proof of Jewish support for Willem’s policy. The sermons added to the already growing mythologization of the virtue of the king, which Moses Löwenstamm’s sermon clearly shows when he describes the king’s conduct as heroic and bold. As such, the sermons helped foster the image of the savior-king.

In his praise Berenstein resembles his father-in-law Löwenstamm, who also devoted several lines the king’s heroic actions. Despite their laudatory praises, the style of the sermons is very different. Berenstein was clearly influenced by contemporary ideas on preaching, which emphasized its moral capacities. A sermon should inspire the congregants to good behavior and should be accessible and understandable for all. Therefore the preacher used examples from daily life and subordinated scholarly

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 36–37.
\textsuperscript{93} In the sermon commemorating the Belgian Revolution, Berenstein compares the actions of the king with important biblical figures such as Jacob, King Solomon, and David. Samuel Berenstein, Neêrlands bededag op den 2den December 1832 of Verslag der viering van dezen dag, zoo als dehelve heeft plaats gehad in de Nederlandsche Israëlitische synagoge, te Amsterdam ingesteld door S. Berenstein, Opperrabbijn der Nederlandsche Israëlitische Hoofdsynagoge aldaar (Amsterdam: D. Proops Jacobszoon en van Embden en C., z.d.), 2–20.
\textsuperscript{94} Compare for instance the poem by Moses Lemans, the “Sin of Belgium,” in Michmanei Yosef: Studies on the History and Literature of the Dutch Jews, edited by Joseph Michman, 493–524.
exegesis to the moral message. Berenstein broke with the sermon tradition of his father-in-law. Löwenstamm’s sermon was written in the old style: a series of biblical quotes clarified the original text, and he did not compare the Bible with secular texts or with the daily experience of the congregants. Moreover, Löwenstamm’s sermon was written in Hebrew, which was probably not understood by the less-educated Jew, while Berenstein’s initial sermon was written in German, which resembled the lingua franca of the community: Yiddish. Furthermore, the intended audience differed. Berenstein clearly addressed every congregant, and the translation of the sermon into Dutch enabled him to represent himself to Dutch society as a loyal subject, committed to the well-being of the nation. In contrast, Löwenstamm’s sermon was more intended for a learned public and the Jewish community. Although the styles differed considerably, their intention was the same, namely the representation of Jewish support for the king and fatherland.

In the newly invented national ritual of gathering support for the victims of the gunpowder explosion, different religious translations developed. Löwenstamm’s was the incorporation of the national ritual within the then-common textual tradition of writing sermons; Berenstein was the promulgation of a new type of sermon. Berenstein especially took this opportunity to set out his own ideas for the renewal of the chief rabbi’s position and the role of religion in Jewish society. His sermon was not a showpiece of scholarship as his father-in-law’s was, but rather a program for Jewish reform and the role of the rabbinate in it. Despite their different uses of the sermon, both men used the opportunity of the gunpowder tragedy to show their alliance to the king and to represent the Jews as concerned and loyal citizens. As such, their engagement with the new dispositive of the sermon reveals different Jewish strategies of incorporation.

Promotion of the Dutch language

Next to presenting the Jews as loyal Dutch citizens, the sermon was an instrument to familiarize the Jews with the vernacular. Promotion of the vernacular was a typical maskilic endeavor, and the ability of the Jews to speak the nation’s language became an

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95 In the river floods of 1808 and 1809, King Louis Napoleon Bonaparte likewise publicly showed his compassion and empathy with the victims by visiting the disaster area and representing himself as the savior-king. Cf. A. M. A. J. Driessen, Watersnood tussen Maas en Waal. Overstromingsrampen in het rivierengebied tussen 1780 en 1810 (Zutphen: Walburg pers, 1994).
important aspect of *maskilic* Jewish identity. This was one among many other reasons why Mendelssohn initiated the German translation of the Pentateuch. In his words: “This is the first step to culture from which, alas, my nation has held itself so aloof that one might almost despair of any possibility of improvement.”96 Likewise, Dutch *maskilim* regarded knowledge of Dutch as a necessary condition for civil elevation. Holding on to Yiddish hindered the Jews in their economic as well as in their educational development.

In 1827, the Supreme Committee for Israelite Affairs encouraged the writing of Dutch sermons by organizing a yearly competition for the best sermon written in Dutch and granting a silver medallion to the winner.97 Promotion of the Dutch vernacular was, however, problematic. The majority of the rabbinate came from the German countries and Eastern Europe and was not well versed in Dutch. Although the royal decree of 26 February 1814 ordered all rabbis to be versed in Dutch, practice proved otherwise. Not until the establishment of the Dutch Jewish Seminary in 1837 did Dutch Jewry have the ability to train their own rabbis. In the seminary, Dutch was an essential part of the rabbis’ training, and besides the emphasis on the vernacular, a secular curriculum was added to prepare the aspiring rabbi for his worldly tasks.98

Another reason for the rabbis’ reluctance to use Dutch was its status. Some rabbis considered the Dutch language, like Yiddish, inferior to Hebrew. The reform-minded Chief Rabbi Jacob Fränkel of Zwolle (1814–1882), for instance, supposedly refused to learn Dutch. Some rabbis, such as Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam Samuel Berenstein and Chief Rabbi of Rotterdam Joseph Isaacsohn (1815–1885), continued preaching in German, probably because they considered Dutch to be a dialect of German. The majority of Berenstein’s sermons are written either in Hebrew or in German with Hebrew letters, even when they concerned special days of thanks or other national events. He did, however, publish some sermons in Dutch, but given the comparative number of Hebrew and German sermons in print, he probably only rarely preached in

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98 Besides the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim were also encouraged to abandon Portuguese and to replace it with Dutch. Here, too, the use of the vernacular posed some problems; opponents feared that it would ultimately lead to the loss of their identity. However, some community members thought otherwise, and in 1850 many left the service in the synagogue during the Portuguese sermon and returned after it was over. Their departure was due to their inability to understand the Portuguese language. Cf. *Wallet, “Religious Oratory”*, 178–179.
the Dutch vernacular. Moreover, in his Dutch-translated sermons he stressed that he was not well versed in Dutch. This is remarkable since he had lived in the Netherlands since his early youth at his father-in-law Moses Löwenstamm’s house. Berenstein’s archive contained much Dutch correspondence with no trace of any difficulties with the Dutch language. His publishing of Dutch sermons probably had more to do with presenting himself as a Dutch Jew and endorsing national values than representing the preaching practices in the synagogue. This hybridity characterized Berenstein, who on the one hand promoted the Supreme Committee of Israelite Affairs’ elevation of the Jews of and on the other hand held on to the status quo by frustrating many of their initiatives, such as the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Dutch and the reform of the Jewish educational system. Notwithstanding Berenstein’s preference for preaching in Hebrew, his Dutch sermons serve as a good example of how he both served the government and wished for an extension of the chief rabbi’s authority.

The sermon as a moral message
Berenstein’s sermon for the victims of the gunpowder explosion in Leiden is an example of the replacement of the scholarly sermon with the moral lesson. His sermons lack many references to Jewish texts and emphasize instead the moral implications of religious observance. The Christian sermon was a model for his new version of the Jewish sermon (darasha). Instead of comparing a Bible verse with various rabbinical texts, which was customary in the homilies of his father-in-law, Moses Löwenstamm, a single Bible verse was explained. The Christian preacher Johannes Henricus van der Palm (1763–1840) was especially influential for many rabbis, and they copied his baroque and imaginative language. Even though Christian books in the libraries of Dutch rabbis were scarce, Berenstein and theology teachers such as Levi Godschalk Wanefried and David Ezechiel Sluijs possessed a copy of van der Palm’s Bible translation.

99 ACA, 1241-82-144. In the sermon translated into Dutch and published for the bededag on 2 December 1832, issued during the Belgian Revolt, Berenstein blamed his reluctance to preach in Dutch on his German accent. Berenstein, Neérlands bededag op den 2den December 1832 of Verslag der viering van de EH en dag.
100 See chapter two.
101 See for instance the sermon for Shabbath Bereshit, ACA, 1241-82. For a characterization of Samuel Berenstein as a transitional figure, see Meijer, Erfenis der Emancipatie, 23–25.
102 ACA, 1241, 480.
In Berenstein’s sermons, only the idea of the verse was discussed, leaving considerable room for a moral exposition. The Bible verse served in this way as a useful leg up to an elaboration on virtues and correct behavior. As such, the sermon on the gunpowder explosion in Leiden as well as his sermon commemorating the Belgian Revolt provide a model for appropriate religious conduct. Berenstein defends his moral exposition of a Bible verse by explaining that “ideas that depart from the norm bring one’s goal closer.”\textsuperscript{104} Thus for Berenstein a sermon should not have to focus only on biblical exegesis. Instead, his purpose was to reach his audience and to deliver his enlightened moral lesson. This message is so important that he strongly condemns pilpul (casuistic argumentation).

His criticism repeats the general enlightened critique of the rabbinate and its textual analysis. “Also among my fellow believers, and maybe among others too, there is the detrimental method of addressing deeply complicated matters and solving and elaborating on them with wit. This abuse, so deeply rooted, is made the predominant goal, while everything else seems to be forgotten.”\textsuperscript{105} He further condemns those who use pilpul because they neglect the community’s moral needs for the benefit of intellectual prestige. They fail to “remind the community of their obligations...and to enlighten their spirit and to make their hearts amenable to moral lessons.”\textsuperscript{106} According to Berenstein, the congregants should be able to understand the message: the sermon should serve the people and not the rabbi.

Berenstein displays some knowledge of new pedagogic insights, wherein positive encouragement was regarded as more effective than brutal admonishment. Likewise, Berenstein tries to positively motivate the Jews into religious observance instead of threatening them with the Lord’s eternal wrath. Following these insights, Berenstein presents himself as a loving father. Only through “warmth and honesty could [the rabbi] win the trust and love of the community. A passionate imagination would render him with a penetrating eloquence to enlighten reason in their spirits.”\textsuperscript{107} Reaching out to the public and making himself familiar with the needs of community meant that the rabbi had to “mingle with all human classes and lower his tone in their ordinary and often

\textsuperscript{104} Berenstein, \textit{Leerrede over Psalm CXII: Vers 9}, 2.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 12–13.
trivial conversations; there he should acquaint himself with their moods, shortcomings, flaws, and ruling desires.” And he continues: “Not everywhere can one convince with cold ingenuity, rules of wisdom, or quotation of the sage’s writings.” Berenstein subordinated intellectual prestige to the needs of the Jewish community. What is interesting, however, is that he, in contrast to the enlightened adage regarding the capability of human beings to think for themselves, employs a cynical and paternalistic point of view regarding the intellectual capabilities of the Jews. According to Berenstein, the Jewish community’s backwardness compelled him to trick the Jews into employing reason.

Berenstein challenges the idea that religious leaders should abstain from politics. On this point, he agreed with his father-in-law Löwenstamm. According to Berenstein, there is a connection between irreligiosity, war, and political turmoil. He justifies his political stance by claiming that immorality and disbelief precedes war. Installing religiosity in his congregants would prevent riots and foster the king’s rule. Berenstein makes an explicit political statement when he condemns the Belgians’ wish for independence, and he uses his sermon to show his loyalty and support of the king. Or as he states: “to show our beloved king that we are warned and abhor these horrors.” According to Berenstein, loyalty to the House of Orange in particular and the government in general not only characterized Dutch Jewry’s conduct but was mandatory according to Jewish law. Berenstein thus made state nationalism part of the Jewish religion.

Related to Berenstein’s display of Jewish loyalty was his wish to portray the Jews as honest. Berenstein tries to counter the wave of anti-Semitism that arose, especially in France, after the Jewish convert Deutz deceived Duchesse de Berry in the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty during the French Revolution of 1830. This was a political episode connected to the Belgian Revolt which once again called Jewish loyalty into question. Berenstein condemns Jewish converts to Christianity. According to Berenstein, converts were inherently bad Jews and treacherous by nature. He referred to them as “those

108 Ibid., 3.
109 Ibid., 6.
110 Berenstein, Neêrlands bededag op den 2den December 1832 of Verslag der viering van dEHen dag, 2.
111 See the paragraphs above on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and Jewish conscription.
112 Berenstein, Neêrlands bededag op den 2den December 1832 of Verslag der viering van dEHen dag, iv.
113 Ibid., 32–33.
fortune seekers, driven to convert only by opportunity and scandalousness.”¹¹⁴ Berenstein displays this perception of the Jewish convert as opportunistic and in search of social acceptance in other writings.¹¹⁵ His negative view of Jewish converts was probably also fueled by the high number of German Jewish converts, particularly among the higher echelons of Jewish society. However, in this case Berenstein uses his negative perception of the Jewish convert to counter accusations of Jewish disloyalty and treacherousness. Denouncing the convert provided Berenstein another chance to display his loyalty to the king and the Dutch nation.

The pastoral role
Berenstein presents himself as a moral leader and coach. His vision of the chief rabbi’s role differed from that of his father-in-law Löwenstamm, who refused to learn Dutch and presented himself as a Jewish scholar. Ironically, he never published anything of value, nor was he praised by others for his intellectual capabilities. These were facts that the Diskursn employed sardonically as they played with his short stature and small intellect.¹¹⁶ The few remains of his archive attest to his small intellectual contribution. Berenstein is a key figure in the new attributions of meaning to the rabbi as mentor. His understanding of the chief rabbi’s office was in line with the expansion of the rabbi’s responsibilities for nineteenth-century Reform and Orthodox Jewry alike.¹¹⁷ The rabbi’s involvement was no longer confined to halakhic matters but included the general well-being of community members. This was inspired by the Christian example as well as a result of the dissolving of the Jewish communities’ health care system. Rabbis filled the social vacuum and began to offer moral support. Because the rabbi’s responsibility extended to various fields of life, a rabbi had to acquaint himself with worldly knowledge. As such, the political change actually extended the rabbi’s authority.

The extension of rabbinic responsibilities opened up the way for authoritative secular sources. This new development reverberates in the naye kille, as its members favored secular literature and strongly condemned the ignorance of the alte kille’s parnasim. “They have never read a book or newspaper in their life. They only progress

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 37.
¹¹⁵ See the paragraphs on ‘Berenstein’s beard’ in chapter four and a ‘Jewish signature’ in chapter two.
¹¹⁶ Michman en Aptroot, Storm in the Community, 238, 320, 322, and 422.
very slowly. They really are stupid jackasses.»118 «There is no knowledge or science in this world that is forbidden for the Jew. On the contrary, the more one wants to study, the better of he is.»119 Although it may seem contradictory, years later Berenstein displayed a similar approval of the acquisition of secular knowledge. “The history of our own days, and the history of the human heart from previous ages, kept in lofty scriptures, should eventually be the main subject of the truly perfect teacher.”120 Knowledge of history, medicine, and economics were essential to the performance of a good village teacher.121 For Berenstein, the multitasking efforts of the village rabbi were an example to strive for.

Berenstein’s ideal rabbi expanded religious authority beyond the confines of Jewish scriptures and created room for the incorporation of secular knowledge and literature. This was not a new phenomenon but was already a common tradition since the Middle Ages and Early Modern times, and later even the Orthodox included literary references in order to spice up their preaching.122 However, Berenstein explicitly states the use and value of secular works in his sermon and thus almost brings these works on a par with Jewish scholarship. Instead of extensively quoting from Jewish sources, he mentions Socrates’ dialogues as an example of how to unravel the false cleverness of the Sophists. In addition, he also praises contemporary moral literature.123 “Our time is extremely rich in its abundance of texts concerning these subjects from which enlightened wisdom can be created. In more than a thousand appearances, in anecdotes, in truth, in histories preserved by us; he who has a researching spirit will find immeasurable treasure for his elevation.”124 However, the inclusion of secular sources also served another purpose, namely the representation of Berenstein as open-minded, someone who challenged the idea of an insular Judaism.125 Berenstein presents himself here as a man of the world embracing the universalistic values of the Enlightenment and thus receptive to other authoritative sources.

118 Michman and Aptroot, Storm in the Community, 82.
119 Ibid., 100.
120 Berenstein, Leerrede over Psalm CXII: Vers 9, 3.
121 Ibid., 3–5.
123 Berenstein, Leerrede over Psalm CXII: Vers 9, 7.
124 Ibid., 14.
125 Cf. Berenstein, Neêrlands bededag op den 2den December 1832 of Verslag der viering van dEHen dag, 5.
Berenstein pushes the appreciation and usefulness of secular literature to the extreme as he extensively refers to playwrights as a source of inspiration and praises their oral techniques in attracting the attention of the audience and their ability to deliver a clear and compelling moral message. Moliere, Shakespeare, Klopstock, and Schiller all inspired him.

In all times, ours not excluded, we observe with amazement what the play brings about and accomplishes through great actors in the theatre. How often whole nations are made passionate. How often patriotism is inflamed with enthusiasm. Here one can see every virtue in her true and natural beauty. Here one sees the same in her soft and humble value. Here she unconditionally conquers hearts. Here all crimes appear in their truly awful appearance. Here one learns the ridiculousness of follies. And who will deny the extended usefulness brought by this noble poetry?

By using the theatre as an inspiration for eloquence and persuasion, Berenstein closely follows the writers of sermon manuals, such as the Calvinist Le Faucheur (1585–1657) and the German reformed minister Johann Ludwig Ewald (1748–1822). Especially the latter referred to Klopstock and Shakespeare as a means to enliven the emotions and cultivate the heart and compared the oratory of the pulpit to the stage techniques of an actor. Reason was replaced by the power of emotion in Berenstein’s romantic vision of the sermon. In his almost-blind admiration for theatre and his appreciation of art, Berenstein distanced himself from his rabbinical predecessors, who during the eighteenth century vehemently criticized attendance at the theatre. Moreover, he positioned himself firmly within the maskilic reinvention of the purimshpiel (the plays performed during Purim) as a moral mirror.

Berenstein’s main concern was the younger generation, since they were easily distracted from the right path. He was clearly influenced by the common understanding of his time of the child as a tabula rasa, as first postulated by John Locke (1632–1704),

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126 Berenstein’s appreciation of oratory techniques closely follows Maimonides’ argument, as put forward in his Guide for the Perplexed; however, this comparison is outside the confines of this research.
129 D.M. Sluys, “Uit den Amsterdamschen Jodenhoek. De strijd tegen de dans- en speelhuizen in de 18e eeuw,” De Vrijdagavond 9 (1932), 136–138 and (part II) 152–154. Leniency was only given during Purim, when it was customary to perform purimshpiels.
who was of the opinion that children developed by experience and confrontations with their environment. It was the responsibility of the parents to show their children righteous conduct.

You, sensitive fathers, who love your children with true tenderness, do not tread them to your current mood, whether too gentle or too strict. You, who do not consider them to be a plaything or a working machine, you, who feed with earnestness the wish to shape your children for the virtues and educate them for science and wisdom.\textsuperscript{130}

The sermon changed from a scholarly exposition into an educational tool to instill the right virtues in the minds of the young. Berenstein did not refer in his sermons to correct Jewish moral conduct, but instead emphasized universalistic virtues, such as charity and love for the fatherland. This was a common phenomenon in many other sermons of the new style.\textsuperscript{131}

Berenstein’s sermons stress universal values without references to any particularistic Jewishness. His sermons could for that matter also be read in a Christian church, and no one would notice that they had been written by a Jew. Berenstein wishes his audience to regard the Jews as citizens on a par with the Dutch, with no visible differences. In this respect, religion became a handmaiden for the promotion of the state and its national identity. In Berenstein’s sermons, several discursive strands became entangled, including Dutch nationalism, universalism, and religious leadership. The sermon communicated various messages; it served as a dispositive for Jewishness, state control, and citizenship. As such, the sermon’s manifold functions reveal the reconfigurations between religious and secular spheres.

\textbf{6. Conclusion}

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Jewish ritual creatively blended religious and secular discourses. The government employed religious discourses such as the Jewish sermon to disseminate their nationalistic propaganda, and a person such as Chief Rabbi Berenstein used his sermons to set out his own Jewish reform agenda. The government used the dispositive of rituals to enhance its power and legitimate its reforms, such as in

\textsuperscript{130} Berenstein, \textit{Leerrede over Psalm CXII: Vers 9, 10.}
\textsuperscript{131} Rozenblit, \textit{"Jewish Identity and the Modern Rabbi,"} 109, 115.
the case of the public sermon, or to strive for emancipation, as in the case of the newly invented state ritual proclaiming the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. In other cases, the new state rituals entangled with discourses on Jewish tradition, which transformed them in such a way as to support religious authority. The intertwining of religious and secular purposes politicized the rituals, while at the same time political authority relied on religion by employing the religious framework. Put differently: religious and secular discourses were dependent on and legitimized one another in various constellations and power structures.

In these restructurings, both Judaizing and secularizing modes of response can be identified. The naye kille incorporated state law into their reformulation of Judaism and constructed a Judaism without authority. This in turn legitimized their secession. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen authorized the naye kille’s version of Judaism. The orthodox also employed the idea of religion without authority, and state law likewise enhanced, enforced, and legitimized their version of Judaism. Interestingly enough, their respective religious authorities depended on the same Declaration.

Both the maskilic and the orthodox factions employed religious discourses to serve their own political purposes. The sermons, for instance, as a dispositive of their own, were an excellent opportunity for consecutive chief rabbis of Amsterdam to demonstrate their allegiance and loyalty to the state as well as to foster their interpretation of the role of the rabbi as a scholar or moral leader in Jewish society. Moreover, the orthodox faction engaged intensely with the state rituals, such as the Declarations and the collection for the gunpowder tragedy in Leiden, and tried to incorporate them into their existing power structures, reconciling their vision of Judaism with what became known as ‘modernity’. The political exploitation of Jewish rituals by both camps counters the idea of a simple dichotomy between the orthodox as defenders of Jewish tradition and the maskilim as forerunners of secularization. As these examples of the politicization of Jewishes ritual demonstrate, secular purposes blended perfectly into the religious infrastructure.