

'Under the Shado of Your Wings':

Religiosity and the Eighteenth Century Jewish Merchant

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“Be mercyfull to me, O Lord [,] forgive my Eniquettys[.] I am morning for my transgretions[,] they Compres me with tearror of Your Wroth, being sensible, of my sin I begg for forgivnss, and as Your goodness is great[,] I rely on your mercey and beseech your blesing that I maye be preserv^d under the Shado of your wings; not for aney wourdenes in me but for your goodness Sake maye my souel Cleave to the they Comand^{ments} and maye I walke in uprightnes[,] that I maye be one of your belov^d Chosen Israelite amen.”¹

This curious Jewish prayer does not come from any known prayerbook. It was scrawled, undated and signed only with a single smudged letter that could be mistaken, variously, for a D or an R or a B, on a piece of scrap paper that had previously been (or perhaps was subsequently) used to calculate a series of sums in Anglo-American currency. About the particular circumstances of its creation, no record has survived. Along with it were found with two similar prayer scraps on what we would now call “re-purposed” paper; one is a simple “memorandum to self”, as it were: “Command you maye your mind from mischif Idelnes and slander.” The other is an extended prayer in a somewhat different hand, with the notation “The Allmighty Grant y^e what you des[ire],” apparently written in the same hand as the prayer quoted above.

What makes these particular scraps of paper of interest to historians of colonial trade is that they were found tucked into a merchant’s ledgerbook. The ledger was donated to the American Jewish Historical Society in 1908 by the children of Jacques Judah Lyons, late *Hazan* for New York’s Congregation Shearith Israel between 1839 and 1877. Indeed, our knowledge of the ledger and its prayer scraps is entirely due to the research of Rabbi Lyons, who had collected the ledger along with other surviving primary evidence of the history of the Jews in early America,

¹ Papers of Jacques Judah Lyons, *P-15, Box 6A, Folder 9, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

about which he had long intended to write a book.² In the course of his research, Lyons both compiled original documents and interviewed knowledgeable informants, travelling to sites of interest such as Albany, New York; Charleston, South Carolina; and Newport, Rhode Island, to meet with elderly residents and descendants and collect information first hand from those who had known and been friendly with members of the Jewish community. In addition to this superb collection of original documents, partially published by the American Jewish Historical Society in the first two decades of the 20th century, Lyons kept careful notes on the information he obtained from oral sources. Though Lyons died without having the opportunity to write the definitive history he had planned, his research collections remained behind to document nearly every important aspect of Jewish religious life in colonial times, from synagogue minutes to circumcisions. If we know anything much at all of Jewish religious life in this period, it is largely due to his efforts to preserve these private documents which had been heretofore kept in the attics of the recordkeepers' descendants.

Still, Lyons made no notes about the ledger or its prayer scraps, and subsequent generations of historians have overlooked their existence. Although the ledger itself is described, the prayer scraps are not mentioned in the published version of the Lyons Collection. Nevertheless, I think they raise some striking questions about the nature of Jewish religiosity in the eighteenth century. Could the prayer scraps be the work of a merchant of substance, or does their abject humility reflect the demeanor of a young and humble clerk? Do they perhaps belong to a God-fearing merchant's wife, acting as his surrogate at home during his travels abroad? And when were they written? Do these expressions of acute remorse reflect incidents still fresh in the mind

² See "Preface", pp. ix-x and "Jacques Judah Lyons" [Biographical Sketch], pp. xxvi-xxvii in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Volume 21 (1913) (hereinafter *The Lyons Collection I*); "Preface" pp. xiv-xv in *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, Volume 27 (1920) (hereinafter *The Lyons Collection II*).

of the supplicant, or are they instead a response to a communal call for individual contrition – such as that made annually in the fall, when observant Jews are admonished to make amends for their sins before they are judged and inscribed in the Book of Life for the new year at Yom Kippur? What were the sins alluded to in such a tantalizing way, and how grievous need they have been to have sparked this *cris de coeur*? Could they have been more imagined than real? Does it matter? And could the third scrap possibly have represented the efforts of a husband to govern his wife, or perhaps a parent to instruct a child in the methodology of prayer?

These are questions that I will attempt to address in this paper, as I unpack the various ways in which Jewish merchants in eighteenth century British America expressed, defined, and were defined by, their religiosity. In my prior work on Jewish merchants, I have frequently been challenged by other historians to explain what made Jewish merchants unlike other groups of merchants – in fact, to specify what it was that made Jewish merchants Jewish. This discussion is not a natural adjunct to the discussion of their mercantilism, for the vast bulk of the historiography on any group of merchants tends to focus first on their economic activities and secondarily on their ethnic ties, generally excluding the study of religious belief and practice altogether.³ Perhaps this is due in large measure to the nature of our sources: merchants tend to

³ For a handful of important works on merchants of colonial British America, see Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, Paperback ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Thomas M. Doerflinger and Institute of Early American History and Culture, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise :Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va. by the University of North Carolina Press, 1986); David Hancock, *Citizens of the World :London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Cathy D. Matson, *Merchants & Empire :Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Jacob M. Price, *Overseas Trade and Traders :Essays on some Commercial, Financial, and Political Challenges Facing British Atlantic Merchants, 1600-1775*, Vol. C554 (Aldershot, Great Britain; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum, 1996). Bailyn, Doerflinger and Matson have no index entries for “religion.” In fact, Bailyn and Matson do not address the question of religion as an operative element of mercantile activity, while Doerflinger discusses religion only as a system of social control; see, e.g., Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit*, pp. 60-61, 185-188. Price describes religion as “a moral system” that promoted some forms of mercantile activity and

leave functional records about their transactions, rather than journals or diaries that reveal their interior selves. Introspection of this type often comes from letters, but few Jewish merchants have left behind caches of personal correspondence that we can analyze for this purpose. So what follows comprises something of a jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces were compiled from a wide variety of sources, from letters and synagogue records to mercantile accounts and scraps unintentionally retained, such as the three cited above. More specifically, I will be utilizing here the language of wills, synagogue accounts, tombstone inscriptions and social correspondence to flesh out our incomplete picture of the religious thoughts and actions of Jewish traders, both ordinary and extraordinary, in the eighteenth century British Atlantic world.

The ledger in which the prayer scraps described above were found dates from the middle of the eighteenth century, and belonged to Daniel Gomez, a Jewish merchant of eighteenth century New York. Its entries imply that it was the third in a series of such ledgers (of which the others have apparently not survived), and that Gomez began using it in 1739. At that time, he would have been in his mid-forties with more than twenty years of mercantile experience behind him and a well-established business enterprise. He was a family man, now six years into his second marriage. His first wife, Rebecca de Torres of Jamaica, had died some ten years prior to the tenure of this ledger, possibly from consequences of childbirth. Left to raise two small sons, Moses (born 1728) and Joseph (born 1729) with the assistance of his aging mother-in-law, Simha de Torres, he had

discouraged others among Quaker merchants; Price, "The Great Quaker Business Families of Eighteenth Century London: the Rise and Fall of a Sectarian Patriciate," in *Overseas Trade*, pp. 386-385. Hancock states that for the select group of merchants included in his study, little information is available about religious beliefs and practices. His subjects, he reports, "made almost no mention of the subject in their correspondence" although most appear in the records to have been "middling Protestants" of Anglican, Presbyterian, and Huguenot background; Hancock, *Citizens of the World*, pp. 40, note 1 and 43, note 8. Frederick Tolles appears to be one of the very few economic historians of the post-WWII period to consider religion as a fundamental feature of merchant life. Frederick Barnes Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House; the Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill: Pub. for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1948). He asserts that Quakers had conceived an "economic ethic" that provided religious justification and focus for desired market behaviors. *Ibid*, pp. 51-63.

taken a second wife from a prominent mercantile family on the island of Curacao in 1733, four years after Rebecca's death. His new wife, Esther ALevy, gave him twenty years of happy married life but no additional children before she herself passed away in May of 1753. The next month, he was allotted the sum of £30 as compensation "for translating and interpreting several letters, papers and other Spanish writings" for the Governor and his Council between 1734 and 1751. In his later years, due in part to illness and infirmity, Gomez became even more of a loner, interacting, it seems, primarily with his son Moses (who was, by then, both his business partner and his sole surviving child; Joseph had died in 1734) and apparently isolating himself from his neighbors, both Jewish and Gentile. Although the custom house records reveal that he occasionally bought and sold slaves, in 1748, he set free – without comment or explanation -- a young Mulatto woman named Terresse Francisca, posting a hefty penal bond in the amount of £200 with the town clerk as surety against the prospect that she might become a charge to the City of New York. He is little referenced in the surviving correspondence of other merchants of the period. His sympathies, as the revolution grew nearer, were apparently with the Patriot cause, and he and Moses were forced to abandon their property and remove themselves to Philadelphia once New York was under British occupation. There, on the 28th of July, 1780, he passed away at the advanced age of 85 years and seven weeks, having left no Will to document his final wishes.⁴

⁴ See Stern, Malcom H., *First American Jewish Families*, Third Edition, Updated and Revised (Baltimore: Ottenheimer Publishers, 1978, 1991), p. 85; Moses Gomez to Aaron Lopez, July 26, 1779 and August 5, 1780, Papers of Aaron Lopez, *P-11, Box 14, Folder 8, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society; Emanuel, I. S., *Precious Stones of the Jews of Curacao: Curacao Jewry, 1656-1957* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1957), pp. 240-243; Letters of Daniel Gomez to Aaron Lopez, dating June 1753 through March 1759, Collections of the Newport Historical Society with copies in SC-4114 at the American Jewish Archives; O'Callaghan, Edmund B., *Calendar of New York Colonial Commissions, 1680-1770* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1929), p. 23; *Journal of the Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the colony of New-York* (New York: Hugh Gainé, 1764-1766), Volume II (1743-1765), p. 346, transcription in Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 4, Folder 13, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society; Petition of Daniel Gomez to the Supreme Elective Council of Pennsylvania, May 1779, in Marcus, Jacob Rader (ed.), *American Jewry – Documents – Eighteenth Century: Primarily Hitherto Unpublished Manuscripts* (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1959), pp. 425-426; Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace, 1732-1762, p. 235, transcription in Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 4, Folder 13, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society; Entry in De Torres/Gomez family bible made by Moses Gomez, *Lyons Collection II*, pp. 283-284.

About the mercantile enterprise of Daniel Gomez, we know only a little. Gomez was one of six sons of Lewis Moses Gomez, an emigrant from Bordeaux who arrived in New York in the early years of the eighteenth century and was endenized in 1705. The father took pains to acquire the credentials necessary to allow his sons to succeed as merchants in their new home, and the four eldest (Daniel and his brothers Jacob, Mordecai, and David) appear on the list of aliens endenized by the crown in December 1714. Daniel was just 19 at the time of his endenization (David was two years younger); his application for legal privileges at this early stage of his career undoubtedly reflects a father's guiding hand.⁵ Daniel later became a Freeman of the City of New York in 1727, once he had established his reputation in trade, but long after his father and elder brother Mordecai had done so.⁶ It would appear that Daniel and his brother David continued to trade under the aegis of their father and elder brother Mordecai well into their 30s. Surviving Entry books for the port of New York do not confirm Daniel's separate trading activities before 1727, although Mordecai had begun doing so in 1704, when he was just 16 or 17. Daniel does not appear in the city tax

⁵ Samuel, W. S. (comp.), "A List of Jewish Persons Edenized and Naturalised 1609-1799," Jewish Historical Society of England: Miscellanies, Part VII (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1970), p. 120-121. Isaac and Benjamin, Daniel's two younger brothers, did not require naturalization as they were born in New York. For them, Lewis merely submitted a certificate from the midwife who had attended their births. Certificate of Judith Bourdet, recorded January 20, 1715, in Liber 28 of Conveyances, folio 208; transcription in Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 4, American Jewish Historical Society. The joint Petition for denization of the Gomez brothers, dated November 1714, presents the four as "Merchants of the Jewish Religion" whose lack of this credential "makes them incapable of being Owners of Shipping, and Severall other Inconveniencies they lye under in their Trades and business upon the Import and Export of Goods and Merchandizes, which renders them not So usefull Subjects to your Ma[jes]tie, and the plantations, as otherwise they might be." Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 4, Folders 9, 13 and 17, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

⁶ *The Burghers of New Amsterdam and the Freemen of New York, 1675-1866*, New York Historical Society Collections for 1885 (New York: New York Historical Society, 1885), p. 110. Mordecai, some seven or eight years older than Daniel, had achieved Freeman status a dozen years earlier, in June 1715; their father, Lewis Moses Gomez, had been made a Freeman in February of 1705/6, just after obtaining endenization. Mordecai, the eldest of the sons, had evidently followed their father's lead in linking Freeman status to his endenization as an important business credential. *Ibid.*, pp. 87, 93.

assessments as having taxable estate until 1728, when he was living in the East Ward, though it is possible that he resided in Jamaica near his inlaws for a short period of time around the time of his first marriage in 1724.⁷ Rising along with his father and brothers, Daniel achieved the wealth and a social status worthy of recognition within the Jewish community, and he served the congregation as Parnas (president) five times (1731-1732, 1738-1739, 1746-1747, 1753-1754, 1760-1761). In his later years, he was re-elected each year to the honorific post as one of five Assistants to the Parnas.⁸ But where Lewis Moses and Mordecai assiduously cultivated good relations both within New York's small Jewish community and with the mercantile elite of the city, Daniel seems to have had something of a temper that did not diminish as he aged. A number of instances of his volatile behaviour appear in the early minutes of Congregation Shearith Israel and involve issues of synagogue governance. In September 1755, for example, upon hearing an argument between Solomon Hays and his son Moses in the synagogue courtyard, Daniel rushed out and was later alleged to have been one of seven men who "laid violent Hands" upon Hays.⁹ In other cases, it appears he was easily provoked into a fight. In February 1716, he was attacked in the Market House on the East end of Wall Street by John Theobalds, who "knowing the said Daniel the night preceding to be bound to the good behaviour" wrung his nose and then beat him severely. The

⁷ See, e.g., Block, Julius M. , et al., *An Account of Her Majesty's Revenue in the Province of New York, 1701-1709: The Customs Records of Early Colonial New York* (Ridgewood, New Jersey: The Gregg Press, 1966), showing entries for Lewis Moses Gomez and Mordecai Gomez, separately and in company, but no entries for either Daniel or David Gomez; see, also, Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 18, folders 4 and 14, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

⁸ Minute books of Congregation Shearith Israel 1728-1786, *Lyons Collection I*, pp. 15, 29, 40, 70, 84, 211; De Sola Pool, David and Tamar de Sola Pool, *An Old Faith in the New World: Portrait of Shearith Israel, 1654-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) , p. 502. The de Sola Pools records Daniel Gomez as parnas only four times, listing another man as Parnas for 1746/7, but have two years (1748/9 and 1751/2) for which they were unable to identify the parnas. Gomez served as Assistant annually between 1761 and 1775.

⁹ Godfrey & Godfrey, "The King vs. Moses Gomez et al," pp. 401, 404.

following month, Daniel himself was prosecuted for attacking Benjamin Vincent “with a drawn sword,” causing a 4 inch wound in Vincent’s side; he pled guilty to the charge and was fined 20 shillings.¹⁰ Some forty years later, in the Spring of 1766, at age 71, he was prosecuted and convicted for the "stabbing and beating" of shopkeeper Uriah Hendricks, the husband of his niece Eve Esther and one of a group of young Ashkenazi men in the synagogue who took issue with the ritual order imposed by the largely Sephardi Parnassim. Although elected to lower synagogue offices a number of times, Daniel as frequently declined as accepted such responsibilities. Unlike his father and elder brother Mordecai, Daniel was not named in any contemporary Jewish wills as witness or executor, nor did he take on the ritual responsibilities often assumed within families, as did his brothers Mordecai and Benjamin.¹¹ Moreover, on several occasions during 1775, Daniel and his son Moses declined to attend meetings of the congregation's elders because of alleged public imputations that they were "not Honest Men."¹²

¹⁰ See Papers of Samuel Oppenheim, *P-255, Box 4, Folder 13, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society. Oppenheim located these references in the Minutes of the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace for 1656-1771.

¹¹ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was common for the knowledge and practice of ritual circumcision to pass within observant families. It is clear from family records that within the Gomez family, Mordecai, the eldest of the Gomez brothers, had taken on this responsibility; he is noted in the family bible as the mohel of Daniel’s son Moses (hereinafter Moses de Daniel, to distinguish him from two cousins of the same name). After Mordecai’s death in 1750, Benjamin, the youngest of the Gomez brothers, assumed the responsibilities of mohel, and he is noted in the family bible as the mohel of Moses de Daniel’s sons, Daniel (born 1761), Isaac (born 1763 and died 1764), Joseph (born 1766), and Isaac (born 1768). *Lyons Collection II*, pp. 281-283. Like other mohels, the Gomez brothers were sometimes asked to officiate at circumcisions outside their own family circle. In 1753, for example, Aaron Lopez sought Benjamin’s services for the circumcision of his newborn son; Benjamin was unable to comply with this request and his reply indicates that Daniel did not possess the necessary skills to serve in his stead but would have to find a third party to perform the ritual for Lopez. Benjamin Gomez to Aaron Lopez, May 28, 1753 in Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 4-5.

¹² *Lyons Collection I*, p. 137. On April 2, 1775, the Parnassim sent the Shamas to Daniel Gomez with a note stating, "We have for severall meeting[s] past regularly summonsed you to meet us as adjuntos, w^{ch} you have not thought proper to Comply with, we therefore should be glad to know wither you intend to meet us in Future or not..." Whatever the source of the underlying dispute, it was resolved by May 8, 1775, when both Daniel and Moses appeared at a meeting of the congregation's officers. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

But for all that, Gomez seems to have been a deeply religious man. The few letters and personal documents in his hand still extant are replete with expressions of pious resignation to the will of God. In 1753, laboring under the weight of intense grief after the death of his beloved second wife, he wrote nevertheless that “nuestro S[en]or [han] sido servido de sacar[la] de my compañia De esta p[ar]a mejor vida,” and prayed “... a my y a my hijo nos conceda Dios vida larga en su Santo Servicio Amen.” Consoling Aaron Lopez of Newport on the death of a child some two months later, he noted “q[u]e la vida q[u]e le falto a el inosente sea acrescentada en la de Vmds [Ustedes] como son obras del criador, es Nesesario conformar con su devina voluntad.” When his grandson was born in the Spring of 1759, he wrote more happily to convey the joyous news, yet noted “ruego ael Criador del mundo, nos lo deje criar p[ar]a su S[an]te servicio Y loaga Su temiente.” In sum, Gomez espoused a philosophy that left men to the disposition of God; God conceded all blessings, from the birth of a child to good health and long life, and ruled over men in mysterious ways; one was blessed to be called to the Almighty’s “Holy service.” Misfortunes – such as the loss of a loved one -- represented Acts of God that were beyond the understanding of men, but must be endured by them for the fulfillment of the divine mission. Prayer was the singular medium through which men might hope to exert influence over the divine will to effect their fate in positive directions, but it required sincere humility or repentance to be efficacious.¹³

¹³ Daniel Gomez to Aaron Lopez, June 19, 1753, July 4, 1753, September 23, 1753, and March 19, 1759, in Collections of the Newport Historical Society, Newport; copies in Collection SC-4114 at the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. The quoted passages may be translated as: “Our Lord has been served to take [her] from my company in this for a better life,” “to me and my son concede long life in his Holy Service, Amen” and “the foreshortened life of the innocent will be augmented in yours as are the works of the creator, it is Necessary to resign oneself to his divine will,” and “I entreat the Creator of the world to allow us his Holy service, and may His [eminence] be praised.” (*translations mine*). These passages are found in the letters of June 19, 1753, September 23, 1753 and March 19, 1759. Daniel’s sentiments are echoed in later documents and letters written by his son Moses. Moses, for example, informed Lopez in August 1780 that “it hath pleased the Almighty to take to himself my most honoured and esteemed Father,” but noted that as “this great loss” was one of several “dispositions of Almighty God we ought to submit to them with patience.” See, also, manuscript notations by Daniel Gomez in his copy of the *Machzor*

If this scenario sounds not so different from the theology of many seventeenth and eighteenth century Christians, it perhaps reflects an understanding of the workings of the universe that was common among persons of intellect in the eighteenth century British Atlantic World, one that cut across denominational boundaries. Nevertheless, the religious expressions of Daniel Gomez contains core elements that were implicitly and distinctively Jewish, delineating a particular way of organizing thought and action as much for the purposes of this world as for the world to come. To elaborate on this theme somewhat, it is useful to look at the spiritual language invoked by other Jewish merchants for different ends. Perhaps the easiest way to get a feel for the piety of Jewish merchants is to look at the language they used in writing their wills. Eighteenth century wills were, more frequently than not, made close to the time of death, and as Samuel Johnson so eloquently put it, "...when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."¹⁴ The quote is provided here not to suggest that many Jewish merchants of note died by hanging, but rather to emphasize what Johnson importantly implied about the imminence of death stimulating a deep desire to set in order one's affairs of both a temporal and spiritual nature.

The singlemost most extensive declaration of Jewish belief that I have encountered in a will comes from the Jamaican merchant Gabriel Moreno, who died in 1695 while on a voyage:

"In the first place I bequeath my Soul to the most high Lord of the world God of Israel whome I do really beleive will Save me, who is omnipotent wheresoever he pleaseth to Act, self existent, not depending of officers, Infinite without Beginning or End, and who by his Will from the beginning did make these three worlds of nothing, and procures thereby his Grace, and hath power to annihilate them, and make others, and who by particular favour, chose the people of Israel to commit to them his most holy Law he brought them

Sepherrim L' Yomim Noraim (Amsterdam: Joseph Atias, 5449/1689), Gomez Family Papers, *P-62, Box 1, Folder 1, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

¹⁴ James Boswell and others, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, with Marginal Comments and Markings from Two Copies Annotated by Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi* (London: Printed for the members of the Limited Editions Club at the Curwen Press, 1938).

from Mount Sinai, in doing whereof he shew himself Propitious to them by many Miracles. Vouchsafing to Entitle himself their God with no less tenderness then a father and therefore with Infallible hope, I hope to Enjoy of his promises, *as well Temporall as Sprituall* and that I shall merit to see the messiah the son of David and having fought his battles when am obliged to leave this world for a Better, I most humbly beseech his (Divine Majesty) that he would have Mercy upon my Soul and pardon all my Sins in the Interim and assist me and all Israel with his Grace, and deliver me from all evil Rencounters and the company of Ill people, and that all my relations may be fearers of his holy name, and observers of his Divine Precepts, being all for his Glory Amen." (*emphasis added*)¹⁵

While other Jewish testators of the seventeenth and eighteenth century were unlikely to make so elaborate an expression of piety, their wills nevertheless encapsulate a number of the same hopes and fears expressed by Moreno. Common themes in wills of eighteenth century Jewish merchants thus include an acknowledgement of the power and authority of the Almighty, concern for the condition of the testator's own soul, hopes for the pardon of sins and recognition of merit in the hereafter, trust in God's grace and recognition of ongoing spiritual obligations toward the living. Only a minority of testators touched on all of these themes in their wills and some Jewish wills mention none of them. But many Jewish merchants do commit to record a number of these in their efforts to delineate their own sense of a spiritual inheritance for their heirs, relations, friends and the Jewish community at large. Of course, the trouble with relying on Wills as a source of evidence is their disconnect from a life as lived, which is to say, rather, that the language one finds in a will frequently results from inner reflection on one's past mistakes as much or more than on one's right thinking actions. So while the language found in wills does provide some insight into the spiritual belief systems of individual merchants, it doesn't always provide the best evidence of how the testator acted on those beliefs over the course of his or her lifetime. There are, in fact, a number of tangible manifestations of

¹⁵ Will of Gabriel Moreno (1695), Probate 10/1332 X/L05954 (English translation contemporary to Portuguese original) in the Island Record office, Spanish Town (Jamaica); typescript copy in the collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

commitment to Jewish religious belief. These include, on the personal level, adherence to *kashruth*, the Jewish dietary laws, and observance of the Sabbath, along with activities performed in and for the communal setting: honoring deceased loved ones through public prayers on specific occasions, endowing the synagogue for charitable purposes (including for the purpose of having prayers read for oneself after death), active participation in constructing the primary institutions of communal Jewish life such as the building of a synagogue structure or the consecration of a cemetery.

Kashruth was the most readily identifiable element of Jewish identity, but also, at least in eighteenth century British America, the most difficult to maintain. Adherence to *kashruth* required knowledge of the correct techniques for slaughtering and processing of meat; the observant merchant who travelled frequently to places without a properly trained communal *shochet* (butcher) either had to carry on this practice himself or forego the consumption of meat. Rigorous observers of the dietary laws accordingly took pains to acquire knowledge of ritual slaughtering so as to be assured of access to kosher meat wherever they went. The merchant Saul Abrahams, who moved between New York and Newport in the 1740s, counted among his few possessions a silk tallis for use in prayer, three razors and a set of *shochet's* knives for the ritual slaughter of cattle;¹⁶ similarly, Savannah's Mordecai Sheftall was so strict about adhering to *kashruth* that he carried a *shochet's* knife when visiting Gentile friends in the countryside so that he might be assured of compliance with *Halachah* (religious law) even while paying social calls in a non-kosher home.¹⁷ *Kashruth*, however, controlled more than the method of slaughtering. It

¹⁶ Newport Town Council Minutes, May 1, 1749, Vol. IX, folios 380, 382; Vol. X, folio 204; Collections of the Newport Historical Society.

¹⁷ Mordecai Sheftall to Sheftall Sheftall, February 21, 1786, and John Wereat to Mordecai Sheftall, December 2, 1788, Marion Abrahams Levy Collection of Sheftall Family Papers, cited in

also dictated the strict separation of meat from dairy products. Thus, a different kind of skill was exercised by Joseph Lopez for the manufacture of kosher cheese, where *kashruth* dictated against the use of the animal-based rennet that was prevalent among Christian cheesemakers; Lopez prevailed upon New York merchant Uriah Hendricks to obtain for him a quantity of the herb cardoon for this purpose.¹⁸

Ocean travel forced different requirements; for that, situation, observant Jews took pains to provide their own provisions so as not to be forced to rely on the unclean provisions that constituted what was available from the ship's stores. Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, seeking the indulgence of the Brown family for passage of a poor Jew to Surinam in May of 1770, assured them "He carries his provisions with him."¹⁹ This is not to say that everyone observed the dietary laws with the same rigor; Ashkenazim, as outsiders observed, tended to adhere more closely than the Sephardim who had lived part of their lives as *Conversos*.²⁰ But even Ashkenazim were prone to let rigor slip in the freewheeling and largely transient environment of British America. Asher Levy, for example, was too lackadaisical about *kashruth* for his sister's taste, and she warned her merchant son, "Never Eat Anything with him Unless it be bread &

Morgan, David T. "Judaism in Eighteenth Century Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Spring 1974), pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ Joseph Lopez to Uriah Hendricks, November 24, 1791, in Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 461-462.

¹⁹ Jacob Rodriguez Rivera to Nicholas Brown & Co., May 21, 1770 and May 25, 1770; Nicholas Brown & Co. to Jacob Rodriguez Rivera, May 29, 1770, in Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 96-98.

²⁰ Snyder, Holly, *A Sense of Place: Jews, Identity and Social Status in Colonial British America, 1654-1831* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University doctoral dissertation, 2000).

butter nor noe where Else where there is the Least doubt of things not done after our Strict Judiacall method,” as she considered *kashruth* one of the “foundementalls” of Jewish life.²¹

Of all of the actions that distinguished Jews from Gentiles in the early modern world, Sabbath observance was the most important and widespread. It was not only the fact that Jews observed the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week (Saturday) rather than the first (Sunday) that made Jewish sabbath observance distinctive from Christian practice; it was instead the host of unique rituals that formed part and parcel of the Jewish sabbath, including the important role of dietary laws, strict rules governing what might or might not be considered “work” for purposes of the Sabbath, and refraining from all forms of such “work” from sundown to sundown that made Jews stand out among their neighbors in the British Atlantic world. In the eighteenth century, Sabbath observance was a key aspect of Jewish ritual life both inside and outside of the home. But outside the home, this left Jewish merchants in an awkward position. Most had necessary dealings with Gentiles at all levels of society as part of their trading activities; Gentiles, of course, observed a different Sabbath and expected to be able to conduct business on Saturdays. For Aaron Lopez, who spent much of his time during the Revolutionary War on the road, either drumming up trade or attempting to forestall efforts by privateers to libel his property as that of a Loyalist, adherence to Sabbath observance could work a particular hardship. In early 1782, he confided to his friend Moses Seixas that the trial of a libelled ship had forced him to spend far longer at Hartford than he had hoped, waiting to be heard. To his chagrin, he found himself forced by circumstances to remain an extra night “it happening also

²¹ Abigail Levy Franks to Naphtali Franks, July 9, 1733, in Herskowitz, Leo (ed), *Wills of Early New York Jews, 1704-1799*, . Studies in American Jewish History No. 4 (New York: American Jewish Historical Society, 1967), pp. 7-8.

that Friday was the day, when the Case was agreed.” But, he wrote, “I would not stay one hour longer in that Town & soon as our Sabbath was over I mounted my Sulkey, & left the contentious Judges to pass the Sentence[.]”²² This was certainly an extreme case where observance of the Sabbath caused inconvenience and discomfort; however, the records kept by Lopez and other merchants indicate that Sabbath observance formed a natural and regular close to a merchant’s weekly responsibilities. As the religious skeptic Abigail Levy Franks put it to her son in 1741, “I never knew the benefit of the Sabbath before but Now I am Glad when it comes” for the sake of her beleaguered husband, merchant Jacob Franks, then “Very full of buisness,” “that he may have a Little relaxation from t[ha]t Continuall Hurry he is in [as trade is] a Very great Fatigue And makes him Very Peevish to those he employs...”²³ In fact, most Jewish merchants, in deference to the customs of the Christians among whom they lived, closed their stores and shops from Friday sundown through Monday morning.²⁴

Careful records kept by Aaron Lopez indicate the extent to which most Jewish merchants obeyed the proscription against hiring others for the purpose of performing ordinary work on the Sabbath and other ritual holidays. Between 1765 and 1768, Lopez had occasion to hire the slaves of other Newport slaveowners as laborers. In his memorandum of accounts for these

²² Aaron Lopez to Moses Seixas, January 7, 1782, Lopez letterbook, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

²³ Abigail Levy Franks to Naphtali Franks, June 21, 1741, in Hershkowitz and Meyer (eds.), *Letters of the Franks Family*, p. 87.

²⁴ See, e.g., the reference to Aaron Lopez and his enterprise at Leiceister, Massachusetts in Washburn, Emory, *Historical Sketches of the Town of Leicester, Massachusetts, During the First Century from Its Settlement* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1860), pp. 120-123. Similarly, George Channing, writing of Newport in the period following the Revolutionary War, recalled that “Joseph” (e.g., Jacob) Lopez, a nephew of Aaron who served as chief clerk at the mercantile firm of Gibbs & Channing, rigorously observed the Sabbath and festivals, making up to his employer for these absences at other times. Channing, George G., *Early Recollections of Newport, R.I., from the Year 1793 to 1811* (Newport: A. J. Ward, 1868), p. 199.

“Negro workers,” Lopez recorded notations as to several criteria which impacted upon the working patterns of these hired slaves. Examination of this record reveals that no slave hireling was asked to work on the Sabbath or a Jewish festival, which would have been a clear violation of the Torah. Of course, this condition reflected more concern for Lopez’ own spiritual account than that of the hirelings. Nevertheless, the care that Lopez took to release these workers not only on the Sabbath, the High Holidays and Passover (and, in the case of a slave hired from another Jewish owner, on Tisha B’Av), but also during less important festivals such as Purim,²⁵ suggests that their humanity had a claim on his spiritual responsibilities. In fact, Jewish merchants took pains, through the structure of the synagogue, to police those among them who went too far in bending Sabbath proscriptions about work. In March 1792, Isaac Pollock was called before the Adjunto (board) of Congregation Mikve Israel in Savannah to respond to charges of “keeping his store open on the Sabbath.” As it happened, Pollock’s situation proved to have been unavoidable, since, without Pollock’s prior knowledge, the captain of a vessel had appeared at his door with goods consigned to Pollock from Charleston, leaving him no choice to but ask his clerk to move the goods into storage. Under the circumstances, Pollock was deemed innocent of a Sabbath violation, which would have cost him all synagogue privileges.²⁶

²⁵ Memorandum [Account] Book, ff. 40-49, Papers of Aaron Lopez, Vol. 589, Collections of the Newport Historical Society, Newport. *See, especially*, accounts for Cuff, hired from Capt. William Pinnegar (f. 42), Quaco, hired from Capt. John Thurston (f. 44), Amboy, hired from Sanford Gardner (f. 45), Quaco, hired from Samuel Marriott (f. 46), Ceazar, hired from Frances & Jacob Pollock (f. 48), Prince, hired from Jonathan Tillinghast (f. 49).

²⁶ Code of Laws of Congregation Mikve Israel of Savannah, 1791-1792 in Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 176-181. Similar rules for dealing with Sabbath violations were adopted by Congregations Shearith Israel in New York and Mickve Israel in Philadelphia in 1790 and 1798, respectively. *Ibid.*, pp. 128-130. 166-167.

One of the earliest significant measures of Jewish commitment found in British America lay in the treatment of the dead. Jewish law mandated that due care be taken with ritual requirements respecting the departed, and Jewish merchants, usually acting as a group, were quick to seek land for the consecration of a *beth haim* (cemetery) as soon as they perceived themselves as permanent settlers in a particular geographic location. In fact, establishment of a *beth haim* preceded the construction of a synagogue in nearly every location where Jews settled in the New World; in Newport, to cite an extreme case, the Jewish cemetery preceded the synagogue by nearly a century.²⁷ Plans for proper disposition of the dead were linked in Jewish theology to the hope of redemption and eventual resurrection. Since, according to the Talmud, God might fulfill promises after the death of the supplicant, it was therefore important that the supplicant maintain good standing even after death.²⁸ Of 51 Jewish wills probated in eighteenth century New York, 25 commended the testator's soul to God, and 17 included direct bequests to a synagogue or other Jewish body for communal purposes. Seven wills, dating primarily from the first half of the century, contain specific mention of redemption at the end of time, "hoping," as Abraham De Lucena put it, "for A Joyful resurr[ection] to Life Eternal."²⁹ For this purpose, Daniel's son Moses Gomez, like many other Jewish merchants of the British Atlantic, made explicit provision in his will

²⁷ The lot for Newport's *beth haim* was purchased in 1677/8, and the first burial took place shortly thereafter; the construction of the synagogue was not begun until 1759. See *Lyons Collection II*, pp. 175-181. A facsimile of a certified eighteenth century copy of the original seventeenth century deed for the cemetery lot is found between pages 174 and 175. For New York, see also, De Sola Pool, David, *Portraits Etched in Stone: Early Jewish Settlers, 1682-1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), p. 10; for Halifax, Montreal, Savannah and Philadelphia, see Marcus, Jacob Rader, *The Colonial American Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), Volume II, pp. 878-880, 887.

²⁸ Levinson, Jon D., *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. x, 25, 33. In July 1773, Ezra Stiles recorded in his diary a conversation with Rabbi Haim Isaac Karigal in which Karigal expounded on the nature of the Resurrection. Dexter, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, Volume 1, p. 399 (entry for July 19, 1773).

²⁹ The wills discussed here are those compiled in Hershkowitz, *Wills of Early New York Jews*. De Lucena's will, dated 1725, appears at pp. 33-35.

“that the value of five pounds be giving to our Synagogue in this City as a *Legado* [Legacy] to say *Escava* for me according to our Custom.”³⁰ Jamaica’s Jewish merchants were particularly adept in devising elaborate schema for propagation of *escavoth* on their own behalf after their decease. In 1737, Kingston merchant Mordecai da Silva, in a state a spiritual self-examination, “calling to mind the uncertainty of this Transitory Life ... [and] being penitent from my heart for my Sins past humbly craving forgiveness for the same,” devised £5 to a young orphan boy "for to say a Funeral Prayer used in our Synagogue during the time of Eleven Months after my decease.”³¹ In a similar manner, Daniel Nunes da Costa devised the sums of £10 to the synagogue and £5 to the *Abby Yetomim* (Society of Orphans) in 1751; "being," as he said, “Pentitent for my sins[,] I commit my soul in the hands of God hoping through his divine mercys forgiveness for my sins and that he will

³⁰ Will of Moses Gomez (1790), Hershkowitz, *Wills of Early New York Jews*, pp. 189-191. Only two of the New York wills compiled by Hershkowitz specifically mention a devise to the synagogue for *escavoth*; however, it is apparent from the early records of Congregation Shearith Israel that it was common for *escavoth* to be recited for deceased members. A record book compiled by Hazan Joseph Jessurun Pinto and maintained by his successors contains an extensive listing of *escavoth*, many of them noted as *legados* – which is to say, that arrangements for the prayer were made by gift to the congregation either by the deceased or his/her heirs. This book records *escavoth* for nearly every member of the Gomez family who lived in New York during the eighteenth century, and most are marked as *legados*. *Livro dos Miseberagh, Ascavoth, & Diversas outras Cerimonias que Se Uzao no kahal kados de [Shearith Israel] de New Iork... 5519 [1758/1759]*, Records of Congregation Shearith Israel, *I-4, Box 1, Folder 11, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society. A record maintained by Moses Seixas for Congregation Yeshuat Israel of Newport for the years 1784-1785 shows that several members of the congregation made donations for the purpose of having *escavoth* for deceased family members on Yom Kippur. Jacques Judah Lyons Collection, *P-?, Box ?, Folder ?, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

³¹ Will of Mordecai da Silva, November 10, 1737 (proved February 28, 1739), Liber of Wills 22, folio 78, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica; *typescript in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. The Will first nominated da Silva’s minor cousin, Mordecai, the son of his deceased uncle Joshua da Silva, for this purpose, but provided that in the event young Mordecai should refuse this request to recite the Kaddish, Isaac Solis (the minor son of widow Rachel Solis) would be nominated in his stead, and the specified £5 would go "to him that shall read the said prayer within Eleven Months" following the decease of the testator.

place me with the Blessed."³² Jewish testators of high social status within the community specified that an *escaba* be recited in their honor in the synagogue on Yom Kippur or other sacred occasions. David Bravo perhaps epitomized the spiritual designs of the materially well off when he specified that £100

". . . shall be entered in the Coffers of the [Kingston] Synagogue according to the usual custom on or before our Great Fast of Attonement called Yom Kepur upon this condition Nevertheless that the said Wardens [of the synagogue] . . . do admist direct and consent to have recorded in their Books of Constitution that forever hereafter from the said Fast day of Yom Kepur...the Hazan or Reader of the said Synagogue shall say or read a prayer called Scava immediately after the morning prayers and say or read as far as the taking out of the Sepher Torah or Five Books of Moses and I do hereby further direct that no other person or persons name or names shall be named or read in the Reading of the Scava but my own."

In the event that the wardens declined his demand for a personal *escaba* and elected instead to include him in a general *escaba* with other decedents of the Jewish community, Bravo's will reduced the bequest to £25.³³ Most such requests were not contingent on compliance, or as stringently worded as that of Mr. Bravo. Daniel da Silva simply left £20 to Isaac, the young son of his friend Joshua Nunes "to say Kadis [Kaddish]"; Judith Lopes Alvin, a wealthy widow, bequeathed £10 to the Kingston synagogue for an *escaba* "in every night of Kipur." She further devised £20 to Abraham Azevedo, a young boy, "on condition he reads the proper prayers for me at Synagogue the eleventh month." Moses Adolphus, in 1795, devised £1000 to the newly-formed

³² Will of Daniel Nunes da Costa, November 14, 1751 (proved December 28, 1752), Liber of Wills 29, folio 15, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica; *typescript in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

³³ Will of David Bravo, January 2, 1748 (proved June 1, 1749), Liber of Wills 27, folio 27, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica; *typescript in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. It is worth noting that Bravo's provision was explicitly copied by another Kingston merchant, Abraham Gonsales, whose 1753 will allotted £100 to the Princess Street synagogue "Provided always and upon this condition that there be had for me an Escava on our fast day called Kipur in the same manner as was done for the late David Bravo deceased," with the proviso that the bequest would be void "if the same shall not be allowed and permitted." Will of Abraham Gonsales, September 21, 1753 (proved November 1, 1753), Liber of Wills 29, folio 108, Island Record Office, Spanish Town, Jamaica; *typescript in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

Ashkenzi congregation (Mikve Israel) at Spanish Town, stating ". . .it is my earnest request that so soon as the . . . Synagogue is erected the usual prayers offered on the greatest fast day of Atonement amongst the Jewish Nation for deceased persons may be read or sung for me in the said Synagogue;" the smaller sums of £25 each were devised to the Ashkenazi synagogue at Kingston and the synagogue at Port Royal with the anxious petition that an *escaba* be said for Adolphus in each of these places as well.³⁴

In fact, successful merchants were the lifeblood of communal activities in every Jewish community in British America. Merchants were the first Jews to establish themselves in the New World, and as such they were responsible for setting the shape of communal life, not only for themselves, but for their families, their descendants and for other Jews whose activities gave the Jewish community its intellectual and religious depth and provided the means for performing important ritual acts. Banding together, merchants purchased land for the establishment of cemeteries, formed the governing boards of religious congregations, and raised funds for the construction and maintenance of synagogue buildings and attendant structures. These tasks were not finite. As economist Meir Tamari notes, Judaism's assertion that all wealth was given by God exerted a constant tension over mercantile activity. A merchant was only the steward of

³⁴ See, for example, Wills of : Abraham Alvares, December 8, 1692/3 (proved August 23, 1693), Liber of Wills 7, folio 171; Aaron Baruch Lousada, Jun 20, 1766 (proved June 16, 1768), Liber of Wills 37, folio 436; Joseph da Costa Alvarenga, September 4, 1699 (proved June 24, 1700), Liber of Wills 9, folio 102; Isaac da Costa Alvarenga, June 14, 1754 (proved January 30, 1755), Liber of Wills 30, folio 20; Daniel da Silva, January 19, 1757 (proved March 18, 1757), Liber of Wills 31, folio 24; David Henriques, September 7, 1759 (proved April 16, 1766), Liber of Wills 36, folio 90; Jacob Henriques Furtado, December 29, 1768 (proved August 24, 1769), Liber of Wills 38, folio 112; Judith Lopes Alvin, December 15, 1763 (proved November 27, 1766), Liber of Wills 36, folio 134; Moses Adolphus the Younger, December 25, 1795 (proved April 16, 1798), Liber of Wills 64, folio 56; Solomon Saldana, October 8, 1766 (proved March 19, 1767), Liber of Wills 36, folio 174. All of these wills are located at the Island Record Office, Spanish Town; *typescripts can be found in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

what God had generously provided. The entire Jewish community was a partner to his wealth, and expected to share in its blessings.³⁵

Evidence from eighteenth century Jewish communities and the employment of their *tzedakah* funds underscores this point. Usually translated into English as “charity,” the *tzedakah* was frequently used for social welfare. Shearith Israel’s *tzedakah* was, for example, applied to provide monetary stipends and material support in the form of medical care, wood, matzoth for passover, and even clothing to poor members of the congregation or transients in need of passage to places where other Jews lived. However, the true meaning of *tzedakah* in Jewish theology is more akin to social justice than charity, and such funds could also be used to support and maintain the religious functionaries -- the *Hazan*, the ritual butchers (*shochet* and *bodek*), the *Ribby* (teacher) for the congregational school, the *shammas* (caretaker) and others -- who dedicated themselves to serving the congregation’s religious and ritual needs and thus, without access to opportunities for self-actualizing profit, were limited to whatever modest living their situations might allow.³⁶ Without access to landed wealth, Jewish communities depended on the contributions of their merchants to sustain the communal *tzedaka*. And Jewish merchants complied with those expectations. One Sabbath during Pesach in 1772, Ezra Stiles observed Newport’s Jewish merchants making “large offerings” of Chai Livre (in this case, £16 or \$2) to the total of forty dollars, during the course of the synagogue service, after *escaboth* for the

³⁵ Tamari, Meir, *With All Your Possessions: Jewish Ethics and Economic Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp. 36-38.

³⁶ Tamari, *With All Your Possessions*, pp. 248-250. Specific instances of charitable support by Congregation Shearith Israel appear in *Lyons Collection I* at pp. 86-89, 91, 93, 95, 99, 105, 106, 108, 109, 114, 121, 124, 127, 135. Evidence of similar support for the religious functionaries appears throughout the minute book of Shearith Israel in this volume, often on the same pages.

deceased. Stiles watched as Aaron Lopez, by then the wealthiest man in Newport, pledged 10 or 12 of these Chai, noticeably more than any other man.³⁷

Comparing charitable donations by Jewish and Christian testators in Jamaica provides further evidence of the communal nature of Jewish giving. In December 1821, the Assembly of Jamaica requested that the Crown Solicitor, Henry John Ross, compile a list of all charitable devises from 1737 through 1821 made by wills on record in the office of the Island Secretary. The resulting list was presented to the Assembly by Ross on November 21, 1825, and was subsequently entered into the Journal of the Assembly. Analysis of this list reveals a number of interesting differences between the island's Jewish and Christian populations, as shown in the Tables presented below.

	<u>JEW</u> S	<u>CHRISTIANS</u>
Number of Testators	282	154
Number of Monetary Bequests	281	108
Number of Bequests of Property (value unspecified)	1	46
TOTAL MONETARY BEQUESTS	£27,245	£46,190 (plus 4900 <i>livres</i>)
Average Value of Monetary Bequests	£97	£428

TABLE I. Charitable Bequests in Jamaica, 1737-1821³⁸

³⁷ Dexter, Franklin Bowditch, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, edited under the Authority of Yale University* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1901), Vol. I, pp. 225-226 (entry for April 18, 1772). These currency equivalents were provided by Stiles in his diary, and undoubtedly came from one of his Jewish informants.

³⁸ **Compiled from** "Schedule of Charitable Devises from 1737 to 1821," November 21, 1825, *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, vol. XIV, pp. 477-490.

As shown in Table I, above, nearly twice as many Jamaican Jews as Christians made charitable bequests during the period from 1737 to 1821. Bearing in mind that Jews constituted perhaps 10-12% of the white population of Jamaica in 1730,³⁹ these differences are even more significant than is apparent from these figures alone. Jews were certainly many times more likely to make charitable contributions by devise. Moreover, the nature of charitable giving was significantly different for Jews than it was for Christians. Christian charitable requests tended to be large (more than £100) and were likely to consist of annuities, land or other property to be placed into service for charitable purposes. Jewish charitable bequests, however, were nearly always monetary and most often small in size (£50 or less). Many charitable bequests made by Jamaican Jews were in amounts of £5 or less. Perusal of the bequests given on the Schedule shows a significant cultural difference between Jews and Christians in charitable giving patterns. Jamaican Christians who made charitable requests were likely to be wealthy property owners, while Jews who made such bequests need not be. Charity to the community was incumbent upon every Jew regardless of economic status, and any Jew who had the means to provide charity was expected to contribute to the extent his or her means allowed.⁴⁰

Further confirmation of the communal nature of Jewish charitable bequests can be seen in the designation of recipients by Jewish and Christian testators, shown in Table II, below. Here, it is

³⁹ Hurwitz, Samuel J. and Edith Hurwitz, "The New World Sets an Example for the Old," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 1 (September 1965), p. 40, note 5.

⁴⁰ Tamari, *With All Your Possessions*, pp. 248-262. See also Holzberg, Carol, *Minorities and Power in a Black Society: The Jewish Community of Jamaica* (North-South Publishing Co., 1987), pp. xix. Holzberg identifies a number of methods by which the economic benefits attained by one Jew were extended throughout the rest of the Jewish community to provide alternative avenues for upward social mobility, including: financial donations, employment opportunities, links to official circles, business contracts, and educational subsidies. Although her anthropological study was intended to describe and explain the status of Jews within the majority Black society of present-day, independent Jamaica, Holzberg's point is even more relevant to the Jewish community of Jamaica prior to civil emancipation in 1830, and can be broadly applied to Jewish communities throughout the early modern world.

evident that where Christians variously devised property to the poor, the parish free schools, hospitals, organized foreign charities and other public institutions, Jamaican Jews overwhelmingly made their bequests to the synagogue. Where Christians were likely to make bequests to institutions on the far side of the Atlantic, Jewish bequests were largely intended for local benefit. On the face of it, these facts might be interpreted as an indication that Jamaican Jews intended their gifts for religious purposes – that is, to benefit the synagogue as an institution. However, for Jamaican Jews the synagogue was much more than a religious institution. Lacking public authority in the broader community, Jews depended upon the synagogue for communal governance. The rolls for the Church & Poor tax in Kingston reveal that by 1745 the Princess Street synagogue owned several houses which it maintained for the use of the religious functionaries who served the synagogue community as well as for poor Jews.⁴¹ Obviously, the synagogue had need of funds to

⁴¹ In 1745, for example, Abigail Funes [Funis] and her son were living in a tenement on Peters Lane, and Esther Musquetta was inhabiting a tenement on Luke Lane, both of which were owned by the “Jew Parish” and located within an easy walking distance of the synagogue. Kingston Poll Tax Rolls for 1745, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 1 (Kingston Vestry Minutes 1744-1749), The Jamaica Archives. Abigail was the widow of Joseph Funis, who had been the *Hazan* of the synagogue in Port Royal. See Will of Judith Baruch Alvares, September 12, 1732 (proved November 22, 1932), Liber of Wills 18, folio 200, Island Record Office, Spanish Town; *typescript in* Collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. In 1753, Abigail Funis was still accepting the synagogue’s largesse, although Esther Musquetta was not; however, Moses Rodrigues was living in one of the synagogue’s tenements on Bourdon Street and paying the nominal rent of £12 (roughly half of the lowest rent paid by other Jewish taxpayers). Church & Poor Tax Roll for 1753, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 2, Part II, (Kingston Vestry Minutes 1750-1754). In 1765, two unnamed families were being supported “on [the] Jew Parish” in tenements rented from a Mr. Williams on Temple Lane, while on Peters Lane the synagogue now owned four tenements and was supporting another unnamed family in a fifth tenement and Abraham Miranda on Princes Street. Church & Poor Tax Roll for 1765, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 4 (Kingston Vestry Minutes 1763-1767). In 1770, the synagogue supported an unnamed family on Tower Street which was renting a tenement from Mr. Curdoza [Cardozo], the Compos [Campos] family on Peters Lane, Sarah Musquetta [Mesquita] (renting from Gutteres) and Jacob Pereira (who owned his own house) on Temple Lane, in addition to the four tenements it maintained on Peters Lane. Church & Poor Tax Roll for 1770, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 5 (Kingston Vestry Minutes 1768-1770). In 1775, the synagogue was supporting the Widow Salome and Esther Manique (renting from Penha) on Peters Lane, Hannah Aboab (who owned her own home) on Maiden Lane, Deborah Pinto Brandon (renting from DeLeon) on Luke Lane, Rebecca Franco (renting from Nunes), Sarah Nunes Carvalho (who owned her own home) and Sarah DeLeon (renting from Gutteres) on White Street, in addition to the four tenements on Peters Lane “to their Synagogue” which it still owned in 1780. Poll Tax Roll for 1775, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 102 (Parochial Tax Rolls 1774-1780); Poll Tax Roll for 1780, R.G. 2/6, Vol. 103 (Parochial Tax Rolls 1780-1785). In 1785, the synagogue was renting a house on Peters Lane to Rebecca

maintain these properties as well as to fulfill other communal needs. Thus, bequests to the synagogue testify to the communal nature of Jewish charitable giving. Jews by and large depended upon the synagogue community for the distribution of their donations, knowing that the community as a whole would make a corporate judgment as to the manner in which the funds could best be applied to serve other Jews in need.

<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<u>Jews</u>	<i>INSTITUTION</i>	<u>Xtian</u>
SYNAGOGUE		PARISH POOR	22
General (i.e., “the Synagogue”)	198	PARISH FREE SCHOOL	15
Kingston	41	CHURCHES	27
Portuguese	19		
German (after 1787)	6		
Spanish Town	26	OTHER (Hospitals, Gaols, etc.)	12
Port Royal	14	FOREIGN ENTITIES	
London	14	Public Charities	18
England (non-London)	8	Parish	10
Other European	4	Parish poor	34
ABY YETOMIM (Orphan’s Society)	65	Hospitals	23
“Poor Jews”	32	Schools and universities	14
NON-JEWISH RECIPIENTS			
Parish Poor (Jamaica)	8		
Free schools (Jamaica)	4		
Churches (Jamaica)	3		

TABLE II: Recipients of Charitable Bequests Made in Jamaica, 1737-1821⁴²

Narbona, a “poor” woman who paid £20 in rent, as well as another family (also on Peters Lane), in addition to the four tenements that it owned.

It should be noted that there are gaps in the extant tax rolls for Kingston during the 18th century, and therefore what is given here is in no way comprehensive. Rather, the information provided here represents sampling from selected years, and is intended to demonstrate continuity and/or change over time.

⁴² **Compiled from** “Schedule of Charitable Devises from 1737 to 1821,” November 21, 1825, *Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica*, vol. XIV, pp. 477-490. As many testators made multiple charitable

Another key manifestation of religiosity among Jewish merchants comprised the personal ownership of implements used for religious study and important home rituals. There were a variety of objects that might fall into this category – Hebrew texts and prayer books, for example, were common⁴³; there were also kits containing the implements used for ritual circumcisions,⁴⁴ and *tefilin* (phylacteries)⁴⁵ used by men for their daily prayers. But the most significant item of this type that could be owned were Torah scrolls and the silver bells, known as *rimonim* (pomegranates), that are used to decorate them. The Torah represented, then as now, the intellectual and cultural core of Judaism, and its study is a virtue enjoined upon all believing Jews. The scrolls themselves are carefully and painstakingly written out on vellum by hand by a *sofer* (certified religious scribe). They are generally owned communally, by a synagogue

bequests, the figures given in this table do not match the total number of testators on the Schedule as given on Table I, above.

⁴³ See, e.g., Inventories of household goods in the estates of merchant Nathan Levy of Philadelphia (1753) and Indian trader Chapman Abraham of Montreal (1783) in Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 9-10, 433-435.

⁴⁴ The American Jewish Historical Society holds in its collections two circumcision kits from the eighteenth century, one owned by the Seixas family (likely used by Moses Seixas in Newport), and the other owned by the Sheftall family of Savannah Georgia. According to a diary kept of communal activities by his brother Levi, Mordecai Sheftall circumcised his own sons as well as those of extended family members. Stern, Malcolm H., "The Sheftall Diaries: Vital Records of Savannah Jewry, 1733-1808," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 54, no. 3, p. 250; This may be the same circumcision kit mentioned in the Sheftall diary as having been brought by the original group of Jewish emigrants from London to Georgia in 1733. See Stern, "The Sheftall Diaries," p. 247, 250.

⁴⁵ *Tefilin* are traditional and still commonly used. Though none have apparently survived from the eighteenth century, there are several extant pieces of correspondence that mention gifts or purchase of *tefilin* in British America. In 1748, Benjamin Sheftall of Savannah had written to a London contact in a panic, seeking assistance in tracking down the fate of a ship on which a set of *tefilin* had been shipped to him for his son Mordecai. "I live Your Honour to guess in what grife I am in to be misfortenable, my eldest son bing three months ago thirteen years of age, and I not to have any frauntlets nor books fit for him." Benjamin Sheftall to Benjamin Isaacs, March 2, 1748, *quoted in* Marcus, Jacob Rader, *The Colonial American Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), Vol. II, p. 989. In 1767, Abraham Isaac Abrahams sent several sets of *tefilin* to Aaron Lopez as gifts for his brother and nephews. Abraham I. Abrahams to Aaron Lopez, November 20, 1767; Aaron Lopez to Abraham I. Abrahams, December 4, 1767, Collections of the Newport Historical Society.

congregation. So the ownership of such an important religious treasure was a particular mark of both social status and religious commitment for the individual merchant. Those privileged to possess a personal Torah or its *rimonim* took great care to pass them to the next generation. Within the Gomez family, Daniel's father Lewis Moses devised "one pare of Silver Adornements for the five Books of Moses weying Thirty nine ounces or thereabouts" to his son, Mordecai, "in full satisfaction of his being my Eldest Son." Ten years later, Mordecai, passed the same *rimonim* on to his oldest surviving son, Isaac, along with a Torah. David Gomez, another son, had inherited a set of *rimonim* from his mother-in-law's estate. But as he had no children of his own, he bequeathed the *rimonim* to his brother Isaac, who in turn left them to his eldest son Mattathias along with a Torah. When Mattathias died in 1784, he in turn passed to his eldest son, Isaac, "my *Sepher* or the five Books of Moses wrote on Parchment, with *Rimonims* or ornaments of silver."⁴⁶

Congregations might ask to borrow a privately held Torah and its *rimonim* from the owner for use on a special occasion, and this was of course a moment of pride and public acknowledgement for the owner. In August 1782, for example, Philadelphia's Congregation Mikve Israel resolved "to apply to Mr. Moses Gomez and request the loan of his *sepharim* and *rimonim* on the day of the dedication of the new synagogue, and that we will return them to him when required." Some merchants were even inspired by a communal milestone to donate or

⁴⁶ Wills of Lewis Moses Gomez (1740), Mordecai Gomez (1750), David Gomez (1769), Isaac Gomez (1770) and Mattathias Gomez (1784) in [Hershkowitz, 1967 #28]pp. 62-64, 84-94, 125-134, 151-157. Similarly, Joseph Bueno de Mesquita left a Torah and plate ornaments (likely not *rimonim*, but a different type of Torah ornament) to his brother Abraham, who resided on the island of Nevis, and Moses Michal, who died in Curacao, willed that "a Pair of Rimonim or Silver Bells by him sent out of holland after the Receipt thereof shall be Remitted to his Children and heires" residing in New York. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-20, 59-61.

bequeath their personal Torahs to the congregation.⁴⁷ Though the ownership and passing of Torah scrolls and *rimonim* was generally considered the domain of men, women could and often did participate in this *mitzvah* (good deed). The widow Judith Baruch Alvares of Jamaica left a set of *rimonim* “the said sett of Bells being of the value of sixty pounds sterling prime cost ...for the use of the Synagogue of Port Royal,” and when the New York spinster Rachel Luis (a trader in her own right) died in 1737, she willed that all of her property be sold so “that the money arising therefrom [shall] be applied to buy a Shepher Tora for the use of the Kall Kados of Sherith Ysraell.”⁴⁸ Further, merchants sometimes passed ritual objects directly to female relations even when they had appropriate male kin just as close or closer in proximity: Kingston’s David Henriques, a bachelor, left “my Sepher Tora or five Books of Moses with the silver bells Capa and the Adornments belonging to it” to his niece, Esther Henriques Quixano, rather than to one of her brothers.⁴⁹ Possession of a Torah scroll allowed the merchant to perform one of Judaism’s key

⁴⁷ Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, p. 125-126. Moses Gomez may have received the Torah and *rimonim* from his grandmother, Simha de Torres, who bequeathed him the bulk of her property in 1746. Although the will does not specifically mention a Torah or *rimonim*, it is known that Simha de Torres did leave to Moses Gomez the family bible that had belonged to her husband, Joseph de Torres of Jamaica, who died before Moses was born. See *Lyons Collection II*, pp. 279-285; Will of Simha de Torres in Hershkowitz, *Wills of Early New York Jews*, pp. 79-82. In connection with the 1782 dedication mentioned above, Jonas Phillips advised the Junta of Congregation Mikve Israel that he intended to donate his own personal Torah to the congregation. Marcus, *American Jewry – Documents*, pp. 125-126. Similarly, in May 1769, Ezra Stiles attended a service at the synagogue for the deposit of “two Copies of the Law,” one of which was “a new Vellum Roll given by Mr. Lopez,” at a cost of £40 sterling, accounted with “Silver Tops & bells washed with Gold.” Dexter, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, Vol. 1, p. 11 (Entry for May 19, 1769).

⁴⁸ Will of Judith Baruch Alvares, Liber of Wills vol. 18, f. 200, Island Record Office, Spanish Town (Jamaica), typescript in the collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. Will of Rachel Luis (1737) in Hershkowitz, *Wills of Early New York Jews*, pp. 51-54; see, also, *Lyons Collection I*, pp. 37.

⁴⁹ Will of David Henriques, Liber of Wills vol. 36, f. 90 (1766), Island Record Office, Spanish Town (Jamaica), typescript in the collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. By contrast, Henriques left to Esther’s sister Abigail a silver Sabbath lamp, which was by tradition a woman’s object; Moses Adolphus of Spanish Town, for example, bequeathed to his grandniece Leah “the silver Sabbath lamp which formerly belonged to my deceased mother.” Will of Moses Adolphus, Liber of Wills vol. 64, f. 56

tenents in public as well as in private space, and provided opportunities for extending *mitzvot* to others through loan, gift or inheritance.⁵⁰

As the preceding discussion shows, there was much more to the life of the eighteenth century Jewish merchant than trade and its profits. Bearing that in mind, I now return to the mysterious prayer scraps with which I started this paper and their specific role in the religious life of Daniel Gomez, the Jewish merchant who created the ledger in which they were found. In the general context of New York mercantilism, the Gomez family was not particularly outstanding, but in this its members were part of the larger pattern of Jewish mercantile success. Thomas Archdeacon's analysis of patterns of trade and wealth in the city at the time of their arrival early in the century show that Jewish merchants were, by and large, clustered in the middling echelons of mercantile wealth. Even the wealthiest Jewish merchant he profiled, Isaac Rodriguez Marques, was eclipsed by the enterprise of the reigning city merchants of Dutch, English and Huguenot extraction.⁵¹ As a whole, Jewish mercantilism in eighteenth century New York, as elsewhere in the British Atlantic world, reflected the ongoing "spiritual challenge" of economic success: it was on the one hand legitimate and beneficial to individual Jews and the community at large, but on the other closely governed by the necessity of adhering to God's

(1798), Island Record Office, Spanish Town (Jamaica), typescript in the collections of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

⁵⁰ On Torah study as a central tenent, see Tamari, *With All Your Possessions* , pp. 26-28.

⁵¹ Archdeacon, Thomas J., *New York City, 1664-1710: Conquest and Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 61-64. Table 4 on page 61 shows that of ten intervals on Archdeacon's scale of commercial importance, Jewish merchants largely clustered in the 7th and 8th intervals, while the English and Dutch merchants who were far more numerous clustered both in the top two and bottom four intervals.

commands as articulated in the precepts of religious law.⁵² What made the Gomez family distinctive in New York was the wholistic structure devised by Lewis Moses for a family “corporation,” in which the primary trading activities were conducted by himself and Mordecai, with the younger sons taking subsidiary roles. Within this picture of the family enterprise, Daniel Gomez does not stand out. His wealth and status were of modest proportions, easily eclipsed, even among the small universe of Jewish merchants, by the achievements of his father and older brother Mordecai, as well as other merchants in the community.⁵³ The role he played in public service was equally modest, limited to the clerical work of translating documents for the Governor. He never took on the public roles in city governance that Mordecai and his sons elected to perform. He never joined in petitions with the body of New York’s merchants for the purpose of promoting policies designed to encourage trade.

Daniel’s standing in the synagogue was not very different from his standing in New York’s circles of trade and governance. He was not especially renowned, as were his father and brothers Mordecai and Benjamin, for benevolence or generosity to the poor. But neither did he shirk his responsibilities to the Jewish community at large. Long schooled in a perspective that put family above self, he had accepted subordination of his personal desires. He did the same for the Jewish community at large, and served important roles in communal governance at various

⁵² Tamari, *With All Your Possessions*, pp. 28-36.

⁵³ New York City Assessment lists, 1701-1734 as transcribed in Samuel Oppenheim Collection, *P-255, Box 18, Folder 4, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society. The assessment list for 1728/9, the first on which Daniel Gomez is listed, shows him with a taxable estate worth £30, compared with £110 for Mordecai and £130 for his father. Five years later, Daniel’s taxable estate was valued at £20, while Mordecai’s was worth £90 and his father’s worth £80. David Gomez had also had taxable estate for these years, but it was valued even lower than that of Daniel.

times, both as Parnas and as Assistant, and actively contributed funds toward the general welfare of the Jewish communities in New York, Newport and Curacao.⁵⁴

In sum, Daniel Gomez was a complicated man. To his family and friends, he was kind and loving; with those he deemed his foes, he was irascible. Though at times he traded in slaves and lent money at interest, his mercantilism did not reflect unfettered desire for wealth and accumulation, contrary to the prevailing English stereotypes of Jews.⁵⁵ He epitomized the struggle to maintain, as his son Moses put it at the time of his death, “a most good character.”⁵⁶ In this regard, it will be useful to take a closer look at the third prayer scrap, the one described above on which notations in two different hands appear. The first hand wrote:

“I pray To The Grate God of Israel to have marcy on my Soul and Inlighten me in his holey Law for ev[er,] to give me understanding That I may not Disobey His Holy Comandments and never forsake them & that he may always Direct me in y^e paths of Life & Refraine me from all Evel[,] To Advise & Direct me to Gett my Honest Liveing in his feare & that I maye always be Charetible to y^e poor & needy[,] that he maye give it in my power to obsearve all y^e above writen things for which I Beseach & Imploure y^e Grate God of Ab[raha]^m Isaac & Jacob In whose power I Does Laye.”⁵⁷

To this, Daniel Gomez added, “The Almighty Grant y^e what you desire.”

⁵⁴ Prayers were offered for Daniel Gomez in both Congregation Yeshuat Israel (Newport) and Congregation Mickve Israel (Curacao) out of respect for his ongoing contributions to each congregation. *Lyons Collection II*. For Daniel’s contributions to Shearith Israel, see the congregation’s early minute books in *Lyons Collection I*.

⁵⁵ See Felsentstein, Frank, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

⁵⁶ Moses Gomez to Aaron Lopez, August 5, 1780, Papers of Aaron Lopez, *P-11, Box 14, Folder 8, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

⁵⁷ Papers of Jacques Judah Lyons, *P-15, Box 6A, Folder 9, Collections of the American Jewish Historical Society.

For our purposes, it little matters who authored this prayer. Its true significance lies in the fact that Daniel read it, concurred with it, appended his approval and tucked the scrap into his ledger, where it joined the other miscellaneous prayer scraps in his own hand, amid the tumble and rigors of everyday commerce. Thus, in the calculated mix of sums and prayer on the scraps of paper in Daniel's ledger, we see the tensions of a life spent seeking balance between the outward demands of economic success in the marketplace and the inward demands of humility before God.