Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany, 1800-1870

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Published by Indiana University Press

Baader, Benjamin.
Gender, Judaism, and Bourgeois Culture in Germany, 1800-1870.
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In nineteenth-century Germany, religion turned bourgeois. For Christians as well as Jews, religion no longer primarily referred to a set of practices and beliefs; instead, men and women sought cultural improvement, moral ennoblement, and emotionally and aesthetically satisfying religious experiences in domestic and public worship. At the same time, pedagogues, ideologues, and theologians assigned to women a central function as carriers and promoters of Bildung, morality, and religion; they declared that women made a specifically female, indispensable contribution to society. They ascribed certain gender traits to the female sex, located women in the private realm, promoted a quasi-religious elevation of domesticity and family life, put an emphasis on early childhood education, and idealized motherhood. Thus, they declared that women made a specifically female, indispensable contribution to society. These notions, that brought women to the fore in a new culture of bourgeois religiosity, formed part of the parameters within which modern Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism evolved.

Jews began to express new sets of ideas on religion in a comprehensive way in Sulamith, the first significant Jewish German-language periodical printed in Latin characters. In this journal, published from 1806 to 1846, a generation of Jewish leaders developed the framework for the culture and religion of nineteenth-century German Jewry. Sulamith played an influential role in creating the Jewish Reform movement and popularized a Judaism that conformed to the cultural trends of contemporary German society. It promoted a new type of religiosity, distinct from rabbinic Judaism and focusing on Bildung, Sittlichkeit (morality), and edification. Human
perfection was no longer embodied in the learned Talmud scholar, but instead was represented by the cultivated, culturally refined, and spiritually sensitive person. This was the ideal propagated by Jewish reform pedagogues and ideologues in *Sulamith*.

Scholars have long acknowledged that *Sulamith* occupied a significant place in the process of cultural embourgeoisement for German Jewry. However, only recently have we become aware that the Judaism informed by *Bildung und Sittlichkeit* that the contributors to *Sulamith* envisioned also had a gendered dimension. *Sulamith* not only addressed women as well as men as readers, but its editors and contributors also believed that women (as the noble and moral sex) were of particular importance in the new culture of bourgeois religiosity that the journal advanced. They conceived of religious sensitivity, inner beauty, morality, and virtue as feminine attributes.

When Jewish pedagogues and ideologues adopted German culture, they also embraced the bourgeois gender model and middle-class notions of the crucial influence of mothers on the moral and intellectual development of their children. Accordingly, these Jewish leaders promoted enlightened, German-language devotional literature for women; encouraged females to attend synagogue; agitated for confirmation ceremonies for both sexes; and supported modern religious schooling for girls. In *Sulamith* the reformers reached only a fraction of German Jewry with these ideas.

However, the reformers laid foundations for a new Jewish culture and devised an entire program of women’s greater inclusion in the religious life of their communities. Ideologues and pedagogues propagated a religiosity of *Bildung*, virtue, and emotionalized spirituality rather than a Judaism primarily defined by ritual observance, rabbinic learning, and formal prayer. In the process, they redefined women’s place in Jewish society.

**WOMEN AS CARRIERS OF RELIGION, BILDUNG, AND MORALITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY**

From the Enlightenment on, German pedagogues, philosophers, and theologians paid great attention to women as mothers, wives, and guardians of their families’ moral conduct. In the world of bourgeois culture and society that took shape in the late eighteenth century, women began to play a clearly circumscribed and highly valued role, a position that went hand in hand with new ideas about men’s and women’s different natures. Previous generations had based their conceptions of gender differences on the diverging social positions of men and women in the household economy.
Contemporaries had described male and female virtues as emanating from the division of labor in the extended family and the household.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, however, ideas of the human rights of an individual took hold in Germany, while *economy* came to designate a domain beyond the *family*. In order to sustain a destabilized gender hierarchy and in the effort to conceptualize the emerging public arena as an exclusively male sphere, male ideologues began to describe gender differences as fixed by nature and expressed in psychological character traits. The reference system for defining masculinity and femininity changed, and a rhetoric of different “characters of the sexes” gained prominence. In this newly founded polarization of sexual stereotypes, men and women were ascribed different characteristics and “natural” tendencies. Men, in this categorization, had an inherent inclination to bravery, boldness, and independence, while women tended to be modest, yielding, and dependent. Men had privileged access to the powers of reason and the intellect. They possessed a mind for abstraction and analytical thinking, whereas women were endowed with a natural capacity for emotionality, receptiveness, morality, and religiosity. In the universe of nineteenth-century bourgeois society, the harmonious and productive workings of society at large (characterized by a happy and fulfilled family life, as well as the integrity of the male individual) depended on the well-balanced development of these gender attributes.²

This polarization of sexual stereotypes based on character traits was now connected to a conceptual division of public and private spheres that had previously not existed in this form. As civil society and a new type of public realm expanded, the distance between family life and life outside of the home grew. A bourgeois public sphere took shape that included the world of politics, the realms of commerce and professional activities, and the new social universe of clubs, coffee houses, and voluntary associations. Contemporaries conceived of this public arena as an exclusively male domain, and men experienced their lives in the larger society as increasingly distinct from the time spent with their families. The house and the world of the public always remained overlapping spheres, as families cultivated extensive social lives in their homes. Yet for a man, the home also became the space into which he could retire from the exigencies of public life. Home became the realm for his physical and emotional restoration, and the place where he expected his deepest needs to be fulfilled. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the household lost some of its economic functions, and the home of a respectable family gained a heightened intimate character. Spouses aspired to cultivate intellectually stimulating and emotionally satisfying companionate relationships with each other, and
they strove to be loving and thoughtful parents. Family life, childhood, and parenting played increasingly pronounced and highly valued roles in nineteenth-century bourgeois society. The concept of domesticity gained in meaning for women as well as for men.³

Yet according to Enlighteners, ideologues, and pedagogues, it was women who infused the home with its benevolent and noble character. Male leaders believed that a woman should restrict herself to the house, and that in her family’s home she carried the responsibility of being a husband’s comfort, support, and companion. She was also expected to educate morally faultless and socially useful children, and to guarantee a family’s unblemished reputation. In this scheme, true womanhood consisted of more than biological functions and competence in housekeeping practices. Women’s conduct and demeanor were expected to meet the highest cultural, moral, and religious standards.⁴

In Väterlicher Rath für meine Tochter (Paternal Advice for My Daughter), one of the earliest and most influential German guidebooks for the education of girls, the Enlightenment pedagogue Joachim Heinrich Campe spelled out the ideal of the bourgeois woman (1788). According to him, women were

wives, who—through tender sympathy, love, care, and solicitude—should sweeten the existence of the entire second half of the human race, namely the men who have to carry the greater burdens, worries, and hardships of life; mothers, who not only bear children, but who should also nurse in their children the first germ of every beautiful human virtue, and who should foster the first buds of their childrens spiritual and intellectual capacities; mistresses of the house, who—through watchfulness, orderliness, cleanliness, diligence, thrift, economic skill and dexterity—should safeguard the prosperity, the honor, the domestic tranquility, and the happiness of the bread-winning spouse, . . . and who should make his house into a seat of peace, joy, and happiness.⁵

Throughout the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, an entire literature of moral guidebooks, educational treatises, and women’s periodicals reiterated this catalogue of female tasks and womanly virtues.⁶ In fact, Campe and other Enlightenment and bourgeois ideologues and pedagogues such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi stressed the inner qualities that a woman needed to cultivate, including purity of heart, modesty, chastity, patience, self-abnegation, “friendliness and always constant, inexhaustible kindness of heart,” as well as “true and enlightened religiosity.” To achieve this sublime state of mind, women were to open their souls to the “good, the beautiful, and the pleasant,” and, in turn, they were destined to uphold morality and cultural refinement in their families.⁷
In this scheme, religion—or, as we shall see below, more precisely religiosity—played a crucial role. From the late eighteenth century on, large segments of the emerging German middle class distanced themselves from the Church and its public rituals. Instead, bourgeois families practiced private devotion and prayer and began to celebrate holidays in the privacy of the domestic realm. Religious holidays such as Christmas as well as more secular occasions such as children’s birthdays soon formed an integral part of an emotionally dense, distinctly private, and intimate bourgeois home life. In these celebrations, the subjective experience of the participant stood at the center. Spouses and children were expected to be moved by the sacred character of the ceremonies as well as by the noble and spiritually pure atmosphere of the house. Many men appear to have cherished these family events and often presided over them. Yet women increasingly orchestrated the domestic celebrations, and it was women’s high spiritual and moral standing that gave a home the lofty dignity it required.  

Nineteenth-century middle-class culture in Germany treated the house as a sacred space and as the domain where women exerted their benevolent influence. In innumerable descriptions, the home was called a temple, and women figured as priestesses of the domestic sanctuary. The theologian Christian Wilhelm Spieker declared that women had “the beautiful and glorious vocation to guard the eternal fire of humanity and love . . . like the priestesses of the Vesta, [and] to administer the quiet worship of innocence and virtue in the interior of the house.” Here and in many other texts, female virtue formed the focal point of a bourgeois religiosity that distinguished itself from earlier concepts of religious practice. A woman's extraordinarily high qualification in this domain did not stem from her closeness to God. Rather, in this view, the female sex possessed an entire array of virtues such as piety, purity of heart, submissiveness, and modesty that made her the incarnation of the sublime and the lofty on earth. In fact, her religiosity constituted one of the qualities that destined women to become the very carriers of civilization within the family. She personified the holy and exalted in a religious sense. The inner beauty, however, that she was expected to radiate and to cultivate also represented the fulfillment of the ideal of Bildung.

Bildung literally means formation. It sometimes can be translated as education but often is rendered more precisely as self-cultivation or harmony of personality. Bildung includes a moral dimension and the term has its roots in pre-modern Christian theology. In Christian mysticism, Bildung refers to a process in which the individual achieves union with God while fully living as human. In the middle of the eighteenth century, Bildung became an enlightened-pedagogical concept in which the expectation of redemption and the claim for education converged. In the decades that
followed, the religious content of the concept of Bildung subsided further, while pietistic ideas of religiosity as individualized and emotionalized devotion displaced religion in the old, heavily institutional sense. Bildung and modern religiosity drew close to each other, and together they took priority over old-style religion. In the nineteenth century, contemporaries described the icons of Bildung—music, literature, and theater—with the same reverence and religiously charged language that they used to extol the domestic sphere. The feminist Louise Otto, among countless others, not only referred to the theater as a “sacred temple, in which one encounters . . . a cult of the ideal,” but also advised mothers that “the solemnity of the Bible and the solemnity of Schiller” should be “the milk with which one nourishes the youth already from the most tender age on.” Scholars have called this spiritually invested elevation of cultural practices a “secular religion.” In fact, in nineteenth-century middle-class culture, Bildung and religion were closely related concepts; both expressed ideas of beauty, human dedication to the sublime, and morality. As Friedrich Hölderlin put it: “The first child of divine beauty is art,” and the second daughter of beauty is religion. Religion is love of beauty . . . Love is religion, religion is love.” Religion, as the term was understood since it had been introduced into the German language in the sixteenth century, had originally designated a system of teachings on the relationship between God and humans. In the late eighteenth century, however, religion came to refer increasingly to a person’s subjective conviction of religious truth, a person’s reverence for God, his or her experience of the divine, or just his or her sense of divine presence. In this meaning, religion was synonymous with the term religiosity, which gained currency in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, however, contemporaries used religiosity when they discussed the subjective and personal dimensions of religious experiences and religious sentiments, whereas religion related to religious teachings and traditions.

In the universe of the nineteenth-century middle class, religiosity occupied a privileged position. In its most general meaning, it denoted the inner, reverent attitude of a person, and related to an emotional and spiritual state of mind and lifestyle rather than to a particular religious practice. This self-reflexive and introspective stance constituted an important aspect of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture. It could be experienced in public worship and private prayer as well as through listening to music, reading classical literature, contemplating a painting, or experiencing a moment of domestic harmony in a beautiful and well-arranged home.

This religiosity of Bildung addressed men, women, and children. The sensitive man who found emotional fulfillment with his wife and children, who was receptive to aesthetic and spiritual experiences, and whose person...
ality was ennobled by worship, art, and literature, formed an ideal of bourgeois culture.\textsuperscript{19} However, nineteenth-century Germans believed that the female sex possessed a particular aptitude for experiencing the beautiful and the sublime, and that women were responsible for upholding aesthetic and spiritual values in their families and in society at large. Thus, in search of religiosity, men not infrequently turned to women. The leader of the Protestant renewal, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who emphasized emotional religiosity, cultivated a close friendship with the beautiful and well-educated Jewish woman Henriette Hertz, sharing with her his thoughts about a true religiosity of the heart, a \textit{\textquotedblleft Herzreligion,\textquotedblright} as he called it.\textsuperscript{20} In German romanticism, authors exalted women for their particular connection to the sublime, and by the middle of the century, it seemed self-evident to contemporaries that women had a stronger attachment to religion than men did, and that they attended church services more diligently than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{21}

Even German Catholicism embraced new ideas of women's highly developed spiritual capacities. For centuries, Catholic theology had ascribed to women a sinful nature, which females could only escape by leading a life of strict chastity. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, a new model of Catholic female piety won acceptance. Accompanied by a revived cult of the Virgin Mary, women could now find salvation as mothers and wives. Catholic Enlightenment theology recast Mary as a model of female morality and feminine virtue, and by the 1820s a devotional literature specifically directed toward women advocated an ideal of Christian womanhood in which Catholic teachings on Mary and bourgeois concepts of female submissiveness, modesty, and sensitivity merged. Previously, the male head of household had carried sole responsibility for upholding the religious integrity of a Catholic family. Now women were expected to infuse the home with piety and religiosity. In particular, the religious education of children lay in the hands of women.\textsuperscript{22}

In nineteenth-century Christian society, the role of the mother as educator of the young gained greater importance. A century earlier, fathers had been responsible for the religious education of the children from a child’s seventh year on, but in the course of the nineteenth century, mothers moved to the center of the religious life in the home.\textsuperscript{23} According to an educational guidebook from the mid-nineteenth-century, mothers were to accustom their children to daily prayer, were asked to read to them from the Bible, were to teach them religious songs and hymns, and were to learn with them from catechism books.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, both in the religious realm in a narrow sense and in the novel kind of bourgeois religiosity of \textit{Bildung}, women came to occupy a prominent position.

This was the society into which German Jews set out to integrate themselves near the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century,
only a small group of Jewish men and a few wealthy and highly educated Jewish women in Berlin had played an active role in the new culture of German Bildung and in the Jewish, Hebrew-language counterpart of the German Enlightenment (the Haskalah). In the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, maskilim (Jewish Enlighteners) increasingly published in German rather than in Hebrew. Religious reforms appeared on the agenda, and the movement of cultural renewal within Judaism broadened.

**BILDUNG, SITT'LICHKEIT, AND ENLIGHTENED RELIGIOSITY IN SULAMITH**

In 1806, two pioneers of Jewish cultural and religious reform in Dessau, David Fränkel and Joseph Wolf, ushered in a new era of German-Jewish literary creativity by founding the periodical *Sulamith*. Fränkel directed the Jewish Free School of Dessau, where Wolf taught students to read and write in German. Like other Jewish men of his generation, the forty-four-year-old Wolf had received an education consisting exclusively of studying the Talmud and other rabbinic literature. In fact, Wolf had left his birthplace Dessau to attend a yeshivah, a Talmud academy, in Berlin. In Berlin, the center of the German Haskalah, he had met maskilim such as Naphtali Herz Wessely and had begun to read contemporary Hebrew literature. Moreover, Wolf had acquainted himself with writings in High German and with modern European literature. Seventeen years younger than Wolf, Fränkel, the son of a rabbi, had been born in Berlin and appears to have been raised with exposure to Enlightenment ideas and modern literature. At age twenty-one, he became the director of the Dessau Free School, one of several newly founded schools in which Jewish reformers worked on putting the pedagogical program of the Jewish Enlightenment into practice.25 The founding of *Sulamith* was part of this project. In the journal, German Jews embarked on creating a Jewish culture and religion informed by contemporary sensibilities. Standing at the heart of the new culture of Jewish religiosity propagated in the journal were the concepts of Bildung and Sittlichkeit. The ideal of Bildung, indeed, had defined the path of integration and emancipation of Jews into German society. It had formed the ideological platform of a new type of social formation, which had emerged in Germany in the 1770s. Jews had been welcome in these social circles of the German Enlightenment, where educated Christian commoners and nobles transgressed the social boundaries of the corporate society and congregated as individuals in search for self-improvement, character formation, educational reform, and social improvement.26 Bildung represented a goal of Enlightenment or bourgeois existence, a moral and cultural imperative that,
in the ensuing decades, became the hallmark of middle-class society in nineteenth-century Germany.

By embracing the cultural ideal of a Bildung, social practices associated with it, German Jews throughout the nineteenth century expressed their adherence to German society and culture and laid claim to citizenship. In his introductory essay in Sulamith, thus, Joseph Wolf stressed that the Jewish people were capable of Bildung and of “improvement of manners,” or Sittlichkeit.11 The concept of Sittlichkeit, which is perhaps most adequately translated as morality, was closely related to the ideal of Bildung and formed part of the Enlightenment and bourgeois project of Bildung as civil and moral betterment. In its social dimension, Sittlichkeit referred to decent behavior and sexual modesty, but nineteenth-century German Jews and non-Jews understood Sittlichkeit—like Bildung—as grounded in the harmonious formation of the character, in the development of the moral capacities of a person, and in the training of the heart.28

Contemporaries conceived of Bildung as the self-reflexive cultivation of virtue that led a person to higher Sittlichkeit. In fact, an emphasis on morality had moved to the center of German religious thought. Enlightenment theology as well as pietism expected the individual to acquire an understanding of religious truth that was founded on reason, while divine worship constituted a means to facilitate the absorption of moral principles.29 In Sulamith, Wolf expressed similar ideas:

The powers of reason need to be expanded and refined, by learning all which is worth knowing, by insight into all which is beautiful and noble in nature. The powers of will need to be improved and strengthened, by exercise and application, by mastering sensual desires, by striving for the necessary, and by scorning all which is dispensable and superfluous. These are the means by which we can achieve perfection and by which we can ennoble ourselves through morality. . . .

Who does not readily admit that all these needs are fulfilled in religion? . . . Religion is the essential intellectual and moral requirement of the cultivated person.30

According to Wolf, religion entailed the achievement of perfection through the development of intellectual and moral faculties. The religion that Wolf propagated here was not halakhic Judaism, even though he assured the reader that the religious principles and teachings of the Jewish religion stood in harmony with life in an enlightened society. As long as the precepts of rabbinic Judaism were not disfigured by “superstitious additions,” Wolf stated, they were not to be abandoned.31 Wolf, however, not only dedared war on what he considered the “bitter shell” of Judaism, “the harmful, false practices which insult God and humans, . . . erroneous opinions
which lead astray, [and] immoral procedures,” but also put Judaism in the service of the larger goals of Bildung and Sittlichkeit. When Wolf referred to “expanding and refining the powers of reason,” he did not mean studying Torah as a mitzvah, a religious commandment, or as a way of gaining insight into God’s teachings that included an ethical dimension. Rather, he suggested that religious as well as secular learning formed part of the larger project of moral and cultural self-ennoblement.

In rabbinc Jewish culture, as it had existed from antiquity through the early modern period, religious study (Talmud Torah) had represented all religious virtues, which then included morality. Morality and virtue had been implied and contained in rabbinc learning and ritual observance. In a development that had begun in the late sixteenth century, Ashkenazi Jewry came to distinguish between morality and Talmudic study, and now, in the early nineteenth century, maskilim such as Joseph Wolf declared that morality and character development represented goals in themselves. Religious learning and the performance of ritual commandments, in the view of these thinkers, potentially furthered the cultivation of virtue, but a Jewish practice marred by additions and distortions could have a corrupting rather than an ennobling effect. Wolf and other contributors to Sulamith, in fact, privileged faith and religious experience over practices of ritual performance and mechanical learning. They advocated a Judaism that was not limited to “cold deism” or to the external forms of Halakhah and Jewish ritual, but one that “could be deeply felt.” Or, as the historian George Mosse has phrased it succinctly: “Not the intellect, but their [the German Jews’] very soul had become the center of Jewish religiosity.”

In this vein, Sulamith also promoted a new style of worship that found its model in modernized Christian church services of the time. Communal worship, as Christian philosophers and Protestant theologians claimed at the turn of the nineteenth century, aimed at heightening the spiritual awareness of the worshipper in festive and highly aesthetic ceremonies, more than it aimed at interceding with the divine. In his introductory artide on the “nature, character and the necessity of religion” in Sulamith, Wolf presented a similar argument, describing the difference between the traditional worshipper and the man who was inspired by true religiosity in the modern sense. The two men, according to Wolf, could not be distinguished by their actions, and both observed the religious commandments meticulously. The old-style observant man, however,

performs actions in which his inner being does not take part. His soul does not know . . . ; his heart does not feel the gentle sentiments of joy, the tender elevation of the feelings which accompanies his actions. All his sentiments are rigid, senseless, mechanical. True religiosity implies the presence of truly divine feeling.
The modern worshipper, by contrast, “consecrates his entire soul to the God whom he feels in his heart and whom he knows with his intellect; . . . deep in the innermost of his heart, he feels the reverence for his [God’s] majesty and magnitude.”

In Sulamith, a generation of young Jewish leaders in Germany developed an agenda for a new Jewish religiosity, in which the fulfillment of mitzvot, the punctual recitation of Hebrew prayer, and the study of rabbinic texts were not considered sufficient. The maskilim claimed that emotional involvement and spiritual intent—crucial ingredients for meaningful worship—had been lacking in Judaism. The Jewish Enlighteners certainly knew better. There is no doubt that these reformers were familiar with the concept of kavanah, of the devotional intent that according to the principles of rabbinic Judaism was to accompany prayer and ritual. However, as was the case with non-Jewish Enlightenment thinkers and bourgeois ideologues, Wolf and other maskilim declared existing social, cultural, and religious practices to be stale, uninspired, and in dire need of reform. In their zeal to renew Jewish worship, Jewish reformers insisted on not propagating a break with halakhic Judaism, but positioned the primacy of emotional involvement and subjective experience as new. They indeed set out to revolutionize the religious lives of Jewish men.

In Sulamith, Wolf, Fraîkel, and other contributors exalted the heightened religiosity of the “sensitive man.” In fact, in the early part of the nineteenth century, men who embraced bourgeois culture and bourgeois values aspired to be emotionally sensitive and spiritually aware. They strove to express their feelings through having loving relationships with their wives, children, and friends. They examined their own sentiments, passions, virtues, and moral shortcomings in diaries and letters. Introspection, emotional fulfillment, and the quest for meaningful spiritual and aesthetic experiences formed part of a lifestyle that both men and women cultivated.

Yet contemporaries believed that women’s aptitudes for religious sentiments surpassed those of men. When Jewish reformers in Sulamith thus propagated a new, truly inspired religiosity, they did not fail to direct their attention to women in particular. The periodical addressed women as readers and included them in its vision of the moral betterment of German Jewry. Contributors to the journal consistently used female metaphors when they lauded religion and Bildung. Indeed, the founders of Sulamith named the periodical after a biblical heroine. By emphasizing a religious sensitivity in which women were expected to excel at the expense of a halakhic Judaism in which men occupied the privileged position, these Jewish leaders laid the foundation to transform the gender order of Jewish culture and religion in nineteenth-century Germany.
1.1. Title page of the periodical Sulamith (Dessau, 1807). Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.
WOMEN AS ICONS
OF VIRTUE

The name of the journal Sulamith and the illustration on the cover page relate to the female figure of “Sulamith.” This Sulamith, however, is not the biblical Sulamith from Song of Songs. Rather, as Wolf explains in an article in the first volume, the woman depicted on the cover represents a woman in II Samuel 20 who in actuality is not named in the biblical text. On the cover of Sulamith, one sees a woman on the walls of a fortress. Erect, with flying garments and a raised arm, she is about to throw an object down to the troops outside the city walls. Under the engraving, a Hebrew verse reads “I am among the peaceful, the faithful in Israel” (אנכי שלמי אמוני ישראל). These are the first words of the biblical verse II Samuel 20:19; the object in Sulamith’s hands is the head of the insurgent Sheba.

According to the biblical account, Sheba had revolted against King David and had then taken refuge in the city of Avelah. Under the command of Yoab, King Davids troops besieged the city and threatened to destroy it. As King David saw men began to storm the city walls, a “wise woman” came forward and negotiated with Yoab, pleading for peace and offering to extradite the villain. Yoab agreed, and the inhabitants of Avelah decapitated Sheba. They threw his head from the city walls, and Yoab and his troops withdrew from the city.

In his article, Wolf related these events and directed his account particularly toward female readers of Sulamith, who—according to Wolf—often knew very little about the history of their forebears and might have wondered whom the woman on the title page represented. Men, supposedly, were familiar with the Bible and would be able to identify the passage with the help of the Hebrew verse. Those fluent in Hebrew, in fact, could also recognize that Fränkel and Wolf had derived the name Sulamith from the word “shlumey” (שלמה) in the biblical verse and that the name meant the peaceful.

Subsequently, Wolf went on to laud the biblical heroine Sulamith and explained why she, as a symbol of peace, could serve as a model for German Jewry. According to Wolf, Sulamith saved a city that had been threatened by destruction and restored peace among a people and its misunderstood king. Wolf stated that the German Sulamith, like her biblical predecessor, had emerged from within a nation in distress, mediating and promoting peace and the “common weal” for the sake of humankind. When the biblical Israelisites believed the enemy to be within the nation and when war threatened to tear the community of Israel apart, Sulamith
showed through her intervention that the malefactor had in fact only intraded by force and hypocrisy. If the disruptive and damaging element were removed from the congregation, peace could be restored. In his day, Wolf claimed, “all superstititious additions and distortions of the [Jewish] religion” needed to be driven out in order to reinstate the integrity of the people of Israel. Then, according to him, the tree of peace could bear fruits from which humankind at large would profit.44 This was the mission of the journal Sulamith.

Paradoxically, the woman whom Wolf idealized as a harbinger of peace was involved in a murder. In fact, the comparison of the “wise woman” in II Samuel to the German Sulamith and Wolf’s sharp comment that damaging additions to the Jewish religion needed to be driven out, attests to the vehemence with which the reformers pursued their agenda, counterpointing with the rhetoric of peacefulness.

Whatever the subtext of aggression, male contributors to Sulamith attributed everything that was good and pure, peaceful and reasonable, progressive and gebildet, moral and faithful, gentle and persevering, and most of all truly religious to women, and they identified these concepts and qualities as feminine. This idealization of the female as the personification of virtue and of the general good constituted an influential literary convention of the Enlightenment, culminating in German romanticism. For Friedrich Schlegel, women represented aesthetic perfection and moral beauty.45 Friedrich Schiller held that women were distinguished by a “beautiful soul.” Women, he believed, brought “feeling and reason, duty and inclination” into perfect harmony.46 And, in works such as Iphigenie aufTauris, Goethe depicted women as carriers, promoters, and guardians of true humanity. In fact, German society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was preoccupied with concepts of beauty and ideas of moral and aesthetic harmony that could help to coalesce Germans into one nation. Female representations of political and social virtues played an important role in this process of nation building. Similarly, in revolutionary France, the iconography of the French Republic relied heavily on feminine depictions of attributes such as Liberty, Reason, Wisdom, Victory, and Force. When represented in a female form, these civic virtues could not be reduced to the characteristics of individual leaders or associated with particular political events. Rather, they represented the common good and thus fulfilled a unifying function.47

The use of the female form as a metaphor of transcendence predates the European Enlightenment. Indeed, it reaches back to medieval literature and imagery and has roots in the political thought and in the artistic traditions of classical antiquity.48 Under the influence of the classicism of the
French Revolution, however, and driven by the need of the emerging modern societies to create an iconography of their own, female allegories of civic virtues and nationhood gained new prominence. In France, the revolutionary figure “Marianne” represented the Republic, and in Germany, “Germania” came to stand for a nation that was unified despite local, political, and social divisions. In this context, Wolf and Frašekl in Dessau chose the biblical Sulamith as the personification of a renewed and modernized Judaism, a religion that was rational as well as spiritually uplifting and aesthetically appealing. Like Marianne did to the French, Sulamith represented the force of Reason for Jewish Enlighteners. She waged war against superstition, aimed to unite her people, and promoted the good of humankind at large.

Like Marianne, Sulamith embodied a determined and combative woman, even though Wolf called her the “goddess of peace.”49 While Marianne, however, symbolized the militant attack of the revolutionary forces against the Ancient Regime, Sulamith, as she appeared on the title page of the journal Sulamith, engaged primarily in reconciling an Israelite community in conflict. In this role, Sulamith resembled a female figure who played a prominent role after the end of the radical phase of the French Revolution, in the second half of the 1790s. In particular, French paintings of the period show men in mortal conflicts and women interceding in order to restore peace. Similarly, the German Sulamith intervened in a dispute among men. In the biblical account, the wise woman of II Samuel was instrumental in bringing the male insurgent to justice. Due to her initiative, the inhabitants of Avelah dissociated themselves from the rebel. Peace and unity returned as the Israelites beheaded the insurgent and reaffirmed their allegiance to the national sovereign.50

Numerous contributions in Sulamith gendered not only Peace and Reason, but also Bildung and Sittlichkeit as feminine. In accordance with the cultural trends of early German romanticism, male authors of the periodical associated religion, Bildung, and morality with female virtue, and idealized women as priestesses, as carriers of divine inspiration, and as promoters of a sublime humanity.51 Thus, in Sulamith, women played an important role as symbols of nineteenth-century concepts of religiosity and morality; they occupied highly visible positions as figureheads in a male project of Jewish reform; and they represented the people of Israel in the iconography of the period. Wolf, Fränkel, and other Jewish reformers, however, not only took interest in the “feminine” on a symbolic level, but also targeted women readers, showed great concern for women’s education, and propagated greater inclusion of the female sex in the religious life of the Jewish community and the Jewish family.
THE PROGRAM OF
FEMALE RELIGIOSITY

In accordance with the new ideal of religiosity promoted by Sulamith, Fränkel argued in an essay in the journal’s first volume that every Israeliite should pursue a “true, purely moral formation of the heart, an intensive ennobling of the sentiment.” While initially it seemed that Fränkel addressed a primarily male audience, he soon turned to “the honorable mothers and daughters in Israel.” Fränkel urged men and women to receive the newly founded periodical favorably. He especially expressed the hope that the female sex would approve of Sulamith, “since only heartfelt, religious sentiments ennoble a woman; . . . this true beauty and gentleness, which pure religiosity confers on the woman. A woman without it [religiosity] is a being in contradiction with herself.” Though Wolf, Fränkel, and the other authors in Sulamith declared that true and pure religiosity were indispensable for refined and moral persons of any sex, in this article Fränkel established a special connection between female gender traits and religious sentiments. A woman not uplifted by religiosity would not be truly female, Fränkel claimed. She would be contradicting her own sex. He adds: “Gentleness, deep confidence, submissiveness . . . and whatever the name of all those virtues which make the woman the adornment of creation, all of these characteristics are infused and sustained in women through true, pure religiosity.”

In the same vein, Michael Heß, director of the Jewish Free School Philanthropin in Frankfurt, claimed in an article in Sulamith that nature had equipped women with a predisposition for the religious. “The woman,” Heß maintained, “has a finer tact, a more tender vibration of nerves; the good and the beautiful affect her lively senses faster.” Thus, like his Christian contemporaries and the other authors of Sulamith, he had come to believe that girls were more receptive to the development of religious sentiments than boys. Accordingly, in Sulamith, pedagogues and ideologues devoted extensive attention to women. Sulamith consistently addressed articles toward female readers and featured essays that discussed women’s education and gender-specific codes of behavior. Many other contributions assumed a readership of men and women but included references to the particular concerns of female religiosity and to women’s motherly responsibilities. By doing so, Sulamith provided a model that sermons, prayer books, educational writings, and other literature about and for Jewish women in nineteenth-century Germany followed.

Even in its first volume, Sulamith set the agenda with two programmatic pieces in the essay, “On Religious Education [Bildung] for Women of
the Jewish Faith” by David Fränkel, and the first installments of a series of six fictional letters by Gotthold Salomon. Salomon’s letters appeared over the course of three years, each under the title “Letters to a Venerable Woman of Jewish Religion.”

In the “Letters,” Salomon—at the time a teacher at the Free School in Dessau—laid out the standard program of moral betterment and emotional refinement propagated by Sulamith, addressing it now specifically to women. “Most of our sisters,” Salomon stated, “still wander in Egyptian darkness,” performing rituals without comprehending their origins and understanding their meaning. It was time to accustom women, like men, “to the great, brightly shining sunlight of divine reason.”

This could best be done, Salomon claimed, by familiarizing women with the history of the Jewish people, and Salomon set out to begin this with his six letters in Sulamith. Salomon held that men, too, might profit greatly from such a historical account. Even though men received a formal Jewish education in their youth, they failed to gain any understanding of how the Jewish religion had changed and developed over the centuries and of how Jewish literature such as the Talmud had come into existence. Rather than approaching these texts intelligently and analytically, most Jews stubbornly believed everything they read. And, Salomon lamented that while Jewish men studied the Bible and rabbinic literature, their hearts remained untouched by the beauty and splendor of true religion. True religion, Salomon and the other contributors to Sulamith believed, was essential for both men and women. A sound knowledge of Jewish history, he explained, opened the gates of religiosity and moral refinement for both sexes, even though Jewish learning did not seem to have a direct application for women, who inhabited the domestic realm.

In his “Letters to a Venerable Woman of Jewish Religion,” Salomon thus offered a reading of biblical history from Abraham to Joseph, in which he presented the patriarchs as archetypes of nineteenth-century virtues.

By introducing Jewish women to biblical history in a new, moralizing, and enlightened manner, Gotthold Salomon included the female sex in a modern culture of Jewish religiosity. In his essay “On Religious Education for Women of the Jewish Faith,” David Fränkel went further. He argued that women deserved particular attention in a reformed Judaism and that the informal education that girls conventionally had obtained from their mothers failed to prepare them for the vital role they now had to fulfill. Jewish women, Fränkel claimed, lacked “refined Bildung, gracefulness, noble propriety, and the right taste.” And what Fränkel deplored most of all was that the lack of true religiosity among Jewish women had fatal consequences. While it was unfortunate if a Jewish man fulfilled his ritual obligations in an unenlightened and uninspired way, for a woman, missing religious instruction had detrimental outcomes. “What is more attuned to the
higher and the divine. . . . Religion adorns the woman, it ennobles her tender nature, whereas irreligion can destroy her.”

Since bourgeois culture defined women as essentially moral, religious, and sensitive, the lack of these qualities in a woman put her womanhood into question and, in the eyes of contemporaries, could destroy her as a useful member of society. On guard against such calamity, Frankel detected a decline of religiosity among Jewish women. Though he believed that only a small number of women had, under the influence of the Zeitgeist, turned their back on religion, he feared that the trend would gain strength. “If formerly, the mothers inspired and animated their daughters with religious sentiment, often the opposite takes place today,” Frankel observed.

This development threatened to have disastrous effects since these daughters would be mothers themselves, as the future of humankind lay in their hands. “The weal and woe of coming generations,” Fränkel exclaimed, “depends on their Bildung.”

Like Christian educators, Fränkel and other contributors to Sulamith assigned great importance to mothers for imbuing their children with Bildung and religiosity, and held women responsible for weaknesses in religious commitment. In the second half of the nineteenth century, when bourgeois ideas of gender roles were firmly established, the charge that Jewish women were leading their families away from Judaism had become a common argument. Blaming Jewish women constituted the flipside of the pivotal position that women began to assume in religious culture. Although Fränkel and other Jewish leaders at the time believed that women possessed an inherent inclination for the sublime and the noble, these leaders also considered women to be easily corruptible and prone to vanity and shallowness. Therefore, female virtue and female religiosity required careful training and adequate reinforcement. Promoting the highest possible standards of Jewish women’s moral and religious education seemed of utmost importance to an increasing number of Jewish leaders. When they came to regard old-style piety as insufficient, and when they diagnosed religious devotion as waning, men such as Frankel and Salomon urged German Jewry to provide girls with a new type of schööling.

Pedagogues and ideologues believed that when women were exposed to the right education and to stimulation of their religious sentiments, they developed a radiant inner beauty, kept their homes as havens of serenity and Bildung, ensured the faithfulness of their families to the Jewish religion, and excelled as mothers and educators of their children. In this scheme, carefully educated, culturally refined, and truly virtuous Jewish women could guarantee the future of the Jewish people in an enlightened German society.
TOWARD WOMEN’S RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
AND THEIR GREATER INTEGRATION
IN THE SYNAGOGUE

With regard to the history of women’s position in this period, three topics are interwoven. The history of Jewish girls’ education in nineteenth-century Germany, the history of the Jewish Free Schools which offered the first modern-style programs of instruction for girls, and the history of Sulamith are tightly linked. In fact, David Frankel and Joseph Wolf, both teachers at the Jewish Free School in Dessau, founded Sulamith in order to propagate the program of educational reform pursued in that location. In Dessau, the foremost pedagogue of the German Enlightenment Johannes Bernhard Basedow had created the first elementary school for girls in Germany, in 1786. From there, modern girls’ schools spread throughout Germany; soon, maskilim began to advocate systematic education for girls. Writing in the Hebrew-language Ha-Me’assef (The Collector) in Berlin in 1788, the Jewish Enlightener David Friedlander deplored the lack of religious and moral education for Jewish girls. That same year, in one of the earliest Jewish publications in German, Friedlander declared that it was “necessary to think about the formation of women’s hearts and intellects. From a young age on, girls need instruction in religious and moral laws.”

Friedländer’s call for modern religious education of Jewish girls constituted one of the earliest signs that women’s position in Jewish religion and culture was changing. In order for women to be good mothers and worthy mistresses of their homes, it was felt that Judaism needed to offer women and girls a new type of inclusion. Education formed the first area in which Jewish reformers put into practice this integration of women into modern Jewish culture and society. In Berlin, the founders of the Jewish Free School for boys failed to establish a parallel institution for girls, but maskilim in Breslau erected a Jewish girls’ school in 1801, ten years after they had founded the boys’ school. By 1801, Jewish girls were also attending the Free School in Dessau, which contained three classes for boys and one for girls. And four years later, the director of the Dessau Free School, David Frankel, established a separate girls’ school. This school, Frankel explained in Sulamith, not only taught needlework and gave its students an appropriate secular education, but also fostered girls’ religious sentiments.

With Sulamith, Fraenkel and Wolf created a forum in which Jewish educators throughout Germany could disseminate their ideas of a reformed Judaism, of women’s place in the new Jewish culture, and of women’s education. Their periodical featured the pedagogical programs of innovators such as Michael Heil, director of the Jewish reform school in Frankfurt,
and Moses Hirsch Bock, director of Berlins’ first Jewish girls’ school, which he had founded in 1809 as a private school. The Frankfurt Free School, called the Jewish Philanthropin, had introduced instruction for girls in 1809 and, in 1821, an article in Sulamith described the religious education received there by both boys and girls.69 In this contribution to Sulamith, originally given as a speech at a public school examination, the author, possibly Heft himself, asserted that the school did not fail to familiarize children with the “ceremonial laws” of halakhic Judaism, even though the students studied the Bible rather than rabbinic literature. The religious education at the Philanthropin excelled, however, in understanding religion as “the ennoblements of sentiments, the uplifting of the spirit above the mundane, the command over passions, and the strengthening of the will in order to practice every human virtue.”70 And while, supposedly, boys as well as girls benefited from being taught religion in such a spirit, the author emphasized the need to include girls in the program. In fact, Heß, Fränkel, and other pedagogues did not tire of declaring that education for girls needed to focus primarily on “awakening, ennobling, and enlivening the moral, religious, and aesthetic emotions.”71

As reformers concurred that newly devised courses of religious instruction needed to address girls as well as boys, some began to claim that women and girls had to be included in public worship, too. In Sulamith, Michael Hefi discussed the potential benefits of “a weekly hour of devotion [Andachtsstunde] with prayer and singing in the German language” for girls and women. Such a devotional exercise would help women, he argued, to develop their taste for beauty in nature and art; he also believed that “the woman of fine taste becomes more decent in her appearance, gentler in her talk, more orderly and cleaner.”72 Heß emphasized here the practical merits of women’s exposure to an edifying service. Yet Sulamith advanced a larger program of a more heartfelt and cultivated culture of worship, in which the reformers expected women to participate. In his series “Letters to a Venerable Woman of Jewish Religion,” Gotthold Salomon elaborated on the notion, according to which the performance of religious commandments needed to be accompanied by sincere religiosity. Salomon insisted that true prayer expressed a person’s most intimate and holiest sentiments. Furthermore, he questioned whether Hebrew formed the most appropriate language for prayer. Since prayer was meant to be more than “mechanical movement of the lips,” Salomon argued, worshippers needed to pray in a language they understood.73 By raising the language of prayer as an issue, Salomon advocated concrete innovations in Jewish practice.

Salomon also emphasized that “rich and poor, big and small, old and young congregated in one temple, all the children in the house of their father.”74

Synagogues worship aimed to promulgate virtue, strengthen faith in
the divine, and further love among all of these humans. Women belonged to this community and Salomon sharply criticized the prevailing custom according to which unmarried women did not attend public services. The integration of girls and unmarried women into the German synagogue, which Salomon advocated in 1807 in Sulamith, came to be a central issue for reformers in the following decades. And so did the question of whether Hebrew or German should be the preferred language of synagogue liturgy.

Moreover, Sulamith consistently promoted decorous and culturally refined public worship for men and women. Together with advancing educational reform and issues of moral and cultural improvement, adapting the synagogue to the requirements of bourgeois society ranked high among Sulamith's goals. The periodical thus disseminated news on the first reformed services, which took place in the Jewish boys’ school in Cassel in 1809. In the Cassel school, the president of the Jewish consistory of Westphalia, Israel Jacobson, or other members of the consistory held a speech every Sabbath; congregants recited prayers in Hebrew and German alternately, and the service was abbreviated. In Sulamith, Fräkel claimed, the children understood what they prayed, thus lending a tone so that “exemplary quiet and holy devotion reign[ed] in this synagogue.”

Sulamith published even more enthusiastic reports on the dedication of the temple in Seesen and subsequently applauded the progress of synagogue reforms in Seesen, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurí, and other German communities. It hailed the introduction of organs and choirs into services, lauded German-language prayers and sermons, and advocated the celebration of marriage and confirmation ceremonies in the synagogue. Indeed, confirmation ceremonies superbly exemplify the new culture of bourgeois religiosity and women’s integration into public worship. Thus, Sulamith devoted much attention to these events and in particular exalted the first confirmations of girls.

Jewish confirmation ceremonies took form as graduation exercises from modern-style religious instruction. The ceremonies resembled the parallel celebrations that had become common in the Protestant church during the Enlightenment. For Jewish boys, confirmation competed with the customary Bar Mitzvah celebration and at times replaced the established rite. Girls were excluded from the Bar Mitzvah rite, but they underwent confirmation when they participated in the newly established programs of Jewish religious education. As early as 1810, David Frankel reported that the consistory of Westphalia planned to provide Jewish girls along with boys with religious instruction that would culminate in a confirmation ceremony.

Sulamith expressed great satisfaction when, in the following decade, girls in fact began to be confirmed in synagogues. The journal characterized the ceremonies as milestones in the development of an enlightened religiosity
and described them as deeply moving events of historic importance.
In the private synagogue of the Beer family in Berlin, Sulamith informed
its readers, “an assembly of four hundred people, as much as the
temple could hold, dissolved so to speak in tears.” Likewise, when the
Hamburg Temple, Germany’s first full-fledged and lasting Reform synagogue
and the model of German Reform worship, introduced the confirmation
of girls, Sulamith commemorated the first of these ceremonies as
“one of the most beautiful festivals that humankind and Judaism could celebrate.”
Contributions in Sulamith acclaimed the confirmation of girls as
a true expression of a thoroughly refined and enlightened religious spirit.
In the symbolic order of the period, the female sex represented beauty and
morality, Sittlichkeit and Bildung, progress and peace, purity and transcendence.
Since Jewish reformers associated religion increasingly with these
values, a white-clad girl who professed her faithfulness to Judaism in front
of a rapt audience, splendidly personified the new Jewish religious culture
that Sulamith helped to shape.

In Sulamith, the foremost publication of Jewish cultural reform in early
nineteenth-century Germany, Jewish ideologues and pedagogues advanced
new ideas of an enlightened Jewish religiosity and systematically propagated
women’s inclusion in modern Judaism. The attention that Salomon,
Fränkel, and other male contributors to Sulamith paid to women’s issues,
however, and the importance they attributed to women in their vision of a
truly refined Judaism, did not challenge the framework of the Jewish legal
tradition. In Sulamith, reformers refrained from systematically criticizing
women’s position in Jewish law. While Salomon urged greater inclusion of
women in public worship and insisted on a devotion in which religious
sentiment played a prominent role for both sexes, he nowhere came so far
as to suggest counting women in a minyan, the Jewish prayer quorum.

As vehemently as the reformers pleaded that Judaism needed to be
cleansed from what they considered to be abuses, superstitions, and additions
to the pure core of the Jewish faith, articles in Sulamith consistently
emphasized that the writers respected biblical Judaism, Halakhah, and the
Jewish tradition. Being suspected of promoting subversion and heresy, in
deed, would have been detrimental to the cause that this small group of
pedagogues and ideologues pursued. Most of the reformers were young,
and they attempted to educate and to enlighten the Jewish people. They
still needed to prove themselves as responsible leaders of German Jewry.
They succeeded in the ensuing decades, and Jewish communities came to
adopt many an innovation that had first been proposed in Sulamith. In the
journal, the reformers promoted, for instance, a mode of devotion in
which the uniodous involvement of the worshippers played a central role.
Salomon encouraged men as well as women to address God with heartfelt prayer, and in the vernacular. The transformation of the Jewish culture of prayer in Germany then, in fact, unfolded along these lines.

In the nineteenth century, a new, emotionalized German-language devotional culture ultimately evolved that did not differentiate between male and female worshippers. The relationship of women to Hebrew prayer, however, remained largely unchanged. Similarly, as articles in Sulamith had suggested, women were included in new programs of religious education, for which Talmud study no longer featured prominently.

*Sulamith* laid the ground for a Reform movement that later articulated a critique of Halakhah. Yet in much broader terms, the journal advanced a cultural framework for a bourgeois Judaism that all of German Jewry came to embrace. By the middle of the nineteenth century, contemporaries considered morality and heartfelt religiosity an indispensable feature of the Jewish religion and, as *Sulamith* had put forward, they believed that women excelled in virtue and religious sensitivity. German Jews came to adopt the language of bourgeois religiosity that had found its first full expression in *Sulamith*. 