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THE CRUCIFIED JEW

TWENTY CENTURIES OF
CHRISTIAN ANTI-SEMITISM



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Fount

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The pope of sinful Rome rose up and urged all the peoples of Edom to believe in the Christ crucified: to unite in order to Jerusalem and conquer the city so that the strayed might return to the site of their shame, to the tomb of him whom they have chosen as their God . . . Let the bones of Emico, the persecutor of the Jews be ground in a mill of fire! . . . O God of vengeance, O Lord God of vengeance, appear! It is for thee that we have let ourselves be slaughtered every day. Return sevenfold the wrongs of neighbours so that they may curse you! Before our very eyes let the nations be punished for the blood of thy servants that they have shed.

In addition, numerous literary works of this period exhorted God to mete out divine justice. Thus in a poem about the martyrdom of Isaac (châtelain of Troyes) and his family who were tried for ritual murder, the author appealed to God for justice:

Sinners have come for Isaac Cohen,
He must abjure, or perish.
He says: "What do you want of me? For God I will die.
As priest, I will offer him the sacrifice of my body."
"You cannot escape, we hold you fast.
Become a Christian," but he swift replies: "No.
For the dogs, I would not leave God nor his name!"
Then Haim was called, the master of Brinon,
And another *kadosh* was led forth;
Then they thrust him into a slow fire
And with good heart he prayed to God often and low,
Gently suffering his pain in the name of the living God.
God of vengeance, jealous God, avenge us on our foes!
From awaiting your vengeance, the day seems long to us.

Those who perished in the Christian onslaught and remained faithful to their ancestral faith were regarded as hallowing God's name. In their heroism and faithfulness, these victims cried out to God for revenge. Hatred and faithfulness were thus mixed together in the blood and tears of those who perished in these terrible centuries of suffering.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Demonic Image of the Jew

During the Middle Ages the Jewish community was detested, and the stereotype of the demonic Jew became part of Western culture. Repeatedly during this period Jews were accused of possessing attributes of both the Devil and witches. As the personification of evil, they were relegated to a sub-species of the human race. Jews were also viewed as magicians *par excellence*, able to work magic against the Christian community; this belief served as the basis for the charge that the Jewish population desecrated the Host and committed acts of ritual murder. Yet while it is true that Jews did engage in magical practices, they were excluded from non-Jewish circles of sorcerers and witches, and Jewish magic was dependent on the power of good rather than the demonic realm. Thus Christian allegations of this period were based on ignorance and fear. None the less, the masses attacked Jews in their pursuit of the demons, and in this Christian onslaught thousands of innocent victims lost their lives.

The Vile Jew

In Germany, France, Italy and England, Jews were detested throughout the Middle Ages, and anti-Semitism served as a central theme of Christian literary and artistic compositions. A fourteenth-century French satire, for example, depicts a Parisian Jew falling into a public latrine. When other Jews attempted to help him, he decreed: "I beg you not to pull me out now, for today is the Sabbath. Wait until tomorrow so as not to violate our law." Some Christians overheard this conversation and reported the situation to King Louis. The king then ordered his men to keep the Jews from removing this individual from the latrine. "He has observed the Sabbath", the king proclaimed. "He will observe our Lord's Day as

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well." However, when they came to rescue him on Monday, the Jew had died.

After the Black Plague there were few Jews left in the Low Countries, but numerous works were written about Jewish life. Some referred to the charge of ritual murder:

The Jews, wicked and cruel as dogs,
Brutally seized the child
Threw him down and trampled him . . .
Swiftly stripped him bare
And once he was naked
The filthy Jews, stinking dogs,
Inflicted several wounds
With daggers and knives . . .

Although no Jews remained in England after the expulsion of 1290, anti-Jewish polemics were repeatedly produced. Thus in about 1255 a story of ritual murder appeared and during the following century gave rise to twenty-one different versions of the ballad entitled "Sir Hugh or the Jew's Daughter". In the latter half of the fourteenth century Geoffrey Chaucer incorporated this theme in his *Priores's Tale*:

Ther was in Asyne, in a greet citee,
Amonges Christene folk, a Jewe . . .
And as the child gan forty for to pace,
This cursed Jew hym hente, and heeld hym faste.
And krite his throte, and in a pit hym caste.
I seye that in a wardrobe they hym threwe
Where as thise Jewes purgen hire entraille.
O cursed folk of Herodes al newel . . .
O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also
With cursed Jewes, as it is notable,
For it is but a liel while ago,
Praye eke for us . . .

In Italy the theme of the pound of flesh connected with a merciless creditor was transformed into a tale about a Jewish woman in *Il Peccone* by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino.

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These motifs were also found in religious drama of the period. In scenes from the New Testament Jews were portrayed in the most heinous fashion, and numerous epithets were used to characterize them: "false Jews", "false thieves", "false miscreants", "wicked and felonious Jews", "perverse Jews", "disloyal Jews", "false swine". The Jewish people were thus presented as vile and treacherous, and sadism became a central feature of the stage: torture, crucifixion and rape were repeatedly enacted to a believing audience. A number of German miracle plays of this period dealing with the Assumption of the Virgin, for example, contain a final scene in which Titus destroys Jerusalem to avenge the Divine Mother. In other plays contemporary events were presented in equally inflammatory terms. Thus in *Mistère de la sainte hostie*, a Jewish usurer forces a Christian debtor to give him a piece of the Host which he wishes to defile. "Desire seized me to crucify it, cast it into the fire and persecute it, and against the ground to trample, boil, beat, and stone it", he declared. Yet no matter what he does, the Host bleeds but remains intact. Witnessing this event, the Jew's wife and family denounce him and request baptism. The Jew, too, says he wishes to embrace the Christian faith when the provost comes for him. But the provost is not fooled and the Jew is burned. As he dies he calls for the devil to carry him away:

O Devil, I feel I am burning
Devils, devils burn and flame
I flare and flame in every limb
I perish now in fire and flame
My body, mind and soul
Burn now and fiercely consume
Devils come speedily
And carry me off from this ordeal.

The Devil and the Jews

From the time of the early Church, Christian theologians were preoccupied with demonology, and the Christian masses subscribed to primitive superstitions about the Devil, witches, and wizards. In the Middle Ages, scholars were anxious to explain the role of the Devil in the terrestrial and celestial spheres. According to Thomas Aquinas,

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demons could assume carnal form. Although they are incapable of procreation, they can introduce into a woman the seed of a man which they had received – the children procreated in this way were not in fact descendants of demons, but were indirectly spawned by them.

In the next century, the Dominicans engaged in speculation about the demonic realm. During this period the heretical doctrine of Catharism maintained that Satan rules the earth, and it was believed to be a great sin to commune with him. In 1320 Pope John XXII issued the bull *Super illius specula* against false Christians who "sacrifice to demons and worship them, produce or procure images, rings, flasks, mirrors, and still other things to which they attach the demons by their magic arts, gaining answers from them, seeking their aid in order to carry out their wicked designs, submitting to the most shameful servitude for the most shameful things."

Under the next Pope (Benedict XII), trials for witchcraft took place in Toulouse in 1335. Two years later the Inquisitor Nidder produced a detailed description of wizards and their activities. After the Black Plague, the Devil's associates were hunted down, and witch burnings became increasingly familiar events. In seeking out the guilty, the Inquisitors insisted on obtaining the victim's confession, and torture was invariably used to obtain the necessary evidence. In 1404 the Holy Office proclaimed that it had burned over 30,000 witches.

In the fifteenth century, witch-hunting flourished in Savoy, Switzerland and Germany. According to Pope Innocent VIII the Teutonic territories were filled with agents of the Devil. The German inquisitors Sprenger and Institoris published a treatise, *Malleus Magicianum*, and Satan's assistants were rounded up throughout the land. During this period the Devil was conceived as an individualized personality who roamed the earth, searching for innocent victims. Possessing horns, talons, a tail, and a goat's beard, he was black in colour and exuded a strong odour. The Devil was ubiquitous, working evil, sowing hatred, pronouncing spells, and possessing individuals. His chief agent was the witch, a woman of impurity and deceit.

In line with much popular Church teaching about the Jews through the centuries, the Jewish population was perceived as possessing the attributes of both the Devil and witches. Depicted as possessing horns, tails, and the beard of a goat, they were accused of producing a terrible odour (*foetor iudaicus*). Although able to perform magical feats, Jews were viewed as suffering from malignant diseases which only Christian

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blood could cure. Born misshapen, they were seen as haemorrhoidal, and men as well as women were afflicted with menses. Such themes are reflected in the accusation of ritual murder made against the Jewish community in Tlaxcala at the end of the fifteenth century:

Firstly, the traditions of their ancestors tell them that the blood of a Christian is an excellent means to cure the wound produced by circumcision. Secondly, they see that this blood permits them to prepare a dish that wakens mutual love. Thirdly, suffering from menstruation, both men and women alike, they have noted that the blood of a Christian constitutes an excellent remedy. Fourthly, they are obliged, by virtue of an ancient and secret commandment, to offer yearly sacrifice with Christian blood.

Thus in the Middle Ages Jews were viewed as the personification of evil. Dabbling in the occult, they were associated with devils and demons. At times they were depicted as the Devil himself; alternatively, they were seen as intermediaries between the Devil and innocent human beings. Given such diabolical attributes, it is not surprising that the Jewish people were relegated to a sub-species of humanity, and as a result butchered without remorse or guilt. As the vermin of the earth, they were a contagion in the body of Europe.

The Jew as Sorcerer

In the medieval period, Christians regarded the Jew as the magician *par excellence*. Since Satan was the ultimate source of magic, Jews were seen as his earthly agents. Repeatedly the masses attacked Jewish communities because of their conviction that Jews worked magical practices against Christians. A typical example was the assault upon Jews in England which was initiated by an incident that occurred in September 1189, at the coronation of Richard I. On this occasion a Jewish delegation which had brought gifts and pledges of allegiance to the new king were driven from the palace, accused of casting enchantments on the king, and set upon by the crowds. This onslaught was followed by numerous attacks on Jewish communities throughout the country.

The central feature of this suspicion of magical practice applied to the entire people – every Jewish act was construed as a diabolical device for working magic against gentiles. Thus at the beginning of the thirteenth century in Paris, the custom of casting earth behind one after a funeral brought a charge of sorcery. Again, the practice of washing hands on returning from the cemetery aroused similar suspicions. Because of these charges, some rabbis found it necessary to suspend a number of Jewish practices. In this atmosphere of suspicion the *mezuzah* was also viewed as an object of dread, because of the fear of Christian retribution Jews in the Rhineland were forced to cover them, for in the words of a thirteenth-century writer, "the Christians out of malice and to annoy us, stick knives into the *mezuzah* openings and cut up the parchment." Yet despite such acts, some Christian officials actually used the *mezuzah* for magical purposes. Thus at the end of the fourteenth century the Bishop of Salzburg asked a Jew to give him a *mezuzah* to fix to the gate of his castle.

In the medical field Jewish doctors were seen as agents of magic, and were frequently called upon by Christians to perform miracles, despite Church prohibitions reiterated by Popes and Synods. According to tradition, demons were frequently responsible for disease, and medicine was therefore viewed as an effective means of curing the ill. Paradoxically, when his ministrations proved successful, the Jewish physician was seen as a magician to be respected and feared, but if the patient died, the doctor was accused of murder. This charge was linked to the general belief that Jews sought to poison the Christian community. Physicians in particular were charged with this crime, but Jews in general were regarded as adept at this art. So widespread was the belief that Jews poisoned gentiles, that in 1550 when the Polish king Sigismund Augustus demanded of Ivan IV that he allow Lithuanian Jews into Russia for business purposes, Ivan replied: "It is not convenient to allow Jews to come with their goods to Russia, since many evils result from them. For they import poisonous herbs into our realms." Similarly Luther wrote: "If they (the Jews) could kill us all, they would gladly do so, aye, and often do it, especially those who profess to be physicians. They know all that is known about medicine in Germany; they can give poison to a man of which he will die in an hour, or in ten or twenty years; they thoroughly understand this art." Not surprisingly, such attitudes provoked the massacre of thousands of Jews in the fourteenth century for poisoning wells during the Black Death.

Another charge levelled against the Jewish population was that they engaged in acts of sorcery in connection with the Eucharist. Given the belief in transubstantiation, the mutilation of the Host was viewed as a most heinous crime: according to numerous accounts Jews attacked the Host in various ways. In addition some reports related that Jews fashioned an image of Christ from wax and through their magic art transmitted various tortures through this image to both Jesus and his followers. Such sympathetic magic was allegedly also used to inflict suffering on Church leaders. Thus in 1066 the Jews of Trèves were accused of having made a wax image of Bishop Eberhard; it was alleged that this object was baptized by a priest (whom the Jews bribed) and burned on the Sabbath – as a result, the bishop became ill and died.

The ritual murder accusation was also linked with Jewish sorcery. In the medieval period a wide range of occult remedies specified the use of human flesh, blood, entrails, hands and fingers; menstrual blood in particular was seen as especially efficacious. In this light the allegation that Jews used Christian blood for magical purposes was readily understandable. One of the earliest medieval references to this practice was made by Thomas of Cantimpre in the thirteenth century, in which he attributed the need for Christian blood to the Jewish affliction of haemorrhage which could only be cured by the application of this fluid. In 1235 the Jews of Fulda were charged with killing five children and confessed that they did so in order to obtain blood for the purposes of healing. Again, Matthew Paris's account of the crucifixion of Hugh of Lincoln by Jews in 1255 recounts that their intention was to use the boy's bowels for divination. Further, at the beginning of the fifteenth century the city Council of Freiburg requested the expulsion of the Jews from the city because they believed that the Jewish community periodically murdered a Christian child to prolong their lives. From these examples it is clear that the suspicion of magic lay behind the accusation of ritual murder – the notion of using blood for Passover *mazot* was a later refinement of this charge.

In the Middle Ages, gentiles who were brought before the Inquisition confessed to a wide range of magical practices: the adoration of Satan, the desecration of the Host and other consecrated objects, the sacrifice of infants, cannibalism, the use of human ingredients in salves and potions, the creation of wax images baptized in their names, and the crime of poisoning. This catalogue of offences determined the character of the charges made against the Jewish

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population. As a strange and mysterious people with whom the majority of Christians had little contact, it is not surprising that the Jewish nation was generally regarded as guilty of the most nefarious diabolical rites against humanity.

The Truth behind the Myth

Although the legend of the Jew as sorcerer was a Christian creation, Jews did engage in magical practices in the Middle Ages. Beginning in the gaonic period, in the sixth century AD, Jewish magic drew on mystical and Gnostic sources. Those who practised this art were acquainted with methods of inducing disease and death, arousing and killing passion, and employing demons for divinatory purposes. Among Jews – as among Christians – there was a widespread belief that sorcerers could alter their shapes and roam the woods in the form of wolves, hares, donkeys or cats, and transform victims into animals. It was also believed that a magician could project his soul to distant places and then return to his body.

The concept of the witch is also found in Jewish literature. In thirteenth-century sources they are depicted as having dishevelled hair, flying at night, and feeding on the blood and flesh of infants and adults. They are accompanied by demons who assume the forms of animals to carry out their designs. Thus Manahem Ziyuni, in his commentary on the Bible written in 1430, declared:

There are men and women who possess demonic attributes; they smear their bodies with a secret oil . . . and instantly fly off like the eagle over seas and rivers and forests and brooks, but they must return home before sunrise; their flight follows a predefined course from which they cannot deviate. Anyone who trespasses upon their meeting place is likely to suffer grave harm . . . They transform themselves into various animals and into cats.

Again, Menasseh ben Israel believed that witches could change their form, because Satan "fashions around their bodies the simulated forms of animals . . . the proof lies in the fact that when the paws of a pseudo-wolf are amputated the witch or magician appears minus hands and feet." Generally it was believed that such demonic figures

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were not Jewish; yet in some instances Jewish witches were depicted as engaging in such activities.

Despite the Jewish interest in magic, Jews were excluded from the gentle fraternity of sorcerers and witches. The witch-cults blasphemed various Church rites in their own ritual: such observance would have little meaning for Jews. Further, demonic practices of this period were based on a worship of Satan, whereas Jewish magic functioned within the context of the Jewish faith which excluded any association with God's arch-enemy. The central principle of medieval Jewish magic was its reliance on the power of good, which was invoked by calling upon the names of God and his angels. It was rooted in the Jewish tradition and exhibited none of the anti-Church elements hunted down by the Inquisition. Thus Jewish magicians were on the whole God-fearing, pious individuals, who observed the tenets of the Jewish faith. Within the ranks of Jewish wonder-workers were scholarly men who had a thorough training in Hebrew and Aramaic and an understanding of rabbinic literature; such knowledge enabled them to invoke God's names so as to effect magical cures. Jewish women, too, served as folk-magicians, healers of wounds, and preparers of love-potions.

According to tradition, demons and angels populate the world, and through their intermediacy the powers of magic can be brought into operation. The particular role of angels is to serve as God's emissaries; demons, on the other hand, can be influenced by the powers of a magician. One of the most common features of medieval Jewish magic was the incantation of names. This act comprised several ingredients: an appeal to ancient masters of magic, citations from or allusions to biblical passages, the invocation of angels, the emanation of holy names, and a specific request or command. A familiar characteristic of this process was to do things in reverse; thus biblical quotations were often recited both forward and backward, and mystical names reversed. One type of incantation was especially suited to dispelling demons – its effect derived from its form rather than content, such as the Talmudic spell against the demon Shabritri:

Shabritri
briri
riri
iri
ri

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In theory the demon shrank and finally vanished as he heard his name decreasing letter by letter. Again, a charm directed against a fever demon, quoted by Eleazar of Worms is: "Ochnotinos, chnotinos, notinos, otinos, tinos, inos, nos, os."

During the Middle Ages Jews also utilized sympathetic magic, yet it appears not to have been used either to harm or to kill an enemy. Rather it was commonly applied to force thieves to return stolen objects: the image of a suspected thief was drawn on a wall, and nails were struck into the image so that he would confess. Another use of such a procedure was to arouse passion. In a fifteenth-century work in Hebrew and Yiddish the following instructions were given:

Take virgin wax and make a female figure, with the sex organs clearly delineated, and with the features of the person you have in mind . . . Then bury the figure and cover it carefully so that its limbs are not broken, and leave it thus for twenty-four hours. Then bury it under the leaves, being careful that no one witnesses your acts, and cover it with a stone so that it does not break. When you disinter it, dip it carefully in water three times, so that it is washed clean, one in the name of Michael, again in the name of Gabriel, and the third time in the name of Raphael, and immerse it in some urine. Then dry it, and when you wish to arouse passion in her, pierce the heart of the image with a new needle, in that spot where it will cause most pain.

One of the most popular magical devices was the amulet, which was either worn on the body or attached to objects and animals. Jewish amulets were of two types: written texts, or objects such as herbs, foxes' tails, and stones. A Talmudic amulet which was widely used in the Middle Ages was the 'preserving stone' which was believed to prevent miscarriage. A man born with a caul was counselled to wear it at all times as a protection against demons. Towards the end of the Middle Ages it became common to hang a piece of the *Aphikomen* (part of the unleavened bread used at the Passover *seder*) in a home or carry it in a pouch to protect one against evil spirits. Again, a metal plate inscribed with the letter "*heh*" (a sign of the Tetragrammaton) was a common amulet. Written amulets were also widely favoured.

An effective amulet, tested and tried, against the evil eye and evil spirits, for grace, against imprisonment and the sword, for intelligence, to be

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able to instruct people in Torah, against all sorts of disease and reverses, and against loss of property . . . Protect him in all his two hundred and forty-eight organs against imprisonment and against the two-edged sword. Help him, deliver him, save him, rescue him from evil men and evil speech, and from a harsh litigant, whether he be Jew or Gentile. Humble and bring low those who rise against him to do him evil by deed or speech, by counsel or by thought . . .

These few examples illustrate the pervasiveness of Jewish magic and superstition among Jewry in the medieval period. Influenced by current cultural and social patterns, Jews formulated their own magical procedures based on biblical and Talmudic precedent. Yet although the practice of sorcery was an important aspect of Jewish folklore, Christian allegations about Jewish magic were misinformed and mistaken. Jews were neither the Devil nor his agents; their preoccupation with sorcery was induced by the desire to protect themselves from ill-fortune. To view Jews as dark and ominous figures with evil designs on the Christian population is to misconstrue their preoccupation with the occult.

Persecution of the Demons

Motivated by the belief in the demonic power of the Jewish people, a number of clergymen encouraged the persecution of the Jews. Thus the preaching friar and miracle worker Vincent Ferrer travelled throughout Spain and France attempting to convert the teachers. As the leader of bands of flagellants, he entered synagogues and demanded of worshippers that they accept the Cross. In Toledo, for example, he burst into the synagogue, expelled the congregation and renamed the place the Church of the Immaculate Virgin. This scourge of the Jews also persecuted Jewish communities in Saragossa, Valencia and Tortosa. Another tormentor was the Inquisitor, John of Capistrano. In Italy and Germany he preached about death, Hell, punishment, and the Anti-Christ. Leading a campaign against the Jewish population, he threatened princes who protected local Jewish communities with the wrath of God. From 1453 to 1454 he initiated a series of trials for ritual murder which resulted in a number of *autos-da-fé*.

Even individuals of a gentler disposition hated Jews with equal ferocity. Thus Bernardino of Siena, the founder of the sect of the Holy Name of Jesus, believed that the Jews were conspiring against Christians through usury, while Jewish doctors sought to undermine their health. His successor, Bernardino of Feltre, was equally hostile about Jewish practices: "They bleed the poor to death and grow fat on their substance," he declared, "and I who live on the bread of the poor, shall I then be mute as a dog before outraged charity? Dogs bark to protect those who feed them, and I, who am fed by the poor, shall I see them robbed of what belongs to them and keep silent? Dogs bark for their masters; shall I not bark for Christ?"

In the activities of the Jews the Devil's hand was seen at work: the Jew-Devil stalked Europe, seeking Christians as his prey. Accused of sorcery, Jewish doctors in particular were seen as agents of the demonic realm. Viewed as evil magicians, they were condemned by the Church. Thus in the thirteenth century the Council of Béziers forbade Christians from resorting to the care of Jews, and this prohibition was repeated by the Councils of Albi, Vienne, and the University of Paris. According to legend, Charles the Bald, Hugh Capet, and the Emperor Charlemagne were poisoned by Jewish physicians, and the Vienna Faculty of Medicine pronounced that the private code of Jewish physicians required them to kill one patient in ten. Thus both Jewish doctors and usurers were seen as united in a common quest to rob Christians of their money and their health. The Jew in the Middle Ages was therefore understood as the demonic counterpart of the Christian saints, and in the mythology of the age Jews came to represent all that is evil and impure.

In the light of this conception of the Jew-Devil, the Jews were depicted in medieval chronicles as predators who sought to destroy the entire social life of the communities where they lived. Hated by gentiles, Jewish communities turned inwards and formed their own closed worlds. Yet despite such isolation, they were not able to protect themselves from the Christian onslaught, and when faced with a choice between death or conversion many went to their deaths as martyrs. During the years of the Black Plague it was reported that they "went to die dancing and singing, as gay as if they were on their way to a wedding: and would not convert, neither father nor mother for their children . . . and when they saw the burning fire, women and children leapt into it singing the while." In some cases Jews committed collective

suicide rather than die at the hands of the uncircumcised. Those who met their deaths in this way were assured of the reward of eternal life. Suffering in this life was thus diminished by the promise of heavenly reward. In this light Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg's words of counsel express the devotion of an entire people: "Whosoever has taken the firm decision to remain loyal to his faith and to die, if he must, a martyr, does not feel the sufferings of torture. Whether he be stoned or burnt, buried alive or hanged, he remains without feeling, no moan escapes from his lips."

Some Jews, however, were unable to sustain such heroism, and converted under the threat of death. Yet subsequently they wished to return to their ancestral faith. For these apostates, there still remained hope. In the words of the fifteenth-century Talmudist, Israel Isserlein:

We must remember that he who returns to Judaism imposes upon himself a continual penitence, for he turns his back upon the advantages and felicities from which he benefited as a Christian, and assumes the sufferings and persecutions which the Jew needs must endure. He did not have to bear this burden while he was a Christian, and in truth his fault is expiated when he assumes it of his own free will, with the sole purpose of again becoming a member of the Jewish community.

This period of Jewish suffering was marked at the end of the Middle Ages by the transformation of Jewish quarters into ghettos where gates were locked at night. Behind the ghetto walls, the Jewish people withdrew into themselves, ever fearful of their Christian neighbours. Accused of sorcery and black magic, the Jew-Devil was thus imprisoned from the surrounding world – as a result the Jewish pollution of Christendom was restrained, and the demonic dark force of evil turned in on itself.