Special Articles
The Condition of American Jewry in Historical Perspective: A Bicentennial Assessment

by Henry L. Feingold

For America's Jews the intensive activities in preparation for the bicentennial celebration are somewhat disturbing. The fact is, their ancestors were present at the creation of the republic, and they can even lay claim to having contributed to its founding. Yet today, two centuries later, with their numbers swelled from barely 3,000 to nearly six million, there exists no fully adequate account of their history in America. American Jews are preoccupied with their present condition, but the connection between how they once were and how they are today escapes them. This indicates a lack of concern about their past that is not without significance.

Into the vacuum has stepped a new genre of literature whose ingredients are journalistic alarmism and a simplified reading of complex sociological phenomena. A year seldom passes without some new gloomy readings of the community's condition. While these vary greatly in perception and quality, they share in common a failure to appreciate the perspective of history. It is the lack of such perspective which gives an unreal, distorted ring to their analyses. Surely, if there is any truth in their dire assessment of the present state and the future of American Jewry, then that condition did not suddenly emerge full-blown in the 1970s. It has historical roots that must be exposed if a balanced analysis is to emerge.

The penchant for self-scrutiny has a history of its own. The need to keep an authoritative current record of Jewish life was first recognized by Cyrus Adler, who initiated the AMERICAN JEWISH YEAR BOOK in 1899. First produced by the Jewish Publication Society, and since 1908 by the American Jewish Committee, it probably is the most complete compilation of data on demography and organization produced by any American subgroup. In 1911 the New York kehillah inaugurated an inventory of Jewish religious and secular organizations, which appeared six years later as the Communal Register. These early studies, particularly the latter, were probably designed more to satisfy the needs of planners than of prophets. Building an expensive community center, an American Jewish preoccupation during the 1920s, could not simply be left to guesswork. One had to know where the Jews were and where they were going.

Preceding today's prophets were Jewish thinkers like Horace Kallen, who were sensitive to the special problem of Jewish survival in a "melting pot" culture. These conceived of new survivalist ideologies and rationales which might arrest the process of dissolution. That was what Kallen's concept of cultural pluralism was intended to do. Like Chaim Zhitlowsky before him and Mordecai Kaplan, who was his contemporary, he envisaged a partial voluntary recreation of a corporate status. Judah Magnes, who founded the New York kehillah in 1908, was motivated by a similar idea. The older survivalists imagined and hoped; contemporary ones agonize.

The rise of the Cassandra-like critiques of today can be traced to the fact that the passage of time has served further to crystallize the dilemma of survival in America and to the Holocaust and the growing insecurity of Israel. The Holocaust, especially, has generated a catastrophe perspective.

Basic to much of the new critique is a species of thinking which may, for convenience' sake, be classified as sociological. To be sure, it contains other varieties of thinking, but above all it is the product of the sociological imagination. Data are deployed to buttress some preconceived generalization regarding what is viewed as an imminent threat to the viability of American Jewry. In the terminology of Max Weber, the approach involved is nomothetic. It seeks to classify what is common in the human experience and then postulates certain laws or generalizations from it. For example, the acculturation process, a source of much anxiety for survivalists, is viewed as an experience undergone by all subgroups in America, with certain variations. The process, rather than American Jewry's unique response to it, is primary, for its inevitable result is the disappearance of the

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subculture as a distinct entity. Only rarely is there evidence that certain differentiating historical experiences may lead to a qualitatively different response to the pressure of acculturation.

The critique is customarily subtly prescriptive. It seeks to warn Jews of real or imagined dangers and prescribes remedies. If, for example, a record number of Jews are marrying out of the faith, then the prescription, often unspoken, is to devise "programs" to "deliver" stronger Jewish identity. Many of the analysts are involved in Jewish organizational life. Institutional self-interest is not always to be precluded.

There was ample proof on the nation's campuses during the late 1960s of sociology's ability to attract bright students, and probably a high proportion of Jews. The attraction of Jewish thinkers to sociology, especially the politically relevant kind, is not new. It was already discernible in the final decades of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th, when sociology earned the reputation of being a Jewish science. This became especially marked in the United States in the 1930s with the convergence of German refugee scholars, who happened to be Jewish, and American Jews, whose Depression experience had awakened an interest in the "classes and the masses" as well as in the phenomenon of antisemitism. Eventually a number of thinkers, largely Jewish and more or less tending toward sociology, became especially interested in examining the American Jewish community. No doubt most were motivated by a concern for, and genuine interest in, things Jewish. But American Jewry was also fertile ground for sociologists. The core problem of sociology, after all, is the passage of communities from traditionalism to modernity. Besides, there had come into existence special subdisciplines dealing with pariah groups, intergroup relations, acculturation, religion, and power and authority. In 1958 the *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, published by the World Jewish Congress in London, was introduced.

Contemporary analysis of American Jewry is ambivalent, because to

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3By the 1960s an estimated 700 of the 12,000 members of the American Sociological Association were of Jewish origin, as were a quarter of the editors and upper-echelon staff members of the two leading professional journals, the *American Sociological Review* and the *American Journal of Sociology*, and half of the officers of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., "Jewish Academics in the United States: Their Achievements, Culture and Politics," *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 72 (1971), pp. 89–128; "Sociology," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 15, cols. 62–70.

4The first two were Samuel Joseph and Louis Wirth, who were joined in the postwar period by a larger group including Aaron Antonovsky, Werner Cahnman, Nathan Glazer, Sidney Goldstein, Milton Gordon, Seymour M. Lipset, Seymour Leventman, Earl Raab, Arnold Rose, Peter Rose, Bezalel Sherman, Marshall Sklare, Leo Srole, Charles Stember, and Melvin Tumin.
survivalists the normal measure of success means failure. The statistics describe a relatively prosperous American Jewry, which in its income and occupational profile compares favorably with the nation's high-status Protestant founding groups. Jews worship and socialize freely in their synagogues. They participate enthusiastically in politics: they follow the domestic and foreign news, they vote, and increasingly they run for office. They are generous in their support of the candidates they like. In short, American Jews have done well in the terms set down by the host culture.

Success has, in a sense, born out the dire warning of the 19th-century opponents of the emancipation. The evidence shows that the more successful American Jews are, the weaker become their religious and cultural ties to Judaism—though assimilation is slower for Jews than for other whites. But generally, secularization is running its course, with all that that implies for survival. Demographically things do not look well. A low birth rate over four decades, a growing rate of intermarriage, and the demise of the East European Jewish community, which might have compensated for the American Jewish demographic lag, may presage a time when the critical population mass required to sustain a distinctive American Jewish culture may cease to exist. The growth of the intermarriage rate, itself a reflection of dwindling Jewish particularity, makes these figures more worrisome. In addition, the accumulation of evidence on the state of the faith shows that Judaism, like other American religions, is becoming nominal. Moreover, the influence of the overweening Christian culture continues to Protestantize the faith. Attendance remains high on holy days, but there is confusion on which is holiest. The most popular Jewish festivals are Hannukah and Passover, which, incidentally, correspond neatly with Christmas and Easter. The number of Jewish children receiving a Jewish education worthy of the name grows proportionately smaller. The Jewish family, once a principal agency for cultural transmission, no longer demonstrates a special ability to withstand the corrosive effects of modernity.

Even the wholesome picture of the active Jewish role in the political process assumes ominous shadings in the new critique. There is the general fear that Jews are politically too conspicuous, and there is apprehension regarding Jewish political behavior. It is imagined that the disintegration of the liberal coalition, with which Jews cast their political lot, has left them in a vulnerable political limbo and without a true understanding of their

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1Demographers estimate that it requires a birth rate of 2.1 per family to assure replacement. American Jewry, efficient contraceptors, come perilously close to that. The Princeton University fertility study of 1960 shows that the cumulative fertility rate of Jewish women, 45 years and above, is 2.2.
group interest. For some, the continued strong influence of the political Left is evidence of a sustained tendency for self-destructive political behavior. Still more disturbing for some is the unresolved Middle East problem, which, they fear, may yet disinter the agonizing "dual loyalty" question and feed a new antisemitism.

In sum, we learn that while things go well for American Jewry on the temporal level, beneath the surface there is a deep uncertainty about the ability of a distinctive Jewish community to survive in the benevolently absorbent atmosphere of America. Statistical projections seem to indicate a decline of the Jewish community in America. Local philanthropic federations and Jewish organizations concentrate on programs to reverse the trend by "teaching" the culture. But thus far no substitute for actually immersing the young in a living culture has been found. Small wonder then that the new seers, unlike the prophets of old, find little hope for redemption.

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What light can the historian cast on the condition of American Jewry today? It should be noted at the outset that in the contexts both of world and of American Jewish history, this pessimistic view is one-dimensional. Since adversity has been a frequent occurrence in Jewish history, no great prescience is required to predict a recurrence. What is more difficult and challenging is to explain how the Jewish people survives it. The sociological style is peculiarly ill-suited to confront the problem of survival, partly because the object of the critique is to sound the alarm, but also because it is not prepared to confront the idiosyncratic character of Jewish history. Yet the clue to the future of American Jewry may lie in its exceptionality, rather than in what it holds in common with other cultures in America. It is precisely in this area where the historian makes his contribution. He is better prepared than the sociologist by training, and perhaps by disposition, to confront what is unique in the Jewish condition.

That is so because, at its best, the historical approach is idiographic. It is aware that, given societies organized by men, the permutations and combinations of events are so innumerable that generalizations based on common features can be made only at great risk, and predictions not at all. Historians are sensitive to the nonrepetitive character of the flow of events. Each episode, each personality is viewed as different and earns examination in its own right. In one sense the historian's modus operandi is the reverse of the sociologist's. When a synthesis is made, it is the last step in the historical method; and conclusions are accepted with considerable trepida-
tion and tentativeness, if at all. For the Jews, the approach which is most prepared to deal with their exceptionality, the locus of their peculiar ability to survive, will prove most fruitful.

Jewish historiography has in fact been open to the insights of sociology, but it prefers its data to its method. It was a sociologist, Max Weber, who first demonstrated how profitable the new discipline could be in yielding insights into the Jewish experience. His lead was followed by Simon Dubnow, who, in the preface to his Weltgeschichte, called for close scrutiny of the social institutions Jews had established in their autonomous communities in Muslim and Christian lands. Salo W. Baron has stressed the need for a historical demography.

We know virtually everything that is statistically verifiable about American Jewry, but tables and demographic projections leave no room for historical contingency. The case of German Jewry clearly illustrates that history has an uncanny way of upsetting the most precise of statistical projections. In 1911, in Der Untergang der deutschen Juden, Dr. Felix Teilhaber gloomily predicted the demographic disaster facing that community. In the years that followed the demographers predicted with certainty that, barring unforeseen circumstances, German Jewry would have all but vanished by the end of the century. The prediction came to pass well before that time, but not for the reason given. The demographers could not foresee that the pathological antisemitism of one individual could be amplified by the totalitarian state and imposed on a people prepared by history to accept it and act upon it. The population trend was not allowed to fulfill itself; German Jewry was annihilated. A complex series of historical contingencies, which could not have been foreseen, intruded and wrote its own conclusion to the history of German Jewry.

Another case in point is contemporary Soviet Jewry, whose new-found militancy might become a decisive factor in Jewish history. Yet one rarely sees mention of the possibility of a Russian Jewish revival in the Jewish journals of the 1940s and 1950s. Had the survivalists been permitted to study the condition of Soviet Jewry in those years, they would have found little cause for hope of continuance. Everything pointed to dissolution. However, the Soviet leadership so mismanaged the nationality question—and this no statistical table could have shown—that its regulations and persecution actually tended to cause disaffection and strengthen national awareness. In a sense, we owe the renewal of Jewish identity in Russia, such as it is, to the fact that upwardly mobile Jews were prevented from freely merging into Soviet society. Of course, the story is more complex than can be told here. It is only used to illustrate that a development which has
become an important item on the American Jewish agenda was virtually unheralded by the prophets, unforeseen by the experts.

The role of the discipline of history in explaining the condition of American Jewry is not confined to methodology and suitability for locating a community's defining exceptionality. History is simply more at home in the Jewish experience and owes much of its conception of time to its roots in the Jewish religious ethos. The religious literature of Judaism consists partly of historical narrative which, despite its didactic, retrojective character, furnishes archaeologists with amazingly accurate clues. Since ancient times, Judaism has been linked to a historical vision of redemption. The vision of the Prophets is essentially one of historical restoration. They constantly remind the people of Israel of the Covenant, of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, of their possession of the Promised Land, and, finally, of the divine consummation of their history at the end of days. Not only are these historical reminders the touchstone of the religio-historical narrative; the force giving Jewish history its movement is a jealous God acting upon a special people that seems constantly in rebellion against His commandments. The Jewish God acts in and through history.

From one point of view, the Israelites were the first people with a relatively modern historical consciousness. Not only did history inform their religious ethos, but also their very idea of historical time departed markedly from that of other peoples of the ancient Near East. Whereas the latter saw in their history a cyclical, fatalistic sameness, ancient Israel insisted on a rhythmic progress to a divinely ordered better world. It was a teleological view, to be sure, but the idea of purpose in history, the notion that society was destined for something better, was revolutionary. For static societies to learn that change was possible, even preordained, was unsettling.

It may be that the relationship of Jews to their history contains a clue to their mysterious survival as a people. Jews have customarily displayed a special talent for historical accretion. The seminal events of their history, from the Exodus to the Holocaust, are deeply embedded in their religious culture. By cherishing and internalizing their history they were able to retain a strong sense of peoplehood, which sustained them through their frequent uprootings and rerootings. The sheer length of time Jews have acted and been acted upon in history is a deterrent to relinquishing the tradition—a fact the new prophets might consider when they sound the alarm over the rapid acculturation of American Jewry. The millennia of

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history weigh each succeeding generation with a special sense of responsibility to the past.

At the same time, Jewish survival poses a historical problem. It is a standing reminder to synthesizers like Marx and Toynbee of the fallibility of the very conception of nomothetic or historical law. The problem goes beyond survival. Jews seem to play a disproportionately active role in contemporary affairs. Caught in the interstices of major historical events, they continually find themselves in the spotlight. It turns out that the "Jewish question," a perennial in Western history, is not a question at all, but an exasperating historical condition, for, as nations discover, Jews are not as malleable as other peoples.

Jews then are a people which has learned to use its history as a cultural cement, while at the same time posing a seemingly insoluble historical problem. The puzzling fact is that, at some time in the last few decades, history's central position in the Jewish cosmology, at least its American aspect, was subsumed by a new critique stemming primarily from sociology and the newer social sciences. One ought not to be surprised at the unseating of the historical discipline. It seems to have occurred everywhere and may be part of the temper of the times. But, in addition, the weakness of the American Jewish historical enterprise may at least in part account for the failure of the historical perspective to make its weight felt.

PROBLEMS IN JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

There is something in the historian's craft which makes the writing of the history of a still vital community problematical. Historians prefer subjects that have stopped moving long enough to allow themselves to be examined. That is the reason why the colonial period in American Jewish history is the most exhaustively researched. However, the time factor alone cannot explain the apparent failure of the discipline to contribute to American Jewry's constant self-scrutiny. Managerial, methodological, and theoretical problems are contributing factors.

The Jewish Historical Enterprise

In earlier periods, before history succumbed to the need to be "scientific," it was not uncommon for one historian of unusual fortitude and ego to compose a historical tour de force, reflecting the intellectual prowess of the
author and giving high priority to artistry of prose. Since then, historical writing, especially American historiography, has changed considerably. Works covering the entire historical canvas are seldom undertaken; specialization is now standard, having become necessary because the enormous increase in original and secondary sources has made it virtually impossible for one historian to master an entire field.

The writing of such "specialized" history cannot be undertaken without specialized supportive institutions. Aspiring historians must undergo professional training, usually at a major university or professional research agency. Training facilities in the field of American Jewish history are being developed. The Jewish Theological Seminary has recently established such a program, which is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. But, for the most part, professionals in the field have received their training in some other area. A most hopeful sign is the number of graduate students who are choosing some aspect of American Jewish history for their field of research. In some ways this is a belated interest. The American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) founded in 1892 by Oscar Straus and others, is among the oldest historical societies in the nation, but it was a marginal enterprise, on the periphery of the Jewish community, for the first half century of its existence. It was housed in one small room of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and few knew of its existence.

Its annual *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (PAJHS) attracted various kinds of contributors. Some, like Leon Huehner, Max J. Kohler, Cyrus Adler, and David de Sola Pool, were gifted amateurs whose work stands up well. Others were antiquarians interested in some quaint historical happening or in lineage or, more typically, in evidence of the Jewish contribution to the development of the nation, which they thought would help legitimize the community. The sundry manuscripts and artifacts which the Society collected over the years were stored in a warehouse, and largely inaccessible to researchers. The wave of professionalization of the historian's craft, which occurred during the early decades of this century, affected the Society only marginally. It took the catastrophic events of World War II to pass to a reluctant American Jewry the mantle of Jewish leadership and, incidentally, to rouse the historical field from its torpor.

The 1954 tercentenary set off a wave of productivity. Numerous contracts for local Jewish histories were awarded, and the American Jewish Committee commissioned a bibliographical inventory produced by Moses Rischin, who became a leading professional in the developing field. Oscar Handlin's
survey, *Adventure in Freedom: Three Hundred Years of Jewish Life in America* (New York, 1954), was generally considered only partly successful, although a careful reading reveals many new insights. The new works supplemented books written in the 1930s and 1940s, so that by the 1960s the field of American Jewish history had been transformed from the humble enterprise it once was. In the last decade there has been a perceptible increase in the number of competently written works, free of the "heroes" who once peopled the historical narrative.

A network of supportive institutions is probably the surest manifestation of the continued vitality of the community's cultural and intellectual tradition. Yet their development has not reached the stage where a continuing historical perspective of American Jewry can be generated. Part of the problem lies in training scholars who are equally expert in American, American Jewish, and Jewish history. All three areas are spanned by the specialization. The best work is now being done by a small cadre of professional historians who were trained in other areas of history. A second group of researchers, usually with little or no professional training, concentrate primarily on local and congregational history. Many are history buffs who simply enjoy "doing" history, or rabbis, community leaders, and founders who feel they must record the history of their communities lest it be lost to posterity. Of growing importance is a third group drawn from doctoral candidates who select a dissertation topic dealing with a problem or theme in American Jewish history. A third of the articles in the *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* (as PAJHS was renamed in September 1961) originate with this group. A number of these young scholars would certainly seek to enter the field if university teaching posts were available, but prospects here remain gloomy.

A program must be initiated to prepare and then nurture a community of scholars exclusively focused on American Jewish history as a specialization. At present no training facilities exist, nor is there a market for such specialists. In an address to the 72nd annual meeting of the AJHS, in May 1974, the Society's president, Abraham Karp, suggested a Center for the Study of Jewish Life and Institutions in America. He saw such a center as primarily devoted to interdisciplinary teaching and research, thus creating the nexus of scholars needed to generate a historical perspective on the American Jewish condition.

Resources in Judaica Americana

Much of the progress in American Jewish historical research is attributable to a parallel development in the archival substructure: the systematic discovery, preservation, and cataloguing of original source material on which the writing of history ultimately rests. There are two major repositories in the field. The American Jewish Historical Society has emerged as an important research center since it moved into its new building on the Brandeis University campus in 1968. It possesses more than 1,300,000 documents from the year 1572 to the present, and its Quarterly features articles and reviews of high professional quality.

In 1947 Jacob R. Marcus, a pioneer in the field, established at Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati, a second repository, the American Jewish Archives (AJA), and, a year later, a journal with the same name. In organization, staffing, cataloguing of their 250,000 volumes, and size of staff the College's Klau library and the AJA are probably the best of their kind.

Several other collections, much more limited in scope but equally important in their fields, should be mentioned here. A remnant of the rich prewar East European historical tradition, transplanted from Vilna in 1940, is institutionalized in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. It publishes two journals, the YIVO Annual and (in Yiddish) YIVO Bleter, whose articles frequently deal with American Jewish historical themes, especially East European immigration. When YIVO's holdings of some 316,500 volumes are fully catalogued and duplication eliminated, and its archival material processed, they will be uniquely valuable.

The Leo Baeck Institute, founded after World War II with the aid of West German reparations, is the repository of the history of another community that has ceased to exist, the Jewish community of Germany. Here, too, scholars will find a wealth of material once its 40,500 volumes, 100,000 documents, and 500 manuscript volumes of unpublished personal memoirs and records of all kehillot have been suitably recorded.

Among the more specialized libraries and archives are those of the Jewish Theological Seminary, which contain much material on local congregations and communities; of the Bund, which specializes in material relating to the Jewish labor movement; the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library; the Gottesman Library of Yeshiva University; the Zionist Archives, and the Blaustein Library of the American Jewish Committee, all in New York City. At the same time, certain major American Jewish agencies, such as the Joint Distribution Committee and numerous local federations, have chosen to retain possession of their files, thus making research more diffi-
cult, though qualified researchers are customarily permitted access. Many universities now offering courses in Jewish studies are also rapidly building up Judaica library resources. But, except for Harvard University whose Judaica collection is one of long standing, these are not yet sufficiently extensive for full-scale research.⁸

A valuable supplement to existing Judaica materials is being developed in the form of recorded interviews with important living historical sources. Thus far the use of new oral-history techniques has been sporadic. But a major effort in the field was the establishment in 1969 of the American Jewish Committee’s William E. Wiener Oral History Library which has been taping and collecting interviews with American Jewish personalities.

Before the historian can have the full benefit of the Judaica collections held by the various libraries and archives, a number of serious problems must be solved. Most of the libraries are extremely short-staffed, and few librarians have had adequate training for their specialized tasks. As a result of this, and a lack of housing facilities which has left a good portion of holdings stored in boxes and inaccessible, much of the material still awaits cataloguing. There is, too, no systematic microfilming of deteriorating books, journals, and archival materials. Records of important agencies like the landsmanshaften are either decaying or are being discarded because there is no organized acquisition program or space for them. Equally troublesome is the wasteful duplication of effort resulting from lack of coordination. For example, both YIVO and the Bund solicit material on Jewish labor, and YIVO and the American Jewish Historical Society collect extensively on Yiddish theatre and other art forms.

No matter how rich the archival holdings, they remain useless to scholars without certain finding aids, such as guides to archival holdings and a formal system of exchange of data. Indicative of the need of such tools for the researcher is a recently completed survey of archives users, which found that an estimated 25 per cent of the respondents reported some difficulty in obtaining the material they needed. A newly published guide is helpful, but it will necessarily remain incomplete until all archives take inventory of their holdings.⁹ In the meantime, a start has been made by individual

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libraries to produce guides to their own materials. The American Jewish Archives has a 4-volume catalogue of its holdings, and a 16-volume listing of the extensive collection of the Jewish Division of the New York Public Library is now in print. Other archives are planning to follow suit.

In the meantime, however, much Judaica Americana material, which undoubtedly contains important clues and microcosmic detail to establish fully the connection between America and its Jews, remains inaccessible to researchers.

Many of these problems have been taken up by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, which acts as coordinator for the major repositories through its Committee for Archives and Research Libraries in Jewish Studies. Financing the necessary work, however, remains a major roadblock. In 1974 the Foundation helped support over two hundred researchers in the field of Judaica. But the scale of its effort in light of what needs to be done is too small, perhaps beyond the capacity of private philanthropy. For this reason, much hope is being placed in federal programs like those sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and funds formerly available under the Ethnic Heritage Studies Law of 1974.

Publication of Research

The health of any academic field is in some measure dependent on the number of publishing outlets, largely because scholars are pressed for various professional reasons to publish or perish. In this respect, the researcher in American Jewish history is probably more fortunate than most other scholars. In addition to several publishing companies specializing in Judaica, and also two journals (American Jewish Historical Quarterly and the American Jewish Archives exclusively devoted to historical monographs), there are a number of journals and annual publications sponsored by the various Jewish organizations—Judaism, Midstream, Commentary, Jewish Social Studies, Leo Baeck Yearbook, Jewish Frontier, Jewish Review, Jewish Spectator—as well as popular Anglo-Jewish publications which occasionally feature such articles.10 The Association for Jewish Studies is about to launch yet another journal which will publish articles of general, and almost certainly American, Jewish historical interest.

10 These are indexed by Jacob Marcus in an indispensable guide, An Index to Scientific Articles on American Jewish History (Ktav, 1971).
Writing the History of American Jews

Problems of archives, libraries, and training are managerial and technological and can be solved, in principle, by buying the needed goods and services on the open market. Problems of methodology and philosophy are less easily solved. Writing the history of American Jewry is qualitatively different from writing the history of other American groups. The American Jewish community, whose sense of peoplehood is historically rather than spatially derived, experiences the strong pull of two separate historical traditions, whose basic assumptions and methodologies are frequently incompatible. American Jewish history is an episode in the long stream of Jewish history as well as an integral part of the history of America. The community shares the fate of both, and in its history, as in real life, the possibility of conflict is a real one. There exists a kind of duality in the posture of American Jewry, which is reflected in the historiographical problem. On the one hand, there is the immediate environment, which exerts a strong pull to merge fully into the host nation's culture. On the other hand, there is the mysterious force of the long-range patterns and rhythms of world Jewish history, which binds Jews everywhere together and constitutes the vitality of Judaism.

Therefore, while American Jewish history cannot be understood without reference to the national culture of which it is part, it must also be viewed in the context of this collective Jewish presence in history. But what this presence is and how its characteristic manifestations might be isolated and verified is a baffling problem for Jewish historians. For much of their history Jews have had no claim to a territorial space or sovereign national power which might serve as concrete evidence of such a presence in history. Their dispersion among the nations has created a problem of identity and definition that permeates all Jewish historiography. Without some definitional binding theme to explain their unity and continuity in time, the Jewish historian is in constant danger of losing focus, and the historical enterprise itself is always on the verge of fragmenting into separate components. One can identify Italians by simply noting that they are people historically linked to the land of Italy. But for Jews, who have traditionally lived in the space of other people, no such identification is possible.

Jewish historians have thus been compelled to seek identity in the realm of ideas. They postulate some unique inner driving force carried by the

Jewish people, which pushes the Jewish collectivity forward through history. Idealistic forces not only identify but explain Jewish unity and continuity in history. In ancient times, Jewish history was God-centered. The Jewish people was His agent, and His transcendent presence moved Jewish history. Jewish history was focused on some predetermined goal and, unlike the Greeks', it did not neatly separate religion and philosophy from history.

During the 19th century Jewish historians began to desacralize Jewish history. But the change created by the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* historians actually was not radical. They merely transmuted God-centeredness and messianism into secular equivalents. Both Nahman Krochmal and Heinrich Graetz continued to view Jews as the bearers of a unique religious idea. For them Jewish history was largely the history of Judaism, bound together by the idea of a single transcendent God and a religious ethos. Graetz, influenced by Hegel and German ideology, conceived of a Jewish *Volksseele* (collective soul) which was basically spiritual in character.\(^{12}\) The idea of a religious definition happened to fit neatly into the post-Emancipation context, for the new secular societies were actually willing to accept a degree of religious disparity. One could be a "German citizen of Mosaic persuasion." What could not be abided was a unifying thread based on a secular nationalist concept. That would have raised embarrassing questions of dual loyalty, as Zionism later did.

Precisely such a postulation is at the heart of Simon Dubnow's philosophy. Although he rejected the idea that Jewish history is guided by divine providence, he did not completely reject the idea that Jews were basically a spiritual nation whose collective identity was maintained, at least in part, by religion.

There have been other attempts to find a unifying thread running through Jewish history. The Zionist historian Ben Zion Dinur finds it in the perpetual Jewish longing for the land of Zion. Such Palestinocentrism raises more problems than it answers. The reappearance of a spatial dimension, with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, has actually complicated defining the parameters of Jewish history. Is the citizen of Israel a carrier of Jewish history or of a separate history of Israel? What happens to the considerable minority of Israeli citizens who are not Jewish?

It is only with Salo W. Baron that the quest for the single thread running through all of Jewish history is abandoned. Baron conceives of a continuing relationship between either national or religious Judaism and the Jewish

\(^{12}\) For an incisive summary of these concepts, see Michael A. Meyer, *Ideas of Jewish History* (New York, 1974), pp. 1–42.
people, but he also observes that the idea of Judaism itself has signified different things at different times in its long history. Baron stresses the host culture and society. He has done much of his mature writing in America, where the impact of the host culture is particularly strong.

A Methodological Dilemma

The fact that the Jews possess an independent historical consciousness while living in dispersed communities among the nations poses a methodological problem. Host cultures naturally develop their own myths and symbols, and their own notion of what in their past is worthy of preservation and admiration. For various reasons, the events and personages so selected cannot always be equally accepted by the Jews living among them, who may read the sources differently. The Romans viewed Titus, the Flavian general and later emperor, affirmatively. But in the rabbinic sources his name rarely appears without the epithet ha-rasha' (the wicked), since he is held responsible for the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.13

Similar conflicting interpretations can be drawn from American history. General Ulysses S. Grant, who has gone down in American history as a rather poor president but as a "blood-and-guts" general whose bludgeoning tactics broke the military might of the Confederacy, was also responsible for promulgating Federal Order Number 11, the only instance of collective punishment of Jews in American history. Populism, which can be seen as a rural-based reform impulse that justly opposed the excesses of early industrialism and finance, which were mitigated during the later Progressive and New Deal reform periods, was also, because of its nativism and its bias against the city and banking, susceptible to antisemitism. Henry Ford, the cranky genius of mass production and mass marketing, was also the sponsor of the most virulent antisemitic propaganda in the 1920s. Looking at the same sources, Jewish and non-Jewish historians may see different historical realities.

Periodization of Jewish History

No less baffling for the Jewish historian is the problem of periodization, required by historians for organizing and shaping their historical narra-

tive.\textsuperscript{14} How a historian chooses to break up the stream of time renders important clues to his particular view of history.

The problem of finding a periodization scheme for Jewish history relates directly to the problem of defining and circumscribing Jewish history. Jewish history is too varied. What may be meaningful to one Jewish community may be safely overlooked by another. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain serves as a watershed date for Sephardi Jewry, but has less significance for the Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. The French Revolution had profound meaning for the Jews of Western Europe, but little immediate significance for the Jews of the East.

An almost classic illustration of the problem of periodization on a community level is found in American Jewish history. Most American Jewish historians follow a scheme suggested by the three waves of immigration, which are viewed as the seminal events. The scheme has been formally outlined by Jacob Marcus, dean of American Jewish history. He views the first period (1654 to 1840) as the period of Sephardi predominance, the second (1841–1920) as the period of German-Jewish predominance, and the third (1852–1920) as the period of East European Jewish predominance. A fourth period beginning in 1921 is identified simply as the American period.

On the surface, American Jewish history falls almost naturally into these periods, so that it is difficult to imagine how historical time might have been divided otherwise. Yet there are problems. Recent research indicates that the actual waves of immigration and dominant influences on which these periods are based are not so neatly separated as heretofore believed. Marcus recognized this by allowing for an overlap between the second and third periods; but the appearance of American Jewish history as being composed of three distinct national divisions, with few continuities between them, remains. It may lead to distortion, particularly in the description of the antagonism between “uptown” (German) and “downtown” (East European) Jews, which has been exaggerated and seen out of context. Moreover, by subsuming important events in American history under a scheme whose reference points are basically rooted in the flow of general Jewish history (the pushes and pulls determining Jewish migration are part of that history), a peculiar emphasis emerges. Much is known about the development of the Reform and Conservative movements and American Zionism, but precious little about the role of Jews in urbanization, the westward movement, or even American entrepreneurial history. Nor does such a scheme allow for sufficient focus on foreign affairs, an area in which American Jewry has been

active. Periodization then is another area where American Jewish history, American history, and general Jewish history are compelled to live with each other in a sometimes less than comfortable relationship.

Methodology and Style

A second order of problems stems from divergences in methodology and style. In its penchant for data and its emphasis on craft skills, American historiography, faithful to Leopold von Ranke, is concerned a good deal more with the fact of what happened than with its meaning. Its most recent enthusiasm, borrowed from the French, is for quantification, or head-counting, for which certain kinds of statistical sources must be available. Jewish historiography, on the other hand, is compelled by the sheer length of time it covers and by the number of communities involved to be drawn on a broader historical canvas. We have seen that its sheer scope and the kind of evidence it employs compel it to be drawn more to ideas. The sources of early pre-Emancipation Jewish history—rabbinical literature or pirqasim (community account books), chronicles, dirges, poetry—seldom give a precise account of happenings. Such sources must be carefully examined and interpreted. Writing general Jewish history is as much an intellectual endeavor as it is a matter of craftsmanship. The difference in sources and how they are used naturally lead to a qualitatively different kind of historical narrative.

The positing of such an entity as a collective Jewish spirit poses problems of definition and evidence for the historian. Is the collective spirit a specific Jewish mentality or way of life? "How can its characteristic manifestations be isolated and its impact verified?" asks J. L. Talmon, the noted Jewish historian.\(^{15}\) For American historians, the specifically Jewish component is a purely intellectual construct. He finds no evidence of Jewish exceptionalism, and probably would object to a search for it.

The historian of American Jewry must deal with the fact that the community possesses a separate history of its own. Like everyone else who delves into the Jewish situation, the historian must sooner or later confront the problem of definition. Clearly, the Jews do not fit into the sociological classification of nation or ethnic group, nor are they simply a religious group. They are all of these, and none. They straddle many classifications. The position of the State of Israel on the American Jewish agenda is but

\(^{15}\)Talmon, *loc. cit.* p. 10.
one manifestation of this straddling. It is also manifest in the third wave of immigrants, from Eastern Europe, who initially settled in large urban ghettos. The delicate suspension of these immigrants between two cultures, which may incidentally be the best definition of the Jewish ghetto in America, can only be understood by examining the reference points in American and Jewish history.

Sometimes the strength of the ties to the other culture created problems. The early organizational difficulties of religious Orthodoxy in America were partly due to a reluctance to abandon the East European organizational model. Basically, it was the assumption that America was merely an extension of the European scene that made the importation of religious leaders like Rabbi Jacob Joseph and others possible. Nor was the desire to strengthen the link between the two Jewries limited to the Orthodox community. Herzl dispatched Jacob DeHaas to America to serve the Zionist interest; and eventually the Bund, Mizrachi, and Agudath Israel thought it the better part of wisdom to have some kind of connection with American Jewry. This naturally led to the establishment of bridges between American and world Jewry. The American Jewish community, which had always responded generously to "messengers" from the outside, was at first reluctant to react to such courting. It was busy establishing itself and worrying about its Americanism. But ultimately it accepted the link, and even reached out to build its own bridges. The oldest and largest of the national Jewish organizations, B'nai B'rith, established its first overseas lodge, in Berlin, in 1882. As the persecution of East European Jewry grew in intensity, new organizations like the American Jewish Committee, the Joint Distribution Committee, and the American Jewish Congress were established to deal with the overseas problem. By the 1930s every major Jewish organization had devoted much of its organizational energy to nurturing Jews abroad, either informally or through overseas departments. A reading of the histories of the major national Jewish organizations shows that, almost without fail, concern for the welfare of Jews overseas accounts for their founding.16

Much of the organizational dynamics of American Jewry, its political behavior and philanthropic activity, is generated by its special sense of connectedness with world Jewry. At the same time, it is also clear that American Jewry is increasingly part of America, whose largesse it enjoys

and whose fate it shares. As we have seen, that duality and the tension it creates pose problems not only in life, but also in historiography.

If understanding the American Jewish experience demands knowledge of Jewish history, so does it demand knowledge of the American historical context. Yet few who write in the field of American Jewish history are abreast of developments in American historiography. And conversely, few American historians have been able to come to grips with the pre- and extra-American sides of the American Jewish experience. The reason, as Professor Talmon suggests, may be that non-Jewish historians simply do not know how to deal with the unique historical development of Jewry. More likely, they are not interested in dealing with it. Of the 450 articles appearing in the *Journal of American History* (formerly the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*) in the last two decades, only two were on subjects pertaining directly to American Jewish history. One historian calculated that of the 4,200 books reviewed in this leading journal between 1952 and 1972, only 25 dealt with American Jewish history.

Clearly, a closer tie might be to the advantage of both fields. It is well known, for example, that American Jews early cast their lot with the city, and subsequently played a not inconsiderable role in urban development. But urban historians have hardly taken note of this. There are no works linking the fast developing field of urban history to American Jewish history. Similarly, the German Jewish banking and merchandising élite, which so fascinated the reading public when Stephen Birmingham popularized it in *Our Crowd* (New York, 1967), is not fully understandable to the historian unless he knows something about the relatively new field of entrepreneurial history developed by Thomas Cochran and William Miller in the early 1940s. This perspective would yield some useful insights into American Jewry's role in developing the economy.

American Jewish historiography may be greatly enriched by the methodological innovations in urban history deriving largely from Stephan Thernstrom's *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1964). Thernstrom, and those who have followed his lead, employed new quantification techniques, which yielded a picture sharply at

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variance with the conventional one of an open American society with great class mobility. Yet one wonders if for the German Jews who came to America in the 19th century the Tocquevillean picture of the open society is not more applicable.

The "rags to riches" story, which served the capitalist ethos so long and well, is hardly borne out by an examination of the career lines of the "industrial statesmen" who built the American economy. Most came from well-established families. It may even be that the much-vaunted class mobility has been generally overestimated. But in the case of the German Jews, who, like Joseph Seligmann, frequently moved from peddling to commercial banking in a few decades and before they could drop their foreign accents, the Horatio Alger myth may not have been a myth at all. (Incidentally, Horatio Alger was employed by the Seligmans.)

Similarly, we may gain a better insight into the experiences of the 19th-century Jewish merchant or peddler when his activities are viewed in the context of the westward movement, especially the urban development of the West—a field increasingly cultivated in the past few decades. Besides helping to urbanize the West, Jews seem also to have helped extend the merchandising nexus to the mining frontier in the far West and to the cattle kingdom in the Southwest.

**Communal Histories**

Local Jewish communal history has become one of the most popular fields in American Jewish historiography. Since the tercentenary in 1954, hundreds of congregational histories have been completed, especially for the Reform movement. Much of the writing of local history emanates from regional Jewish historical societies which have been established in recent years. The Rhode Island society has been followed by others in Los Angeles, Richmond, Maryland, Greater Washington, Michigan, St. Louis, Berkeley, New York City, and Western Canada. Histories of the Jewish communities of New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans, and most recently, Cleveland, together with such middle-sized cities as Buffalo and Birmingham, are now available. In October 1974 a regional meeting of the American Jewish Historical Society, at Ohio State University, examined the methodological problems of writing local histo-

20 For a listing, see *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, December 1973, pp. 126-137.
ries. If this work continues, a history of every sizeable Jewish community in the nation should be available in a few years. When these are added to the histories of specialized agencies which are gradually being written, the American Jewish community will possess some of the indispensable material for a historical synthesis. It must be remembered, however, that some of these local histories are not of high quality and make for tedious reading. The authors appear to work on the assumption that their art lies in listing as many names as possible of community leaders, philanthropists, sundry heroes, and local boys who have made good. Customarily, also, such works focus almost exclusively on happenings within the community and fail to relate their material to the larger Jewish scene or the American historical context.

Still, there are good histories, and these cast their light beyond their boundaries. This is especially true of the communities of those great cities of the East where Jews settled in large numbers. Thus it is now possible to distill certain regularities about Jewish communal life. The beginnings usually date to the time when the reason for the coming together of Jews was to discharge some basic religious duty, such as burial. The next stage is the formation of some groupings for holding religious services, which in turn naturally leads to the founding of a formal congregation, if and when there are enough potential committed worshippers. Often that point is never reached in smaller outlying communities, and they must look for the fulfillment of religious obligations to the nearest larger Jewish community. Afterward further religious elaboration and some form of organized philanthropy may become possible, always provided that there are enough Jews. The importance of a critical mass of committed Jews can hardly be exaggerated. One wonders how many small Jewish communities failed to establish viable institutions and simply vanished without ever being heard from again.

In the 19th century, especially, religion plays the central role in founding communities. This continues to be so in the 20th century, but then there is also a new factor, the conscious choice of secularized Jews to live together in order to ease the painful transition to the new environment. This makes for the interesting amalgamation of Old and New World elements, as well as of secular and religious modalities, in the Jewish urban ghettos of the Eastern seaboard and Chicago. At some point in the course of the community-building process, the engagement of a rabbi is deemed advisable. Frequently many years go by before action is taken, since Jewish law permits any informed layman to conduct services. The rabbi is really needed as a community organizer and a symbol of the solidity of the community. Such
factors, rather than purely spiritual ones, continue to be important in congregational development; they reveal the nature of Jewish congregational life in America. The lay leaders are there first, and it is they who assure the permanence of the religious community. The rabbi's function is to serve them.

The antisemitic fantasy of a highly organized Jewish community seeking to impose its will on society seems especially ironic in view of the fragmentation of Jewish communal life. To some degree, that characteristic emerged as a result of the relatively free and open atmosphere of America, which permits and in a sense encourages differences. More concretely, the tripartite religious division of American Jewry is based as much on social, cultural, and class factors as on theology. According to Isaac Mayer Wise, division might have arisen from sheer boredom and the absence of other institutions that might serve as an arena for the release of frustration. When there are enough worshippers, and sometimes before, the congregation can undergo a process not unlike cell division, with the result that three or four congregations are established where one might have sufficed. Such proliferation has little to do with religious fervor, but, one suspects, rather with a superabundance of would-be leaders who regard the congregation, and the Jewish secular organization, as an opportunity for exercising leadership. Here the sociologist may be able to help explain possible aberrations in American Jewish leadership-followership patterns leading to the contentiousness that seems to mark Jewish organizational life in America.

Contentiousness, or at least lack of cohesiveness, does not stop there. Reading the histories of local Jewish communities one cannot help but be struck by the frequency with which Jews resort to litigation among themselves over business matters. The many Jewish jokes about the inability of business partners to get along appear to have been born out of the Jewish experience, perhaps shaped by the uncertainty of mercantile activity, in which most Jews were engaged in the 19th century. But in the last analysis, the diversity of background and origins, and the lack of a sense of common enterprise among American Jews in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, accounts for much of the division within the community. If that is so, then one can expect rapid embourgeoisement and the growth of a common experience in America to result in a more unified Jewish community.

The truth regarding 19th-century Jewish mobility awaits the application of quantitative techniques. A study of this type has already been done of the Irish of Philadelphia, and a comparison with the Jews of that city is
instructive. It throws the difference between the old and the new methodologies into bold relief. Dennis Clark's *Irish of Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia, 1973) follows roughly Thernstrom's quantification method. An outstanding study of the history of the Philadelphia Jewish community is Edwin Wolf II and Maxwell Whiteman's *The History of the Jews of Philadelphia From Colonial Times to the Age of Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1957). Although both studies are masterful in their own right and cover the development of an ethnic group in the same city, they are worlds apart. The thoroughly researched and eloquently written book by Wolf and Whiteman is broad in scope and throws much new light on Jewish commercial enterprise in the colonial and national periods. It represents an almost classic example of traditional methodology, using an abundance of newspapers and other archival material, as well as pertinent secondary sources. The result is a richly informative work. The Clark study's richness lies in the yield of the new quantification method. By consulting tax lists, painstakingly combing through business records, and researching other quantifiable material, Clark was able to show how through the acquisition of real estate, a key to the mobility of subgroups, the Irish were able to pull themselves up the economic ladder. Drawing upon social psychology, Clark discovered that the motivation and the proper capitalist ethos for the climb was supplied by an unlikely institution, the Catholic archdiocese, and especially its school system, which stressed the importance of "accuracy, literacy, and regulated behavior." We learn a great deal from Wolf and Whiteman regarding the early Jews of Philadelphia, but not what Clark tells us about the Irish.\footnote{We do have one study which suggests possibilities for quantification: E. Digby Baltzell, "The Development of a Jewish Upper Class in Philadelphia, 1872-1940," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), pp. 271-87.}

However it may turn out, the most remarkable aspect of the 19th-century history of American Jewry was its mobility. We really have only surmised much of this story. One suspects that when we know more we will be less certain of German Jewish success in America. Much depended on time and place and luck. We hear little about downward mobility among German Jews, yet the frequency of references to business failures in the local histories indicates it existed. The recent late discovery of the Jewish poor suggests that we are relatively blind to this aspect of the American Jewish experience.
How does the application of the historical perspective to an analysis of the American Jewish community work out in practice? Two approaches may be used. The historian can select some analogous community in the history of the Jews and see how it fared, or he may select a core problem facing American Jewry and bring all the relevant history to bear on it in the hope that this will reveal what lies beneath the surface.

For the comparative approach, more than one community in Jewish history seems to offer opportunities for comparison. The case of the Jews of medieval Moorish Spain is instructive. That community also possessed a modicum of security and was lodged in a prosperous, relatively tolerant host culture. It developed a commercial and cultural élan, and Jews became important carriers of the host culture. All this is not dissimilar from what seems to be happening with American Jewry.

The comparison with post-Emancipation German Jewry is even more striking. This Jewish community, developing within a modern industrial nation-state, underwent a painful transition to modernity, not unlike ours, and the resultant occupational and demographic profile bears further startling resemblances to ours. German Jewry, too, had three branches of Judaism. It, too, lived in an attractive and inviting host culture. In Germany, too, Jews were allowed to occupy high office, in a nation which to all intents and purposes was their own. But there is a more direct link than resemblance or parallelism. About 1880 most American Jews were immigrants from the zone of German speech, or their children. Although the Reform movement in America could boast native roots, its institutional framework and theoretical buttressing was provided by rabbis coming from the German Kulturgebiet. Similarly, the American Jewish commercial élite was nurtured by capital and intellectual resources from Jewish banking houses in Germany.

Yet one discovers that the comparative approach is so full of pitfalls that its usefulness in explaining American Jewry to itself is severely circumscribed. There is, of course, no such thing in history as repetition, because the variables are too numerous. The three analogous communities evolved differently and were qualitatively and quantitatively dissimilar. All we can fairly conclude from a comparison is that, in favorable conditions, Jewish talent flourishes—a truism that applies equally to the talent of all people.

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21Leo Merzbacher arrived in 1841, Max Lilienthal in 1845, Isaac Wise in 1846, David Einhorn in 1855, and Samuel Adler in 1857.
There are other weaknesses as well. The Jews of Moorish Spain did not live in a modern nation-state. For that matter, they did not live in modernity. Islam's tolerance was only relative. There is no need to go on.

The analogy with German Jewry, too, is more apparent than real. The German nation, especially its Mittelstand, came to reject the emancipation of the Jews out of conviction that Jews could not be part of the German Volk, since it held national identity to be something organic. Today we finally understand that German antisemitism went beyond finding Jews distasteful; nor was it necessarily related to the Christian schema, even envy. In its extreme form it desired to destroy a bacillus that would otherwise be fatal to the organism.

The contrast with the American nationhood is startling. America is the secular state par excellence, child of the Age of Reason. It does not have a long history to harden its sense of identity; rather, it employs a centripetal principle to ingather its disparate elements. It is a highly inclusive culture. American antisemitism has almost never been official or governmental.

In the end, comparison with other Jewish communities is fruitless because the exceptionality of the American Jewish position is historically unprecedented. In other host cultures, like post-Emancipation Germany or Moorish Spain, the epoch of tolerance which permitted Jewish culture to flourish was temporary. Both ultimately became murderously lethal environments for Jews. To a lesser extent, the same is true of other golden ages and places in Jewish history. In America, however, the threat to Jewish survival emanates only from the openness of the host culture. Outspoken hostility towards Jews hardly exists and therefore cannot feed Jewish differentiation. America thus furnishes the great historical test: whether the Jewish community can survive without enemies to mobilize itself against. American Jews, now overwhelmingly native-born, know America as the nation which has allowed them to develop their genius and expend their ample energies almost entirely as they see fit. No Jewry has trod this path before. Our problems and prospects are unique in Jewish history.

**AMERICAN JEWDY AND THE HOLOCAUST**

We turn to the second approach, that of viewing a seminal historical experience of American Jewry in its American Jewish historical context. The relationship of American Jewry to the Holocaust is ideally suited for that
purpose. That unhappy story is rapidly becoming the most popular area of research in American Jewish historiography. It allows us a glimpse into an important yet relatively unexplored aspect of American Jewish history: the relationship of the perennial Jewish question to American foreign relations. The problem has deep roots in American Jewish history. We have mentioned that much of American Jewish organizational energy in the 19th and 20th centuries was devoted to giving succor to Jewish communities overseas. Today American Jewry continues to be differentiated from other subgroups by its overriding commitments abroad—to Israel and the Jews in the Soviet Union.

We do not intend here to give a detailed account of what occurred during those bitter years, but to outline the events and to suggest some lessons about the influence of the Jewish community on American foreign policy. We want to find a historical explanation for its failure, if indeed there was failure, to respond effectively to the plight of European Jewry during World War II.

Clearly, no other American group ever had a more critical need to influence government policy, and it would have seemed that few groups were in a better position to make their will felt. Jews were recovering from the Depression at a faster rate than others. The three committees in the House of Representatives concerned with refugees—House Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Naturalization, and Judiciary—were chaired by Jews. American Jewry was an important element in the New Deal liberal coalition. So many prominent Jews had become part of Roosevelt's inner circle that the opposition had coined the pejorative "Jew Deal" to exploit the phenomenon. Few other American groups could boast of such a wealth of experience in influencing foreign policy. Throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries Jews had requested, and usually received, diplomatic intercession and philosemitic statements of concern from various administrations. Wealthy Jews like Jacob Schiff had used their economic leverage in an effort to wring better treatment of Jews in Russia. There existed, too, a rich organizational infrastructure that could be utilized to inform the Roosevelt administration about the plight of European Jewry.

Yet despite these resources, American Jews were less than successful in wringing a favorable response from the Roosevelt administration. They failed not for lack of effort or concern, as some have recently maintained; rather, factors inherent in the making of foreign policy, combined with certain historically conditioned structural weaknesses in American Jewry, undermined the effort to move the Roosevelt administration to act. But even if these weaknesses had been overcome, that might not have helped to
rescue more Jews. Especially after Germany went to war against the Soviet Union, the Nazi leaders were absolutely determined to destroy the Jews. Washington was unable to muster a matching determination to save them.

What did American Jews want of the Roosevelt administration? Generally, they needed its good offices to help the Jews caught in the Nazi net. In the early days, a more liberal interpretation of the restrictive immigration regulations was required, one that would have distinguished between ordinary immigrants and refugees. There was, too, desperate need of a voice to protest the persecution of Jews which at least would have shown the Nazis that Washington was aware of what was happening. After the news of the actual implementation of the Final Solution became known in the fall of 1942, there were urgent calls for direct physical intervention, such as bombing the camps and the railroad tracks leading to them. A further need was to relax the strict licensing regulations, which would have permitted the depositing of money in foreign accounts to satisfy Nazi ransom requirements. And it was important that Washington should intercede with London to change its inhumane political policy limiting migration to, and land sales in, Palestine.

Except for the extension of visitors' visas, little was done to change immigration regulations. Only in 1939 was the full annual quota of visas issued. A gap developed between the administration's professed good intentions and what actually occurred in the field, where the consuls were allowed to give full vent to their customary antipathy toward Jewish refugees by denying them visas. Resistance also developed in Congress, which twice rejected the Wagner-Rogers bill providing for the admission outside the quota of 20,000 mainly Jewish refugee children. A measure allowing British children who were victims of the Blitz to enter was passed with enthusiasm. In Congress, much depended on who was knocking at the door.

Instead of opening the gates to those in need, the Roosevelt administration created what one author called a "paper wall," which most Jewish refugees could not scale. Security-minded officials incessantly harped on the danger that Berlin might infiltrate spies among the refugees. To guard against that possibility, a rigid screening procedure was established by June 1941, which made it virtually impossible for anyone with close relatives in Nazi-occupied Europe to enter the country. In addition, a special camouflage terminology was developed, which concealed the largely Jewish character of the refugee problem. Those in need of asylum were classified as "political refugees." Thus, while the Nazi regime was making Jews of all its enemies, including Roosevelt, the administration was covering over the Jewishness of its Jewish victims—the better, it was imagined, to help them.
In fact that policy helped to conceal what the Nazis were doing.

Much of the administration’s energy was devoted to finding places for mass Jewish resettlement in Africa and Latin America, in the apparent belief that the highly urbanized Jews of Europe could be tucked away in some remote tropical spots where they would bother no one and pioneer in nation building. At the same time, Alaska, a population-starved American territory which required precisely the kind of human resources present in the refugee stream, was ruled out as a haven. Throughout the crisis, for example, American rescue advocates were plagued by the resistance of the bureaucracy. Lesser government officials and some in the middle echelons delighted in sabotaging or simply tying up rescue programs in red tape.

The responsibility of the Roosevelt administration to prevent, or at least reduce, the human tragedy cannot be denied. For example, it refused to intercede forcefully with Britain to assure that at least Palestine, a logical place for Jewish refugees, should remain accessible. Nor would it raise its voice against the mass-murder operation, about which it was fully informed. More than anything else, that refusal helped lower a “curtain of silence” on the final solution. It convinced such Nazis as Goebbels that the Allied leadership secretly approved of the extermination of the Jews.

Rescue efforts by the administration reached a high point only after the November 1943 congressional hearings revealed the extent to which the State Department had sabotaged earlier efforts. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, an intimate friend of the President, convinced him of the need to establish a special refugee-rescue agency. Established in January 1944, the War Refugee Board was almost immediately faced with the problem of rescuing Hungarian Jewry, against whom the Nazis had turned with special fury. In April of that year the restrictive immigration laws were finally circumvented, at least in a token way, when the administration established a refugee camp in Oswego, N.Y., which permitted a mixed group of fewer than 1,000 refugees to enter outside the quota system. Both steps were taken too late to save the Jews of Europe.

Yet characterizing American Jewry’s performance during those critical years as one of failure is not appropriate, since the degree of success or failure possible under the circumstances cannot be ascertained. Given the Nazi determination to “solve” the Jewish problem, it is impossible to know how many Jewish lives could have been saved. Moreover, rather than seeking to prove or disprove that such a failure occurred, the historian merely seeks to discover whether American Jewry’s power to influence policy matched the responsibilities thrust upon it by the ominous turn of
events in Jewish history. Clearly, the evidence indicates that it did not.

Contemporary observers are remiss in that they ignore the fact that the admission of Jewish refugees, and later the need to rescue Jews from death camps, occurred during periods of great national stress, the Depression and the war. Both made the rescue of Jews a peripheral concern for the American government. Tragic as this may be, it seems almost impossible to the contemporary observer that the Roosevelt administration might ever have adopted as its own American Jewry's priority for rescuing European Jewry. Yet only the acceptance of this priority would have made mass rescue possible. All things considered, the modern nation-state was not well suited for responding to the planned murder of the Jews.

An excessive concern for legality, too, often served to block more active rescue efforts. The Jews of Europe were first of all citizens of their respective countries; therefore expression of concern over their fate could be interpreted as interference in the internal affairs of another nation. Ironically, when they had been made stateless, they could not legally be the concern of any country. The question of documents for stateless Jews consumed an inordinate part of rescue advocates' energies. But even if such problems had been solved, the question remains whether the Roosevelt administration would have responded differently. The tendency is to overlook the fact that America had hardly learned to concern itself with its own underclass. The internment of Japanese Americans during the war indicates, too, the presence of a state of mind somewhat akin to the antisemitic imagination.

If the Roosevelt administration was relatively immune to pressure, American Jewry's condition rendered it relatively ineffective when it was called upon to bend every effort to wring a more active policy from the administration. The community was barely able to mobilize its political, organizational, and financial resources. At a time when unity was essential, the religious, cultural, and political divisions within the community deepened. Leadership wrangles intensified. When Nazi persecution of the Jews was in the beginning stage, the community consensus generally was that Nazism was a temporary phenomenon whose radicalism would be tempered by time. But even then the various groups differed in their approach to counteracting Nazi depredations. The leaders of the American Jewish Committee believed in the efficacy of "quiet diplomacy." "Emotional" tactics, such as the protest rallies and boycotts used by the American Jewish Congress, were shunned. The Zionist movement, working through the American Zionist Emergency Committee, preferred to focus almost exclusively on a long-range campaign to effect a change in the British policy of restricted immigration to Palestine. A small Zionist Revisionist group, headed by
Peter Bergson, clamored in the press for more effective rescue action, even if that meant temporarily abandoning Zionist objectives. Its harsh criticism of the American Zionist leaders, whom it accused of doing nothing, led to a bitter conflict that was fought out in page-long ads in major newspapers.

Despite the establishment of the American Jewish Conference, separate Jewish delegations periodically visited the State Department to plead their case. So exasperating did the situation become that Roosevelt once expressed the wish that the Jews had their own pope. Looking back at the Jewish community during the crisis, the historian must have serious doubts that there was enough coherence to warrant the use of the term community. American Jewry not only lacked power to work its will on the White House, it also disagreed on what should be done.

The historian can distill some important lessons from this episode. The manner in which American Jewry is organized poses special problems for the projection of influence on government. American Jewry differs from other Diaspora communities in that it has a looser organizational structure and lower degree of community coherence. Its community life is typically voluntaristic. In the free atmosphere of America, organizations proliferate and leadership is continually changing. And most American Jews, ensconced in their private, affluent world and becoming less Jewish in concern and outlook, choose not to join the national organizations which act for them in times of crisis. Congregational affiliation remains the most typical identification with the community, but it, too, has tended to become nominal. Thus, while the community probably has the richest organizational infrastructure of any group in the nation, it cannot generate the coherence needed to influence government policy. There is always pressure on relevant issues from various Jewish groups, but there rarely is consensus on objectives, nor is there one recognized agency for achieving them. The existence of many organizations and leaders, each representing a different segment of the community, interfered with the community’s interests and diminished its power during the Holocaust period.

Recently new factors have emerged which may further reduce the community’s ability to influence United States policy. Receptivity to the objectives of special-interest groups is understandably related to their financial power and voting strength. The generosity of Jews in giving financial support to candidates of their choice may soon be curtailed by campaign-financing reforms. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the proportion of Jewish populations in pivotal states is no longer so great as it used to be, and that the independence of the individual voter makes it virtually impossible to deliver a “Jewish vote.” This was so even during the Holocaust
period, when Jewish leadership could not, even if it had wished, sway the Jewish electorate to deny Roosevelt its support. It was his New Deal domestic program that won the heart of the Jewish voter, and not even his relative slowness in opposing isolationism could lessen his attraction.

A special-interest group trying to influence policy rarely operates in a vacuum; it tends to awaken counterpressure from competing interests. Nor are the objectives of the group independent of larger issues. Thus when Charles Lindbergh, in his Des Moines speech on September 11, 1941, warned that the Jews, the British, and Roosevelt were conspiring to bring the United States into a war against Germany he was actually saying that the specific Jewish interest was linked to the larger issue of interventionism. By the same token, isolationism combined in itself several subissues including restrictionism and hostility to a welfare state.

The question of admitting Jewish refugees was in some measure part of the larger conflict between interventionist and isolationist forces, the crux of the great foreign-policy debate of the late 1930s. What the Roosevelt administration would and would not do for Jews was partly determined by its position on the larger issue, of which the fate of Europe's Jews happened to become a part. After the United States had entered the war, the rescue of the Jews was again subordinated to the larger issue of winning the war. In American foreign policy the Jewish question, whatever its form, rarely stands by itself. It is a secondary issue whose disposition is largely determined by the major issue of which it has become part.

The ostensible failure of American Jewry to achieve a more effective rescue program has given rise to polemics regarding guilt about the Holocaust. The period of intense Jewish activity after the war, which reached its peak in 1948 when Truman, under intense pressure from American Jewish leaders, extended recognition to Israel, has at times been characterized as related to the community's blaming itself for failure during the previous administration. If failure there was, it cannot be said to have been due to indifference.

From a historical perspective, Jewish influence on American foreign policy about matters of Jewish concern has been minimal, especially in the 20th century when America became a world power. Even during the 19th century—the Damascus blood libel, the Mortara affair, and the like—the philosemitic statements and diplomatic intercessions from Washington were in essence little more than friendly gestures to the Jewish community. They barely made a ripple in international relations.

The most successful instance of Jewish influence was the abrogation of the commercial treaty of 1832 with Russia in 1911. Between 1908 and 1911
Louis Marshall and the American Jewish Committee worked through Congress and used every instrument of public pressure, until they wrung abrogation from the Taft administration over the opposition of the business community. Thereafter there were several minor successes by American Zionists, the chief of which was winning Wilson's support for the Balfour Declaration. But during the Harding administration such influence, which customarily concerned peripheral issues on which major policy had not crystallized, declined. In fact, in these later cases success was achieved despite sustained opposition within the Jewish community itself, from the western representatives of Reform Judaism headed by David Philipson.

The difference between the roles of Jews in the Roosevelt era and in the earlier administrations of Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, and Harding was that a larger number of influential Jews had found their way into FDR's charmed "inner circle." Why did these Jews not use their position for their European brethren? Clearly such contemporary "court Jews" cannot serve as channels of Jewish influence, for several reasons. The Jews selected for such positions customarily come from the periphery of the community and rarely are committed enough to recognize, much less support, a specific Jewish interest. If they advocated such a specific interest, they would risk compromising their credentials as representatives of the national, rather than some parochial, interest. They want to think of themselves, and hope others will think of them, as Americans who happen to be Jewish. Oscar Straus, Samuel Rosenman, Henry Morgenthau, and Henry Kissinger are far more common types than Louis Brandeis, who was himself careful to remain in the background of the Zionist movement after his appointment to the Supreme Court in 1916.

Permitting Jews to play only a minor role in matters of Jewish concern is not necessarily an expression of antisemitism. The perennially precarious position of Jewish communities abroad created a great need for American Jewry to seek to influence United States policy. Yet American ethnic groups have at various times been compelled to learn through hard experience the limits of their influence. By sheer numbers, no group seemed better situated to influence policy than German-Americans before World War I. Their votes were thought to have been instrumental in helping Wilson to achieve his narrow victory in the 1916 election, when he ran on the slogan, "He kept us out of the war." Keeping America out of the war was German America's primary foreign-policy goal. But barely a month after his second inauguration, Wilson felt compelled to ask Congress for a declaration of war against Germany. The nation underwent a paroxysm of patriotism and the fortunes of the German-American community changed drastically. Sauerkraut be-
came liberty cabbage and hamburgers, Salisbury steaks. German street names were changed, and some German-Americans experienced physical abuse and social ostracism. They were paying the price for being out of step with what most Americans thought to be the national interest. The lesson was not soon forgotten. When the German-born chemist Fritz Kuhn tried to rally German-Americans to the Nazi cause during the 1930s, barely 10,000 joined the German-American Bund; and most of these were immigrants who arrived after World War I.

The Irish American community experienced similar limitations of influence when it attempted in the second half of the 19th century to disrupt amicable United States relations with Britain. It is a long and complex story, of which we can only note the conclusion. Irish Americans could not prevent the great Anglo-American rapprochement, initiated by the settlement of the Venezuela boundary dispute in 1895, that was to become a tacit alliance and dominate international relations in the first half of the 20th century. One can cite other examples. Polish Americans were unable to prevent the Yalta agreement, and anti-Castro Cubans cannot prevent détente in the Caribbean. All seems to point to the conclusion that the ability of pressure groups, ethnic or other, to pull policy in the direction of their own interests is limited. German Americans ultimately discovered that they were contending with a powerful group of Anglophiles in the administration—Walter Page, Edward House, Robert Lansing, and perhaps Wilson himself—who were in a better position than they to affect policy. Similarly, Jewish efforts to liberalize the immigration laws by such devices as mortgaging future quotas aroused the anger of nativist groups and other elements of the anti-New Deal, isolationist coalition. In a word, pressure on policy-making appears to operate dialectically: the espousal of a cause tends to elicit its own opposition, with the result that the actual makers of policy can do pretty much as they judge best. Viewed against such a background, the lack of effectiveness of American Jewry during the years of the Holocaust appears not at all atypical.

The uninformed are apt to overestimate the influence of American Jewry on policy. Jewish power behind the scenes is a fantasy of the antisemitic imagination, but many Jews have come to accept and rely upon it. There was little such power during the Holocaust. There is little such power today over American policy in the Middle East. It is surely preferable to begin our calculations of what American Jewry can achieve in the realm of public policy with a proper historical perspective.
CONCLUSION

We return finally to the basic question: How does the condition of American Jewry appear from the historical point of view?

For the historian, an optimistic or pessimistic stance tells only what the observer feels, not what the condition actually is. I am optimistic about American Jewry (though I freely acknowledge that there is much reason to question whether optimism is warranted). The historical perspective can temper the gloom which descends on us from the new prophetic literature. Those who know Jewish history are aware that Jewish communities have traditionally lived on the razor's edge. They know that it is just as short-sighted to predict the demise of a people which has survived countless catastrophes over the centuries as it is to ignore the imminence of catastrophe. Both catastrophe and survival are omnipresent in the Jewish historical experience. I do not believe that the balance has tipped in favor of the former. Indeed, it is possible that a historian viewing the American scene from the vantage of the year 2,000 may conclude that in this centennial year American Jewry was about to embark on its golden age. There is some evidence for such a conclusion. The energies and talents of American Jews have been allowed full play in this society. They are accepted in its representative assemblies, and they have a share of power. Survivalists are unhappy about the growing loss of distinctiveness, but that loss can mean that singling Jews out as a target becomes increasingly unlikely.

It is of course true that Jewish survival requires more than acceptance by the host culture, whose attractiveness and inclusiveness may in fact militate against survival. There is also the fear that the energies and talents so generously invested in American secular culture are inversely proportionate to those which American Jewry invests in Jewish culture. Where are our ge'onim?

Over a decade ago, Salo Baron wondered aloud about American Jewish culture. Was there sufficient "cultural energy" left for American Jewry to cultivate its Jewish heritage? He was confident that such a culture would eventually develop. When measured by the calendar of history, he observed, American Jewry was still relatively young. Its real beginnings as a community of some numerical weight go back only to the turn of the century. Centuries of dormant germination were needed by the Jewish communities of hellenistic Egypt, Babylonia, medieval France and Germany, Moorish Spain, and Eastern Europe before the
cultural flowerings for which they became noted. American Jewry needs time.

It may also be that the standard of comparison is distorting. Compared with its immediate predecessor, the Jewish community of Eastern Europe, American Jewry appears sterile. That was in fact the cry of many an immigrant who returned to Eastern Europe. Such a comparison is natural, since most American Jews derive or have received their cultural cues from Eastern Europe. But in fact it is misleading, for the special historical circumstances of East European Jewry bred a separateness and a piety rarely encountered in other Jewish communities of the Diaspora. For comparison with American Jewry better models might be the Jewish communities in countries, like medieval Spain, where a modicum of tolerance prevailed. Although their conditions are by no means identical to those exceptional ones which fashion the Jewish community's character in America, they are more like American Jewry in the extent of their integration and acculturation. Since these communities made notable contributions to Judaism, above all philosophical and literary, it is evident that freedom and tolerance do not necessarily work against Jewish culture, but may in fact enhance it.

In this centennial year the portents are that American Jewry may generate sufficient cultural energy to carry Judaism forward. The mantle of scholarship worn for centuries by European Jewry has been successfully transferred not only to Israel but also to America, where Jewish scholarship and its institutional support do not appear to be problematic. When Leo- pold Zunz several times petitioned the Prussian authorities in the 1840s to permit Jewish literature and history to be taught in the universities, his requests were rejected out of hand. There is no such resistance in American universities, which are witnessing a proliferation of courses in Jewish history and culture, and in some cases of entire Jewish-studies departments. Given the nature of the American university, that does not mean that a great Jewish cultural effervescence will spring from these institutions. However, it does indicate that a substructure is being created, that energy and talent are being invested, and, in a word, that Jewish culture has a future in America.

It is difficult to argue with the statistical projections of the new prophets, except to note that the troubled Jewish presence in history defied statistics and logic. The data of the demographers seem to dwindle before the mystery of millennia of Jewish continuance. That, too, is a problem with which the

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new prophets should come to grips. It seems strange that they, armed with scientific tools and reason, should be less hopeful than the prophets of old, who at least allowed for a saving remnant. America has such a remnant, and perhaps more than a remnant. There has never been a monolithic Jewish culture. Variety has been the rule throughout Jewish history. The commitment is carried forward by the few, while the many dance around the golden calf. Some return when summoned.

24 "A remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob unto God the Mighty": Isaiah 10:21.
Religion in Israel

by Zvi Yaron

The Controversy

Religion in the State of Israel has become noted for its potential to generate strife. The frequent controversies over its role in society, an issue affecting the most sensitive areas of Israeli life, are acrimonious and harsh in tone. Many of them are accompanied by demonstrations and spiteful incidents instigated by extremists of all shades and opinions, ranging from the zealous Neture Karta to the frenetic League for the Prevention of Religious Coercion. No doubt, they reflect the acerbated feelings of many moderate Israelis. Religious disputes have arisen over education, the legal definition of "who is a Jew," the authority of the rabbinate, autopsies, marriage and divorce, the legal status of the common-law wife, the status of women, army service for girls and yeshivah students, Sabbath observance, kashrut, the prohibition of pig-raising, and the closing of cinemas and theaters on religious holidays.

Some people complain that Israel is a theocracy, arguing that religion intrudes into every important aspect of public and individual life and imposes its authority on the governing of the state. At the same time, there is the often-heard lament that Israel is a radically secularist state, in which the religious areas are narrowly circumscribed and the decisive influences

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1 On the complexities of the meaning of theocracy (first used by Josephus in his Against Apion) and its application to modern Israel, see Mordecai Roshwald, "Theocracy in Israel in Antiquity and Today," Jewish Journal of Sociology, Vol. 14, No. 1, June 1972, pp. 5–42.
are nonreligious. The actual situation is too complex, too full of contradictions and overlapping influences, to be defined in neat categories. Religion in Israel can be understood only in the light of historical events that shaped its role in the life of the Jewish people. Thus, it would be completely wrong to take into account only the period since Israel's establishment, or to analyze only the legal and political aspects of the problem.

Both in Israel and the United States, there has been an effusion of popular and scholarly writings offering simplistic interpretations of the problem of religion in Israel by reducing it to a legalistic church-state issue and a power struggle between religious and secularist parties. These interpretations are based on the assumption that Israel is a democratic state, in which the religious parties are trying to force religion on a majority of unwilling, secular Israelis. Religious laws, they contend, are the result of the "tactic of political extortionism by a minority," the religious parties in a coalition government whose majority parties "acted from constraint and against convictions." The rationale for this view is that the issues can be understood within the context of the here-and-now, without reference to the historical relationships between the Jewish people and its traditional beliefs and patterns of behavior. The subject of the writings is contemporary Israel; all that went before and all Jewishness existing today outside Israel are considered impertinent to an understanding of the problem. According to one political scientist, the entire problem is one of theopolitics, which he defines as "the attempt to attain theological ends by means of political activity."

No doubt, religion in Israel has the classic church-state features of political struggles, with religious or antireligious coercion creating a serious problem of individual liberty. But to isolate these aspects and to magnify them into the quintessence of the issue is to distort it. A serious study of

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the question must start out with the uniqueness of Israel in its links with
the Jewish past and the contemporary Jewish Diaspora. Israel's intrinsic
Jewishness is at the root of its dynamism and ways and means of grappling
with difficulties.

Zionism and the Jewish state arose with the declared purpose to renew
national life and break with the ghetto past. But renewal does not imply a
hiatus in the nation's history. The traditions of the past pervade the present.
And yet, the Jewish national renascence challenged what hitherto had been
the very essence of Jewish existence, religious faith, and way of life. Martin
Buber bemoaned this schism:

When at last we stepped out of the ghetto into the world, worse befell us from
within than had ever befallen us from without: the foundation, the unique unity
of people and religion, developed a deep rift, which has since become deeper and
deeper. Even the event of our days, the re-entry of the Jews into the history of
the nations by the rebuilding of a Jewish state, is most intimately affected and
classified by that rift.¹

Indeed, this schism is the underlying cause of the dispute about religion.
For what we have in modern Israel is not the classical church-state conflict
between secular and religious forces, but a debate between opposing views
of the relationship between the Jewish nation and traditional Judaism,
which is also reflected in the differing patterns of the daily behavior of
Israelis.² To religious Jews the new secularism is an aberration that is not
only untrue but also un-Jewish. To secular Jews the traditional religion is
an unconscionable burden that depresses the potentialities of man and
thwarts the free development of Jewish culture.

RELIGION AND NATIONALITY

The nature of the dispute about religion is new in Jewish history. No one
had thought it possible to separate Jewish religion from membership in the
Jewish people. Rejection of the Jewish religion automatically meant a break
with the Jewish community. Today, however, many Jews consider religion
to be no part of Jewishness. While Judaism is a faith held by many Jews,
it no longer is an essential condition for belonging to the Jewish people.
There has thus arisen a distinct difference between the individual Jew's

²For a survey and analysis of one year's (1972) religious issues in Israel see my
article "Religious Developments in Israel," *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973,*
pp. 306–309.
belief in the tenets of Judaism and his conscious identification with the Jewish people.

The new Jewish state is the embodiment of these profound changes, giving them political and social shape, and territorial concentration. At the same time, the revolution the state's establishment wrought in Jewish life served to accentuate earlier cultural and religious problems. Therefore, the religious situation in Israel can be understood only by a study of these changes and their implications.

One of the crucial developments in modern history is the secularization of society. Its main significance is not only that many people ceased to be religious, but that religion no longer is central to the life of the individual and society. The impact of secularization on the patterns of living goes far beyond the narrowly circumscribed issues of religious faith and ritual. Religion is not a strictly defined human function. It involves man's personality, culture, and aspirations in all their ramifications. And when the attitude toward religion changes from confident assertion to nagging question, the crisis spreads within this wider context.

Hayim Greenberg states that religion can never be a peripheral matter: "Either it stands at the core of things, and all other cultural activities intentionally or unintentionally serve as its periphery—or it ceases to be religion." When it ceases to be a central element in the Jewish community, it becomes tedious and insipid. Says Greenberg: "When Satan wishes to undermine religious life, he afflicts it—if he is successful—with a yawn." Even where religious beliefs hold sway, they are usually not pervasive and do not provide the basic frame of reference and the focal and integrative point of social life.

In his analysis of the religious experience in contemporary society, "The Lonely Man of Faith," Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes that, while he is not troubled by the theoretical problems with which religion has been assailed, he cannot shake off the disquieting feeling that for the man of faith the very

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7The Inner Eye (New York, 1974), Vol. 2, pp. 68–69. Abraham Joshua Heschel often spoke of the "irrelevance" of contemporary religion. In God in Search of Man (New York, 1955), p. 3, he said: "Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid." And more emphatically, in his posthumously published A Passion for Truth (New York, 1973), p. 307, he declared that it cannot exist in modern times unless the religious are committed to a life of relentless opposition to "spiritual leprosy."
fact of living in the modern secular society presents an insoluble dilemma. The contemporary man of faith, Soloveitchik holds, lives in a difficult and agonizing crisis, and his religious faith is a "passional" experience. He regards himself as a stranger in modern society; for what, asks Soloveitchik, can such a man say to a "functional utilitarian society which is saeculum-oriented?" Since he neither renounces secular society nor withdraws from civilization, he lives in constant and dialectical tension with that society, fulfilling an exacting and sacrificial role.9

In Jewish life, secularism seriously challenged religious faith and national cohesion. For Judaism was always understood as both the religion of the Jews and the essential component of Jewish nationality. The existence and destiny of the Jewish people were interpreted in distinctly theological terms. At Sinai, before the people of Israel received the Ten Commandments, God asked that they become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This involves not only the behavior of the individual, but the dedication to God of the nation "with all its substance and all its functions, with legal forms and institutions, with the organization of its internal and external relationships."10 The implication is that the nationhood of the people of Israel has religious significance. This view was summed up by Saadyya Gaon in his classic definition: "Our nation, the Children of Israel, is a nation only by virtue of its laws."11 The definition of Judaism as a "nation-creating religion,"12 or a "nation-religion"13 derives from the fact that the Jewish religion and the Jewish nation have always been regarded as one. According to Heschel, Israel is a "spiritual order in which the human and the ultimate, the natural and the holy" enter a lasting covenant with God:

For us Jews there can be no fellowship with God without the fellowship with the people of Israel. Abandoning Israel, we desert God. Jewish existence is not only the adherence to particular doctrines and observances, but primarily the living spiritual order of the Jewish people, the living in the Jews of the past and with the Jews of the present. It is not only a certain quality in the souls of the individuals, but primarily the existence of the community of Israel.14

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9 As representative of the dialectical "theology of crisis" school in contemporary Jewish thought, Soloveitchik interprets his halakhah theology as a confrontation with the secular situation. See his "The Man of Halakhah" (Hebrew), Talpioth Vol. 1, 1944–45, particularly note 4, pp. 652–54.
11 Emunot we-de'ot ("The Book of Beliefs and Opinions"), Treatise 3.
Intrusion of Secularism

If the challenges of modern secularism are unprecedented in the history of mankind, they are of crucial importance to the Jewish people; for no other people has been so closely involved and intrinsically identified with religion. Religion decisively influenced ancient Greece and Rome, as well as medieval Europe; but there were periods in the political and literary life of some nations that were not under its sway. In the history of the Jews such nonreligious areas were almost unknown until the 18th century. As secularism spread, Jews began to question their own traditions and pattern of living, and changes in their religiosity radically affected their self-understanding. At the same time, Jewish life was torn by almost uninterrupted political and social revolutions.

The era began with the lure of emancipation, when European nations held out to the Jews the promise of complete freedom at the price of total obliteration of Jewish identity. It ended, in our own time, with the most frightful abomination—the extirpation by the Nazis of six million Jews while the world remained silent. In the intervening period, the Jewish people experienced every imaginable kind of crisis: pogroms, discrimination, political disabilities, and antisemitic vilification.

The effects of the events that shook the foundations of Judaism and Jewish existence continued to be felt. The close identification of nationality with religious faith gave rise to anxious questioning. And today the issue of whether religion should be a criterion for belonging to the Jewish people is a subject of bitter polemics.

Zionism vs. Tradition

It is one of the coincidences of history that Zionism sprang up toward the end of the 19th century, a time of the general decline of all religions. And since religion became a "problem" in Jewish life just when the Zionist movement was growing, the controversy over religion became an ingredient of renascent Jewish nationalism, first in the Zionist movement and later in the State of Israel.

This was bound to happen; for Jewish nationalism differed from European 19th-century nationalism in that it lacked two essential characteristics: territory and a common language. Yet Zionism brought about large-scale migration of Jews to Eretz Israel and, ultimately, the establishment of the

"Yitzhak Baer, Israel Among the Nations (Jerusalem, 1955; Hebrew)."
Jewish state. What doubtless compensated for the lack of "normal" national traits was the allegiance which, over the centuries of dispersion, firmly held together all Jews in the unassailable conviction that they belonged to one nation; that they not only worshipped as one, but also lived the life of one national community.

The political and social emancipation of the Jews in the century before the advent of Zionism resulted in the severance of their ties to Jewish nationalism and a strong thrust to assimilate with the non-Jewish society, which often led to baptism. Heinrich Heine epitomized this struggle in his observation that baptism was the ticket to European civilization. In time, however, a formula was worked out that attempted to divorce Jewish nationality from religion. It went like this: "I am a German [French, Dutch, etc.] citizen of the Mosaic faith." Judaism became like one of the Christian denominations in that it claimed no national attachment.

Zionism rejected all forms of assimilation and urged the renascence of the distinctive Jewish nationality. Permeated with the traditional longing for the ultimate redemption of, and return to, Zion, the movement always had the support of many religious Jews. But its impetus came mainly from nonreligious Jews who opposed assimilation as a threat to the survival of the Jewish people. The historical concomitance of Zionism and irreligiosity produced a built-in tension between a nationalism traditionally steeped in religion and the view that insisted on divorcing Jewish nationality from religion. Since the revived nationalism was intended to preserve the historical ethos of the Jewish people, atheistic or agnostic Zionists faced the dilemma of how to reject Judaism and, at the same time, preserve Jewish nationality.

**Herzl's Blueprint**

Not all Zionists were aware of the complexity and acuteness of this problem. When Theodor Herzl declared, at the first Zionist Congress, that "Zionism is the return home to Judaism even before the return to the land of the Jews," he was not talking of teshuvah, religious repentance, but of the return of the estranged and assimilated Jews to their people. His knowl-

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16The "functional" purpose of conversion was reflected in the remark by the Russian scholar Daniel Chwolsky that he became a Christian out of conviction—the conviction that it was better to be a professor at a university than a *melammed* (teacher) in a poor Jewish community. See Milton Himmelfarb, *The Jews of Modernity* (New York, 1973), p. 28.

17See Eliezer Livneh, *Israel and the Crisis of Western Civilization* (Tel Aviv, 1972; Hebrew).

18*Protokoll des I Zionistenkongresses, Basel 1897* (Prague, 1911), p. 16.
edge of Judaism was scant; he thought of religion in terms familiar to non-Jewish liberals of the Victorian age: It was the duty of a well-ordered society to provide churches and clergymen for religious guidance but, at the same time, leave room for disbelief. Religion was to be the private concern of the individual. In *Der Judenstaat*, the first blueprint for a Jewish state, Herzl declared that “each group will have its rabbi who will travel with his congregation” because, he explained, “we recognize our historic identity only by the faith of our fathers.” At the same time, Herzl ruled out theocracy for the state: “Faith unites us, knowledge makes us free. Therefore we shall permit no theocratic tendencies on the part of our clergy to arise. Every man will be as free and as unrestricted in his belief or unbelief as he is in his nationality.” The clergy was to be restricted to the temples, “just as we shall restrict our professional soldiers to their barracks.”

Because he did not grasp the significance of the role of religion in Jewish nationality, Herzl thought he had disposed of the problem with the formula that Zionism would do nothing that contradicts the Jewish religion.

However, for the nonreligious Zionists in Eastern Europe, who lived in communities that were steeped in Jewish life and cultural traditions and where Jewish nationality was a conspicuous and inseparable element of existence, religion was a serious problem. For them it was not only a question of personal freedom of religion, but of the very meaning of Jewishness and collective Jewish life. They had to find the answer to the nagging question of how to reject religion and still remain Jews in nationality; how to conceive of Jewish nationality that is shorn of its religious content. With the rise of nationalism, many West European Jews debated whether or not they were a nation, while the nonreligious Jews of Eastern Europe asked why the disappearance of the separate Jewish nation through assimilation should not be encouraged. Was it enough to affirm Jewish nationality without inquiring into the particularity of Jewish national existence? Continued identification with the Jewish nation, they argued, could not rest on tradition alone—on the sanctity of long-cherished beliefs, laws, and customs, which they were determined to reject.

With the steadily increasing secularization of Jewish society throughout

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20 Ibid., p. 100.
the years, the once ostracized opponent of religious tradition became a respectable member of a society that defied traditional convictions and obligations. Indeed, the very notion of tradition underwent a far-reaching transformation. For after a few generations of continuous erosion of religion, secularism, which was both established and fashionable, assumed the role of "tradition."22

Zionism: "Preservative Revolution"

In modern times, according to Franz Rosenzweig's incisive characterization, everyone's Jewishness is wriggling on the needle point of a "why."23 The query gave rise to two main responses: Some Jews opted for the deliberate act of assimilation, the obliteration of all Jewish identity; others made strenuous efforts to work out an answer which was contemporary in relevance and, at the same time, upheld the timeless validity of Jewishness. The most radical "survivalist" answer to the challenges threatening the continuity of the Jewish people is Zionism. However, it, too, has failed to escape the tensions that have characterized Jewish life in modern times.

The rationale for modern Zionism is that Jewish life in the dispersed communities is an aberration of nationality, and that normalization can be achieved only by ingathering and the establishment in the historic homeland of an independent, creative Jewish society.24 This view has its antecedents in the long and firmly established Jewish tradition that the dispersion is considered as galut, exile, a condition which will be replaced by ge'ulah, redemption, and the ingathering of the exiles in Eretz Israel.25 In modern Zionism, "normalization" acquired a compelling thrust for immediate, revolutionary change. This is one of the most significant characteristics of modern Jewish nationalism, which differs profoundly from other nationalist movements in its efforts to transform the people's established conditions and ways of life.

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22 The American Catholic philosopher Michael Novak pointed out that the bias of our age leans towards irreligion and that "those who believe in God are now the chief bearers of the tradition of dissent." See Belief and Unbelief (New York, 1967), p. 16.


25 Cf. Nezah Yisrael and other writings of Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague. For a discussion of his theology of Jewish nationalism, see Martin Buber, Ben 'am le-arzo ("Between a People and Its Land"; Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1945), pp. 78-91.
This distinctively Jewish character of Zionism is responsible for the built-in tension between revolution and tradition, a tension that goes far beyond the universal conflicts between the old and new. It is different, too, from the post-emancipation clashes between the Orthodox and the reformers. There is in Zionism a dialectical situation\(^{26}\) that has arisen from the paradox of the Zionist urge to "normalize" the Jewish people in order to preserve it from assimilation and extinction. The thrust for revolution is countervailed by the urge for continuation; the longing to revive the past is offset by the determination to change the tradition.

Every Zionist view begins with a critique of Jewish life in the Diaspora. This leads to the conviction that the Jewish people is faced with a crisis which demands a radical solution, involving politics, culture, society, and even personal lives, to conserve its continuous existence. Thus Zionism may be called a "preservative revolution." Every Zionist, then, faces two questions: 1) how much change is necessary to achieve preservation; 2) how much continuity is ideally important to justify change. The revolution to preserve clearly affects the nonreligious Zionists, but even Orthodox Zionists cannot escape the tensions created by the urge to change and the simultaneous yearning to preserve the tradition.

These inherent tensions influenced the cultural debates that raged in the pre-state years and have intensified since 1948. Although the debaters' positions appeared to be clearly defined as rebels versus traditionalists, the arguments invariably crossed and blurred the demarcation lines; for they reflected the innate paradox and consequent ambivalence within the formally adopted Zionist positions. Every "rebel" had to come to grips with his traditionalism, and every "traditionalist" labored to fashion his rebellion. For while the revolution's goals were set for a state of normalcy, it was not intended to be anything but Jewish normalcy, implying a revival of something that was regarded as ancient and classical.

The theoretical arguments, articulated in Zionist literature in the new settlements in Eretz Israel and, with even greater force, in the State of Israel, were transformed into sharply defined practical, legal, and political ones. Israel's perennial religion-and-state issues did not originate after 1948, and they can be understood only as concretized and politicized versions of the dialectic of the Zionist "preservative revolution." And their full implications can be gauged only in the broader context of the clash between tradition and the movements to change Judaism.

CONTEMPORARY EXEGESIS

There has been a bewildering proliferation of theories to interpret Judaism in contemporary terms. The sheer abundance of exegesis has driven religion to a position where it can mean so many different things that its substance tends to be blurred. Much of the ambiguity derives from the tendency to cling strenuously to traditional patterns of thought, from the desire to preserve the format and the mold of tradition while giving free rein to change in content.

The search for contemporary exegesis is not new in Judaism. What is new is the acute awareness of the revolutionary character of this exegesis. Judaism would long ago have become rigid had it not undergone continual interpretation. In the past, however, this process did not arouse the kind of misgiving or downright suspicion with which modern attempts at exegesis are viewed. In the past, exegesis was an integral and vital part of religious and traditional life, and had the unchangeable sanctity of the texts and laws. Revolutionary interpretation, by contrast, consciously aims at changing the meaning and practice of the traditional texts and laws. Recognition of the implications of contemporary interpretation has thus given rise to a sharp polarization. Reformers and revolutionaries, as well as the Conservative and Orthodox, are alive to historical changes, and both tend to exacerbate their differences. Against the declared intention to alter Judaism radically, the Orthodox strenuously try to preserve a timeless and unchanging Judaism.

However, this polarization is dislocated by the insistence of most reformist and revolutionary Jewish cultural, social, and political movements on the ancient origins of their innovations. They are accompanied by historical exegesis and, although there are many varieties, most of them reflect the desire to represent change as a revival of essential Judaism. Almost no one is satisfied with a new interpretation unless it is shown to represent the true essence of Judaism.

Essence of Judaism

The result is a "retroactive exegesis" which attempts to reinterpret Judaism from its beginnings. It seeks to show that the traditional exegesis was erroneous and that change therefore is a revival of the true meaning of

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Judaism. Modern Jewish thinking, whether religious or professedly secular, is distinguished by a persistent search for the essence of Judaism.²⁸

The quest derived from the assumption that tradition has overlaid Judaism with rigid laws, customs, proscriptions, and teachings that have stifled the essential Judaism. Of course, no one denies that the halakhah has always been the predominant element in Judaism.²⁹ But the rationale of the retroactive exegesis is that the tradition is not necessarily the true, or the only true, interpretation of authentic Judaism. No exegesis can avoid a process of selection and elimination, choosing certain items as salient, while rejecting or suppressing others. Martin Buber wrote of "subterranean Judaism," which, "secret and suppressed, remains authentic and bears witness," in contradistinction to the "official, sham Judaism whose power and public representation have neither authority nor legitimacy."³⁰ He distinguished between religion and religiosity. Religion is the organizing principle: it wants to force the person into a system stabilized for all time, accepting the yoke of the laws. Religiosity is the creative principle: it starts anew with every person in each generation. The dogmas of religion are "handed down as unalterably binding to all future generations without regard for their newly developed religiosity which seeks new forms." Religion, Buber said, can be true and creative only as long as it is imbued with the new meaning that springs from religiosity. Buber maintained that the fence tradition has put around the Torah to guard against alien and dangerous encroachments has very often also "kept at a distance living religiosity."³¹

Buber's theory of two distinct movements, the official religion and the "subterranean" religiosity, rests on a highly subjective exegesis of historical developments. The fact is that there was creative religiosity among official halakhah personalities, and the revolutionary movements of religiosity were marked by a good deal of punctilious rigidity. Though eminently qualified, Buber never made an attempt at a scholarly analysis of history.

²⁸In Die Bauleute, op. cit., Rosenzweig criticized Martin Buber for upholding this approach. The influential work in its support is Leo Baeck's Das Wesen des Judentums ("The Essence of Judaism"), first published in 1905.

²⁹Louis Ginzberg in Students, Scholars and Saints (Philadelphia, 1928, p. 112) quoted Moritz Steinschneider's finding that between the first and 18th centuries almost 80 per cent of Hebrew literature was halakhic material. For divergent views on the role of halakhah in modern Judaism, see Max Wiener, Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation ("Jewish Religion in the Age of the Emancipation"; Berlin, 1933), introduction and chapter 1.

³⁰On Judaism, op.cit., p. 83. Buber first developed this view in his famous Reden über das Judentum ("Addresses on Judaism"), delivered to the Bar-Kokhba Jewish student organization in Prague, 1909–11.

³¹Ibid., p. 91.
He imparted his polemical view of authentic Judaism as he saw it. And he urged rebellion against the established religion, which he held responsible for the "increasing ossification of the law," to achieve the revival of the authentic Judaism, which lives a "mute and underground existence" awaiting the day of renewal:

Religiosity induces sons, who want to find their own God, to rebel against their fathers; religion induces fathers to reject their sons, who will not let their fathers' God be forced upon them.

. I shall try to extricate the unique character of Jewish religiosity from the rubble with which rabbinism and rationalism have covered it.32

Buber's call for renewal was a deliberate break with tradition; but his message was consciously religious.33

**Secular Interpretation of Judaism**

The concomitant radical demand that Zionism declare the secular character of Jewish nationality accentuated the dilemma of how to integrate the religious tradition with secular nationality. The fact was that not even extreme nonreligious Zionists wished to divest their nationalism of tradition; they were dedicated to the renascence of the Jewish people and its culture. They resolved the dilemma with a retroactive exegesis of Judaism that was shorn of religious faith. The new interpretation of Judaism was in keeping with the secular view of Jewish nationality and invested Zionism with a meaning that spanned the centuries of Jewish history.

The most influential exegesis was that of Asher Ginzberg, the Zionist thinker who wrote under the pen name Ahad Ha'am. The role of religion, he argued, was to ensure the survival of the Jewish nation, and this was its real significance in Jewish history. In their struggle against the "yoke" of exile and persecution, Aḥah Ha'am argued, the Jews used the heavy "yoke" of the halakhah as an effective weapon to combat assimilation and extinction. Applying the Darwinian evolutionary "will to survive" to the behavior of peoples, as was fashionable in his time, Aḥad Ha'am regarded the Jewish religion as the product of the collective will of the Jewish nation, which instinctively chose it to assure national survival. It was an instinctive reaction, like that of any living organism, to defend itself when attacked.

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32 Ibd., pp. 52, 80–81; also Nahum N. Glatzer's own criticism, pp. 240–41.
33 See Ernst Simon, "Martin Buber we-emunat Yisrael" (Buber and the Faith of Israel); Iyun, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 1958, pp. 13–50 and Eliezer Berkovits, A Jewish Critique of the Philosophy of Martin Buber (New York, 1962).
Ahad Ha'am's retroactive exegesis empties religion of its intrinsic value and provides it with the functional role of preserving and sustaining the nation throughout the prolonged exile and dispersion. In his essay, "Sabbath and Zionism," he argues that Sabbath observance fulfilled the historic task of preserving the cohesion of the Jewish nation: "It can be said without any exaggeration that more than the people of Israel have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel." However, since religious observance has no intrinsic value, there is no reason not to discard it when it no longer fulfills its function. Carrying the argument a step further, he wrote that, in his view, "our religion is national, that is to say it is a product of our national spirit, but the reverse is not true. If it is impossible to be a Jew in the religious sense without acknowledging our nationality, it is possible to be a Jew in the national sense without accepting many things in which religion requires belief." Ahad Ha'am therefore concludes that, in view of the general decline of religion and growing assimilation among Jews in the modern age, Zionism should do in the 20th century what halakhah achieved in the past: enable the Jewish nation to survive.

Ahad Ha'am affirms the uniqueness of Judaism as a way of life imbued with firmly rooted belief in the principles of justice and morality. The essence of Judaism is musar ha-yahadut, the ethics of Judaism, which is distinctly Jewish because it was shaped and guided by the Jewish nation. He brings the so obviously dominant religious element in Jewish ethics into consonance with his retroactive exegesis by saying Jewish ethics are essentially secular because the religious element was only the means of preserving the core of this ethical system.

One of the most incisive nonreligious critics of Ahad Ha'am was Jacob Klatzkin, a brilliant Zionist thinker. Klatzkin held that on purely philosophical grounds, ethics cannot be classified as national. They are not necessarily associated with a particular people because they may be evolved and accepted by any individual or group, at any time. Agreeing with Ahad Ha'am's rejection of the idea that religious faith is inherent in Jewish

35 Kol kitve Ahad Ha'am ("The Complete Writings of Ahad Ha'am"; Tel Aviv, 1947), pp. 286-87. On Ahad Ha'am's attitude toward religious tradition see especially Leon Simon, "Ahad Ha'am weha-masoret" (Ahad Ha'am and Tradition), Mezudah, London, Vol. 2, 1944, pp. 147-53.
nationality, he argues that, if Judaism were only a faith, it would not have been a national religion. What at all times was distinctively Jewish in the national sense, he maintains, was the pattern of living created by the Jewish nation.

According to Klatzkin, ideals or faith are not elements of Jewish nationalism and are therefore interchangeable at all times. Nationality per se is constituted by the continuing existence of a collective form of living, or patterns of behavior, shared by a people. Ethical ideals or religious faith, on the other hand, are universal. But when individuals are moved by religion to conduct collectively their lives according to an all-embracing pattern of mitzvot, they have, in fact, constituted themselves as a nation. The contents of Jewish culture and religion are the products of Jewish nationality and may undergo radical transformation without affecting nationality. Says Klatzkin: "Hebrew existence does not mean the acceptance of religious creeds or intellectual principles. . . . The definition of nationalism has two aspects: the partnership in the past and the will to continue this partnership in the future."

Klatzkin distinguishes between values and criteria: A belief or a value may be cherished by a people, but it is not the criterion of its nationality. The content of life is a national value, but what is decisive in nationalism is the form, not the content. And since, according to this interpretation, nationality is without content, Klatzkin rejects Aḥad Ha'am's reinterpreted secular Judaism. He was convinced that the observance of the mitzvot is the quintessence of Jewish nationality. He was equally certain that religion is coming to an end. Klatzkin therefore concludes that the Jewish people cannot survive as a nation.

The Jews will then have two alternatives: assimilation in the dispersion or establishment of an independent Jewish society in the national homeland. Only that society will be able to replace the vanishing mitzvot, for it will shape new forms of national Jewish living. In Eretz Israel, the continuity of nationhood will be assured by the very fact that the Jews will live collectively as a nation, on national territory. Then the questions of content, of beliefs and values, will be irrelevant to the fact of national life. Whatever beliefs the people will hold at a particular time will be Jewish because they will be held by Jews. But they will not be intrinsically Jewish because ideas and beliefs are universal and may be held by any individual or people.38

38 Klatzkin's theory of Zionism determined his very negative prognosis for the future of the Jewish Diaspora. Since the old religious bonds were bound to disappear, Jewish nationality would survive only in Eretz Israel. Elsewhere, the Jewish people would disappear by assimilation. Klatzkin further was convinced that there would be a complete break between Eretz Israel and the Diaspora.
Critique of Secular Nationalism

Yehezkel Kaufmann, Zionist philosopher, historian, and Bible scholar, rejected Aḥad Ha'am's "biological nationalism" as unfounded. In his view, national feeling is not an instinctive trait, but derives from an overriding and conscious will to be part of a national entity. That national feelings are not natural is particularly obvious in Jewish history. When the Jewish people were scattered in the Diaspora, its national uniqueness was precisely that it did not succumb to the natural pull of assimilation. Its existence in the Diaspora was thus a struggle against natural instincts.

Why then did the Jews want to survive as a nation—against nature and despite formidable odds? Kaufmann's explanation is the Jewish people's religious faith, which is closely integrated with its nationality:

While the spiritual culture and life of the Jewish people in the diaspora does contain secular nationalistic elements... the element that has been the cause of the Jewish people's unique national survival in exile has been the religious element in our spiritual culture. The decisive proof is that the Jewish people in the Diaspora preserved only that part of its spiritual culture which had acquired the sanctification of religion. This fact clearly proves that adherence to the religious elements in its culture impelled the nation to isolate itself from its neighbors, contrary to nature. Because the nation adhered to its faith, and because it wished to live by that faith even after it became separated from the other elements of its national life, it set up a barrier between itself and the rest of the world and rejected the natural process of assimilation.39

Religion was not used by the nation as a means to achieve survival; rather, adherence to religion impelled it to isolate itself from other peoples and thus it preserved its national uniqueness. Says Kaufmann: "The national existence of the Jewish people in the diaspora, then, is not to be explained by the force of some biological or psychological quality (there is no such basis for any national existence), or by the force of the nature of social reality (as is the case with the existence of other nations), but by the force of religion, which is the source of its national will. Recognition of this fact is fundamental for an understanding of our national life in the past and in the present."40

Kaufmann was aware that for nonreligious Zionists to recognize religion as the source of Jewish nationality involves far more than the academic question of interpreting Jewish history. Jewish nationality exists regardless


of the beliefs and unbeliefs of the Jews. As a matter of fact, the major and most influential part of the Zionist movement has been opposed to religion. As a result, the nonreligious Zionists found themselves in a dilemma which Kaufmann—who regarded himself as one of many Jews who had lost their religious faith—described as follows:

Our situation is indeed tragic. . . . It is hard to reconcile ourselves to the idea that our nationalism derives from a faith that no longer exists in our hearts. This is why we try to find some other basis for our nationalism and devise a "natural nationalism" or a "spiritual nationalism" or other explanations. But if the fate of our nation has been ordained, shall we avert the evil of the decree by ignoring the truth? On the other hand, if relief and deliverance are to be our lot, only a recognition of our true position can show us the road we must take.

The dilemma of the unbelieving Zionist was dramatically described by the Hebrew writer Mordekhai Ze'ev Feuerberg in 1899 in his story, "Le-an" (Whither). Nachman, its hero, lives in unbearable tension between his loss of faith and his attachment to the Jewish people, which finally leads him to break with the tradition and the community in a symbolic act: he extinguishes the candle in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. The shocked community is convinced that Nachman is mad. Nachman, himself, is deeply troubled by his action. What impelled him to desecrate the most holy day?

I am miserable . . . because I am a son of a people which has nothing in the world except religion. You have only two possibilities: to fight for religion or against religion—but I want to be a free man. The purpose of my life is not to fight for or against religion. . . I sense in my heart different yearnings and I hope to do different things in my world and among my people.°

Religion is a problem which he wants to escape; yet tradition weighs so heavily upon him that he is compelled to face it—and work out a position that is Jewish and nonreligious at the same time.

The complexity of the situation has probably been the main reason for the popularity of Aḥad Ha’am’s exegesis. By imputing to Judaism a secular “essence,” he could work out a formula for a Judaism that is both traditional and ultramodern, and tailored to the secular Zionist. It provides a simple and acceptable answer for those who wish to give up religion and retain Jewish nationality. Thus, tradition can be embraced without religious commitment by preserving traditional nomenclature and secularizing content.

In Israel, traditional texts are occasionally secularized without a change in the basic wording. To cite but a few examples: During the festival of Hanukkah, the nonbelieving Israeli sings, “Who can utter the mighty acts

°Ketavim (“Writings”; Tel Aviv, 1964), p. 85.
of Israel?" instead of "the mighty acts of God" of Psalm 106. At memorial ceremonies, the religious Yizkor Elohim is often replaced by Yizkor 'am Yisrael or Nizkor (we shall remember). On Israel's Independence Day in the 1950s, some cities spanned their streets with festive banners announcing, "This is the day which Zahal [the Israel army] has made; we will be glad and rejoice thereon,"—a secularized version of Psalm 118, substituting "Zahal" for "the Lord." The famous verse in chapter four of the Book of Zechariah is often quoted, but with a slight, though significant, change. Instead of the biblical text "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, sayeth the God of Hosts," they quote: "but by the spirit." In a popular children's dance based on the last verse of the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:31) the children sing, "So perish all your enemies, O Israel," instead of "O LORD."

Still, there were some for whom Ahad Ha'am's thinking was not radical enough. Among its most popular critics were the writers Joseph Hayyim Brenner and Micah Joseph Berdichevski, who urged Zionism to repudiate unequivocally the link between the Jewish nation and any form of Judaism.42 In his novels and essays Brenner challenges his readers to subject Jewish life to uncompromising criticism, to hate the past, and to create a new life through Zionism.43 Berdichevski turns Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the Umwertung aller Werte (revaluation of all values) into a challenge to contemporary Jewish life, urging a fundamental revision of its foundations: "We must cease to be tablets on which books are transcribed and thoughts handed down to us—always handed down." Jewish revival, he held, can be accomplished only by revolution. "The Jews must come first, before Judaism; the living man, before the legacy of his ancestors."44

Zionism fosters a pronounced historical consciousness and an enhanced sense of historic continuity; for without them the Jews' attachment to

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43Avraham Kariv, in Adabberah we-yirwah li ("I Shall Speak to Find Relief"; Tel Aviv, 1961), has criticized this negative evaluation of Jewish diaspora life, which is shared by other modern Hebrew writers. Kaufmann, (Golah we-nekhar, vol 2, pp. 411–14) characterized this aspect of Zionist ideology as antishemiyut me-ahavah, antisemitism arising out of love for the Jewish people. See also his "Antisemitic Stereotypes in Zionism," Commentary, March 1949, pp. 239–45.
44"Ahad Ha'am wrote a spirited criticism of the application of the idea of revaluation of values to Jewish life. See Leon Simon, tr. and ed., Ahad Ha'am, Essays, Letters, Memoirs. (Oxford, 1946). It is significant that this debate is reflected in the writings of the leading Hebrew poets of pre-state Zionism. Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) was deeply influenced by Aḥad Ha'am, while Saül Tchernichowsky (1875–1943) was close to the thinking of Brenner and Berdichevski.
nation and land would have withered. But the simultaneous urge for change and revolt against the past has continued, and, for this reason, the debate about Judaism that arose with the beginnings of Zionism continues to agitate the cultural and religious life in Israel. It not only affects relations between religious and nonreligious Israelis, but also cuts across all movements, trends, parties, and political and cultural opinion. Viewed in the context of modern Jewish history, the conflict contains a decidedly creative element: the commitment to, and search for, the contemporary relevance of Judaism. It is symptomatic of the disputants' concern for this relevance, although the discussions admittedly often deteriorate into acrimonious, even obnoxious, political wrangling.

AFTER 1948

Extremist Anti-Zionism

There are in Israel also exponents of extreme anti-Zionist positions: the religious extremists, the Neture Karta ("guardians of the city"), and the secular extremists, the Canaanites. Although both are no more than tiny fringe sects, their ideas find acceptance among some religious and secular groups. For the Neture Karta, Zionism is an affliction, a shocking heresy.

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46 Its Aramaic name is derived from the Jerusalem Talmud, Hagiga 1:7, which describes the city's military guards as its destroyers, and the scholars as its true guardians. For Neture Karta's theology, see two books by its leader, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmarer rebbe, who lives in New York: Wa-yo'el Mosheh (Jerusalem, 1962) and Kuntres 'al ha-ge'ulah we-'al ha-temurah (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1967). For a sympathetic appraisal see Yerachmiel Domb, The Transformation (London, 1958); Emile Marmorstein, Heaven at Bay (London, 1969); for a critical discussion, see Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of the Neturei Karta—According to the Satmarer Version," Tradition, Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall 1971, pp. 38-53.

47 "Canaanites" was the epithet used to describe the small group of Hebrew writers who, in the early forties, advocated the view that a new "Hebrew" nation will develop in Eretz Israel, which will relate to the peoples who had inhabited the area before the advent of Judaism. In time, this group adopted the derisory name originally used by its opponents. For its ideology, see Yonathan Ratosh, "The New Hebrew Nation," in Ben Ezer, Unease in Zion, op.cit., pp. 201-34. On its literary aspects, see Baruch Kurzweil, "The New 'Canaanites' in Israel," Judaism, Vol. 2, No. 1, January 1953.

48 The Neture Karta are thought to number only a few dozen families, the Canaanites about a dozen writers.
in Judaism, to be utterly condemned and given no religious legitimacy. Any possible religious or cultural influence it may have on Jews must be obliterated. Judaism and Jewish life must remain untouched by modern interferences. The Canaanites believe life in Israel is so radically new and normal that it brooks no relationship to the Jewish people in the Diaspora, now or in the past. The new "Hebrew" nation emerging in the new State of Israel comprises both Jews and Arabs and obliterates past affiliations. It is a continuation of the classic Hebrew nation anteceding Judaism. The Canaanites, therefore, reject both Zionism and Jewishness. The insistence of Zionism on the link with Jewish history and the Jewish people in the Diaspora, they hold, distorts and stunts the growth of the new and normal Hebrew nation.\footnote{See Benjamin Eliav, 

In rejecting Zionism, both the Neture Karta and the Canaanites declare their determination to ignore the cultural and religious problems inherent in modern Jewish life. The Neture Karta is doing so by repudiating the new; the Canaanites, by discarding the old. While Israelis generally oppose the extravagances of the extremists, many lend qualified support to some of their positions. What is of decisive significance is that the overwhelming majority of Israelis reject cut-and-dried polarizations, and continue to grapple with the ideologies that perpetuate the inner conflicts and tensions over the meaning of Jewishness.

*Judaism as Living Civilization*

Under the impact of Zionism, and particularly of the new conditions in the State of Israel, the confrontation between modernity and Judaism has taken a new turn. According to Gershom Scholem, leading expert in Jewish mysticism, Judaism is regarded not merely as a body of religious knowledge and practice, but as the living civilization of a nation. Therefore, the Jew's relationship to Judaism is both committed and critical. Judaism imposes itself upon him, but he is not bound by it.\footnote{See "Education for Judaism: Prof. Gershom Scholem Talks with Educators," *Dispersion and Unity*, No. 12, 1971, pp. 205-14; cf. also note 26.} Unlike \Ahad Ha'am, Scholem does not produce a retroactive exegesis. His argument is that there is no unalterable definition of Judaism; that Judaism is a living phenomenon, to be interpreted by each generation in a process of selection and rejection. The meaning of living Judaism should not be bound by the dogmatic defini-
tions of the rabbinical traditions. Even the most Orthodox are selective in that they quite often suppress what they consider undesirable in tradition.

What then should be retained of the tradition? For Scholem, this is a dogmatic question posing no real problem: "I go far in identifying myself with the past, with my forefathers, and I nevertheless do not arrive at dogmatic conclusions from that." Scholem argues that no people can exist without fostering "the feeling for tradition," but that each generation, on the basis of profound understanding of, and identification with, the tradition should evaluate it from its own vantage point. Scholem advocates that Jews should not commit themselves to the traditional exegesis, but should retain open minds and hearts so that they can work out their own interpretation of Jewishness, without interference of any kind. The religious believer should accept the possibility of an atheistic Judaism, if it does not reject the Jewish heritage. This approach excludes the explicit Canaanite ideology, as well as the hubris of some Israelis who speak in terms of "it all begins with us here" or "we have created it all with our own hands."

Kibbutz Movement

Preoccupation with the religious heritage is, perhaps surprisingly, most energetic and consistent in Israel's secular kibbutz movement. The kibbutzim were founded, and their life-style was shaped, by halutzim, members of the Jewish socialist movement, who had left Eastern Europe in open rebellion against the Jewish religion. Often, their rejection of religion was not based on reasoning; it was self-understood, in keeping with a prevailing

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51 In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), p. 312, Scholem discusses the potentially important effects of the Zionist non-Orthodox view of Judaism: "Seen from a theological point of view, it may in a quite different fashion lead to a new manner of religious inquiry which will then not be determined simply by formulas inherited from an earlier generation."

52 Abba Kovner, poet and a member of a Hashomer Hatzair kibbutz, castigated this view as an "infantile myth," in "Mi'fagash me-'ever la-hashekhah" (Meeting Beyond the Darkness), *Yalkut Moreshet*, No. 17, February 1974.

53 Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook believed that the growth of irreligiosity among young Jews in Eastern Europe and in Eretz Israel was mainly due to social issues. See Zvi Yaron, *Mishnato shel Ha-rav Kook* ("The Philosophy of Rabbi Kook"; Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 33–52.

54 Curiously enough, the name Kibbutz was adopted by the halutzim from the Bratzlaver Hasidim; see Judah Ya'ari, "Be-derekh hatatim" (On the Fearsome Road), in *Sefer ha-'aliyah ha-shelishit* ("The Book of the Third Aliyah"; Tel Aviv, 1964).
mode of looking at the world. They simply “could not understand how a young man could be religious in these times.”

The irreligion of the halutzim was articulate, and dominated the ideological and cultural developments of the kibbutzim. And yet, it was in this conspicuously and deliberately secular atmosphere that some of the most significant grappling with Jewish tradition took place. The confrontation began in the early days of the movement, when rebellion was still strong. The kibbutz participated in an antireligious revolt, but, at the same time, it consciously gave secular form to many teachings of Judaism and patterns of Jewish living. It thus has become suffused with Jewish purpose and culture. The Jewishness of the first generation of kibbutzniks did not conflict with the pronounced secularism of the kibbutz. But the second and third generations appear to be coming under the spell of a sort of Israeli-Jewish “Hansen’s law.” While the first generation of halutzim felt the need to rebel against East European religious Jewishness, the second and third are content that the revolt has achieved its purpose, and the sabra kibbutznik can now tackle his Jewishness without the strain of the compelling call to rebellion. The problem of the nonreligious sabra is his sense of alienation from the Jewish heritage. The early halutzim broke away from something they knew intimately; the sabra wonders how he can fill his life with a clearly identifiable Jewish cultural heritage, from which he is estranged.

This development is by no means limited to the kibbutz movement. Urban young people in Israel have been asking similar questions. But because the kibbutz is an intensely ideological way of life, and is regarded by the Israeli public and the Zionist movement as the best and most ethical


56The religious kibbutzim were established only in the 1930s, and remained a tiny minority. See Meir Orlean, *Ha-kibbutz ha-dati we-hitpattehuto* (“The Religious Kibbutz and its Development”; Tel Aviv, 1946); Aryeh Fishman, ed., *The Religious Kibbutz Movement* (Jerusalem, 1957).


58A theory advanced by Marcus L. Hansen regarding differences between successive immigrant generations in the United States (see reprint of his “The Third Generation in America,” *Commentary*, Vol. 14, No. 5, November 1952, pp. 492–500). It describes the first immigrant generation as rooted in the culture of the country of origin; the second generation as torn between the culture of their parents and that of their native country and anxious to erase the immigrant past; the third generation as no longer feeling this conflict or the need to assimilate. Lilker (ibid., pp. 88–116) has applied Hansen’s law to the changing attitudes to religion in the kibbutz.
expression of the Zionist ideals, it is far more exposed to publicity, and its members carry far more influence than their number warrants. Kibbutzniks are encouraged to voice critical views, even complaints, and it is quite usual for their publications to carry articles and discussions on all aspects of kibbutz life. Interest in these statements is particularly strong because the kibbutz is assumed to have always been a hotbed of antireligious ideology and strongly negative attitude to the Jewish past. Though this view is too simplistic and one-sided, it is encouraged by much of the “official” literature of the kibbutz which seeks to emphasize its secular humanist values. The average Israeli sees the kibbutznik’s probing as a reflection—perhaps more intensive and articulate—of his own hopes, anxieties and doubts.

That is why *Siah lohamim* ("Soldiers’ Conversation") became a best-seller and one of the most argued books in Israel. It appeared at a time when Israelis were still experiencing the elation of victory after the six-day war. There was a strange disparity between that feeling and the introspective thinking of young kibbutz members who had fought in the war and were now searching for the meaning of their Jewishness. And this was by no means an isolated outburst, which may have been described as a kind of “shell-shock philosophy” or “foxhole religion.” The most incisive questioning of the official kibbutz opposition to religion is continuously raised in *Shedemot* ("Furrows"), the unconventional quarterly issued by young members of all kibbutz movements. It does not herald a religious revival in the kibbutzim; it rather reflects the tension between young kibbutzniks’ spiritual gropings and kibbutz ideology, as sharply indicated by a young member who chided the kibbutz founders for eradicating religion without offering a substitute, thus creating a profound feeling of spiritual emptiness.

Another collection of conversations of young kibbutzniks, *Ben ze’irim* ("Among Young People") was published a year later, as a sequel to *Siah*.
lohamim. It, too, aroused a good deal of heartsearching in the kibbutzim and elsewhere in Israel. But like the earlier volume, it was strong on questions and elusive on answers. The kibbutzniks condemned their parents and teachers for rejecting the religious traditions, but only few were ready to accept belief in God. Our life is empty, was the often-repeated complaint: "We live a grey life 365 days a year." They wanted to come to grips with what they called "the mystery of the existence of the Jewish people." The questions tumbled out in staggering confusion: What is the meaning and purpose of our life? Why are we hated by the Arabs? What is the point of the kibbutz? Why is Jewish history an almost unbroken string of persecution and death? Does Jewishness mean existence as such, or does it imply Jewish content and meaning? If we can't have religious faith, should we at least observe some traditional customs? Are we Jews or Israelis, or Israeli Jews? Are we Jews because we have to be Jews, that is to say because other people—Gentiles, Arabs, antisemites—regard us as Jews? Or has the fact of our being different some meaning calling for a commitment, and if so, a commitment to what, for what purpose? Or perhaps, as some argued, we need not worry about meaning and purpose: we live, we exist, and we want to continue living, and that's all. The discussions were marked by a never-ending tentativeness.

Role of Bible

The heightened sense of tragedy after the Yom Kippur war of 1973 intensified discontent with the view that the existence of the State of Israel solves all problems inherent in Jewish life. There is a restlessness and a sensitive awareness that the meaning of Jewishness is eluding a generation which has become estranged from religious faith. The conviction has been growing that Israel ought to be a means for revitalizing the content of Jewish life.

It is significant that in Israel the Hebrew word masoret (tradition) is used to describe religion. The equation of religion and tradition persists in the Jewish consciousness, although the rise of Jewish nationalism was possible only after the religious tradition had undergone a process of secularization. A recent study of Jewish identity among young sabras shows that the

62See also symposium on "Historical Continuity and Traditional Values," Hedim (the quarterly of the Hashomer Hatzair Kibbutzim), No. 97, May 1972; radio discussion on "Is God in the Kibbutz?", published in Ofek, Vol. 2, Spring 1972; discussion on a humanistic kaddish, opened by Meir Ayali, a member of kibbutz Yifat and a leading Israeli educator, which was published in Davar, February 18, March 23, April 1, 1971.

concept "Jewish" continues to have "both a religious and national connotation"; that they regard their Jewishness as consisting of "inextricably interwoven" national and religious elements. This is precisely why the normalized national-secular (Israeli) element is in constant friction with the traditional-religious (Jewish) one, and why this friction is not limited to the conspicuous conflicts between religious and nonreligious Israelis, but affects the inner life of almost every Israeli.

One of the most important attempts in Israel to overcome the dichotomy of revolution-tradition is to regard the Bible as the fountainhead of the state's new and normalized Jewish culture. This will enable the atheist to embrace the Bible as the source of his attachment to the Jewish people and its culture. The Bible for him is the literature of the ancient people of Israel living in its homeland, a normal and healthy nation. While the religiosity of the Bible cannot be denied, the atheist's commitment is not to its religion, but to its humanistic values. Rabbinic Judaism, in his eyes, is not suitable for the new, normal life because it developed in exile, reflecting its stunting and thwarting influence.

The Bible was seen as the exclusive source of Judaism in the initial stages of Zionist settlement in Eretz Israel in the beginning of the 20th century. After 1948 the search for ancient roots in the "old-new" country spurred extraordinary public interest in archaeology, accompanied by an unabated and widespread enthusiasm for Bible study. Israel is the only country in the world where a Bible quiz is a national event; where Bible reading and commentary is broadcast daily during prime listening time. The annual Bible Conference, devoted entirely to the study of the Bible, lasts four days, and is attended by hundreds of people. Numerous Bible study circles and seminars are held in cities and in kibbutzim. Many are for women, mostly housewives, and others are for workers, clerks, and professionals. Many of the seminars are held in factory and office buildings.

This activity is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition: the religious duty to study the weekly *parashah* (pericope), read in the synagogue on the Sabbath; the reading by women of the old Yiddish *Ze'enah u-re'enah*, a translation of the *parashiyot* and homilectical commentary; the interpretation of the Bible for each generation by a long line of Jewish exegetes. In Israel, this tradition has taken on new meaning; the Bible is the prototype of Israel's renewed normal life. This view was vigorously stated by David

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Ben-Gurion in his many writings on biblical themes. They reflect efforts to ascribe spiritual significance to contemporary events that have changed the life of the Jewish nation.

In Ben-Gurion's scheme of things, the Bible is the core and essence of Jewishness, the vital force that has preserved the Jewish people. It has imbued the Jewish people throughout its history with faith in redemption and in the return to Zion. Jews prayed daily for redemption, and were confident that their prayers would be fulfilled. The Bible also taught the Jews "the essence of the teaching of the Prophets and the ethics of Judaism," which became the universal values for human behavior.

Ben-Gurion was scornful of the "clever people" who regard as chauvinistic the belief in Israel as a "chosen people." Israel is indeed a chosen people, not because God chose Israel, but because Israel chose God. The historical facts are that God was elected by the Jewish people; that the Jewish people distinguished itself from other nations in that it decided to believe in one God.

Ben-Gurion was painstakingly careful not to exclude God from this vision. Man is made not only of matter; and even matter is not purely matter. There is something great and terrible and mysterious, which we call spirit. Some people call this mystery God. But, argued Ben-Gurion, giving this mystery a name does not end the mystery. We know from the Bible how the biblical persons interpreted that mystery; they called it God. This is as close as he came to theology. It is less than what in Jewish tradition is meant by belief in God, but implies far more than the classic agnostic nonbelief. Perhaps Ben-Gurion's religion is some kind of Spinozist pantheism; for despite his repeated asseverations concerning the human origin of the Bible and of humanistic ethics, he unfailingly returned to declare his profound wonder at the ineffable.

The apparent incompatibility of secular disbelief and the realization that the Bible is in some sense beyond the human experience has kept alive the tension affecting attachment to the Bible. The Israeli atheist, therefore, must confront the Bible's religious character. In theory it is, of course, possible to study the Bible in a purely scholarly and scientific manner, treating it as a collection of ancient texts and subjecting it to modern philological meth-


ods of textual analysis. Although this is the rationale for the curriculum of the Bible faculties at Israeli universities, no one tries to deny that the Israeli concern with the Bible stems from a profoundly spiritual commitment and a deeply ingrained "nonscientific" conviction that the Bible is quite unlike any other book.

"GODLESS" BIBLE

In 1952 a leading nonreligious kibbutz educator published a book of Bible stories which deliberately omitted any mention of God. He argued in the preface that the Bible should be treated as manifestly human literature; that the nonreligious educator should have "the courage to restore, as far as possible, the Bible's secular texture." Since the Bible is man's faith and deals with "human pathos," Bible stories should contain no reference to the divine.

The book created somewhat of a sensation in educational circles. Some of the angriest protests came from other nonreligious teachers, who were aghast at the thought that anyone should tamper with the ancient and hallowed text of the Bible. They were, of course, aware that the idea of the godless Bible followed from the consistent application of their conviction that man was the measure of all things and that religion was man's projection of human nature into the beyond. But they thought it futile to try to solve the problem of their attachment to what was obviously a religious book by rewriting the Bible and eliminating all mention of divinity.

HUMANISTIC APPROACH TO BIBLE

While the godless Bible was soon forgotten, the underlying issue of nonreligious commitment to the Bible is very much alive. For if man is entirely on his own and if nothing transcends experience, there is a serious difficulty in the biblical assertion that God addresses man and that man responds to God. A leading Israeli Bible scholar, Professor Shmaryahu Talmon, raises this question in an essay, "The Bible in Contemporary Israeli Humanism." Talmon admits that the Bible is "the cornerstone of the Jewish national-cultural heritage." However, he argues, the present generation needs a logical justification for the esteem in which the Bible is...
held in Israel, since the nonreligious Israeli embraces "humanism without God and without faith and yet yearns for a return to the historic sources of Jewish culture and strives to determine a place for the Bible in his own world of ideas." Talmon's solution is for nonbelieving Jews to have a purely humanistic approach to the Bible by emphasizing objective study and research, and to abstain carefully from "identifying" with it. The Bible should have a central role as the primary source of the early history and the beginning of the faith of the people of Israel, and as the foundation of the Hebrew language and literature. Talmon also suggests that normative values be drawn from the Bible. In this way, he holds, "The subjection of the will of the individual to the essential goals of his society, which is characteristic of biblical thought, may become a formative factor in the solidification of the Israeli society and a force which unites it with the Jewish people at large." Thus, nonreligious Jews can find in the Bible a theory of man and society "which can serve as a basis for a new Jewish humanism." Although Talmon then confesses that it may not after all be possible to work the Bible into a secular pattern of thought, he expresses the hope that an approach of "intellectual enlightenment" may yet enable convinced atheists to discover in the Bible "the bases of a humanistic faith." 69

That this question is of primary concern to nonreligious Israelis who study the Bible was pointed out by Professor Shelomo D. Goitein. 70 When he asked his students to indicate their chief concern about teaching the Bible, the usual reply was what to do about God in the Bible. In a chapter significantly entitled "Beruah ha-kaodesh" (In the Spirit of Holiness), Goitein attempts to persuade all of them, no matter what their convictions, not to ignore God in teaching the Bible. It is, he states, impossible to excise God from the Bible; teaching the Bible without God would be an educational travesty. Teachers, even the unreligious, should talk about God with understanding and veneration, and emphasize that God speaks to us through the Bible. For those who do not believe in the existence of God there is "educational meaning" in learning about the biblical God and valuable humanistic experience in reading the Bible and listening to the "God of the Bible." 71

The religious person is bound to reject this approach. Abraham Joshua

70 Hora'at ha-Tanakh ("Teaching the Bible"; Tel Aviv, 1957); cf. Zvi Adar, Humanistic Values in the Bible (New York, 1967).
71 This bears strong similarity to Reconstructionism; cf. Mordecai M. Kaplan, Questions Jews Ask (New York, 1956), pp. 82–85.
Heschel repeatedly insisted on the need for a radical decision: either God exists, or the Bible is a scandal. In his view, the Bible "is primarily not man's vision of God but God's vision of man," as the Prophets claimed to have perceived it. If their claim is false, we should condemn them as impostors. "The Bible has either originated in a lie or in an act of God." But in Israel the Bible is not only an issue of religious faith. It has become an issue of personal value commitment and of identification with the Jewish past. The people's attitude toward the Bible is thus inherent in the cultural and religious dialectic of the Zionist preservative revolution.

**Religious vs. Nonreligious Establishment**

As the almost total engrossment with *mamlakhtiyut*, statehood, in the early days of Israel's existence began to give way to emphasis on the content of Jewish nationality and a growing willingness to infuse culture and the patterns of living with Jewish tradition, even with its religious aspects, public friction caused by religious issues became more frequent and acrimonious.

Two distinct views prevail on anything related to religion, Jewishness, or tradition. These are discussed and worked out among the Orthodox religious on the one side, and the non-Orthodox on the other, with no dialogue between the two. The Orthodox discuss problems related to Orthodoxy, the non-Orthodox are concerned with the questions of Jewishness in an ostensibly secular culture. In the main, the two sides debate with each other only the divisive religious issues affecting public and political life. The non-Orthodox concentrate their arguments on religious coercion, freedom of individual conscience, and separation of religion and state, and say almost nothing about why they oppose religious faith. The result is that Israelis never hear of the purely religious aspects of the issues involved, only of those that are conspicuous in public life and therefore inevitably affect both the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Even the question of the Reform and

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73 Before the establishment of the state, it was yishuvism, which emphasized the predominance in Zionism of the *yishuv*, Eretz Israel's Jewish community.

74 In "Beri'at ha-bore" (The Creation of the Creator), *Al Hamishmar*, November 7, 1965, Dov Bar-Nir urges people to study antireligious thought, for, he complains, "Many people in this country, and in particular young people, are no longer aware that there is a philosophy which negates the principles of religion."
Conservative movements is raised not in terms of their claims as alternatives to Orthodoxy, but solely in reference to the legal and public recognition of their rabbis and congregations.

The character of the dispute is determined by a consensus that religious belief is definitely not at issue; for the Orthodox and non-Orthodox have the same view of the character and essence of Judaism. They oppose each other only on whether to accept or reject it. The consensus derives from the fact that religious life and thought in Israel have been shaped largely by East European and Middle Eastern communities. The influence of these groups is evident in the composition of the rabbinate, and in the prevailing conception of the rabbi’s role in the community. It is equally apparent in the general view of religious education, which in practice favors the inclusion of secular studies, but in principle opposes synthesis. Most religious Israelis accept academic training as professionally necessary, though they have not yet integrated it into the religious scheme and are uneasy about “worldly education."

Orthodox Jewish life of Eastern Europe was wholly oriented to the spiritual and was contemptuous of _divel_, the worldly aspects of life. This philosophy does not totally reject the sciences and secular knowledge, but regards them as outside the religious sphere. They are relegated to that large neutral realm of things necessary for earning a living and remaining healthy, thereby combining a pragmatic formula for living with traditional disdain for the “worldly.”

East European religious thinking is well suited to the Israelis of the Oriental Sephardi communities. They came from countries where Jews did not experience the complex confrontation that affected European Jews. They either remained strictly within the Jewish fold or assimilated to the non-Jewish culture. Only in Israel have they begun to face the modern Jewish dilemma—the confrontation between traditional religion and a secularism with intense national consciousness. However, opposition to religion moved neither the Oriental Sephardim nor the East European Jews to engage in noteworthy philosophical debates. The main argument of the nonreligious is that religion is outmoded and superfluous, of no value in the contemporary world of science and enlightenment. This type of anti-religion could not produce a religious reform movement, for such a movement can only arise from _religious_ dissatisfaction with Orthodoxy. The total negation of religion by the East European Jew, and by some Middle Eastern

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Sephardim, is possible only when religion is considered not important enough to warrant reform.\textsuperscript{76} Faced with this onslaught, Orthodoxy shored up its defenses against secularization by conducting a virtual battle against all inroads and innovations.\textsuperscript{77}

\textit{The Rabbinate}

The absence of dialogue between the opposing groups is also reflected in Israeli religious literature. Despite a considerable annual output of homiletic writings, less than half a dozen recently published books indicate awareness of the nature of the current challenges to religious faith. The rabbis ignore the problems that concern young religious Israelis who study science, read literature, listen to the radio, go to the movies, and, above all, mingle in the army with other young people of the most varied backgrounds. With few exceptions, the attitude of the rabbis is one of aloofness from the spiritual upheavals of our time and the encroachments of modern culture on tradition. This is reflected in the rabbinate's almost complete preoccupation with practical \textit{halakhah}, with "conspicuous" religion, particularly the public observance of kashrut and the Sabbath, and with marriage and divorce. It is almost completely silent on matters of thought and rarely speaks out on social problems. There is an old joke that an Israeli who is a vegetarian and gets along with his wife will never need a rabbi.

Of the 400 practicing rabbis in Israel, only a handful are university graduates. Moreover, Israel is the only free country with a large Jewish population that has no rabbinical seminary. An attempt, in 1934, to transfer the Orthodox Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary from Berlin to Jerusalem was successfully opposed by the rabbinate.\textsuperscript{78} And when Bar Ilan university was established in 1954, the rabbinate exacted a promise from the founders that it would not have a department for the training of rabbis, although it was originally modeled after Yeshiva University in New York, which has a rabbinical school.

There is a glaring lack of communication between the rabbinate and Israeli society, the modern Orthodox as well as the nonreligious. The rabbinate, which thinks and lives in the past, is unaware of the complexities of


\textsuperscript{77}Opposition to all novelty was summed up in a catch phrase, \textit{hadash asur min ha-Torah}, anything new is prohibited by the Torah. See Meir Herschkovitz, \textit{Rabbi Z. H. Chayes} (Jerusalem, 1972), pp. 75, 143.

\textsuperscript{78}Rabbi Leo Jung, "Rabbiner-Seminar für das orthodoxe Judentum," \textit{Encyclopædia Judaica}.
contemporary issues, and its unsophisticated attempts at solutions are irrelevant. Instinctively, its initial reaction is to oppose innovation, a stand it frequently is forced to revise after further consideration of a particular case. No wonder that the so-called "religious establishment" is turning inward and is avoiding what must be a painful confrontation with modern realities.

Opposing the rabbinate is an equally authoritative "nonreligious establishment" which has no interest in religion, yet is intent on retaining a fairly large measure of Jewish tradition in national life and culture. It accepts the distinction between Orthodox-religious and nonreligious as an unalterable division. If the establishment Orthodox are convinced that the only true Jewishness is in Orthodoxy, the establishment nonreligious are persuaded that religion is irrelevant to modern life.

State of Belief

It would, however, be incorrect to conclude that the religious situation is one of polarization between the Orthodox and nonreligious establishments. It is vastly more complex, involving numerous divisions and subdivisions in opinions and beliefs among both the religious and nonreligious that are inherent in religion, but are particularly pronounced in Israel as a result of the tensions of the Zionist preservative revolution.

The complexity of the situation is heightened by the difficulty of understanding the Hebrew terms used to describe the extent of religious belief, or opposition: hilloni, translated as secular; dati, as religious; and masorati, as traditional. The meaning and implications of these terms are far from simple. Although a hilloni is secular, it does not necessarily follow that he does not believe in God; he may even occasionally attend synagogue. Dati is usually confined to the Orthodox. A masorati, or traditional Jew, may light Sabbath candles or refrain from eating nonkosher food; he also may pray regularly and observe mitzvot, though usually selectively.

There is a good deal of overlapping. A person who thinks of himself as hilloni may also describe himself as masorati. And an Orthodox Jew may correctly be defined as masorati. At the same time, any person may rightfully define himself as masorati, arguing that no culture is without tradition. Some people may hesitate to define themselves as hilloni because of its

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possible atheist connotation. And there are some religious persons who prefer to describe themselves as masorati.\(^9\)

More than half of the Israelis can be accurately described as masorati, in the sense that they are not fully observant but are traditional with regard to some beliefs, or certain mitzvot and customs. Many observe kashrut in varying degrees; observe some of the Sabbath mitzvot, attend synagogue services more or less often, and want to be married in a traditional religious ceremony. According to a “Pori” poll of July 1973, over 70 per cent of the respondents said they eat only kosher food; among the Orientals the percentage was 87 (Ha-are\(\tilde{z}\), September 2, 1973). There are no figures on Sabbath observance. The question of civil versus religious marriage—whether the state should give legal recognition to civil marriages—has become a political issue, and the polls deal exclusively with this aspect.

Outside of Israel, the confusion is even greater. For example, when Israelis speak of dati, they clearly think of Orthodox religious only. Elsewhere, the translation of the term as “religious” is understood as referring to all religious movements in Judaism.\(^8\)

The common usage of dati is annoying to Israelis who are consciously religious, but not Orthodox. They maintain that their opposition to the observance of the unchanged halakhah should make them non-Orthodox, but by no means hilloni, secular and nonreligious.

The question of the definition of religiosity is, of course, of primary importance to the Reform and Conservative congregations in Israel in their quest for full legal and public recognition. These congregations, offering Israelis new religious alternatives, began to make an impact only in the 1960s; of the 6,000 synagogues in Israel in 1974, 11 were Reform and 13 Conservative.\(^8\)

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform) stresses its dedication to a “renewal of Jewish tradition to meet the needs of our time; respect for the past; inspiration for the present and creative openness for the future; rights for women, who participate as equals in the services; relating

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\(^9\)A public opinion poll, conducted by Diwwuah we-Sikkur Institute in Jerusalem and published in the daily Yedi\(\acute{o}t\) Aharonot (May 11, 1973), pointed up this confusion and overlapping.

\(^8\)The misunderstanding caused by David Ben-Gurion’s use of dati is discussed in Avi-hai, op. cit., pp. 237–38.

\(^8\)While the first Conservative congregation was established in 1937, the Conservative movement began to function only in 1960. The first Reform congregation was founded in 1957. A Mevakshe derekh (Seekers of the Way) congregation, established in Jerusalem in 1962, is neither Orthodox nor affiliated with any of the non-Orthodox movements.
Jewish values to contemporary issues of Israeli society." The United Synagogue of Israel (Conservative) uses in its appeal to the public a phrase from the writings of the late Chief Rabbi Kook: "To renew the old and sanctify the new." The continuing numerical weakness and religious isolation of these movements emphasize the over-all identification of religion with Orthodoxy. By 1974, neither the Conservative nor the Reform had been significantly active in educational and cultural work. The general impression remains that, unlike Orthodoxy, they are not indigenous to Israel.

However, despite formal labels and organizational definitions, religious beliefs and observances in Israel are not only Orthodox. The situation is comparable to that in Britain, where the establishment religion and the majority of formal synagogue affiliations are Orthodox and most Jews identify religion with the Orthodox tradition, but where there is considerable variation in religious faith and practice. A large number of Israelis work out their religion in terms that elsewhere would clearly be defined as Reform or Conservative. Many who describe themselves as hilloni are actually indistinguishable from American Reform, Reconstructionist, or left-wing Conservative Jews. There are, too, the basic differences between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, which are by no means limited to nusah (text of prayers) and ritual observance; they are quite distinct in religious outlook and the treatment of religious problems.

"Jewish Consciousness"

The most important debate on the subject of Jewishness and its religious implications began when the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1959 introduced a program of toda'ah yehudit, "Jewish consciousness," into the nonreligious-school curriculum. The English translation does not transmit the deeper commitment implied by the Hebrew phrase. It means, above all, that much more should be taught about Judaism. For example, children should learn the religious significance of festivals, not the secularized meaning. They should become familiar with synagogue procedures; know the prayers and religious laws, and even study talmudic literature.

The purpose of this program, an official directive of the ministry ex-
plained, is "not to adopt a historical approach to the subject, but rather to treat Judaism as capable of contributing to contemporary issues." The program's sponsors always carefully pointed out that its aim was not to achieve the pupils' actual commitment to religion, but to familiarize the young generation with religious thought, the mitzvot and customs, and generally to "develop a sympathetic understanding for the traditional forms of Jewish life."

The program was initiated to alleviate the worry of parents and educators that nonreligious-school children were becoming estranged from the Jewish heritage. It was also meant to deal with a specific problem: the relationship between the young sabra and Diaspora Jews, which, educators felt, had been undermined by the new state's strong emphasis on the purely territorial aspect and Zionist criticism of diaspora life. Without roots in the past and attachment to the Jewish people everywhere, it was feared, the sabra may come very close to the Canaanite ideology. The issue was of such importance that the government coalition agreement (after the election of the third Keneset) in 1955 devoted a special clause to it:

In primary, secondary, and higher education the Government will endeavor to deepen the Jewish consciousness of Israel's youth, to enable it to become rooted in the past of the Jewish people and its historical heritage, to strengthen its moral attachment to Jewry through an appreciation of the common destiny and the historic continuity which has united Jews the world over, in all generations and all countries.\(^{85}\)

Strong opposition to the program came from the antireligious minority, which argued that Jewish consciousness was in fact a program of religious education. It was supported in the Keneset by almost all members of all parties, except Mapam (Socialist) and Aḥdut Ha-avodah (left-wing Labor). Speaking in support of the program, the writer Yizhar Smilansky, member of Mapai (Labor), argued that any possible conflict arising from a confrontation with Jewish tradition can only be fruitful.

However, the program suffers from theoretical and practical difficulties. The state schools do not have enough teachers with the knowledge to teach Jewish subjects. And those who can teach Jewish traditional texts and ritual feel ill at ease when they are inevitably drawn into a consideration of belief in God, revelation and halakhah. (For example, the prayerbook is so replete with religious meaning that no one can study it without taking a personal position for or against prayer). Teaching the Jewish heritage is particularly difficult in the high school where students do not respond to an emotional

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and sentimental appeal that can be used with younger children. The real difficulty, some educators suggest, lies not in the program contents, but in the outlook and attitude of the teachers.

Whatever the immediate results of the program, the fact remains that it has become part of the school curriculum and, if nothing more, its very existence is bound to raise the issue of Jewishness with both pupils and teachers. Its main significance may well be in the ongoing discussions regarding its effects, successes, and failures. The program is frequently amended, and this requires seminars for its teachers and the availability of literature. In 1974 the ministry of education introduced courses emphasizing the values of the Jewish heritage, and special seminars on the subjects were arranged for high-school students.

The most important and thoroughgoing study of Jewish self-identity among youth in Israel, conducted by Simon Herman, shows that "the majority of Israelis see themselves linked to the Jewish people and to its past," but that religious and traditional beliefs or unbeliefs are decisive in determining their attitude to the question of historic continuity: "There are Israeli Jews for whom the Jewish element is primary, and Jewish Israelis with whom the Israeli component is dominant." Herman points out that a large measure of overlap exists in most Israelis between the "Jewish and Israeli subidentities," which are mutually reinforcing; that the patriotic attachment of the sabras to their homeland is strengthened and deepened when it is given a Jewish perspective. On the other hand, "An Israeliness divorced from Jewishness has dangers for a country which wishes to be a land of immigration and not of emigration." But Herman is optimistic about the continued Jewishness of Israeli society:

The thread of historic continuity has not been snapped; it still runs strongly through the new forms of Jewishness made possible by the return of a people to its ancient homeland. The new molds of Jewish life in Israel have not yet been firmly nor finally cast. But into the making of Israeli society there enter a number

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"Herman, op.cit., pp. 234–35.
"In Jerusalem, a group of educators established the Society for Jewish Humanistic Education and held a conference for which a program entitled Hinnukh humanisti yehudi ("Jewish Humanistic Education"; Jerusalem, 1974) was issued.
"Herman, op.cit., pp. 197, 202.
"Ibid. p. 204. The connection between the Jewish-Israeli identity and the desire to emigrate to a more affluent country is clearly shown in Rina Shapiro and Eve Etzioni-Halevi, Mi attah ha-student ha-yisre'eli? ("Who Are You, Israeli Student"); Tel Aviv, 1963), p. 162.
of ingredients which remain essentially Jewish even if in the new context they inevitably undergo transformation.91

State of Orthodoxy

Over the years, attempts have been made to collect data that would have given an indication of the proportion of Orthodox and non-Orthodox in the population. A number of surveys were conducted, but these did not probe attitudes toward religion. As a rule, pollsters see religion in terms of related political issues, with the result that they concentrate on behavior and political activity on behalf of religion. The underlying assumptions are that, a) the Jewish religion is contained in the political programs of the religious parties (p. 83); b) Judaism is a religion of practice.92 Questions generally deal with whether the government should be concerned with conducting public life in accordance with the Jewish religion, never with belief in God and revelation, the divine source of mitzvot the need for reform in religious observance, the rabbinate, or religion’s confrontation with modern science. Still, the surveys are useful because they do furnish some solid data. They are also instructive in that they clearly show the ambiguity of the religious situation.

Sabbath and Festival Observance

Attitudes toward the Sabbath and festivals are determined by the public character of their celebration. They are the legally recognized days of rest in token of a general commitment to Judaism.93 Offices, factories, shops, and most public transportation are at a standstill. No newspapers are published. Most cinemas and theatres are closed. Harbors and airports are shut down. On the other hand, taxis do a brisk business. Many private cars and special touring buses are on the roads, for many Israelis consider tiyul (touring the country) a favorite Sabbath and holiday pastime. Beaches are crowded during the summer months. Radio and television operate. Football matches and other sports activities are held mainly on the Sabbath. Yom Kippur is the only day on which all such activities are suspended.

One indicator of the extent of Orthodoxy is the use of radio and television

91Herman, op.cit., p. 197.
92Israeli social scientists have been chided for their ignorance of what religion means to the religious. Himmelfarb, op.cit., pp. 339-41.
on the Sabbath. According to several polls, more than 90 per cent of the Jews in Israel regularly listen to the radio; some 75 per cent of them do so on the Sabbath. The respective percentages for regular television viewers are just under 90 and 73 per cent. In evaluating these figures account must be taken of two factors: 1) some Orthodox Jews object in principle to television viewing and radio listening, and therefore were not included in the survey; 2) a considerable percentage of those who consider themselves religious view television on the Sabbath, most of them of Asian and North African origin. No doubt, the overwhelming majority of those who use neither radio nor television—at least 25 per cent of all Israeli Jews—are Orthodox.

More than half of the non-Orthodox Israelis object to the public observance of the Sabbath: 61 per cent want public transportation to be available; 69 per cent want cultural centers to be open; 53 per cent want to have the opportunity to go to the theatre or to concerts; 43 per cent to go to the cinema. It is striking that even in rejecting the halakhah, they continue to differentiate between cultural activities (cultural centers, theatres, concerts) and more ordinary pursuits (cinema). This is in keeping with the expressed desire of the majority of Israelis of all ages to retain the typically Jewish style of the Sabbath.

The survey findings indicate, however, that even those describing themselves as lo'dati (not religious) observe some rituals, or favor certain public traditional behavior. Only one-fifth of all Israeli Jews, or fewer, are totally opposed to any form of religious observance in their personal lives or in public manifestations. The overwhelming majority identify with the traditional meaning of Yom Kippur. For the nonreligious, it has acquired national meaning as their personal affirmation of dedication to the continuity of the Jewish people. Only 16 per cent claim the day has "no meaning" for them. Purim has become a very popular festival, far more so than in the Diaspora. Passover, which has been given a nonreligious interpretation in modern Israel, continues to retain religious meaning for 47 per cent of the


"No figures are available. When television was introduced in Israel in 1968, a religious anti-television campaign was conducted. The anonymously published Kuntres hasbarah ("Treatise of Information"; Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 260–61, warned that "Every household which possesses a radio is a dwelling of tum'ah" (uncleanliness). Some Orthodox also object strongly to newspapers.

But regardless of attitude toward the holiday's religious aspect, few Israelis do not participate in some form of the Seder, ranging from the traditional to the innovative.

On Sukkot a large number of booths can be seen on balconies and roofs, and in gardens and courtyards. Simḥat Torah is widely celebrated in the synagogues and, on the evening after the festival ends, by public dancing with Torah scrolls in the streets of the cities. Festivities in some of the religious kibbutzim are attended by members of neighboring nonreligious settlements. During Hanukkah, menorahs are lit on all public buildings.

On Tish'ah be-Av, the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple, all places of entertainment, cafés, and restaurants are closed. Since the liberation of East Jerusalem in 1967, tens of thousands of Israelis have been going to the Western Wall on that day to recite *kinot* (dirges). Unlike Tish'ah be-Av, the official memorial day for the victims of the Nazi holocaust has not yet become a personal day of commemoration. It is a public *Yom ha-sho'ah weha-gevurah* (Day of the Holocaust and Heroism), fixed by the Knesset as the 27th of Nisan, to fall between the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and Independence Day. A special law provides that all places of entertainment be closed on this day, which is marked by public meetings in the cities and settlements, mainly at the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem and in the kibbutzim Yad Mordekhai (Mordecai Anielewicz was the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt) and *Loḥame ha-getta'ot* (founded by survivors of the Jewish resistance against the Nazis). The rabbinate ruled that Kaddish be said for those whose date of death is unknown on the 10th day of Tevet (the traditional fast). Many people treat Tish'ah be-Av, the day of mourning for all Jewish suffering throughout history, as the personal and national commemorative day for the victims of the holocaust.

Yom ha-Azma'ut (Independence Day) is, of course, a public festival; but on account of its newness and theological and halakhic controversies, it has not yet been universally accepted as a religious festival.

A striking illustration of the ubiquitous character of traditional behavior is the almost universal custom to celebrate bar-mitzvah for boys and bat-mitzvah for girls. It is significant that, with the exception of a tiny minority, bar-mitzvah is celebrated in Orthodox ceremonies in the synagogue, or, since 1967, at the Western Wall.

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Whether the ambivalence in observance is misinterpreted by the religious press as a sign of teshuvah, or by nonreligious journalists as being of no significance, the fact remains that the attitudes of the non-Orthodox Israelis (who are not antireligious) are marked by changes and shifting nuances in beliefs and behavior.

Religious Education

Aside from observance of mitzvot, an important index of the extent of Orthodoxy is the percentage of children attending religious schools. Israel's State Education Law of 1953 established one state educational system, administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which is divided into state (mamlakhti) and state-religious (mamlakhti-dati) schools. The Agudath Israel runs its own state-recognized religious school system (Ḥinukh 'Aẓma'i). Over the years, the proportion of children attending religious primary schools has been between 30 and 35 per cent of the total school population.

The proportion of religious-school enrollment does not really reflect the size of the Orthodox adult population, since not all parents who send their children to religious schools are Orthodox, and religious families have a higher birthrate than others. And all surveys and population statistics show that birthrate is an important factor in evaluating the strength of religion. Nearly 50 per cent of the immigrants from North Africa and Asia are religious and have a higher birthrate than any other sector of the Jewish population. The strength of the state-religious schools derives to a large extent from the Oriental communities. In recent years, their enrollment has declined from 110,887 (29 per cent) in 1968 to 99,288 (24.7 per cent) in 1974. The decline should be ascribed to the fact that, whereas the 1950s and 1960s saw the mass influx of religious Sephardim, the more recent immigrants are generally not religious.

A recent development among young Orthodox sabras is to the point. There appears to be a new intensification of religiosity among them. Many of them carry their religion with pride, and with a certain amount of ostentation in what seems to be a deliberate display or emphasis for the benefit of the nonreligious and secular. A phenomenon called dor ha-kippot

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98 The principle of two types of education and culture, general and religious, goes back to 1902, when it was adopted at the conference of Russian Zionists in Minsk as a compromise between the nonreligious and religious Zionists.

99 The decrease in Agudah schools has been slightly less; see Chaim Ṭuviyahu's articles in Ha-ẓafeḥ, July 30, 1973, and August 19, 1974.
ha-serugot, generation of knitted yarmulkes, refers to the small skull-caps seen in the streets of Israel. And yet, there has been a visible erosion in the number of religiously observant youth, particularly, but by no means exclusively, among native-born children of North African and Asian immigrants. This erosion is probably reflected in the decline of the state religious schools.

Religion in Politics

Significantly, contemporary opposition to religion in Israel continues to be influenced by an intrinsic connection between Jewish nationality and the Jewish religion. It is too complex to be interpreted only in terms of a church-and-state conflict, though political power evidently is an ingredient. The roots of the problem are so ramified and interlocking that no one-cause theory can suffice. Dissension is not along clearly demarcated lines, between the Orthodox and the nonreligious; it cuts across all variants of religious commitments. Although usually focused on topical issues, the debate basically centers on the purposes of Zionism and the Jewishness of the state—the role of Judaism in modern Israel.

The majority of Israelis agree that Israel should be Jewish in population, as well as in lifestyle. The findings of a 1969 public-opinion poll leave no doubt about this. Eighty-eight per cent of religious-party, 19 per cent of Ma'arakh (Labor), and 29 per cent of Ga\text{h}al voters want Israel's public life to be conducted according to religious tradition. Eighty-three per cent of religious-party, 33 per cent of Ma'arakh, and 39 per cent of Gahal voters are against the separation of religion and state. Only 37 per cent of Ma'arakh and 32 per cent of Gahal supporters definitely favor separation of religion and state. But on the issue of "public life according to religious tradition," 49 per cent of Ma'arakh voters and 38 per cent of Gahal voters declared their opposition.

A comparison of the 1968 poll with a similar one conducted in 1962 indicates a decline in the percentage of Orthodox from 30 to 26, an increase of traditionalists from 46 to 48, and a rise of the nonreligious from 24 to 26 per cent. These differences are clearly too small to indicate possible directions of development in religiosity. (A 2 per cent discrepancy in poll findings is generally considered a reasonable margin of error.) Any evaluation will have to take into consideration the ambiguity involved in a self-definition of dato and masorati. The fact that the surveys were conducted

\footnote{Aaron Antonovsky, \textit{Ammot}, June-July 1963. The survey is also quoted in Antonovsky and Asher Arian, \textit{Hopes and Fears of Israelis} (Jerusalem, 1972); see also Himmelfarb, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 339–41.}
within the context of a general questionnaire about political attitudes intensified the ambiguity.\textsuperscript{101}

It is the consensus regarding the principles of Judaism that sharpens the polemics over the content and expressions of Jewishness. Occasionally feelings become aggravated, and polemics degenerate into spiteful or violent acts by extremists, which assume highly exaggerated importance in the reporting of the communications media. Quite typical are two items carried on the same day by Israeli newspapers. One reported that young men in the religious Me'ah She'arim quarter of Jerusalem threw stones at officials collecting census data, because they considered them in violation of a biblical injunction against taking a census (Exodus 30:12; cf II Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21), although the Chief Rabbinate had ruled that the prohibition did not apply to the contemporary population census. The other item told of the invasion of a section of the Tel Aviv beach reserved by the municipality for religious people who disapproved of mixed bathing by a group of antireligious men and women, who declared they would do all they can to prevent the "theft of the beach from the nonreligious public."\textsuperscript{102}

The exclusive emphasis on violent acts distorts the real picture and misrepresents the much broader scope of the religious problem. Still, the marginal incidents are important in pointing up the feelings of annoyance and frustration that are shared by many Israelis.

The injection of religion into Israeli politics has historical precedents. They range from ancient times, when the Prophets in the market places became involved in social and political issues,\textsuperscript{103} to 19th-century Eastern Europe that saw the politicization of the bitter dispute over Judaism between the protagonists of Haskalah and their religious opponents, and 19th-century Germany where a good deal of political wrangling characterized the struggle between the Reform and Orthodox movements in the organization and leadership of the Jewish communities. What is new in Israel is that a debate essentially dealing with religion and its practices has assumed the characteristics of a political conflict.

This is highlighted by the very existence of religious parties, which, some believe, have utterly politicized religion in the state. Some of their extreme

\textsuperscript{101}Neglect of the specific Israeli and Jewish subtleties in meanings of terms probably were responsible for the Time-Harris poll findings that 13 per cent define themselves as religious, which is less than the voting strength of the religious parties; 40 per cent as nonreligious, and 47 per cent as traditionalists (Time, April 12, 1971).

\textsuperscript{102}In Ha-arez and Ma'ariv on May 22, 1972.

opponents have accused the parties of being so politically conscious, even power-drunk, that they have suspended the purely religious dimension in their party activities. But criticism of the parties should not obscure the fact that underlying the political manipulations are the polemics about the meaning and validity of Judaism.

Religious Parties

Like most of the other parties in Israel, the religious parties have their roots in the political divisions which existed in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, solidified in the early 1900s as political parties within the World Zionist Organization, and remained active in all major bodies of the organized yishuv. Israel's political parties perpetuate the early intense ideological differences, but they now are part of the governing process and are therefore Israeli in character.

It is in the light of this evolution that the policies and tactics of the religious parties—and their concentration on issues (education, "Who is a Jew?", Sabbath) which are not exclusively "state" affairs—can be understood.

The factors that led the religious parties to participate in politics are similar to those that have produced the involvement of religious parties in the politics of other countries. The most fundamental is the conviction that society should be governed by the principles of religion. For religion is concerned with the relationship of all individual and social activities of men to the religious principles of behavior and therefore is bound to consider politics as its sphere of interest.

Religious parties usually spring up when there is widespread belief in the religious sector of society that a) the existing nonreligious political parties are a serious threat to religion and b) that only a religious party can successfully defend "the religious interest." In other words, the existence of a religious party is always predicated on a conflict situation which is believed to require the defense of religion. This is, of course, true of the religious parties in Israel.

The religious disputes, and policies and tactics of the religious parties, must be viewed in the context of the national consensus on the Jewishness of Israel, as expressed in basic law. It is clearly stated in Israel's Proclama-


105For a contemporary view of the all-embracing concerns of Judaism see Samuel Ḥayyim Landau's idea of Torah and Labor, in Hertzberg, *op.cit.*, pp. 434–39.
tion of Independence, which is steeped in Jewishness and yet utterly neutral on religion. Its concluding passage, “With trust in the Rock of Israel,” was intended to satisfy both religious and antireligious Jews, for while the traditional meaning of the term is God, it can also mean “national spirit of historic Judaism.” It is restated in the 1952 law on the status of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency, according to which the State of Israel “regards itself as the creation of the entire Jewish people.” Its most striking expression is the 1950 Law of Return, which proclaims the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel, but remains ambiguous on the definition of Jewishness. This ambiguity has given rise to the perennial issue of “Who is a Jew?” and has frequently triggered religious-political disputes.

PARTY IDEOLOGIES

Israel’s religious parties reflect the major trends in Orthodoxy, except for Neture Karta, which rejects participation in the political life of a state it regards as sacrilegious. Mizrachi, the religious Zionist party, was founded in 1902 as a faction in the World Zionist Organization with the aim of establishing “the people of Israel in Eretz Israel according to the Torah of Israel.” Hapoel Hamizrachi, the Labor religious Zionist party, was founded in 1922 to build Eretz Israel according to the principles of Torah and Labor. The two merged in 1956 to form the Miflagah datit le’ummit (abbreviated Mafdal; National Religious party), the leading religious party and a partner in almost all coalition governments.

Agudath Israel, the leading non-Zionist religious party, was founded in 1912 to promote the unity of Orthodox Jews for the advancement of Torah in Jewish life. It modified its initial strictly anti-Zionist attitude in the late 1930s, has been active in Israel’s political life since the inception of the state, and was represented in the government from 1949 to 1952. While Agudah has not embraced Zionist ideology, it recognizes the fact of Jewish statehood. Its declared chief interest is to maintain traditional religious life. A Labor Agudah party, Po’ale Agudat Yisra’el, founded in 1922, has over the years evolved an ideology that is close to Zionism. While it never joined the World Zionist Organization (WZO), it received WZO aid for the establishment of settlements in Israel and for its Zionist-oriented youth movement. Its relations with the parent party have varied. They currently are separate

parties, but join forces in the Torah Religious Front for political purposes.

In the election campaign for the first Keneset (January 1949), the four parties united in the Religious Front and received 12.2 per cent of the vote, obtaining 16 out of total 120 seats. In the elections that followed, the Zionist religious parties polled variously between 8.3 and 9.9 per cent of the vote, and the Agudah parties of the Torah Religious Front, between 3.7 and 5.6 per cent. The combined vote for the religious parties is rather low in view of a 1969 poll finding that Orthodox-religious voters, obviously the mainstay of the religious parties, constitute 26 per cent of the Israeli electorate. Ninety-two per cent of those voting for the religious parties consider themselves religious.\textsuperscript{108} However, the polls indicate that, altogether, the religious parties represent little more than half of the Orthodox Israelis. They constitute 18 per cent of Ma'arakh (Labor Alignment) supporters and 27 per cent of those voting for Ga\={a}hal (Herut and Liberal).

The elections were fought over issues which divided not only the religious from the secular parties, but also the religious parties from one another. The deep-seated division continues between religious Zionists, for whom the State of Israel has religious meaning, and the religious non-Zionists and anti-Zionists, who view it as a secular political reality. The dissension also reflects the rift between the “closed” view of Orthodoxy, which disdains novelty, and the “open,” dynamic interpretation of Orthodoxy, as represented by the Agudah and the religious Zionists, respectively.\textsuperscript{109}

One of the basic issues dividing the Mizrachi from the Agudah in principle and in practice is the relationship with non-Orthodox and secular Jews. Unlike the Mizrachi, Agudists believe in separate organizations for the Orthodox; and although this principle is not consistently applied in Israel, it nevertheless profoundly colors their aims and tactics. They find it extremely difficult to participate actively in the government of a state which is deliberately Zionist, and prefer to maintain an opposition which is radical in purely religious matters and accommodating on political issues.\textsuperscript{110}

Over the years, the political work of the religious parties has largely been in religious legislation, which can be divided into a) laws providing religious services and facilities, such as religious education, for Israelis who wish to avail themselves of them and b) laws imposing religious norms on all citizens, regardless of belief, especially the marriage and divorce law, and

\textsuperscript{108} Asher Arian, \textit{Ha'am ha-boher} ("The Choosing People"); Ramat Gan, 1973), pp. 58–70.

\textsuperscript{109} For a full treatment of this question see my discussion in \textit{Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1973: Events of 1972}, pp. 306–309.

\textsuperscript{110} Isaac Breuer, \textit{Concepts of Judaism} (Jerusalem, 1974).
giving the rabbinate and the rabbinical courts exclusive jurisdiction over this aspect of personal life.\textsuperscript{111}

The legal framework for this legislative activity is the system of religious laws as it existed in Eretz Israel under Ottoman rule. This system was preserved under the British Mandate, and taken over, in principle, by the State of Israel.\textsuperscript{112} Israel follows the British Mandate system in granting all religious communities full religious autonomy. On the other hand, Israel is a Jewish state, and its Jewishness is clearly stated in the legislation. But this is national Jewishness; no Israeli law recognizes Judaism as the state religion. Discussions on the separation of religion and state, therefore, generally deal with religious legislation that is imposed on Jews, who are thus treated by the law as members of the Jewish religious community. However, as indicated before, the issue of separation is complicated by the question of the "Jewishness" of Israel, since even ostensibly religious matters have throughout Jewish history acquired the characteristics of a national culture and have thus become integral to the national consensus.\textsuperscript{113}

\textit{Religious-Party Arguments}

In the continuing polemics, the religious parties most frequently use the argument that religious laws are necessary not only for reasons of religion, but also for the survival of the Jewish heritage and national unity. In this way, they attempt to persuade the public and the secular parties of the national and cultural validity of these laws.\textsuperscript{114} Their first important involvement in a political struggle occurred in 1949 and 1950, when they accused the government of antireligious coercion by denying religious education to children of religious families in the immigrant camps.\textsuperscript{115} They used the

\textsuperscript{111}See Elon, \textit{Hakikah datit}, op.cit; Goldman, \textit{Religious Issues in Israel's Political Life}, \textit{op.cit.} note 85, for political and ideological aspects.


\textsuperscript{113}Cf. Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Hafradah ben dat u-medinah: Sismah we-tokhen" (Separation of Religion and State: Slogan and Content), \textit{Molad}, Nos. 25-26, August-September 1972, pp. 71-89; also Eliezer Goldman, \textit{Ha-halakhah weha-medinah} ("The Halakhah and the State"); Tel Aviv, 1954) and his \textit{Religious Issues}.


\textsuperscript{115}The Orthodox religious organizations in the Diaspora actively supported the religious parties, as they did in other controversies, particularly the one over "Who is a Jew?" See Charles Liebman, "Diaspora Influence over Religious Policy in Israel: The Immigrant Camp Education Controversy, 1949-1950," \textit{Niv ha-midrashiyah}, Vol. 11, 1974.
antireligious coercion argument again in the conflict over the autopsy law, which imposed on religious grounds practices repugnant to many Israelis.\textsuperscript{116}

Generally, however, the religious parties state their positions in hortatory sermons rather than in persuasive arguments—probably out of their thorough conviction that their demands carry divine authority—and therefore tend to ignore the convictions of their opponents. The failure to communicate is reinforced by the strong influence of the rabbinate on the religious parties and its deliberate policy of cultural isolation, which sets up a barrier between the parties and the rest of the community.\textsuperscript{117}

**Religious-Coercion Argument**

Although there is frequent talk about the constitutional principle of the separation of state and religion, the controversy is usually over specific issues that agitate the public at a particular time. These have ranged from education to television on the Sabbath, from kashrut to autopsies, with opposition to religious legislation mainly concentrated on the marriage and divorce law.\textsuperscript{118}

The preferred argument of the opponents of religious laws is that they infringe on freedom of conscience and thus constitute religious coercion. There doubtless is a tactical element in the use of this emotionally charged argument in preference to a discussion of the law itself. However, its predominant use indicates that many Israelis feel at least some of the religious laws to be coercive and thus infringing on personal rights and liberties. Some object to the lack of public transport on the Sabbath; but most chafe under the rabbinical laws on marriage, divorce, and conversion.

The religious-coercion argument implies that any law motivated by religion is coercive and inimical to civil liberties. However, even the critics of the religious legislation agree that the legislator has the right, and the duty, to enact freedom-infringing laws about days of rest and marriage and divorce. The essential dispute is therefore not about coercion \textit{per se}, but about the particular religion-motivated laws. But it is the argument of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117}See Goldman, \textit{op. cit}, pp. 65, 79–80, 100–101.
\item \textsuperscript{118}See Joseph Ben-Menashe, "Ha-ra'shut ha-shofetet we-dine ha-mishpahah" (The Judiciary and Family Law), \textit{Keshet}, No. 16, Summer 1974; also Milstain, \textit{op.cit.}
\end{itemize}
religious coercion which is predominant in the religious controversies. Clearly, the popularity of this argument and its polemical effectiveness do not depend on logic and legal soundness. It has become a "persuasive definition," one that gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people's interests.119

**Power Politics of Religious Parties**

As a political tactic the religious parties occasionally resort to defending the *status quo* of time-honored agreements on religious matters. Many of these agreements go back to decisions made in Zionist Congresses and were later reformulated in Kneset legislation and municipal by-laws to constitute the system of laws and regulations on matters affecting religion in Israeli public life. But whatever their origin and authority, past agreements can have abiding political force only to the extent that the religious parties have sufficient political power to ensure their continued enforcement.

Although always a minority, the religious parties have been able to wield political power by virtue of the consensus of most parties on the Jewishness of the state, and their leverage in coalitional politics. But the sole dependence of governments on the religious parties for a parliamentary majority has decreased over the years. Agudath Israel has not been in the government since 1952. And while the National Religious party's role as a coalition partner has remained important, its main political impact does not derive solely from this role; it largely rests on the consensus among most parties regarding the Jewishness and the traditional cultural character of Israel. The *status quo* argument has been persuasive for the same reason.

It has become evident over the years that the religious parties have gone beyond their original goals; that they have acquired a built-in momentum and vested interests as political parties. In their daily bid for power, they have had to resort constantly to pressure tactics and political threats that make it impossible for them to pursue their aim of using politics exclusively in behalf of religion. As a result, religion has become politicized. There is undue emphasis on public religious behavior, at the expense of the religious faith and observance of the individual. A piece of legislation has become

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more important than an attempt at the rational and persuasive interpretation of Judaism. In the politics of the religious parties the Keneset overshadows the bet ha-keneset, the synagogue.

A paradigmatic expression of the legalistic emphasis fostered by the religious parties is the issue of “Who is a Jew?”. According to the halakhah, it has two aspects: There is the biological question on which the halakhah rules that Jewishness is determined by the mother. And there is the question of the voluntary commitment implicit in being a Jew, the individual’s acceptance of “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.” The chief consequence of the “Who is a Jew?” agitation has been to emphasize only the legal-biological aspect and to ignore almost completely the question of voluntary commitment.

Religion in politics is certainly plausible, and may even be necessary. No one can debate the right of religious parties to exist, for in a democracy people who feel strongly enough about any issue can organize themselves to further their aim. However, there has been increasing doubt in Israel, even among members of the religious parties, whether, in the long run, politicization is conducive to strengthening religious faith. Religious Israelis must raise the question in the context of their faith. Even if they are convinced that religion needs defense against a pervasive secular culture, they must decide whether a political party is the best vehicle for promoting their religious aims. This is not a question of politics, but one of religion.

There is no shortcut to resolving the religious problem in Israel. It exists because modernity has made for a wholly paradoxical situation in Jewish life—the intensive rise of Jewish nationalism, which has led to the creation of the Jewish state, and the simultaneous erosion of religion. Whatever the political and legislative development, the “preservative revolution” and its inherent tensions will continue to prevail in Jewish life and in Israel. Debate can help bring about a more profound understanding of the problem, clarifying the issues and sharpening the perception of opposing sides. Strife, on the other hand, may exacerbate feelings, distort the democratic process, and caricature faith. A tense situation makes for temptation to cast about for emotional slogans, and probably for greater difficulty in promoting ahavat Yisra’el, the love for all Jews. There is need for the moral strength to view Jewish nationality as the “oneness” of the Jewish people, regardless of

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120 Cf. Moshe Unna, Yisra’el ba-ummot (“Israel Among the Nations”; Tel Aviv, 1971).
schisms and divisions. An admonition by the late Chief Rabbi Kook is very relevant today. According to the Talmud, he said, the Second Temple was destroyed because of sin'at ḥinnam, causeless hatred. Now that we are rebuilding our independent state, we must promote ahavat ḥinnam, causeless love.\footnote{Cf. Yaron, Mishnato shel ha-Rav Kook, p. 368, note 53.}
Leo Strauss (1899–1973)

by Ralph Lerner

Leo Strauss died on October 18, 1973, in his seventy-fifth year. To the end, he remained what he had been for half a century: a most attentive student of the greatest minds of the Western tradition. It was this lernen (the Yiddish term conveys quite well the character and mode of the activity) that provided the focus of his life. His teaching and writing were by-products—however masterful and impressive in themselves—of this intensely private study. If philosophy, as Strauss maintained, was not a system or a teaching or a discipline or an instrument of self-realization, but nothing less than a way of life, his own life testified to the power of attraction of that way of life and to the depth of his dedication to it. Actions and words were as one.

The external events of Strauss’s life are few and not especially interesting; the internal encounters and developments, whose visible and formal expression are his scholarly writings, may more properly form the basis of a memoir. The following pages reflect this judgment of fit proportion.

Life

Leo Strauss was born in Kirchhain, Hessen, Germany, on September 20, 1899, into a family of sturdy, provincial Orthodoxy. Thus, for example, it was a question to be settled by religious law whether to indulge the young Strauss’s passion for raising pet rabbits. By age seventeen, he was a convert to “simple, straightforward political Zionism” of the Jabotinsky variety. After graduating from Gymnasium and serving in the German army of occupation in Belgium, he studied philosophy, mathematics, and natural science at the universities of Marburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, and Hamburg. It was from Hamburg that he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1921. He went on to Freiburg, attending lectures by Husserl and Heidegger (in the latter case, usually “without understanding a word, but [sensing] that he dealt with something of the utmost importance to man as man”). Between 1925 and 1932, Strauss worked in Berlin as a research assistant.
at the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. Still predominantly interested in theology, he concentrated on studying the roots of the seventeenth-century attack on traditional Orthodoxy, specifically Spinoza and Hobbes. He also was co-editor of the philosophic writings of Moses Mendelssohn, whose works were being reissued by the Akademie in the (soon to be interrupted) jubilee edition.

In 1932, having received a Rockefeller Foundation grant to study in France, he left Germany, never again to return, except for a visit in 1954 to his father's grave. It was while in Paris in 1932 that he and Miriam Bernson Petry were wed. By 1934 he was in England, remaining there until 1938, a foreign scholar living in the interstices of the formal structure of the University of Cambridge. Encouraged by Ernest Barker and R.H. Tawney, among others, he continued the life of scholarly research begun in his native land, a life equally remote from public notice and the creative tensions of the classroom. He had come to accept the life of a solitary—not only in the sense in which every man of profound thought is a solitary, but also in the sense in which one who is deprived of an appropriate live audience resigns himself to writing for faceless men of some unknown place and time. It was not the best of all possible arrangements, but neither was it the worst; and there was this to be said for it: it seemed stable.

But this was only seeming. England could afford a temporary haven, but little more. Strauss had to join that extraordinary migration of talent and intellect whereby, once again, America's advantage was drawn from Europe's distress. He had to find a regular job; and so, like many other anxious immigrants, he came with his chief, or only, resource—himself. Sewn by his wife into the lining of his greatcoat was the immediate instrument of his salvation, a lengthy lecture designed to display his fitness to teach American college students. Many of a greenhorn's travails take on a comic character, viewed in retrospect or from a distance. Strauss's obliviousness of the sanctity of the fifty-minute hour provided a number of such instances, but in the end none of that mattered. He received an appointment in the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research in New York City, remaining there until 1949. He then was invited to join the University of Chicago and later designated Robert Maynard Hutchins Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science, which position he held until his retirement in 1968. It was during his tenure at Chicago that he also was a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Subsequently he taught briefly at Claremont Men's College. For the final four years of his life, he was the Scott Buchanan Distinguished Scholar in Residence at St. John's
College in Annapolis, where he continued his teaching, albeit on a reduced scale, till his death.

**Works**

As these things are measured today, Leo Strauss was a productive, but not an extraordinarily prolific, scholar. He wrote and published scholarly essays and books at a more or less steady rate from age thirty to the very end, leaving a legacy of fourteen books* (with an additional final collection of studies on Platonic political philosophy still to be published), over sixty essays, and more than twenty reviews. One gets a closer glimpse of his work by considering some of the subjects of his writing: Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Lucretius, Farabi, Yehuda Halevi, Maimonides, Marsilius, Machiavelli, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Nietzsche, Weber. If one added to these the names of other authors whose works he studied in intensive seminars but on which he did not write at length—such as Cicero, Aquinas, Montesquieu, Vico, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger—one gets a still clearer sense of the range of his interests and concerns. But even this does not give a full account of his erudition and literary sensibilities, and none of it, of course, gives even a clue to the quality of his thought and analysis. A summary secondary account can be only a pale replica: the source remains more intelligible and arresting than any simplifying presentation.

The bulk of his study and writing was devoted to recovering for himself (and, through his writings, for others) a realm of reasoning and reflection that had almost entirely lost its credibility as a guide to life. The beliefs elevated by nineteenth-century thinkers into certainties—that all thought is historically conditioned; that every thinker (whatever his pretensions) is fundamentally a child of his time, confined on all sides by forces and habits of which he cannot be fully cognizant; or that the only kind of knowledge worthy of the name is the kind modern natural science strives for, a knowledge that eschews even the attempt to rank conflicting "values," let alone seek to resolve those conflicts through the operations of reason—these

*Die Religionskritik Spinozas (1930), translated into English as *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1965); *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935; an English translation is in preparation); *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936); *On Tyranny* (1948; revised and enlarged edition 1963); *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952); *Natural Right and History* (1953); *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958); *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (1959); *The City and Man* (1964); *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966); *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (1968); *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse* (1970); *Xenophon's Socrates* (1972); *The Argument and the Action of Plato's "Laws"* (1975).
beliefs were seen by Strauss as the most powerful modern barriers to serious thought. Such certainties simultaneously gratified modern man's pride of place and reinforced his sense of helplessness, even as they closed off from him the most rudimentary and accessible means for learning about what it meant to be human.

To recover something of the directness of human experience and of a kind of thought that took off from that experience was an indispensable first step. But that first step was itself a massive undertaking, not least because it went against the grain of almost all modern respectable opinion. Truly to learn from the authors of the past meant to be open to the possibility that they were right in their understanding, right for their times and for ours. Truly to learn from the authors of the Bible or from Plato or Machiavelli meant to be open to the possibility that the questions to which they addressed themselves were still meaningful for us. Considerations such as these led Strauss to undertake a series of studies, remarkably alike for their simple exteriors and profound inner workings. He placed himself under the tutelage of the great minds of the past, an act of submission that required boldness and caution, along with an intense, unflagging, attentive passivity. He learned something of how earlier writers wrote and meant to be read. He came to see with unblinking clarity how and why the expectations and hopes raised by the union of modern natural science and modern philosophy had proved so problematic and disappointing in our times. And he came to see how pre-modern political philosophy offered, not a ready-made suit of answers, to be sure, but an alternative way of understanding, a way of perceiving the roots of our dissatisfactions and possible means of dealing with them.

The modern outlawing of serious discussion of the purposes or ends of things, and especially of political things, had impoverished analysis and analyst alike. Similarly, the easy assumption that whatever appeared to be high or noble in man might more truly or realistically be understood in terms of what was low in man—his passionate preoccupation with self-preservation, and the sundry means thereto—closed off a realm of thought, motivation, and action that was, if anything, more distinctively and revealingly human than the admitted rump of behavior. By returning to the masters of the past and listening attentively to their speech, Strauss was able to transcend the questions and answers of his own time. Similarly, issues that had ceased to be issues—that is, problematic—regained that character when considered outside the historicist and positivist orthodoxies of the day. Thus it was that the profound tension between philosophy and the polis, pondered and brooded over since Socrates' days—and loudly pro-
claimed to have been overcome by men such as the Encyclopedists, Comte, and Marx (each after his own fashion)—was disclosed to be a continuing problem, inseparable from philosophizing. Thus, too, what used to be called the theological-political problem—an outgrowth of the impressive and conflicting claims of monotheistic religion and pagan philosophy to command and deserve men’s primary allegiance—was seen as very much alive and with us; announcements of its death, premised on the triumph of deism or atheism, were, to say the least, premature. By recovering such problems and others, by recovering the boldness of thought and niceness of expression characteristic of the past masters, by rendering their answers intelligible to moderns who could barely perceive the issues—Strauss acted as transmitter, interpreter, and revivifier of a dead, or almost dead, portion of the Western tradition. Accordingly, all those for whom that tradition has special value and significance are in his debt.

On Being Jewish

Among his debtors, Jews, it must be said, are a special case. Though Mr. Strauss was a Jew by birth, he also was a Jew by deliberation. His thoughts on being Jewish are a legacy of peculiar importance to us. Those thoughts may be considered under two heads: the challenge posed to Judaism by modern secular liberalism, and the challenge posed to Judaism by philosophy.

Modern liberalism arose out of, and in opposition to, medieval society and all it stood for. If the Crusades were the most characteristic actions of medieval times, one could well understand why Jews in particular would welcome modern liberal democracy. In place of the wholesale destruction of Jewish communities would come the tearing down of ghetto walls, emancipation, and the relegation of religion to the private sphere. To participate fully and freely in all aspects of Western life was the promise; never to be permitted to forget that one (or one’s ancestry) was Jewish, was the reality. Implicit in Heine’s characterization of Judaism as a “misfortune” was the propriety, nay, the necessity, of escape, abandonment, assimilation. The manifest failure of that course as a solution to communal problems (as distinguished from the frustrations of this or that individual) led to the alternative course: political Zionism. Pinsker and Herzl saw clearly enough the failure of liberalism to solve the Jewish problem in a manner compatible with self-respect; they were less clear in recognizing the limits of the liberal premise to which they themselves held fast: that the Jewish problem was a merely human problem, one that could be solved by purely human means,
by making the Jews a normal people, like unto all the nations. From the vantage point of any variety of Jewish religion, neither of these solutions was acceptable. The official neutrality and latitudinarianism of the state religion presupposed by assimilationism led inexorably to the abandonment of Torah; while a purely political solution (Uganda, anyplace) presupposed overcoming or sloughing off the very spirit of the Jewish religion. These consequences did not escape the notice of the author of those solutions, Spinoza. In an extraordinary intellectual autobiography, his 1965 preface to the English translation of *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, Strauss limned the subsequent flawed efforts of Ahad Ha'am, Hermann Cohen, and Franz Rosenzweig to remedy the shortcomings of Spinoza's two solutions.

At bottom—as a Jew—Strauss accepted and welcomed liberal democracy. In so doing he was blinded neither by sentimentality (which he detested) nor by simple-minded forgetfulness. America, to be sure, was no exception: here, too, attempts to solve the Jewish problem by purely human means would fail. "It is very far from me to minimize the difference between a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, and the nations of the old world, which certainly were not conceived in liberty. I share the hope in America and the faith in America, but I am compelled to add that that faith and that hope cannot be of the same character as that faith and that hope which a Jew has in regard to Judaism and which the Christian has in regard to Christianity. No one claims that the faith in America and the hope for America is based on explicit divine promise." Strauss, then, willingly accepted the uneasy solution offered by liberal democracy—legal equality and private discrimination—not because it was best, not because it was simply just, but because no better human arrangement was to be expected. With such moderated expectations, he could see the anomalous position of the believer who finds himself in this world of little or tepid faith. Strauss could take pride in the fact that we Jews "have behind us and within us a heroic past," one that is "all the more heroic, one could say, since its chief characters are not the glitter and trappings of martial glory and of cultural splendor, although it does not lack even these." From such a vantage point, he could view differently "that fortitude in suffering, now despised as 'ghetto mentality' by shallow people who have surrendered wholeheartedly to the modern world or who lack the intelligence to consider that a secession from this world might again become necessary for Jews and even for Christians."

The challenge posed to Judaism by philosophy is another story. Current usage permits speaking of a modern Jewish philosopher, one troubled by the relation of the spirit of science and the spirit of the Bible. Such a man
would seek to clarify and harmonize his double attachment to Judaism and to philosophy. Earlier usage, however (to which Strauss adhered), would regard a "Jewish philosopher" as something anomalous, perhaps absurd, an attempt to combine incompatibles, if not opposites. Strauss’s shorthand formulation for this was "Jerusalem and Athens," meaning thereby the highest, most comprehensive and impressive statements of antagonistic claims to know the decisive truth about the right way of life. The one commands us to a life of obedient love; to this we say, "*na'aseh we-nishma*;" and enter into an unceasing life-long effort to return to the perfect faithfulness of our fathers. Trusting in the plans for our future made by an unknowable, omnipotent God—"I shall be What I shall be"—we (the community of the faithful) rest assured believing in His mercy and in the knowledge of the good shown by Him and announced to all men by His prophets. The other beckons us to a life of noble action devoid of any guilt-inspired fear and pity—and devoid of any divine promises; above all, to a life of autonomous understanding, a dedication to a transsocial or asocial contemplation. Reasoning freely from what they themselves have perceived, a few choice souls go on to dedicate their lives to the *quest* for knowledge of the good. When the philosopher refuses to assent to revelation because he does not understand it, he is doing more than suspending his judgment about something that to him is neither evident nor disproved. He is choosing among ways of life, among lives animated by very different passions.

Through his teaching and writing, Strauss helped others come to see the austere dignity of these alternatives. In that way, more than a few of his Jewish students came to appreciate better the roots of their past and found new reasons for cherishing it as their own. They also had before them the example of Strauss himself. In mid-life, and while paying attention, he had discovered afresh the modes in which Maimonides "spoke" to his several kinds of readers. What had all along been a matter of abiding interest to Strauss now took on new intensity and urgency. For it was one thing to share in the collective heroic act whereby a whole nation, this people, dedicated itself to the infinitely highest. But it was yet another kind of heroism—private, barely marked—whereby a few solitary individuals, "the remnant whom the Lord calls," sought to maintain fidelity to the command to love—that is to say, to know—the Lord. It was while seated at his study table, his thoughts engaged with those of the author before him, it was in such rare and select company that Leo Strauss lived his life.
Harry Austryn Wolfson (1887–1974)

by Isadore Twersky

The public academic career and impressive scholarly achievement of Harry Austryn Wolfson, Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard since 1925, are relatively well known. However, in addition to this Wolfson revelatus—the straightforward success story of a talented, industrious young immigrant and his rise to scholarly fame—there is a Wolfson absconditus—a story, for the most part unknown, of a shy, introspective, sometimes melancholy, former yeshivah student and eminent professor, candidly assessing his own achievement in historical-typological terms, soberly pondering the state of Jewish scholarship and sensitively, sometimes agonizingly, reflecting upon contemporary history and the destiny of Judaism and the Jewish people. This brief memoir tries to integrate the two narratives.

"From enormous knowledge"

Wolfson was clearly one of this century's great humanists, a prolific and creative scholar in the history of philosophy. The quintessential Wolfson was pointedly described in the citation accompanying the honorary degree (Litt.D.) which Harvard conferred upon him in 1956: "From enormous knowledge, he graciously illumines the major problems of religious philosophy and their relation to revealed truth."

In many respects, he resembled an uncrowned and unwreathed scholar laureate, widely acclaimed and admired, respected and honored. Even a partial list of honorary degrees which were bestowed upon him, and organizational affiliations which he maintained, and awards which he received is

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a suggestive, although very formal, index of the esteem he enjoyed in this country. His honorary degrees came from the Jewish Institute of Religion (1935), Jewish Theological Seminary (1937), Hebrew Union College (1945), Yeshiva University (1950), and Dropsie College (1952), as well as from the University of Chicago (1953), Harvard University (1956), Brandeis University (1958), Columbia University (1970), and Stonehill College (1973). He was a founding member, fellow, and past president of the American Academy for Jewish Research; honorary member of the American Jewish Historical Society; fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, American Philosophical Society, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and past president of the American Oriental Society. He received the American Council of Learned Societies award for distinguished scholarship in the Humanities and the Kaplun prize awarded by the Hebrew University for distinguished research and scholarship in Judaica.

Wolfson’s trail-blazing study and interpretation of the unpublished commentaries (originals as well as translations) of Averroes and his systematic integration of the study of Jewish and Islamic—and Christian—philosophy (in other words, the philosophical literature written in Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin) attracted wide, even international, attention. His arduous and meticulous investigation of Averroes, in a pre-xerox, almost pre-technological academic age, without staff or secretariat, led to the preparation of a “Plan for the Publication of a Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelen” which, in turn, goaded and guided other scholars—students and colleagues in the United States and abroad—to edit the long, intermediate and short commentaries of Averroes, the great twelfth-century Islamic philosopher whom Wolfson dubbed “a naturalized Hebrew and Latin author.” This Averroes project, an academic milestone, may be seen as an Archimedean fulcrum for the originality and scope of his work, and its resonance in the international scholarly community. It may be noted that soon after his death The Medieval Academy of America, which sponsored the project, despaired of continuing it without the editorial direction, scholarly supervision, and personal dedication of Wolfson.

Totally un-Aristotelian, shunning moderation in his extreme, all-consuming devotion to learning, Wolfson converted his life into an itinerarium mentis, an adventurous journey and colorful odyssey of the mind. He transcended all formal requirements and academic norms, pursuing his scholarly enterprises—truly his calling—with zest and love. Indeed, his prodigious scholarly output is comprehensible only if we see it emerging from a matrix of singleness of purpose, intensity of commitment, consistency of method, and clarity of destination. I may testify that to the very end
of his life, when he was lean and wizened, his eyes dim and tired, his body
racked with disease, he continued to be preoccupied with scholarly matters.

From Philo to Spinoza

His intense, unqualified commitment to scholarship—there was some-
thing fervent about it—bore ripe fruit. His many well-known and justly
celebrated volumes are monuments to the pertinacity, perspicacity, and
profundity of his life’s work: Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle: Problems of
Aristotle’s Physics in Jewish and Arabic Philosophy (1929); The Philosophy
of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning, 2 vols. (1934);
Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and
Islam, 2 vols. (1947); The Philosophy of the Church Fathers (1956); The
Philosophy of Kalam, (1975); and Kalam Repercussions in Jewish Philosophy
(ready in galleys). There are, in addition, three collections of papers and
articles, some of which are full-fledged monographs of high quality and
wide scope: Religious Philosophy: A Group of Essays (1961); Studies in the
of these large tomes in its own right could and would be a scholar’s pride;
each one would amply justify a lifetime devoted exclusively to Hellenistic,
or to patristic, or to Islamic, or to scholastic, or to Jewish scholarship.

This is the real measure of Harry Wolfson, of his intellectual daring and
imaginativeness; starting as a student of medieval Jewish philosophy (his
first published article, growing out of an undergraduate paper written at
Harvard for Santayana, was “Maimonides and Ha-Levi: A Study in Typical
Jewish Attitudes towards Greek Philosophy in the Middle Ages,” Jewish
Quarterly Review, n.s. 2 [1911], 297–337), he burst the recognized bounds
and bonds of specialized, sometimes provincial scholarship and then pa-
tiently but vigorously brought within his purview the entire history of
philosophy, moving with verve and aplomb and delicacy from pre-Socratics
to neo-Kantians, from Greek atomists to American pragmatists. In the
process he sought unsolved problems, unexplored sources, unperceived
relationships, and uncharted lanes of philosophy. The challenge of under-
standing and unraveling the origin, structure, and diversity of philosophic
systems fascinated and stimulated him; his sustained, simultaneously eru-
dite and imaginative, response to the challenge produced the pageantry and
vitality of his wide-ranging scholarship.

This achievement is notable for its happy marriage of philosophical per-
ceptivity and philological precision, its unusual combination of powers of
dissection and integration, its fastidious argumentation and felicitous for-
mulation. This tireless scholar, cloistered most of his life in Widener Li-
brary, was able to combine unflagging attention to detail—stylistic, struc-
tural, or substantive—with powerful skills of original synthesis. While eluci-
dating difficult texts and knotty passages in Averroes or Gersonides, 
Aquinas or Falaquera, Pico della Mirandola or Abarbanel, he also clearly 
formulated a new anti-Hegelian scheme for the periodization of the history 
of philosophy—in which Jewish philosophy from Philo to Spinoza was 
central—and expounded, more allusively, a philosophy of the history of 
philosophy—in which religious thought played a major role. Both of these 
are reflected in the subtitle of his study on Philo: “Foundations of Religious 
Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” Wolfson depicts Philo as 
the founder of a new philosophic trend which was continued not only by 
his immediate chronological successors, the Church Fathers, but also by his 
indirect disciples, the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian medieval philosophers 
until the time of Spinoza. The distinctive-innovative feature of Philonic 
teachings—and that which was to be a dominant influence, latent or visible, 
indirect or direct, in European philosophic thought for seventeen centuries 
—was a well-integrated interpretation of Scripture in terms of philosophy 
and a balanced critique (and, concomitantly, radical revision) of philosophy 
in light of Scriptural principles of belief. It is this type of religious philo-
osophy which was new and influential—and which was so fully and sympa-
thetically and imaginatively reconstructed by Professor Wolfson. 

This central conception concerning the history of philosophy—which 
positioned Philo, the first century Jew of Alexandria, and Spinoza, the 
seventeenth century Jew of Amsterdam, as the pivots of “medieval” 
philosophy—was very dear to him; it was, in many respects, the core and 
catalyst of his life’s work. The fact that this conceptual scheme of periodiza-
tion did not become widely influential was, consequently, a major disap-
pointment for him. 

Furthermore, while developing and sustaining his conception of the his-
tory of philosophy, he also provided an unequivocally affirmative answer to 
the question whether or not there is such a creature as Jewish philosophy, 
a question which had been answered negatively by many serious scholars. 
It was Wolfson’s contention that not only is there such an intellectual entity 
as Jewish philosophy but that it is the very core, the essence, of all religious 
philosophy for seventeen centuries—and indeed, in residual form or unac-
knowledged guise, down to our own time. 

The literary quality of his work, his lucidity of style and precision of 
expression, should also be underscored. He was as concerned with form as 
with content. The same patience and exhaustiveness which characterized
his approach to research determined his style, which became an integral, not merely ornamental, part of his work. The presentation had to conform with the analysis. He would not consciously settle for "good enough" or "second best," regardless of the requisite expenditure of time and energy. A reader need only turn to one of the collections of Wolfson's essays in order to encounter directly the elegance of style, flow of wit, and effusion of charm; the vigorous prologue, the animated epilogue, the exhilarating characterization, the intricately-textured and carefully-cadenced generalization, and the resonant allusion provide a light, soothing ambiance for his philosophic explorations. The fusion of these aspects is seen very clearly in the volume on Crescas, where felicitous translation, exhaustive explication, and enticing conceptualization are combined.

The methodological foundation for this literary-philosophic and historiographical achievement is a mode of minute textual-philological study which Wolfson labeled the "hypothetico-deductive method" or the method of conjecture and verification, but which was in essence the traditional method of studying Talmudic texts. Wolfson applied it purely and consistently, free of sociological generalizations, metahistorical hypotheses, and other popular forms of conjecture. He was particularly wary of sociological explanations which often claimed to supplant rather than supplement historical-philological analysis and then ended up as smoke screens for lack of precision. His conjecture was philological, which he always tried to verify by adducing direct, or at least indirect, textual evidence; he developed an interpretation and then proceeded to anchor it textually; he traced abstract problems through their terminological footprints, guided all along, to be sure, by his own conception of the history of philosophy, its major trends and traits. There was, in short, constant interplay between the a priori-conceptual and the empirical-textual. While his critics sometimes found him to be too speculative in his unfolding of latent processes of philosophic reasoning, ready to build upon soaring conjecture without sufficient, self-evident textual verification (his lucid expositions of complex problems and ingenious interpretations of intractable texts are punctuated by such phrases as "it may be reasonably assumed;" "from all this we may gather;" "his [Ghazali's] explanation may be taken to reflect Aristotle's . . . ;" etc.) —and it is precisely the daring of his method which contributes both to the solidity as well as the vulnerability of his achievement—he could only retort that the alternative was deadly, stultifying, or prosaic. The following conclusion of an article—a rejoinder to some critical comments on his explication of "four Arabic terms"—is typical: "But all this is based, of course, only upon circumstantial evidence; we have no direct testimony of either
al-Kindi or Israeli that this is exactly how their minds worked; bread-and-butter scholarship may, therefore, brush it all aside and dismiss it as unconvincing." His own erudition and ingenuity (rich but not extravagant) prevented him from being prosaic or timid.

From Slabodka to Harvard

While there is not much material connection between Talmudic study and philosophic research—and Wolfson was totally engrossed in the latter—he did try to sustain and benefit from a methodological affinity between them and, in many respects, this affinity—natural or contrived, real or imaginary—is the cornerstone of his life. Harry Austryn Wolfson was born November 2, 1887, in Ostrin, Lithuania, and died on September 19, 1974,* in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His life—its heterogeneity and creativity as well as its tensions and increasing loneliness of his later years—is symbolized by his odyssey from Ostrin through Grodno, Slonim, Bialostok, Kovno, Slabodka and Vilna, a roster of place names which throbs with Jewish history and learning, joy and suffering, to Cambridge. Upon his arrival with his family in New York (September, 1903) he continued his Jewish studies and shortly thereafter (1905) settled in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where, at the age of 18, he enrolled in the Central High School and graduated three years later, supporting himself during this period by part-time Hebrew teaching. A $250 scholarship, awarded on the basis of competitive exams, enabled him to come to Harvard, from which he received his B.A. (1911) and Ph.D. (1915) with two years in Europe as a Sheldon Travelling Fellow; typically enough, he spent most of this time working independently in the great libraries of London, Paris, Berlin, and Munich, rather than in the lecture hall or seminar room. In 1915 he began teaching at Harvard and, after a series of term appointments during which he was also for a few years part-time professor of Jewish history at the recently established Jewish Institute of Religion, in 1925 became the first Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Jewish Philosophy.

This student of Santayana—Wolfson came to Harvard toward the end of its so-called golden age in Philosophy (Josiah Royce, William James, George Santayana)—had attended the last mussar lecture** delivered by the famous R. Yitzhak (Itzele) Blazer at the Yeshivah of Slabodka prior to his becoming the rabbi of Petersburg. We have here in this juxtaposition an effective symbol of the two worlds which constituted Professor Wolfson's

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*4 Tishri, 5735
**A discourse combining homiletics, exegesis, and theology, geared to stimulating or sustaining the individual's quest for ethical perfection.
universe. His early Lithuanian years left their mark on all the later decades at Harvard. All indications suggest that he was a serious undergraduate, hard-working doctoral student, and imaginative junior faculty member, overflowing with remembrances of things past (particularly his formal educational experiences supplemented by his extracurricular haskalah reading) and hopes for things future (particularly a career as a free-lance Hebrew writer and novelist, a goal he gradually abandoned in favor of academic scholarship). Even in his later years, these experiences continued to reverberate.

The intense education of Harry Wolfson and his Americanization notwithstanding, he could never be singled out as the typical Harvard scholar, even though he spent over sixty-five years of his life at Harvard and became not only one of Harvard's most illustrious, but also one of its most loyal and loving sons. There was something different about him—not only because of the accent which stayed with him throughout his life even after he became an eloquent master of English prose. He was reminiscent of an old-fashioned gaon transposed into a secular university setting, studying day and night, resisting presumptive attractions and distractions with a tenacity which sometimes seemed awkward and anti-social. Bialik's description of the matmid, the paradigm of an assiduous scholar, the classical student of Jewish lore, comes to mind:

A matmid, in his prison-house
A prisoner, self-guarded, self condemned,
Self-sacrificed to the study of the Law

Earth and her fullness are concentrated here,
A thousand suns blaze in the gloomy corner.
Like vehement coals, his eyes give answering fire
While, lore-impassioned, back and forth he sways

Day after day firm stands the sentinel
From noon to night, from darkness to darkness.

All you have to do is remove the swaying posture, change the subject matter, and substitute one of the studies in massive Widener Library for the gloomy corner of the modest bet midrash—both prison houses—and you have the scenario for Wolfson's scholarly career. A dramatic change, and yet!

The impact and imprint are manifest in many scholarly, as well as personal, ways.

In 1921, at the dawn of his scholarly career, he penned the following lines:

Once, in a great library, I was walking through the narrow aisles between long rows of book-shelves stocked with the works of the church writers. Every great thinker of the church whose teachings helped to mold Christian thought and
tradition was represented there by his writings. There were the old Church Fathers, both those who wrote in Greek and those who wrote in Latin; there also were Augustine the saint and Abelard the erratic, the great Albertus and Thomas, he of Aquino. Hundreds upon hundreds of volumes, the choicest products of the printer’s art of Venice, Basel, Leipzig, Paris, and Rome, bound in pigskin and in morocco leather, with gilded back and bronzed corners, all were gathered together, standing there in the open shelves, offering themselves for use and for study. And looking at that wealth of magnificent volumes, I thought of those shabby tomes which incarnate the spirit of Saadia, Halevi and Maimonides, of those unpublished works of Gersonides, Narboni and Shem-tobs, scattered all over the world and rotting in the holds of libraries; and I was overcome by that feeling of sadness and sorrow which to our forefathers was ever present throughout their exiled life amid the foreign splendor of European cities, a feeling so well expressed in the touching prayer:

"Lord, I remember, and am sore amazed
To see each city standing in her state,
And God's city to low grave razed."

I see in these words more than just the stirrings of a scholarly consciousness. His citing the words of Amittai b. Shephatiah’s penitential hymn—which is recited during the Ten Days of Repentance and repeated at the Ne’ilah service concluding the prayers of the Day of Atonement—is not, in my opinion, merely an academic secularization of a religious motif, but rises from deep emotional wellsprings. His knowledge of this poem came from the prayer book and not from an anthology of Hebrew poetry. His abiding appreciation of traditional Judaism was a formative and pervasive—and sometimes enigmatic and unsettling—influence.

While Wolfson was effusive about his scholarly works—he repeatedly and uninhibitedly discussed them—he rarely discussed his inner experiences or publicly reflected upon his self-assessment and self-perception. With typical Lithuanian restraint and detachment, almost Stoic apathy, he camouflaged and concealed his feelings and aspirations. Now, if we were to unfold the latent processes of his heart and mind, as he, for example, unfolded the latent processes of Philo’s or Spinoza’s reasoning, we would reconstruct an unknown dimension of his life. We would be able to illumine his deep roots in the Jewish past, profound concern for the Jewish present, and passionate commitment to the Jewish future. There is no need, nor am I able, to identify and isolate the emotional, intellectual, or fideist components of this commitment; we need only confront it and recognize the tension, introspection, and retrospection which it produced. Just as the focus of his work—medieval Jewish philosophy—did not change but the periphery kept growing and expanding, embracing Greek, Christian, and Islamic philosophy, so the core of his life was unaltered even though he often moved on the periphery and seemed to stray from the traditional center.
Jewish Studies on Campus

As first incumbent of the first chair in an American university completely devoted to Jewish studies, he played an important role in the institutionalization and professionalization of Jewish studies and their spread across the American campus. Actually Wolfson’s life-work at Harvard marks the emergence of Judaica in great universities as a respectable, self-sufficient discipline with its own integrity, autonomy, and comprehensiveness. In the past—and that means up to very recent times—the study of Judaica was ancillary, secondary, fragmentary, or derivative. Jewish studies were sometimes referred to as service departments whose task was to help illumine an obscurity in Tacitus or Posidonius, a midrash in Jerome, a Hebrew allusion in Dante, or an exegetical turn in Nicholas of Lyra, a cabalistic topos in Pico or a Jewish notion in ibn Khaldun, a rabbinic metaphor in Milton, a Talmudic citation in John Selden, a fact in the biography of Walter Rathenau or Emile Durkheim or Hans Kelsen, a symbol in Franz Kafka, or even a Yiddishism in the memoirs of Bernard Berenson. The establishment of the Littauer chair at Harvard for Harry Wolfson gave Judaica its own station on the frontiers of knowledge and pursuit of truth, and began to redress the lopsidedness or imbalance of quasi-Jewish studies.

Jewish studies in the university are difficult and demanding and—indeed like Judaism itself—require dialectical deftness. They should be universalist, should strive to correlate, as Edmund Wilson put it, “the adventures and achievements of Jews with those of the rest of the world,” should bring the outer-directed tendencies of the Jewish historical experience into clear focus, and try to develop a panoramic and synoptic view which sees the interplay of forces and help integrate the study of Jewish and world history. However, in the process of elaborating this approach and sustaining this conception, Jewish studies should not ignore the unique features, should not play down the inner-directed forces and experiences, sacrifice the specific to the generic, the particular to the general; in a word, they should avoid dwelling exclusively on the borders of the picture. It has been said—the idea is widespread, but Ernst Curtius’ formulation of it comes to mind—that specialization without universalism is blind but universalism without specialization is inane. Wolfson concretized this principle in his scholarly creativity; he personified the scope, balance, and profundity which are needed to make Jewish studies innovative and authentic while saving them from superficiality or sensationalism, abuse, distortion, and caricature. He knew that the inner core of Jewish studies must not be eroded.

Wolfson’s impact was great not only because of institutional leverage, but also because of the broad range of his own creative scholarship as well as
the even wider range of his literary interests. Personal, professional, and institutional preeminence—happily joined, at some point, by growing seniority and increasing venerability—carved out a central niche for Harry Wolfson in the development of Jewish scholarship in America. He was, really, in his own humble, retiring way, a one-man scholarly establishment, commodious and capacious, a respected symbol of the entire range of twentieth-century Jewish scholarship, a senior scholar-statesman in Judaica, whose learning or intuition made his opinions relevant. Cuneiformists and Americanists, medievalists and modernists, students of belles-lettres as well as philosophy frequented his Widener study, requesting and receiving advice and encouragement. His work provided a general paradigm of thoroughness and originality, his personal involvement and interest in many scholarly fields encouraged scholars to devote their energies to them, and his generally sage and subtle (sometimes, apparently innocent) comments on virtually all facets of Jewish learning led different individuals and organizations to seek his support or participation. He revealed great understanding and appreciation of fields in which he was not, but would have liked to be, involved. Rabbinic scholarship in the broadest sense was clearly the most important of these fields, one which attracted him irresistibly and which he respected unboundedly. His acknowledgement of the centrality of Talmudic learning in Judaism and Jewish scholarship never wavered and his respect for Talmudists—traditional talmide hakhamim or modern Talmudic scholars—was steadfast. Early in his career he wrote—and repeated this sentiment throughout his life—that “the Talmud with its literature is the most promising field of study, the most fertile field of original research and investigation.” If he had his way, he would make a traditional Talmudic education a firm prerequisite for any area of Jewish scholarly expertise; he was uncomfortable with academic upstarts and “nouveaux riches” who lacked such Jewish education and pretended to be authorities in Judaica.

Past and Present

All his commitment to detached, humanistic scholarship, his personal shyness and rigid sense of discipline notwithstanding, Wolfson was not indifferent to or unconcerned with contemporary realities. He shied away from discussing his epistemology and ontology, he did not even formulate his “philosophy of life.” He was not a “public” figure in the conventional sense; he did not address large popular gatherings or plenary sessions of philanthropic or cultural organizations and never issued pronouncements concerning the burning issues of the day. Perhaps he was afraid of compro-
mising—even obliquely—his scholarly objectivity. Nevertheless, his writing is seasoned with relevance and insight, all the more forceful and attractive by virtue of its subtlety and unobstrusiveness, and studded with critical commentary on the contemporary scene. He remained a child of his times: he lived with the complexities, ambiguities, continuities, and discontinuities, that characterize a matmid-maskil who remained rooted in, and loyal to, his past, who refused to join the ranks of the alienated intellectuals (whom he described so poignantly at the beginning of his study on Philo). The problems of tradition and modernity, faith and enlightenment, religious observance and acculturation, evoked concerned, unsettling, and often paradoxical or apparently inconsistent responses from him. He was particularly agitated by much of the intentional obfuscation or unintentional ignorance which characterized discussion of religious philosophy. Just as he approached those addicted to fashionable jargon or scholarly faddishness with benign but trenchant criticism, he looked with wry humor and suspicion at many aspects of modern Jewish life. He approached the presumptive modernity of certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophers with scholarly reserve and critical insight. He was guided by the discipline of medieval Jewish philosophy; modern distortions or tendentious interpretations of classical Jewish thought were, therefore, distasteful to him.

One could easily compile a collection of Wolfsonian observations—culled from his writings, particularly his occasional pieces and the early articles in the Menorah Journal, and the memories of friends and colleagues—which would illustrate his concern with, and attitude to, such specific issues as the relationship of Christianity to Judaism (as broached, for example, by Ahad Ha'am) and Jewish-Christian relations, ecumenicism and good will, ("bury the hatchet, not the differences"), study of Judaism and the Western humanistic tradition, varieties of scholarship (good and bad), renaissance of Hebrew literature and formation of modern Hebrew style, the danger of Yiddishism and the promise of Hebraism, optimistic and pessimistic appraisals of the prospects for Jewish survival in face of assimilation, Zionism and the varieties of anti-Zionism, religious reform and cultural enlightenment. He tended to view such problems and phenomena from a historical perspective and to form a judgment about them in light of traditional patterns and conceptions.

While many writers were apparently agitated about the tyranny of the past and its stultifying effects,—i.e., varieties of traditionalism—Wolfson, despite his settling into an academic routine which appeared to be almost clinically, antiseptically detached from contemporary contingencies and time-bound concerns, was worried about the tyranny of the present—i.e.,
varieties of conformism, amorphous existentialism, and facile acculturation. He was an unrelenting critic of the "disintegrated consciousness" of modern Judaism. The following words, first published in 1925 and frequently reprinted (most recently in a Hebrew translation as well) are revealing:

Throughout the history of religious controversies between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages, Christianity was on the defensive. The Christians considered themselves called upon to prove the claims they made on behalf of Jesus by endeavoring to show that the vague prophetic promises were all fulfilled in Christ. The Jews had no counterclaims to make; they simply refused to be impressed. As the historical custodians of the Bible texts as well as of its manifold interpretations, the Jews were rather amazed and at times even amused by the confidence with which the erstwhile heathen interpreted at their own pleasure the mistaken Scriptures quoted from the Vulgate. This attitude of aloofness and incredulity was sufficient to enrage even saints among Christians, for it gave them an uneasiness of feeling, deepening into fear and doubt and a general sense of discomfort, which explains much of the Christian intolerance of the Jews. The great victories achieved by Christianity, its conquest of many youthful barbarian races and its destruction of many effete civilizations—all this did not compensate its adherents for their failure to win over the handful of survivors of the race that had witnessed the birth of Christianity. And so the Jews were dragged to churches and to royal courts to listen to sermons and to partake in disputations in order to be impressed and become convinced.

Today many of us Jews have taken the burden of proof upon ourselves. A century of infiltration of Christian ideas into our life through all the agencies of education has robbed many of us of our essential Jewish character, of our distinctive Jewish philosophy of life, and has left us Jews only in appearance, in occupation, and in the semblance of an external social coherence. In everything that guides our life and determines our view thereof, we have become Christianized.

American Judaism

We may note finally that American Jewish history was also of special interest to him. Convinced that a historiography of the Jewish experience in America built on sociological platitudes, general political-economic tendencies, impersonal communal and institutional developments or simplified cultural traits could not be too enlightening, he would urge writers in this field to elaborate case histories of prominent and not so prominent families, to search for the pre-modern and pre-American roots of this experience, to recognize the uniqueness of American Jewish history and yet to relate it to the totality of Jewish history. His articles in the Menorah Journal reveal a witty, poignant, and constructive critic of American Judaism. His statement (1922), restrained but firm, concerning the proposed quota for Jewish students at Harvard illustrates how he would invariably—whether addressing himself to Jews or to non-Jews—relate contemporary situations to historical perceptions. All the problems—challenges and frustrations—of moder-
nity could be found in the American Jewish experience. Particularly noteworthy in this context are the notes and observations published under the title, “Pomegranates” (Menorah Journal, IV [1918], pp. 16 ff; 162 ff). For example:

Today the problem which Judaism has to contend with is indifference. Once it was error. To fight error, be that error superstition or heresy—for superstition is the heresy of the ignorant and heresy is nothing more than the superstition of the educated—implies a certain courage and conviction. Once Judaism had both. It knew its own mind and spoke it. Judaism stood defined, in terms clear and unmistakable, in a cumulative written tradition. Not that the living tradition, the life and institutions of the people, has ever been discounted as a source from which an understanding of Judaism could be derived, but the living tradition was significant only in so far as it had been continuous, pure and unadulterated, guided and controlled by eternal immutable principles. Judaism was then something objectively real and tangible from which it was conceived possible that the entire people could be led astray, and toward which, in that case, it was the duty of those entrusted with its care to lead it back. The nomistic character of Judaism, whatever else it may have meant, surely meant that Judaism was not a mere will-o’-the-wisp. Today a perverted sense of democracy and of a biological nationalism has given rise to a doctrine of the religion of the people corresponding to the old autocratic doctrine of the religion of the king. Judaism is now the changing mood of the Jews. It is no longer an inheritance; it is a set of inherited characteristics. It is no longer a discipline; it is a day-dream. . . We cannot take Jewish life of today as the source of Judaism, for we are all now in a state of apostasy both in a religious and in a secular cultural sense. To remain as Jews it is not sufficient for us to continue to be what we are, for we are not what we should be. Jewish life of today is indeed peculiar, but it is not peculiarly Jewish.

“Escaping Judaism” (ibid., VII [1921], pp. 71 ff), a clever and caustic indictment of that Judaism which “suffers from an excessive craving for modernity, formality and respectability” and deludes itself into thinking that religion without law is possible, is still timely and refreshing.

Harry Wolfson was a great, laconic, and lonely person; his legacy is rich, colorful, and provocative.