AHAD HA-AM (ASHER ZVI GINSBERG)
1856-1927

AHAD HA-AM was born as Asher Zvi Ginsberg in Skvira, in the Russian Ukraine on August 18, 1856. His family belonged to the very highest aristocracy of the Jewish ghetto, being particularly close to the Hasidic rebbe of Sadagura. His formal education was so strictly pious that his teacher was forbidden to instruct him even in the letters of the Russian alphabet, lest this might lead to heresy (he nonetheless taught himself to read Russian at the age of eight from the signs on the store fronts of his town). By the middle of his adolescence Asher Ginsberg was already a considerable and even somewhat celebrated scholar of the Talmud and its literature, as well as of the devotional literature of the Hasidic movement.

In 1868 his family moved to an estate which his wealthy father had leased. There, locked in his room (then and later he had no interest in nature) he began on the road toward "enlightenment" by studying the works of the great medieval Jewish philosophers, especially of Maimonides. By stages he went on to the "forbidden books" of the modern Hebrew "enlightenment," and eventually, at the age of twenty, to the wider horizons of literature and philosophy in Russian and German. Soon, like his contemporary, Lilienblum, Ahad Ha-Am discovered the works of D. I. Pisarev, one of the founders of Russian positivism, and definitely lost his religious faith.

The years between 1879 and 1886 were the most painful period of his life, marked by abortive attempts to go to Vienna, Berlin, Breslau, and Leipzig to study. Personal troubles, the severe illness of his wife (as was the custom of his class, a marriage had been arranged for him at the age of twenty), and his own self-doubts and lack of resolution kept forcing him to return home after a few weeks with, as he put it, "a pained heart." The family finally moved to Odessa in 1886, not by choice but under the constraint of a new tsarist ukase forbidding Jews to lease land. Though this was a grave economic blow, Ahad Ha-Am was nonetheless relieved to be gone from a place which was associated in his memory with inner torment.

His first article, "This Is Not the Way," was published in 1889 when he was thirty-three. Not regarding himself as a writer, he signed it as Ahad Ha-Am, i.e., "one of the people," the pen name by which he was to be known henceforth. He always refused to consider himself as a man of letters, even when increasing poverty of his family forced him to take a job in 1896 as the editor of a Hebrew monthly, *Ha-Shiloah*, in order to support his wife and, by then, three children. After six years of editing this literary journal, which he intended as a platform for the discussion of the contemporary problems of Judaism, he resigned his post, feeling bitter and depressed but relieved to be free of the hateful burdens of being a public servant. He became an official of a tea concern and traveled widely on its behalf throughout Russia for four years. He moved to London in 1907, when his firm opened a branch there, and remained there for fourteen years, until 1921, when he settled in Palestine.

Ahad Ha-Am's debut in Hebrew literature occurred in the era which followed after the pogroms of 1881, in the day of the Hibbat Zion movement. In his first essay and, within several years, in long pieces of analytical reportage that he wrote from the recently founded few colonies in Palestine, he appeared as a disturber of the peace. Comparing the high-flown verbiage of this early Zionism with its paltry and often ill-conceived practical achievements, Ahad Ha-Am was uncompromising in his insistence that work in Palestine needed to be done slowly and with great care. Above all, he suggested that the true meaning of Hibbat Zion was not to be found, as leaders like Lilienblum thought, in mass action but in the cultural revival and modernization of the Jewish people through the agency of a carefully chosen few. From the very beginning these views aroused a storm and his continued reiteration of them after the appearance of Herzl simply continued the controversy. The agnostic definitions that he was proposing for a new Jewish spiritual culture involved him in another continuing argument, a debate with the orthodox. On the other hand, the conservatism of his thought, in practical application, made him the target of many of the younger and more rebellious voices in modern Hebrew literature, who found him too traditionalist in temper, a hard taskmaster as an editor, and lacking in interest in art and belles-lettres for their own sake.

With considerable self-knowledge of his lack of capacity for leadership in practical affairs, Ahad Ha-Am consistently avoided any kind of office within Zionism. However, his first essay inspired a number of men to organize the B'nai Moshe, a semi-secret elite order the purpose

of which was to raise the moral and cultural tone of the Jewish national revival. Ahad Ha-Am became its reluctant leader; he failed in this task because his idealism, the deep pessimism of his nature, and his revulsion as moralist from imposing his will on others made it inconceivable that he should succeed. Indeed, a lifetime of bad health and, especially as he grew older, frequent spells of melancholy limited his literary production to the essays that have been collected in four volumes and the six volumes of his letters, which he helped edit toward the end of his life.

Though Ahad Ha-Am's views were rejected by the bulk of the Zionist movement, and he himself never attended a Zionist Congress after the very first, many of the younger east European leaders of the movement, like Chaim Weizmann, owed much to his influence. In 1917, when Weizmann was negotiating with the British Cabinet for the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, Ahad Ha-Am was among his most intimate advisers. Ahad Ha-Am's influence on modern Hebrew writing was notable not only in the realm of ideas but also for the creation of a spare, unadorned, "western" style.

When Ahad Ha-Am settled in Tel Aviv, the street on which he lived was named after him and even closed off from all traffic during his afternoon rest hours. In his sunset years this agnostic reached his apotheosis as the secular rabbi—indeed, almost the secular Hasidic rebbe—of a wide circle within the growing Jewish settlement in Palestine.

He died in the early hours of January 2, 1927, and all Tel Aviv attended his funeral.

THE LAW OF THE HEART (1894)

THE RELATION BETWEEN a normal people and its literature is one of parallel development and mutual interaction. Literature responds to the demands of life, and life reacts to the guidance of literature. The function of literature is to plant the seed of new ideas and new desires; the seed once planted, life does the rest. The tender shoot is nurtured and brought to maturity by the spontaneous action of men's minds, and its growth is shaped by their needs. In time the new

idea or desire becomes an organic part of consciousness, an independent dynamic force, no more related to its literary origin than is the work of a great writer to the primer from which he learned at school.

But a "people of the book," unlike a normal people, is a slave to the book. It has surrendered its whole soul to the written word. The book ceases to be what it should be, a source of ever-new inspiration and moral strength; on the contrary, its function in life is to weaken and finally to crush all spontaneity of action and emotion, till men become wholly dependent on the written word and incapable of responding to any stimulus in nature or in human life without its permission and approval. Nor, even when that sanction is found, is the response simple and natural; it has to follow a prearranged and artificial plan. Consequently both the people and its book stand still from age to age; little or nothing changes, because the vital impulse to change is lacking on both sides. The people stagnates because heart and mind do not react directly and immediately to external events; the book stagnates because, as a result of this absence of direct reaction, heart and mind do not rise in revolt against the written word where it has ceased to be in harmony with current needs.

We Jews have been a people of the book in this sense for nearly two thousand years; but we were not always so. It goes without saying that we were not a people of the book in the era of the Prophets, from which we have traveled so far that we can no longer even understand it. But even in the period of the Second Temple heart and mind had not lost their spontaneity of action and their self-reliance. In those days it was still possible to find the source of the Law and the arbiter of the written word in the human heart, as witness the famous dictum of Hillel: "Do not unto your neighbor what you would not have him do unto you; that is the whole Law."[1] If on occasion the spontaneity of thought and emotion brought them into conflict with the written word, they did not efface themselves in obedience to its dictates; they revolted against it where it no longer met their needs, and so forced upon it a development in consonance with their new requirements. For example: The Biblical law of "an eye for an eye" was felt by the more developed moral sense of a later age to be savage and unworthy of a civilized nation; and at that time the moral judgment of the people was still the highest tribunal. Consequently it was regarded as obvious that the written word, which was also authoritative, must have meant "the value of an eye for an eye," that is to say, a penalty in money and not in kind.

But this state of things did not endure. The Oral Law (which is

Torah vs. Talmud

really the inner law, the law of the moral sense) was itself reduced to writing and fossilized; and the moral sense was left with only one clear and firm conviction—that of its own utter impotence and its eternal subservience to the written word. Conscience no longer had any authority in its own right; not conscience but the book became the arbiter in every human question. More than that: conscience had no longer the right even to approve of what the written word prescribed. So we are told that a Jew must not say he dislikes pork: to do so would be like the impudence of a slave who agrees with his master instead of unquestioningly doing his bidding. In such an atmosphere we need not be surprised that some commentators came to regard Hillel's moral interpretation of the Law as sacrilegious and found themselves compelled to explain away the finest saying in the Talmud. By "your neighbor," they said, Hillel really meant the Almighty: you are not to go against His will, because you would not like your neighbor to go against your will. And if the doctrine of "an eye for an eye" had been laid down in the Babylonian Talmud, not in the Mosaic Law, and its interpretation had consequently fallen not to the early Sages but to the Talmudic commentators, they would doubtless have accepted the doctrine in its literal meaning; Rabbis and common people alike would have forcibly silenced the protest of their own moral sense against an explicit injunction, and would have claimed credit for doing so.

The Haskalah writers of the last generation did not get down to the root cause of this tyranny of the written word. They put the blame primarily on the hardheartedness and hidebound conservatism of Rabbis who thought nothing of sacrificing the happiness of the individual on the altar of a meticulous legalism. Thus Gordon in *The Point of a Yod* depicts the Rabbi as

> *A man who sought not peace and knew no pity,*
> *For ever banning this, forbidding that,*
> *Condemning here, and penalizing there.*

These writers appealed to the moral sense of the common man against the harshness of the Law. They thought that by painting the contrast in sufficiently lurid colors they could provoke a revolt which would lead to the triumph of the moral sense over the written word. But this was a complete mistake. There was in fact no difference between the attitude of the Rabbi and that of the ordinary man. When Vofsi[2] pronounced the bill of divorce invalid, he may have been just as sorry for the victims as was the assembled congregation, who, in the poet's words,

not the rabbis' fault

Stood all atremble, as though the shadow of death
Had fallen upon them.

It was only the Rabbi who never doubted for a moment where the victory must lie in a conflict between the moral sense and the written word; the congregation did not dream of questioning the Rabbi's decision, still less of questioning the Law itself. If they "stood all atremble," it was only as one might tremble at some catastrophe due to the unalterable course of nature. A normal people would react to a tragedy of this kind by determining that such a thing should never happen again; but a "people of the book" can react only by dumb sorrow, such as would have been occasioned by the heroine's falling dead at her wedding. To blame the written word, to revolt against the rigor of the Law—that is out of the question.

Zangwill[3] is nearer the truth in his *Children of the Ghetto*. In this novel there is an incident similar to that of Gordon's poem, but the treatment is very different. The Rabbi, Reb Shmuel, is himself the girl's father, and a very affectionate father. His daughter's happiness in her love for David is his happiness too. But when he discovers by accident that David is of the priestly family, and therefore cannot marry Hannah, who is technically a divorced woman because of a young man's stupid joke, his first words, in spite of his anguish, are "Thank God I knew it in time." All David's appeals to justice and mercy are in vain. It is God's law, and must be obeyed. "Do you think," says Reb Shmuel at the end of a long and painful scene, "I would not die to make Hannah happy? But God has laid this burden upon her—and I can only help her to bear it."

No: Vofsi and all his kind are not monsters of cruelty. They are tenderhearted enough; but their natural feelings have not free scope. Every sentiment, every impulse, every desire gives in without a struggle to "the point of a yod."

Where the natural play of heart and mind is thus stifled, we cannot expect to find self-assertion or strength of purpose in any business outside the field of the written word. Logic, experience, common sense, and moral feeling are alike powerless to lead men into new paths toward a goal of their own choice. Inevitably, as our experience has shown, this general condition puts obstacles in the way of the solution of any and every one of our problems. It has long been obvious to thinking men that there is no hope for any particular measure of improvement unless the general condition is put right first of all.

The paramount question is, then, whether there is any possibility of

curing this long-standing disease; whether the Jewish people can still shake off its inertia, regain direct contact with the actualities of life, and yet remain the Jewish people.

It is this last requirement that makes the question so very difficult. A generation ago the Haskalah movement showed how the process of awakening could be brought about. Leaving the older people alone, it caught hold of the young and normalized their attitude to life by introducing them to European culture through education and literature. But it could not make good its promise to bring humanism into Jewish life without disturbing the Jewish continuity: to that its products bear ample witness. Coming into Jewish life from outside, Haskalah found it easier to create an entirely new mold for its followers than to repair the defects of the Jewish mold while preserving its essential characteristics. Hence there can be no complete answer to our question until a new and compelling urge toward normalization springs up among us from within, from our own Jewish life, and is communicated to the younger generation through education and literature, so that it may fuse with the humanism of Haskalah and prevent the latter from overwhelming and obliterating the Jewish mold.

A native-born urge of this kind has recently come into play in the form of the idea which we call Hibbat Zion,[4] though that name is inadequate to express the full meaning of the idea. True Hibbat Zion is not merely a part of Judaism, nor is it something added on to Judaism; it is the whole of Judaism, but with a different focal point. Hibbat Zion neither excludes the written word nor seeks to modify it artificially by addition or subtraction. It stands for a Judaism which shall have as its focal point the ideal of our nation's unity, its renascence, and its free development through the expression of universal human values in the terms of its own distinctive spirit.

This is the conception of Judaism on which our education and our literature must be based. We must revitalize the idea of the national renascence, and use every possible means to strengthen its hold and deepen its roots, until it becomes an organic element in the Jewish consciousness and an independent dynamic force. Only in that way, as it seems to me, can the Jewish soul be freed from its shackles and regain contact with the broad stream of human life without having to pay for its freedom by the sacrifice of its individuality.

FLESH AND SPIRIT (1904)

. . . IN THE PERIOD of our early national existence—the period of the First Temple[5]—we find no trace of the conception of a duality of body and soul. Man, as a living and thinking being, is one in all his parts. The Hebrew word *nefesh* includes everything, body and soul and all that belongs to them. The *nefesh*, the individual human being, lives as a whole and dies as a whole; nothing survives. This notwithstanding, early Judaism was not perplexed by the problem of life and death. It knew nothing of the despair which begets the materialistic philosophy of the exaltation of the flesh and of sense enjoyment as a refuge from the emptiness of life; nor did it turn its gaze upward to create in Heaven an eternal habitation for the souls of men. It offered eternal life here on earth. This it did by emphasizing the sense of collectivity, by teaching the individual to regard himself not as an isolated unit, with an existence bounded by his own birth and death, but as part of a larger and more important whole, as a member of the social body. This conception shifts the center of personality not from the body to the spirit but from the individual to the community; concurrently, the problem of life is transferred from the individual to the social plane. I live for the sake of the perpetuation and the well-being of the community to which I belong; I die to make way for others, who will remold the community and save it from petrifaction and stagnation. When the individual loves the community as himself and identifies himself completely with its well-being, he has something to live for; he feels his personal hardships less keenly, because he knows the purpose for which he lives and suffers.

But obviously this will hold good only if the community itself lives for some purpose which the individual can regard as justifying every possible sacrifice on his part: Otherwise the old question recurs, but on the plane of the community. I put up with life in order that the community may live; but why does the community exist? What end does it serve, that I must bear my troubles cheerfully for its sake? Thus, having shifted the center of life from the individual to the community, Judaism was compelled to find an answer to the problem of the collective life. It had to endow the life of the community with

a purpose sufficiently large and important to sustain the morale of the individual even when his personal life was a burden to him. Hence the community of Israel became "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," destined from the very beginning to be an example to the whole of mankind through its Torah.

This solution of the problem left no room in Judaism for the two extreme views. Man is one and indivisible; all his limbs, his senses, his emotions, his thoughts constitute a single whole. But the existence of the man who is a Jew is not purposeless, because he is a member of the people of Israel, which exists for a sublime purpose. And as the community is only the sum of its members, every Israelite is entitled to regard himself as an indispensable link in the chain of his people's life and as sharing in his people's imperishability. That is why true asceticism is unknown in the early period of Jewish history. True asceticism, hatred of the flesh and the desire for its annihilation, is possible only where men, unable to find the purpose of life in this world, are compelled to look for it in another. It is true that in early Jewish life there were Nazarites, who observed certain of the outward practices of asceticism; but this was simply part of the ritual of sacrifice and had nothing to do with hatred of the flesh. It must be remembered that even so unascetic a hero as Samson was reckoned a Nazarite.

This attitude to life, which lifts the individual above the love of self and teaches him to find the purpose of his existence in the perpetuation and well-being of the community, is regarded by many non-Jewish students of religion as overmaterialistic; and on the strength of it they pronounce Judaism inferior, because it does not, like other religions, promise immortal life to everybody and a reward to the righteous after death. There could be no better example of the blindness of prejudice. . . .

In the early period of Jewish history there was a considerable party which took a materialistic view of the national life, in the sense that it had no ideal beyond that of making the State supreme at home, respected abroad, and secure against aggression. This was the aristocratic party; it embraced the entourage of the king, the military leaders, and most of the priests—all those, in a word, who in their individual lives had no experience of the suffering which demands consolation. They attached no importance to the spiritual aspect of the national life, and they were almost always prepared to desert the nation's spiritual ideals—"to serve other gods"—if they thought that there was any political advantage in doing so. The moral idealism of

the Prophets waged incessant war on this political materialism, until it disappeared automatically with the destruction of the State. But it is entirely wrong to assert, as some modern historians do, that the Prophets were opposed to the State as such, that they regarded its very existence as inconsistent with the spiritual life which was their ideal, and therefore desired its overthrow. This political asceticism, this desire for the annihilation of the physical organism of the national life in order to promote its spiritual progress, is in fact entirely repugnant to the Prophetic attitude. One has only to read those passages of the Prophets in which they rejoice in the victories of the State (in the time of Sennacherib,[6] for example) and bewail its defeats, to see at once how highly they valued the political life, and how fully they realized that national independence was an essential condition of the attainment of their own ideals. But at the same time they never forgot that it is only by the spirit that life, whether individual or national, can be raised to a higher plane, and that only from the spirit can it derive meaning and purpose; consequently they insisted that the end should not be subordinated to the means, that the body should not be given empire over the spirit. Thus the Prophets simply enunciated on the national plane the principle which Judaism had laid down for the individual life: the unity of body and spirit, in the sense explained above.

It was not till the period of the Second Temple[7] that political asceticism found expression in the life of the Jewish State. The Essenes had no antipathy to the physical life so far as the individual was concerned; but on the national plane, in relation to the State, their attitude was precisely that of the ascetic. These spiritually minded men saw that from the spiritual point of view the Jewish State was going from bad to worse. Its rulers, like those of the first kingdom, worshiped only material power; its men of vision were wasting their energies in a vain struggle to arrest the corruption of the body politic, already in the grip of relentless enemies, and to breathe into it the spirit of true Judaism. In this situation the Essenes gave up the political life in despair, turned their backs on its incurable corruption, and withdrew into the wilderness, there to live out their individual lives in purity and holiness. In their hermit-like seclusion their antipathy to the State became more and more intense, and when the State was at its last gasp, hovering between life and death, some of them made no attempt to conceal their satisfaction.

However, the political asceticism of the Essenes had not much influence on the general trend of thought. It was not to them, but to

the Pharisees, that the people looked for instruction and leadership, and the Pharisees represented the Prophetic conception of Judaism, with its unification of body and spirit. So far from turning away from life and ostracizing the State, they stuck to their post in the thick of the fray, and made every possible effort to save the State from moral degeneration and to shape it in conformity with the spirit of Judaism. It was clear to them that a spirit without a body could have no reality, and that the spirit of Judaism could not develop and fulfill itself without concrete expression in a political organism. Hence the Pharisees were always fighting on two fronts: against the political materialists within the State, and side by side with them against the external enemy for the preservation of the State.

It was only at the last moment, when the imminent destruction of the political organism was beyond all shadow of doubt, that the internal difference of ideals inevitably led to a split. The political materialists, for whom the preservation of the State meant everything, had no further interest in life, and fell fighting desperately among the ruins they loved; but the Pharisees remembered even in this hour of agony that they cared for the State only for the sake of the national spirit which was embodied in the State and needed its help. It could not occur to them to suppose that the end of the State meant the end of the nation and of all that made life worth living: On the contrary, it was for them imperatively necessary to find some temporary means of preserving the nation and its spirit without the political organism, until it should please the Almighty to restore His people to their land and freedom. So the alliance was broken: The political zealots remained sword in hand on the walls of Jerusalem, and the Pharisees, Torah in hand, went to Yavneh.[8]

The work of the Pharisees bore fruit. They succeeded in creating a sort of shadow body politic, with no roots in solid earth; within this shadowy framework the Hebrew national spirit has lived its own distinctive life for two thousand years. The ghetto organization, the foundations of which were laid in the period immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem, is a miracle without parallel in human history. Its root conception is that the purpose of life is spiritual perfection, but that the spirit needs a body to serve as its instrument. Until the nation could once again find a local habitation for its spirit in one complete and independent political organism, the Pharisees thought it necessary to provide an artificial stopgap. Their method was that of concentration in a number of small and scattered communities, all built to the same pattern, all living one type of life,

and all united, despite geography, by consciousness of their common origin, by devotion to a single ideal, and by the hope of complete reunion in the future.

This artificial structure, built at a time when the Messianic Age was expected to dawn at any moment, was originally intended to serve only for a brief period. It has endured far too long; now at last it is in a state of advanced decay, with cracks and fissures everywhere.

So once again spiritually minded Jews have revived the political asceticism of the Essenes. They see their people exiled and dispersed, with no hope of a return to its former estate; they see the ghetto organization, which offered at least some semblance of a concrete national life, in process of dissolution. In their despair they renounce the physical element of the national life, and regard the spiritual element as its sole foundation. For them the Jewish people is a spirit without a body. The spirit is not only the purpose of life, but the whole of life; the body is not only subordinate to the spirit, it is a dangerous enemy, which ties the spirit and prevents it from entering into its kingdom.

As might have been expected, the reaction against this extreme theory has produced an equally extreme theory on the opposite side, and there has been a recrudescence of that political materialism which sees the physical organism—the Jewish State—as the be-all and end-all of Jewish life. This development is still too recent to have run its full course; but if history is any guide, we are entitled to believe that neither of these two extreme theories truly reflects the spirit of our people. Both, we may believe, will disappear, and make way for the only view that really has its roots in Judaism: the view which was that of the Prophets in the first Jewish State and of the Pharisees in the second. If, as we hope, there is to be a third, its fundamental principle, on the national as on the individual plane, will be neither the ascendancy of body over spirit, nor the suppression of the body for the spirit's sake, but the uplifting of the body by the spirit.

ON NATIONALISM AND RELIGION (1910)

Baden-Baden, September 18, 1910

TO DR. J. L. MAGNES[9] (New York)

. . . The object of your Society, you say, is "to establish Synagogues and Houses of Study." I am not sure whether you regard the Synagogue and the House of Study as two distinct institutions and mean to establish them separately from one another; but if you do, I do not think that you will achieve your object. Experience everywhere, and especially in America, has shown that the Synagogue by itself, as a House of Prayer exclusively, cannot save Judaism, which, unlike other religions, does not depend on prayer. Nor can the separate House of Study, which is intended for young people in search of knowledge, serve as an instrument of *popular* education. What we have to do is to revert to the system which our ancestors adopted in days gone by and to which we owe our survival: We have to make the Synagogue itself the House of Study, with Jewish learning as its first concern and prayer as a secondary matter. Cut the prayers as short as you like, but make your Synagogue a haven of Jewish knowledge, alike for children and adults, for the educated and the ordinary folk. The sermon on Sabbaths and Holy Days must give the congregants instruction in Torah, not phrases of unctuous piety. But the sermon alone is not enough. The Synagogue must be the center to which those who want to learn about Judaism resort every day. "Readings" on Jewish subjects can be arranged every evening, for the more and the less educated separately. That is what our ancestors did, with good results. The spirit of the teaching must be different, to suit the altered conditions; but the system itself cannot be bettered. In the old days the evening reading consisted of the *Ain Jacob*[10] with Rashi's[11] commentary, or the *Menorat Hamaor*,[12] for ordinary people, and of Talmud for the learned. In our day, of course, we must introduce readings better suited to modern requirements. But learning—learning—learning: that is the secret of Jewish survival.

Then you say you want "to propagate national religion and religious nationalism." I must confess that this formula is not altogether clear

to me. "National religion"—by all means: Judaism is fundamentally national, and all the efforts of the "Reformers" to separate the Jewish religion from its national element have had no result except to ruin both the nationalism and the religion. Clearly, then, if you want to build and not to destroy, you must teach religion on the basis of nationalism, with which it is inseparably intertwined. But when you talk of propagating "religious nationalism," I do not know what you mean (unless you are simply saying the same thing in other words). Do you really think of excluding from the ranks of the nationalists all those who do not believe in the principles of religion? If that is your intention, I cannot agree. In my 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. . . .

THE JEWISH STATE AND THE JEWISH PROBLEM (1897)

SOME MONTHS have passed since the Zionist Congress, but its echoes are still reverberating in daily life and in the press. All kinds of gatherings—small and large, local and regional—are taking place. Since the delegates returned home, they have been calling public meetings and repeatedly regaling us with tales of the wonders that were enacted before their very eyes. The wretched, hungry public is listening, becoming ecstatic, and hoping for salvation. It is inconceivable to them that "they"—the Jews of the West—can fail to succeed in what they propose. Heads grow hot and hearts beat fast, and many "leaders" who had for years—until last August—lived only for Palestinian settlement, and for whom a penny donation in aid of Jewish labor in Palestine or the Jaffa School[18] was worth the world, have now lost their bearings and ask one another: "What's the good of this sort of work? The days of the Messiah are near at hand, and we busy ourselves with trifles! The time has come for great deeds, for great

men, men of the West, have enlisted in the cause and march before us."

There has been a revolution in their world, and, to emphasize it, they have given the cause itself a new name: It is no longer "Love of Zion" (Hibbat Zion), but "Zionism" (Zioniyuth). Indeed, there are even "precisionists" who, being determined to leave no loophole for error, use only the European form of the name ("Zionismus")—thus announcing to all and sundry that they are not talking about anything so antiquated as Hibbat Zion, but about a new, up-to-date movement, which comes, like its name, from the West, where people are innocent of the Hebrew language.

Nordau's address on the general condition of the Jews was a sort of introduction to the business of the Congress. It described in incisive language the sore troubles, whether material or spiritual, which beset the Jews the world over. In eastern countries their trouble is material: they must struggle without letup to satisfy the most elementary physical needs—for the crust of bread and the breath of air which are denied them because they are Jews. In the West, in lands where the Jews are legally emancipated, their material condition is not particularly bad, but their spiritual state is serious: they want to take full advantage of their legal rights, and cannot; they long to be accepted by the gentile majority and to become part of the national society, but they are kept at arm's length; they hope for love and brotherhood, but they encounter looks of hatred and contempt on all sides; they know that they are in no way inferior to their neighbors in ability or virtue, but they have it continually thrown in their faces that they are of an inferior type and that they are unfit to rise to the level of the Aryans. And more to the same effect.

Well—what then?

Nordau himself did not touch on this question, which was outside the scope of his address. But the whole Congress was the answer. Beginning as it did with Nordau's address, the Congress meant this: that in order to escape from all these troubles it is necessary to establish a Jewish State.

There is no doubt that, even when the Jewish State is established, Jewish settlement will be able to advance only by small degrees, as permitted by the resources of the people themselves and by the progress of the economic development of the country. Meanwhile the natural increase of Jewish population both within the Palestinian settlement and in the Diaspora, will continue, with the inevitable result that, on the one hand, Palestine will have less and less room

for the new immigrants, and, on the other hand, despite continual emigration, the number of those remaining outside Palestine will not be appreciably diminished. In his opening speech at the Congress, Dr. Herzl, wishing to demonstrate the superiority of his State idea to the previous form of Palestinian colonization, calculated that by the latter method it would take nine hundred years before all the Jews could be settled in their land. The members of the Congress applauded this as a conclusive argument. But it was a cheap victory. The Jewish State itself, do what it will, will find no way to make a more favorable calculation.

The truth is bitter, but with all its bitterness it is better than illusion. We must admit to ourselves that the "ingathering of the exiles" is unattainable by natural means. We may, by natural means, someday establish a Jewish State; it is possible that the Jews may increase and multiply within it until the "land is filled with them"—but even then the greater part of our people will remain scattered on foreign soils. "To gather our scattered ones from the four corners of the earth" (in the words of the Prayer Book) is impossible. Only religion, with its belief in a miraculous redemption, can promise such a consummation.

But if this is so, if the Jewish State, too, means not an "ingathering of the exiles" but the settlement of a small part of our people in Palestine, then how will this solve the material problem of the Jewish masses in the lands of the Diaspora?

The material problem will not be ended by the establishment of a Jewish State, and it is, indeed, beyond our power to solve it once and for all. (Even now there are various means at our disposal to alleviate this problem to a greater or lesser degree, e.g., by increasing the proportion of farmers and artisans among our people *in all lands*, etc.) Whether or not we create a Jewish State, the material situation of the Jews will always basically depend on the economic condition and the cultural level of the various nations among which we are dispersed.

Thus we are driven to the conclusion that the real and only basis of Zionism is to be found in another problem, the spiritual one.

But the spiritual problem appears in two differing forms, one in the West and one in the East, which explains the fundamental difference between western "Zionism" and eastern "Hibbat Zion." Nordau dealt only with the western form of the problem, apparently knowing nothing about the eastern; and the Congress as a whole concentrated on the first, and paid little attention to the second.

The western Jew, having left the ghetto and having sought accept-

ance by the gentile majority, is unhappy because his hope of an open-armed welcome has been disappointed. Perforce he returns to his own people and tries to find within the Jewish community that life for which he yearns—but in vain. The life and horizon of the Jewish community no longer satisfy him. He has already grown accustomed to a broader social and political life, and on the intellectual side the work to be done for our Jewish national culture does not attract him, because that culture has played no part in his earliest education and is a closed book to him. In this dilemma he therefore turns to the land of his ancestors and imagines how good it would be if a Jewish State were re-established there—a State and society organized exactly after the pattern of other States. Then he could live a full, complete life within his own people, and he could find at home all that he now sees outside, dangled before his eyes but out of reach. Of course, not all the Jews will be able to take wing and go to their State; but the very existence of the Jewish State will also raise the prestige of those who remain in exile, and their fellow citizens will no longer despise them and keep them at arm's length, as though they were base slaves, dependent entirely on the hospitality of others. As he further contemplates this fascinating vision, it suddenly dawns on his inner consciousness that even now, before the Jewish State is established, the mere idea of it gives him almost complete relief. It provides an opportunity for communal work and political excitement; his emotions find an outlet in a field of activity which is not subservient to non-Jews; and he feels that, thanks to this ideal, he stands once more spiritually erect and has regained his personal dignity, without overmuch trouble and purely by his own efforts. So he devotes himself to the ideal with all the ardor of which he is capable; he gives rein to his fancy and lets it soar as it will, beyond reality and the limitations of human power. For it is not the attainment of the ideal that he needs; its pursuit alone is sufficient to cure him of his spiritual disease, which is that of an inferiority complex, and the loftier and more distant the ideal, the greater its power to exalt.

This is the basis of western Zionism and the secret of its attraction. But eastern Hibbat Zion originated and developed in a different setting. It, too, began as a political movement; but, being a result of material evils, it could not be content with an "activity" consisting only of outbursts of feeling and fine phrases, which may satisfy the heart but not the stomach. Hibbat Zion began at once to express itself in concrete activities—in the establishment of colonies in Palestine. This practical work soon clipped the wings of fancy and demonstrated

conclusively that Hibbat Zion could not lessen the material woe of the Jews by one iota. One might, therefore, have thought that, when this fact became patent, the Hovevei Zion[14] would give up their effort and cease wasting time and energy on work which brought them no nearer their goal. But, no: they remained true to their flag and went on working with the old enthusiasm, though most of them did not understand, even in their own minds, why they did so. They felt instinctively that they must go on; but, as they did not clearly appreciate the nature of this feeling, the things that they did were not always effectively directed toward the true goal, to which they were unconsciously dedicated.

For at the very time when the material tragedy in the East was at its height, the heart of the eastern Jews was sensitive to another tragedy as well—a spiritual one; and when the Hovevei Zion began to work for the solution of the material problem, the national instinct of the people felt that in this work it would find the remedy for its spiritual trouble. Hence the people rallied to this effort and did not abandon it even after it had become obvious that it was an ineffective instrument for curing the material trouble of the Jews.

The eastern form of the spiritual problem is absolutely different from the western. In the West it is the problem of the Jews; in the East, the *problem of Judaism*. The first weighs on the individual; the second, on the nation. The one is felt by Jews who have had a European education; the other, by Jews whose education has been Jewish. The one is a product of anti-Semitism, and is dependent on anti-Semitism for its existence; the other is a natural product of a real link with a millennial culture, and it will remain unsolved and unaffected even if the troubled of the Jews all over the world attain comfortable economic positions, are on the best possible terms with their neighbors, and are admitted to the fullest social and political equality.

It is not only the Jews who have come out of the ghetto; Judaism has come out, too. For the Jews the exodus from the ghetto is confined to certain countries and is due to toleration; but Judaism has come out (or is coming out) of its own accord, wherever it has come into contact with modern culture. This contact with modern culture overturns the inner defences of Judaism, so that it can no longer remain isolated and live a life apart. The spirit of our people desires further development; it wants to absorb the basic elements of general culture which are reaching it from the outside world, to digest them and to make them a part of itself, as it has done before at various

periods of its history. But the conditions of its life in exile are not suitable for such a task. In our time culture expresses itself everywhere through the form of the national spirit, and the stranger who would become part of culture must sink his individuality and become absorbed in the dominant environment. In exile, Judaism cannot, therefore, develop its individuality in its own way. When it leaves the ghetto walls, it is in danger of losing its essential being or—at very least—its national unity; it is in danger of being split up into as many kinds of Judaism, each with a different character and life, as there are countries of the dispersion.

Judaism is, therefore, in a quandry: It can no longer tolerate the *Galut*[15] form which it had to take on, in obedience to its will-to-live, when it was exiled from its own country; but, without that form, its life is in danger. So it seeks to return to its historic center, where it will be able to live a life developing in a natural way, to bring its powers into play in every department of human culture, to broaden and perfect those national possessions which it has acquired up to now, and thus to contribute to the common stock of humanity, in the future as it has in the past, a great national culture, the fruit of the unhampered activity of a people living by the light of its own spirit. For this purpose Judaism can, for the present, content itself with little. It does not need an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favorable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working without hindrance in every branch of civilization, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature. This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the center of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then, from this center, the spirit of Judaism will radiate to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, to inspire them with new life and to preserve the over-all unity of our people. When our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may be confident that it will produce men in the Land of Israel itself who will be able, at a favorable moment, to establish a State there—one which will be not merely a State of Jews but a really Jewish State.

This Hibbat Zion, which concerns itself with the preservation of Judaism at a time when Jewry is suffering so much, is something odd and unintelligible to the "political" Zionists of the West, just as the demand of R. Johanan ben Zakkai for "Yavneh" was strange and unintelligible to the comparable party of his time. And so political

Zionism cannot satisfy those Jews who care for Judaism; its growth seems to them to be fraught with danger to the object of their own aspiration.

The secret of our people's persistence is—as I have tried to show elsewhere—that at a very early period the Prophets taught it to respect only the power of the spirit and not to worship material power. Therefore, unlike the other nations of antiquity, the Jewish people never reached the point of losing its self-respect in the face of more powerful enemies. As long as we remain faithful to this principle, our existence has a secure basis, and we shall not lose our self-respect, for we are not spiritually inferior to any nation. But a political ideal which is not grounded in our national culture is apt to seduce us from loyalty to our own inner spirit and to beget in us a tendency to find the path of glory in the attainment of material power and political dominion, thus breaking the thread that unites us with the past and undermining our historical foundation. Needless to say, if the political ideal is not attained, it will have disastrous consequences, because we shall have lost the old basis without finding a new one. But even if it is attained under present conditions, when we are a scattered people not only in the physical but also in the spiritual sense—even then, Judaism will be in great danger. Almost all our great men—those, that is, whose education and social position have prepared them to be at the head of a Jewish State—are spiritually far removed from Judaism and have no true conception of its nature and its value. Such men, however loyal to their State and devoted to its interests, will necessarily envisage those interests by the standards of the foreign culture which they themselves have imbibed; and they will endeavor, by moral persuasion or even by force, to implant that culture in the Jewish State, so that in the end the Jewish State will be a State of Germans or Frenchmen of the Jewish race. We have even now a small example of this process in Palestine.

History teaches us that in the days of the Herodian house Palestine was indeed a Jewish State, but the national culture was despised and persecuted. The ruling house did everything in its power to implant Roman culture in the country and frittered away the resources of the nation in the building of heathen temples, amphitheaters, and so forth. Such a Jewish State would spell death and utter degradation for our people. Such a State would never achieve sufficient political power to deserve respect, while it would be estranged from the living inner spiritual force of Judaism. The puny State, being "tossed about like a ball between its powerful neighbors, and maintaining its existence

only by diplomatic shifts and continual truckling to the favored of fortune," would not be able to give us a feeling of national glory; the national culture, in which we might have sought and found our glory, would not have been implanted in our State and would not be the principle of its life. So we should really be then—much more than we are now—"a small and insignificant nation," enslaved in spirit to "the favored of fortune," turning an envious and covetous eye on the armed force of our "powerful neighbors"; our existence in such terms, as a sovereign State would not add a glorious chapter to our national history.

Would it not be better for "an ancient people which was once a beacon to the world" to disappear than to end by reaching such a goal as this? Mr. Lilienblum[16] reminds me that there exist today small States, like Switzerland, which are safeguarded against interference by the other nations and are not forced to "continual truckling." But a comparison between Palestine and small countries like Switzerland overlooks the geographical position of Palestine and its religious importance for all the world. These two facts will make it quite impossible for its "powerful neighbors" (by which expression, of course, I did not mean, as Mr. Lilienblum interprets, "the Druses and the Persians") to leave it alone. Even after it has become a Jewish State, they will all still keep an eye on it, and each power will try to influence its policy in a direction favorable to itself, after the pattern of events in other weak states (like Turkey) in which the great European nations have "interests."

In sum: Hibbat Zion, no less than "Zionism," wants a Jewish State and believes in the possibility of the establishment of a Jewish State in the future. But while "Zionism" looks to the Jewish State to furnish a remedy for poverty and to provide complete tranquillity and national glory, Hibbat Zion knows that our State will not give us all these things until "universal Righteousness is enthroned and holds sway over nations and States"—it looks to a Jewish State to provide only a "secure refuge" for Judaism and a cultural bond to unite our nation. "Zionism," therefore, begins its work with political propaganda; Hibbat Zion begins with national culture, because only *through* the national culture and *for its sake* can a Jewish State be established in such a way as to correspond with the will and the needs of the Jewish people.

THE NEGATION OF THE DIASPORA (1909)

"A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE DIASPORA" is an expression frequently heard in discussions between the Zionists, who look beyond the Diaspora for a solution of our national problem, and the Nationalists, who do not, and the latter have come to take it for granted that the attitude in question is necessarily predicable of anybody who does accept their "autonomist" doctrine. Actually, however, the expression is not so clear as it might be.

An attitude may be either subjectively or objectively negative. If we express disapproval or dislike of something or other, our negative attitude is subjective: it relates not to the thing itself, but only to our own reactions to it. But if we say that something or other cannot possibly exist, our negative attitude is objective: it results from an examination of the objective facts, without any reference to our own predilections.

In the subjective sense all Jews adopt a negative attitude toward the Diaspora. With few exceptions, they all recognize that the position of a lamb among wolves is unsatisfactory, and they would gladly put an end to this state of things if it were possible. Those who profess to regard our dispersion as a heaven-sent blessing are simply weak-kneed optimists; lacking the courage to look the evil thing in the face, they find it necessary to smile on it and call it good so long as they cannot abolish it. But if the Messiah—the true Messiah—were to appear today or tomorrow, to lead us out of our exile, even these optimists would join the throng of his followers without a moment's hesitation.

This being so, the "negative attitude toward the Diaspora" which has become a debating counter must be negative in the objective sense. To adopt a negative attitude toward the Diaspora means, for our present purpose, to believe that the Jews cannot survive as a scattered people now that our spiritual isolation is ended, because we have no longer any defence against the ocean of foreign culture, which threatens to obliterate our national characteristics and traditions, and thus gradually to put an end to our existence as a people.

There are, it is true, some Jews who are of that opinion; but they are not all of one way of thinking. They belong in fact to two different

parties, which draw diametrically opposite conclusions from their common assumption. The one party argues that, as we are doomed to extinction, it is better to hasten the end by our action than to sit and wait for it to come of its own accord after a long and painful death agony. If a Jew can get rid of his Judaism here and now by assimilation, good luck to him; if he cannot, let him try to make it possible for his children. But the other party argues that, since we are threatened with extinction, we ought to put an end to our dispersion before it puts an end to us. We must secure our future by gathering the scattered members of our race together in our historical land (or, some would add, in some other country of their own), where alone we shall be able to continue to live as a people. Any Jew who is both able and willing to get rid of his Judaism by assimilation may remain where he is; those who are unable or unwilling to assimilate will betake themselves to the Jewish State.

But so far both these parties remain merely parties, and neither has succeeded in persuading the Jewish people as a whole to accept the fundamental postulate with either of its consequential policies. Both alike have come into conflict with something very deep-rooted and stubborn—the instinctive and unconquerable desire of the Jewish people to survive. This desire for survival, or will to live, obviously makes it impossible for the Jewish people as a whole to contemplate the disappearance of the Diaspora if that involves its own disappearance; but the case is no better if the argument is that the Diaspora must disappear in order that the people may survive. Survival cannot be made dependent on any condition, because the condition might not be fulfilled. The Jews as a people feel that they have the will and the strength to survive whatever may happen, without any ifs or ands. They cannot accept a theory which makes their survival conditional on their ceasing to be dispersed, because that theory implies that failure to end the dispersion would mean extinction, and extinction is an alternative that cannot be contemplated in any circumstances whatever.

Except, then, for these two extreme parties, the Jews remain true to their ancient belief: their attitude toward the Diaspora is subjectively negative, but objectively positive. Dispersion is a thoroughly evil and unpleasant thing, but we can and must live in dispersion, for all its evils and all its unpleasantness. Exodus from the dispersion will always be, as it always has been, an inspiring hope for the distant future; but the date of that consummation is the secret of a higher power, and our survival as a people is not dependent upon it.

This, however, does not settle the question of our survival in dispersion. On the contrary, it is precisely this positive attitude toward the Diaspora that gives the question its urgency. A man at death's door does not worry much about his affairs during his last days on earth; a man on the point of going abroad is not particular about the tidiness of the lodging he occupies just before his departure. But if the Jews believe that they can and must continue to live in dispersion, the question at once arises—how is it to be done? It is neither necessary nor possible for them to go on living all the time in exactly the same old way. The will to live not only persuades them to believe that it is possible to survive in dispersion; it also impels them, in the changing circumstances of successive epochs, to find always the most appropriate means of preserving and developing their national identity. Moreover, this watchful instinct is always anticipating events, always providing in advance against the future. When Titus besieged Jerusalem, we are told, the defenders always had a new rampart ready in the rear before the one in front of it was overthrown. So it is with our national survival. And now that all but the wilfully blind can see the old rampart tottering to its fall, we are bound to ask ourselves: Where is the new rampart that is to secure our existence as a people in dispersion?

The Nationalists answer: national autonomy. What they mean by this has been made reasonably clear in the literature on the subject, and there is no need to go into detail here. But it seems to me that one fundamental point has been left obscure, and that some confusion of thought has in consequence arisen.

If we are to decide how far autonomy is a satisfactory answer to our problem, we must first of all define the scope of the problem itself. To judge from the current controversy on this matter, there appear in fact to be two different schools of thought. It is common ground among the Nationalists that we must find some new means of maintaining our distinctive national life in the Diaspora; but, on close examination, we find that while some of them are looking for a pattern of national life that will be as complete and self-contained as the ghetto life of our forefathers, others are convinced, in their heart of hearts, that that is an impossible ideal. These latter ask for nothing more than the possibility of developing our national life up to the limit of what is in practice attainable, and with no more than the unavoidable minimum of truncation and circumscription. When we are told, then, that autonomy is the solution, we must ask the further question: To what extent is it a solution? Is national autonomy put forward as a final answer to our problem, holding out a promise of

full and complete national life in the Diaspora? Or is it offered merely as the best that can be had in the circumstances, it being recognized that a complete national life in the Diaspora is impossible except in the ghetto which we have left forever?

The autonomists do not answer this question. Mr. Dubnov[17] himself appears sometimes to think that autonomy would be a complete solution, providing a full synthesis of the "human" and the "national" elements in our corporate life; at other times he uses qualifying phrases like "within the bounds of possibility" or "as far as possible." But it seems to me that our doubts will disappear if we remember what is really meant by "a complete national life."

A complete national life involves two things: first, full play for the creative faculties of the nation in a specific national culture of its own, and, second, a system of education whereby the individual members of the nation will be thoroughly imbued with that culture, and so molded by it that its imprint will be recognizable in all their way of life and thought, individual and social. These two aspects of a national life may not always be realized in the same degree, but broadly speaking they are interdependent. If the individuals are not imbued with the national culture, the development of the nation will be arrested, and its creative faculties will suffer atrophy or dissipation. On the other hand, if those faculties are not sufficiently employed in the service of the development of the national culture, the education of children and adults alike will become narrow, its influence will progressively decline, and many individuals will turn elsewhere for the satisfaction of their cultural needs, with the result that gradually their minds and characters will cease to bear the nation's imprint.

Moreover, if a nation is to live a complete national life, it must have both the opportunity and the will to do so. It is the environment —the complex of political, economic, social, and moral factors—that creates both the opportunity and the psychological attitude from which springs the will to take advantage of the opportunity. This psychological attitude is of the utmost importance. When Mr. Dubnov says that autonomy will solve our problem only if we have the strength of will to make proper use of our rights, I take him to mean not that it will be entirely for us to decide, as free beings in the metaphysical sense, whether to use our rights or not, but that the external and internal conditions will be such that in our case, as in that of other national groups, the will to use our opportunities will automatically develop.

To sum up, then: If national autonomy in the Diaspora is put

forward as a completely satisfactory solution of our problem, it has to promise to normalize the life of the scattered and atomized Jewish people. It has to undertake to provide the Jewish people with both the opportunity and the necessary strength of will to deploy its creative faculties to the maximum extent in the development of its specific national culture. Nor is that all. It has to guarantee the possibility of educating all the individual members of the people, in every rank of society, on the lines of the national culture, so as to ensure that when they reach maturity they will find within the circle of the national life so wide a range of intellectual interests, and such ample scope for practical activity, that they will feel neither the need nor the desire to desert that sphere for another.

Now it may be that autonomists of the Yiddishist school believe that national autonomy can satisfy these requirements. For them our national culture means Yiddish literature, national education means speaking Yiddish, and the national ideal is to reach the level of nations like the Letts or the Slovaks, which have not as yet made any contribution whatever to the general stock of human culture. If "Nationalists" of this type regard autonomy in the Diaspora as the perfect solution of our problem, we can more or less understand their point of view. But it is otherwise with Nationalists who have a historical perspective—who demand that the future of our nation shall be a continuation of its past, and date the beginning of our national history from the Exodus from Egypt, not from the birth of the Yiddish novel and drama. Such Nationalists cannot be satisfied with a future that would put the greatness of our past to shame, and consequently they must see that the sort of exiguous living-space that might perhaps suffice for the infant toddlings of a nation of yesterday cannot provide elbow-room for the cultural life of the "eternal people," which has an ancient heritage of spiritual values and a fund of creative energy too large to be pent up within its own narrow confines. It is with Nationalists of this kind alone that I am here concerned, and they, I feel sure, would not subscribe to the obviously untenable view that autonomy can perform all these miracles. At any rate, pending an explicit statement on their part that they do subscribe to that view, I feel that to develop the arguments against it would be pushing an open door.

It may, then, be taken as practically certain that the autonomists admit that national autonomy in the Diaspora cannot give us the possibility of a full and complete national life; their contention is that nonetheless, if we wish to survive, we must struggle for national rights

in the Diaspora, so as to broaden the basis of our national life to the greatest possible extent. It is, however, common ground that at best we cannot get all we really need, and that our national culture and education must remain fragmentary and distorted, for lack of sufficient elbow-room within the framework of the alien culture which hems us in on every side.

If the autonomist doctrine is put in this more modest form, I doubt whether any true Jew will be opposed to it, in the sense of not regarding the extension of our national rights in the Diaspora as something to be desired and to be worked for whenever possible. Any opposition to it must be based on the view that it is objectively impossible; that our position among the nations is unique, and that the rest of the world will never be induced to admit that we have national rights in the territories that belong to other nations. True, the autonomists are fond of comparing our position with that of other small nations in Russia, Austria, and elsewhere, of which some have achieved autonomy and others hope to acquire it some day. But what is the use of our forgetting the difference between ourselves and the other small nations if those with whom the decision rests will not forget it? Each of the other small nations in question has lived in its national territory for generations and was once independent. The independence has gone, but even the new overlords cannot deny the historic right of the indigenous people, or regard its nationality as a foreign growth on the very soil on which it first came to birth. And if in the course of time some branches of the national tree have spread into the neighboring fields, without losing their connection with the parent stem, that is a perfectly natural and normal historic process. But we Jews entered every one of the lands of our dispersion as a foreign people, with a national culture which had been born and developed elsewhere. Wandering beggars from a distant clime, we have been compassionately granted asylum by the nations of the earth; but there never was, and is not now, any nexus between the life into which we have been admitted and the Jewish type of life which we brought with us, already fully developed, on our arrival. For this reason it is not likely that the world will recognize "the historic right of an alien people to live a national life of its own in a country of which from the very first it has never thought (and still less has anybody else ever thought) as belonging to itself. Ownership is after all a matter of convention; so long as individual ownership is recognized, national ownership cannot be condemned."

This, however, is by the way. My object was not to argue against the

autonomist doctrine, but to explain what it leaves obscure and to carry it to its logical conclusion. Hence I leave the question of practicability on one side. The point I really wish to make is this: If the autonomists agree that autonomy in the Diaspora is not a complete solution, and that we have to struggle for it merely on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread, then they must also agree that we have to look for other and more radical ways of strengthening and enlarging our national life, on the principle that a whole loaf is better than half a loaf. The will to live, it must be remembered, will not be satisfied with the half loaf; it will give us no rest until we throw all our latent strength into the task of achieving its demands in full. But if this is so, the autonomists, like the rest of us, have still to face the question with which we started: Where is the new rampart that is to secure our existence as a people in dispersion in place of the old rampart, which is tottering before our eyes?

The autonomists know that for twenty years one Zionist school of thought has answered this question by saying that the new rampart must be built outside the Diaspora, in our historic land. This school of thought differs from those who claim to be the "real" Zionists in refusing to believe in the possibility of transferring all the Jews in the world to Palestine, and consequently in refusing to accept the proposition that we cannot survive in the Diaspora. On the contrary, it holds that dispersion must remain a permanent feature of our life, which it is beyond our power to eliminate, and therefore it insists that our national life in the Diaspora must be strengthened. But that object, it holds, can be attained only by the creation of a fixed center for our national life in the land of its birth. Isolated groups of Jews wandering about the world here, there, and everywhere can be nothing more than a sort of formless raw material until they are provided with a single permanent center, which can exert a "pull" on all of them, and so transform the scattered atoms into a single entity with a definite and self-subsistent character of its own. This answer, as I have said, has been given again and again during the last twenty years, and the arguments for and against it have been so thoroughly canvassed that there is no need to embark on a long explanation of it here. But when our autonomists argue with Zionists, they seem to recognize only one kind of Zionism—the kind that pins its faith on the transfer of all the Jews to Palestine and is therefore open to the charge that it adopts the dangerous doctrine of the impossibility of Jewish life in the Diaspora. They completely ignore the other kind of Zionism, which is not open to that criticism, and in doing so they

more or less admit, as it seems to me, to a feeling at the back of their minds that their own doctrine leads them straight into the arms of this version of Zionism. For otherwise they are on the horns of a dilemma. They must either promise that Diaspora autonomy will completely solve our problem or deny that any complete solution is possible. But the first alternative is not open to them, because they do not believe in miracles, and the second is equally impossible, because it is too pessimistic—it means that our unhappy people has to look forward to an endless sick-bed existence with no hope of recovery. So in the end the autonomists, too, will be driven to look eastward and to recast their program so as to include, along with the maximum possible improvement and expansion of our national life in the Diaspora, the search for a complete solution outside the Diaspora.

HAYYIM NAHMAN BIALIK 1873-1934

THE CLASH OF CULTURES within late nineteenth-century Russian Jewry was, as we have seen, the great theme to which many essayists and novelists addressed themselves. These inner tensions, the increasing pain of a much massacred community, and the anodyne to both woes in the dawning national affirmations of Zionism gave rise, as well, to a new Hebrew poetry, the greatest since the Middle Ages. Its supreme master was Hayyim Nahman Bialik.

Bialik's early life was of the kind we know from the biographies of Smolenskin, Lilienblum, and Ahad Ha-Am. He was born in a village near Zhitomir, in the Russian province of Volhynia, as the eighth and youngest child of poor parents. Bialik tells in his fragmentary autobiography of being left very much to himself in his earliest childhood, to dream under the blue skies. Tragedy came at the age of seven with the death of his father and his mother's bitter, but unavailing struggle to support her family. The boy was soon sent to live with his strict and very pious grandfather. Bialik owed to these years his excellent education in the classical texts of the religious tradition and his taste for omnivorous reading. Among the books he devoured were the writings of the "enlighteners," and, as a result, he was soon restless under the uncompromising religious regime of his grandfather's house. At the age of seventeen he was given reluctant consent to leave for the famous yeshivah of Volozhin, where he remained for eighteen months. It was there that he began to write; at Volozhin he took a further step toward intellectual emancipation by joining a secret students' organization of Hibbat Zion.

When Bialik left the yeshivah in 1891 to strike out on his own, he made his way to Odessa, which was then graced by the presence of a whole galaxy of intellectual leaders of the national revival in Hebrew, and especially of Ahad Ha-Am. The older man encouraged him as a writer and even arranged for the publication of his first poem, thus beginning a life-long friendship between the two. Nonetheless, Bialik

did not yet dream of making literature his career. He married the daughter of a lumber merchant and settled down in a small town for four years to work in his father-in-law's business. It was among the poet's foibles all his life that he imagined himself to possess a talent for business, but he lost his money in this first venture and by 1897 he turned to the traditional occupation of Hebrew writers, teaching that language to the young. His experiences as educator in a Polish provincial town were even unhappier than his career in business, and so after three years he returned to Odessa, which was to be his home until after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Bialik's intellectual emancipation from the orthodox religious faith was not as thoroughly rationalist as that of his master, Ahad Ha-Am, and his romantic love of the Jewish past included even the recent ghetto, which Ahad Ha-Am disliked. He felt as keenly—and more sentimentally—the need to preserve the treasures of classical Hebrew literature as a "usable past" for the Zionist national revival. His labors as publisher and editor, from which he made his living until his death, were largely devoted to this aim. In his essays and, especially, his speeches—he was a master of intimate causerie in both Hebrew and Yiddish—he returned many times to the theme of *kinnus*, i.e., the winnowing of the chaff from the wheat in Jewish literature in order to create a new "canon" of works accepted as indispensable classics. When the Hebrew University was projected he became one of its most enthusiastic protagonists, for here he believed the old and the new, the Jewish and the supranational, would meet to blend in a contemporary but traditional Hebrew culture. The excerpt below represents a speech he gave in the presence of Lord Balfour and a galaxy of other dignitaries at ceremonies marking the opening of the University in 1925.

Though Bialik's prose only is represented in this volume, a word must be said about his poetry. Passionately felt and intensely personal though all of Bialik's poetry was, the generation which loved him deeply was correct in regarding him as the voice of all, the Jewish national poet. Certainly he spoke both for others as well as for himself in lines like these from *Al Ha-Shehitah*, the defiant dirge he wrote in Kishinev right after the pogrom of 1903:

> *If there is justice—let it appear at once!*
> *But if justice will appear*
> *Only after I am destroyed from under heaven—*
> *Let its chair be uprooted forever!*

Under pressure from the renowned Maxim Gorky, the Communist rulers of Russia permitted Bialik to emigrate in 1921. After three years in Berlin he settled in Tel Aviv, on a street the municipality called by his name. He died in Vienna, where he had gone for an operation, in the summer of 1934 and was buried in Tel Aviv.

BIALIK ON THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY

AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY JERUSALEM, JANUARY 4, 1925

THE SOLEMNITY AND EXALTATION of this moment can only be desecrated by any sort of exaggeration. It is therefore our duty to declare openly and honestly in the presence of this gathering that the house which has just been opened on Mount Scopus by our honored guest Lord Balfour[1] is now but the embryo of an institution, hardly more than a name. For the time being it is but a vessel that may become filled with content and its future is as yet unrevealed and in the hands of fate. Nevertheless I feel certain that the thousands assembled here, and with them tens of thousands of Israel in all corners of the world, feel, in hearts that are trembling with joy, that the festival which is being celebrated this day upon this spot is not an artificial ritual that someone has devised but a great and holy day unto our Lord and unto our People. I am sure that the eyes of tens of thousands of Israel that are lifted from all parts of the Diaspora to this hill are shining with hope and comfort; their hearts and their flesh are singing a blessing of thanksgiving unto the Living God Who hath preserved us and sustained us and let us live to see this hour. They all realize that at this moment Israel has kindled upon Mount Scopus the first candle of the renaissance of her intellectual life. This day the glad tidings will come unto all the scattered families of Israel, wherever they may be, that the first peg in the upbuilding of the Higher Jerusalem (*Yerushalayim shel Ma'lah*) has been fixed for all time.

For let people say what they may: This peculiar people called Israel has, despite all the vicissitudes which for two thousand years

have daily, yea hourly, attempted to expel it from its own milieu and uproot it from its spiritual climate—this people, I assert, has accepted upon its body and soul the burden of eternal allegiance to the Kingdom of the Spirit. Within that Kingdom it recognizes itself as a creative citizen and in that eternal soil it has planted its feet with all its might for all time. All the sordidness of the accursed Galut and all the pain of our people's poverty did not disfigure its fundamental nature. Obliged to sacrifice temporal life for eternal life, it learned in the days of suffering and travail to subordinate material to spiritual needs and the requirements of the body to those of the soul. Within the boundaries of the realm of the Spirit the Jewish nation fashioned the bases of its national heritage and its principal national institutions. These preserved it through millennia of wandering, safeguarded its inner freedom amid outward bondage and have led up to this joyful event of the Inauguration of the University on Mount Scopus. The national school in all its forms—the *heder*, the *yeshivah*, the *bet-midrash*[2]—these have been our securest strongholds throughout our long, hard struggle for existence, and for the right to exist, in the world as a separate and distinct people among the peoples. In times of tempest and wrath we took refuge within the walls of these fortresses, where we polished the only weapon we had left—the Jewish mind—lest it become rusty. At this moment I cannot but recall a saying of our sages, a saying of unparalleled bitter sadness. A certain scholar, when reading in the Pentateuch (Leviticus 26:44) "Nevertheless, even when they are in the land of their enemies I shall not detest them, and I shall not abhor them . . .", remarked bitterly: "What has, then, been left to Israel in the Galut that has not been detested and abhorred? Have not all the goodly gifts been taken from them? What has been left to them? Only the Torah. For had that not been preserved for Israel, they would in no wise be different from the gentile."

The concept of "Torah" attained in the esteem of the people an infinite exaltation. For them the Torah was almost another existence, a more spiritual and loftier state, added to or even taking the place of secular existence. The Torah became the center of the nations secret and avowed aspirations and desires in its exile. The dictum "Israel and the Torah are one" was no mere phrase: the non-Jew cannot appreciate it, because the concept of "Torah," in its full national significance, cannot be rendered adequately in any other tongue. Its content and connotations embrace more than "religion" or "creed" alone, or "ethics" or "commandments" or "learning" alone, and it is not even

just a combination of all these, but something far transcending all of them. It is a mystic, almost cosmic, conception. The Torah is the tool of the Creator; with it and for it He created the universe. The Torah is older than creation. It is the highest idea and the living soul of the world. Without it the world could not exist and would have no right to exist. "The study of the Torah is more important than the building of the Temple." "Knowledge of the Torah ranks higher than priesthood or kingship." "Only he is free who engages in the study of the Torah." "It is the Torah that magnifies and exalts man above all creatures." "Even a heathen who engages in the study of the Torah is as good as a High Priest." "A bastard learned in the Torah takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest."[3]

Such is the world outlook to which almost seventy generations of Jews have been educated. In accordance therewith their spiritual life was provisionally organized for the interim of the exile. For it they suffered martyrdom and by virtue of it they lived. The Jewish elementary school was established shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem and has survived to this day. As a result of such prolonged training, the nation has acquired a sort of sixth sense for everything connected with the needs of the spirit, a most delicate sense and always the first to be affected, and one possessed by almost every individual. There is not a Jew but would be filled with horror by a cruel decree "that Jews shall not engage in the Torah." Even the poorest and meanest man in Israel sacrificed for the teaching of his children, on which he spent sometimes as much as a half of his income or more. Before asking for the satisfaction of his material needs, the Jew first prays daily: "And graciously bestow upon us knowledge, understanding, and comprehension." And what was the first request of our pious mothers over the Sabbath candles? "May it be Thy will that the eyes of my children may shine with Torah." Nor do I doubt that if God had appeared to one of these mothers in a dream, as He did once to Solomon, and said, "Ask, what shall I give unto thee?" she would have replied even as Solomon did: "I ask not for myself either riches or honor, but O Lord of the Universe, may it please Thee to give unto my sons a heart to understand Torah and wisdom and to distinguish good from evil."[4]

Ladies and Gentlemen! You all know what has become of our old spiritual strongholds in the Diaspora in recent times and I need not dwell upon this theme now. For all their inner strength, and for all the energy the nation had expended upon creating and preserving these centers, they stood not firm on the day of wrath; by the decree of history they are crumbled and razed to the foundations and our people

is left standing empty-handed upon their ruins. This is the very curse of the Galut, that our undertakings do not, indeed cannot, prosper. In every land and in every age we have been sowing a bushel and reaping less than a peck. The winds and hurricanes of history always begin by attacking the creation of Israel and, in a moment, uproot and utterly destroy that which hands and minds have produced over a period of generations. Through cruel and bitter trials and tribulations, through blasted hopes and despair of the soul, through innumerable humiliations, we have slowly arrived at the realization that without a tangible homeland, without private national premises that are entirely ours, we can have no sort of a life, either material or spiritual. Without Eretz Israel—Eretz means land, literally land—there is no hope for the rehabilitation of Israel anywhere, ever. Our very ideas about the material and intellectual existence of the nation have also meanwhile undergone a radical change. We no longer admit a division of the body and the spirit, or a division of the man and the Jew. We hold neither with Beth Shammai, that the heavens were created first, nor with Beth Hillel,[5] that the earth was created first, but with the sages that both were created simultaneously by one command so that neither can exist without the other. In the consciousness of the nation the comprehensive human concept of "culture" has, meanwhile, taken the place of the theological one of "Torah." We have come to the conclusion that a people that aspires to a dignified existence must create a culture; it is not enough merely to make use of a culture—a people must create its own, with its own hands and its own implements and materials, and impress it with its own seal. Of course our people in its "diasporas" is creating culture; I doubt whether any place in the world where culture is being produced is entirely devoid of Jews. But as whatever the Jew creates in the Diaspora is always absorbed in the culture of others, it loses its identity and is never accounted to the credit of the Jew. Our cultural account in the Diaspora is consequently all debit and no credit. The Jewish people is therefore in a painfully false position: Whereas its true function culturally is that of a proletariat—i.e., it produces with the materials and implements of others for others—it is regarded by others, and at times even by itself, as a cultural parasite, possessing nothing of its own. A self-respecting people will never become reconciled to such a lot; it is bound to arise one day and resolve: No more. Better a little that is undisputedly my own than much that is not definitely either mine or somebody else's. Better a dry crust in my own home and on my own table than a stall-fed ox in the home of others and on the table of others. Better one little university but entirely my own, entirely my handiwork from foundations to coping stones, than thousands of temples of learning from which I derive benefit but in which I have no recognized share. Let my food be little and bitter as the olive, if I may but taste in it the delicious flavor of a gift from myself.

It was in this frame of mind that we took refuge in this land. We are not come here to seek wealth, or dominion, or greatness. How much of these can this poor little country give us? We wish to find here only a domain of our own for our physical and intellectual labor. We have not yet achieved great things here. We have not had time to wash the dust of long wanderings from our feet and to change our patched garments. Undoubtedly many years have yet to pass until we have healed this desolate land of the leprosy of its rocks and the rot of its swamps. For the present there is only a small beginning of upbuilding; yet already the need has been felt for erecting a home for the intellectual work of the nation. Such has ever been the nature of our people: it cannot live for three consecutive days without Torah. Already at this early hour we experience cultural needs that cannot be postponed and must be satisfied at once. Besides, we are burdened with heavy cares for the cultural fate of our people in the Diaspora. Nations born only yesterday foolishly imagine that through intellectual parching, by means of a *numerus clausus*,[6] they can do to death an old nation with a past of four thousand years of Torah. We must therefore hasten to light here the first lamp of learning and science and of every sort of intellectual activity in Israel, ere the last lamp grows dark for us in foreign lands. And this we propose to do in the house whose doors have been opened this day upon Mount Scopus.

There is an ancient tradition that in the time of the Redemption the synagogues and houses of study of the Diaspora will be transported, along with their foundations, to Palestine. Naturally this legend cannot come true literally; the house of knowledge and learning that has been erected on Mount Scopus will differ greatly, not only in the materials of which it is made but in its nature and purpose, from the old *bet-midrash*. But, Ladies and Gentlemen, amid the ruins of those hallowed structures there are many sound and beautiful stones that can and ought to be foundation stones of our new edifice. Let not the builders reject these stones. At this hallowed moment I feel impelled to pray: May those stones not be forgotten! May we succeed in raising the science and learning that will issue from this house to the moral level to which our people raised its Torah! We should not be worthy of this festive day if we proposed to content ourselves with a poor

imitation of other peoples. We know well that true wisdom is that which learns from all; the windows of this house will therefore be open on every side, that the fairest fruit produced by man's creative spirit in every land and every age may enter. But we ourselves are not newcomers to the Kingdom of the Spirit and while learning from everybody we also have something to teach. I feel sure that a time will come when the moral principles upon which our Houses of Torah were founded, such as those enumerated in the wonderful short *baraitha*[7] known as "The Chapter on the Acquisition of Torah," will become the heritage of humanity at large.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Thousands of our youth, obeying the call of their hearts, are streaming from the four corners of the earth to this land for the purpose of redeeming it from desolation and ruin. They are prepared to pour all their aspirations and longings and to empty all the strength of their youth into the bosom of this wasteland in order to revive it. They are plowing rocks, draining swamps, and building roads amid singing and rejoicing. These young people know how to raise simple and crude labor—physical labor—to the level of highest sanctity, to the level of religion. It is our task to kindle such a holy fire within the walls of the house which has just been opened upon Mount Scopus. Let those youths build the Earthly Jerusalem with fire and let them who work within these walls build the Heavenly Jerusalem with fire, and between them let them build and establish our House of Life. "For Thou, O Lord, didst consume it with fire, and with fire Thou wilt rebuild it."

Let me say in conclusion a few words to the honored representative of the great British people, Lord Balfour.

"Who despises a day of small deeds?"[8] asked the prophet. Least of all should small undertakings be despised in our small country. This country has the virtue of turning small things into great things in the fullness of time. Four thousand years ago there gathered in this land, from Ur of the Chaldees, from Aram, from Egypt, and from the Arabian Desert, some groups of wandering shepherds divided into a number of tribes. They became in time, in consequence of events of apparently no great importance, a people small and poor in its day—the people Israel. Few and unhappy were the days of this people on its land as "a people dwelling apart, not counted among the nations." But this people produced men—for the most part of humble station, shepherds, plowmen, and dressers of sycamores, like their brethren—who carried the tempest of the spirit of God in their hearts and His earthquakes and thunders in their mouths. Those men, in speaking of nations and individuals and in discoursing upon the history of their times and the apparently trivial affairs of the moment, dared to turn to eternity, to the Heavens and to the Earth. And it was they who in the end provided the foundation for the religious and moral culture of the world. Across the centuries and over the heads of nations ascending and descending the stage of history, their voice has come down to us to this day, and it is mighty and sublime and filled with the power of God even more than at first, as if it were constantly gaining in strength with increasing remoteness in time. After the proclamation of Cyrus, some tens of thousands of exiles rallied again to this poor, waste country and again formed a poor small community, even poorer and smaller than the first. After only some three hundred years, there arose again in this land a man of Israel, the son of an Israelite carpenter, who conveyed the gospel of salvation to the pagan world and cleared the way for the days of the Messiah. Since then two thousand years have elapsed, and we are all witnesses this day that idols have not yet disappeared from the face of the earth; the place of the old has been taken by new ones, no better than the former. And then came the Balfour Declaration. Israel is assembling in Eretz Israel for a third time. Why should not the miracle be repeated again this time? Providence willed that the fate of the Jewish people be associated with that of every civilized nation in the world, and this circumstance has perhaps developed in them more than in other peoples a sense of moral responsibility toward, and concern for, the future of civilization. Many years ago one of our sages gave fitting expression to this feeling: "A man should always think of himself and of the world as half righteous and half guilty. If he has committed a single transgression—woe betide him, for he has weighed down the scales of the whole world on the side of guilt." Who knows but that the task in which great nations have failed amid the tumult of wealth may be achieved by a poor people in its small country? Who knows but in the end of days this doctrine of responsibility for the fate of humanity may go forth from its house of learning and spread to all the people? Surely not for nothing has the hand of God led this people for four thousand years through the pangs of hell and now brought it back unto its land for the third time.

The Books of Chronicles, the last of the Scriptures, are not the last in the history of Israel. To its two small parts there will be added a third, perhaps more important than the first two. And if the first two Books of Chronicles begin with "Adam, Seth, Noah" and end with the

Proclamation of Cyrus, which three hundred years later brought the gospel of redemption to the heathen of old, the third will undoubtedly begin with the Proclamation of Balfour and end with a new gospel, the gospel of redemption to the whole of humanity.

Part 5
Rebels at Their Most Defiant

MICAH JOSEPH BERDICHEVSKI

1865-1921

"I LOVE AND I HATE," Catullus wrote about the lady he could neither be happy with nor abandon. In essence Berdichevski's many volumes embroider this theme, except that his was a love-hate relationship with Judaism and the Jewish tradition. He described this state of soul, correctly, as the mark of his generation, "the rent in the heart" that inevitably attended the passage from the religious faith of the ghetto to secular values of modern European civilization. But Ahad Ha-Am and Bialik found some peace in their synthesis in cultural Zionism; Berdichevski, Ahad Ha-Am's greatest adversary, denied that such a peace was real or possible. He saw only tension and affirmed only revolt. For Berdichevski tradition was an illusion, whether in Jewish history or in the history of civilization as a whole, and balance between the old and the new a figment of the imaginings of closet philosophers. True, primal values were the creations of rebels, who arose to challenge all conventional life and thought, and therefore a valid Jewish national revival was to be found not in the morality of books but in the proud human dignity of men who were not enslaved even by a great past. And yet from Berdichevski's pen we have some of the most poignant appreciations of the very tradition he professed to contemn and unsurpassed volumes opening the door for the modern reader to talmudic legend and morality, and to Hasidism.

Berdichevski, even more than Ahad Ha-Am, could have begun an autobiography exactly as Henry Adams began his *Education*, by announcing himself as, by birth, a Brahmin of Brahmins, a veritable scion of high priests, come into the world in the shadow of the Temple. He was born in Miedzyborz, Russia, in the city which had been the cradle of Hasidism in the middle of the eighteenth century, into a family of the most notable rabbinic lineage. By the age of seventeen, when a suitable match with an heiress was arranged for him, he was already well known as a phenomenal scholar of talmudic literature and of the mystical texts of Cabbala and Hasidism. In secret, however,

Berdichevski was reading in "enlightened" works; when caught in this "crime" by his pious father-in-law, he was thrown out on the street and the recent marriage was broken up. He went briefly to the yeshivah at Volozhin and began to write seriously. His earliest essays and stories were unimportant, conventional attempts to do what he later denounced as impossible, i.e., to find a compromise between the rabbinic tradition and enlightenment.

The stay at Volozhin and the years immediately thereafter were, however, a transition period. In 1890 he left for western Europe to study first at the University of Breslau and even for a while at its academy for painting. Within two years a radically different writer was revealing himself, one who spoke now of the vagueness of all the much debated great values, like Jewish tradition, culture, and nationalism, and of the neglect of the individual. Nietzsche was then one of the gods of advanced young men and, though it can be doubted whether Berdichevski was ever completely a disciple, it is beyond question that he was deeply influenced by the doctrine of the superman. A key idea of Nietzsche, the need for the "transvaluation of all values," was soon adopted by Berdichevski, who used it as the slogan for his radical attack on the Jewish tradition.

Berdichevski was a distinguished writer (though there are many lapses of style and taste) not only in Hebrew, his major language of literary expression, but also in Yiddish and German. He wrote on many, and often contradictory levels, from the seriousness of his dissertation in German devoted to the relationship of ethics and aesthetics, to light short stories and even popular philosophy in Yiddish. In the later years of his life he was concurrently producing collections of talmudic and post-talmudic legends—this with immense regard for their nobility—and preparing a major study (part appeared posthumously, entitled *Sinai und Gerisim*) in which he asserted that nature worship and idolatry, not biblical monotheism, had been the real religion of ancient Israel in its days of glory. His writings in Hebrew, collected by him in twenty volumes, were, however, the most significant aspect of Berdichevski's career.

From 1911 Berdichevski lived in Berlin, supporting himself as a dentist, in seclusion from public affairs and utterly devoted to his scholarly writings and to belles-lettres. Though he sought no disciples, his death in 1921 left a legacy which still lives on, for his thought is, even for many who do not know it, the source of a strain of humanist, Promethean *grandezza* which colors modern Israel.

WRECKING AND BUILDING (1900–1903)

THIS TIME in which we live is not like yesterday or the day before —it has no counterpart, for all the bases and conditions of our previous existence are now undermined and changed. The "long, dark night" is gone, and new days, with new circumstances, have replaced it. There is reason for the fear in our hearts—it is true that we are no longer standing on a clear road; we have come to a time of two worlds in conflict: To be or not to be! To be the last Jews or the first Hebrews.

Our people has come to its crisis, its inner and outer slavery has passed all bounds, and it now stands one step from spiritual and material annihilation. Is it any wonder that all who know in their hearts the burden, the implications, and the "dread" of such an hour should pit their whole souls on the side of life against annihilation? And this, too, such men must feel: that a new life must arise, broader in scope and different in condition from what has been. In devoting ourselves to the essential task, the resurrection of the people, we cannot even be indulgent to its tradition.

It is true that our past is that which gives us an historic claim and title to live on in the future; and as we go forward in our struggle for existence we look back to the day of Judah's bannered camp, to our heroes and ancient men of war, to our sages, the beacons of our spirit. Yet we cannot hide from ourselves that our ancestral heritage is not entirely an asset; it has also caused us great loss.

After the destruction of the Temple our political status declined and our independence came to an end. We ceased to be a people actively adding to its spiritual and material store and living in unbroken continuity with its earlier days. As our creativity diminished, the past—whatever had once been done and said among us, our legacy of thoughts and deeds—became the center of our existence, the main supports of our life. The Jews became secondary to Judaism.

All sentiments of survival, all vital desires that had swelled the hearts of Jacob's children in former times, sought an outlet through these channels. Many thought that they could satisfy the national conscience that lived in their hearts by preserving what had been handed down from their ancestors.

Apart from turning us into spiritual slaves, men whose natural forces had dried up and whose relation to life and to the world was no longer normal, this brought about the great interruption in our social and political development, an interruption that has almost led us to total decay.

Our young people were made to believe that spiritual attachment to the Jewish people necessarily meant faith in a fixed and parochial outlook, so they turned away and left us, for their souls sought another way.

We are torn to shreds: at one extreme, some leave the House of Israel to venture among foreign peoples, devoting to them the service of their hearts and spirits and offering their strength to strangers; while, at the other extreme, the pious sit in their gloomy caverns, obeying and preserving what God had commanded them. And the enlightened, standing between, are men of two faces: half Western—in their daily life and thoughts; and half Jews—in their synagogues. Our vital forces disperse while the nation crumbles.

For all the yearning for a revival which has begun to awaken in the hearts of the remaining few, we feel that such a revival must encompass both the inner and the outer life. It cannot arise other than by a total overturn, that is, by a transvaluation of the values which have been the guide lines of our lives in the past.

Our hearts, ardent for life, sense that the resurrection of Israel depends on a revolution—the Jews must come first, before Judaism—the living man, before the legacy of his ancestors.

We must cease to be Jews by virtue of an abstract Judaism and become Jews in our own right, as a living and developing nationality. The traditional "credo" is no longer enough for us.

We desire to elevate our powers of thought, to enrich our spirit, and to enlarge our capacity for action; but let us never force our spirits into set forms which prescribe for us what we may think and feel.

It is not reforms but transvaluations that we need—fundamental transvaluations in the whole course of our life, in our thoughts, in our very souls.

Jewish scholarship and religion are not the basic values—every man may be as much or as little devoted to them as he wills. But the people of Israel come before them—"Israel precedes the Torah."

The world about us, life in all its aspects, the many desires, resolves, and dispositions in our hearts—all these concern us as they would any man and affect the integrity of our soul. We can no longer solve the riddles of life in the old ways, or live and act as our ancestors did. We

are the sons, and sons of sons, of older generations, but not their living monuments. . . .

We must cease to be tablets on which books are transcribed and thoughts handed down to us—always handed down.

Through a basic revision of the very foundations of Israel's inner and outer life, our whole consciousness, our predispositions, thoughts, feelings, desires, and will and aim will be transformed: and we shall live and stand fast.

Such a fundamental revision in the people's condition, the basic drive toward freedom, and the boundless urge to new life will revive our souls. Transvaluation is like a flowing spring. It revives whatever is in us, in the secret places of the soul. Our powers are filled with a new, life-giving content.

Such a choice promises us a noble future; the alternative is to remain a straying people following its erring shepherds. A great responsibility rests upon us, for everything lies in our hands! We are the last Jews —or we are the first of a new nation.

IN TWO DIRECTIONS (1900–1903)

TO THIS DAY I wonder how Israel's sages came to coin the saying, "The blade and the book descended from Heaven coupled together,"[1] when it is obvious that the two contradict and destroy each other.

Their periods are distinct. Each one has its own time, and upon the appearance of one, the other vanishes . . .

There is a time for men and nations who live by the sword, by their power and their strong arm, by vital boldness. This time is the hour of intensity, of life in its essential meaning. But the book is no more than the shade of life, life in its senescence.

The blade is not something abstracted and standing apart from life; it is the materialization of life in its boldest lines, in its essential and substantial likeness. Not so the book.

There are times when we live, and there are times when we only think about life.

The Talmud rules: "'A man should not go out on the Sabbath bearing either a blade or a bow.' The sages commented that arms were

not a mark of honor, since it is written, 'They shall beat their swords into plowshares.' "

The blade and the bow, by whose force Israel fared so nobly, through which it became a people, these are now discreditable, since it is written . . .

But a vestige of vitality still remained in Rabbi Eliezer.[2] There was a man alive at the time who had not utterly capitulated to the moral rebellion; and he said: It is permissible to go out on the Sabbath bearing a blade and a bow, for they are an ornament to a man.

Now here comes Ahad Ha-Am and calls Rabbi Eliezer to book for not rising, in his ethical conceptions, to the level of the other sages of his time, and failing to sense in his heart the dishonor that lies in the strong arm and in its implements.

Ornament or discredit, Rabbi Eliezer or Ahad Ha-Am, which of these two stands higher?

Even if it were not plain Scripture, one should have to say: In the beginning God created the Universe, and then afterward, He made man, only afterward . . . And thus we, with our thoughts and feelings and desires and destiny and all we have and are, are the drippings of the bucket, the dust in the scales, against the world and all that's in it.

The Universe telleth the glory of God, the works of His hand doth Nature relate; for Nature is the father of all life and the source of all life; Nature is the fount of all, the fount and soul of all that live . . .

And then Israel sang the song of the Universe and of Nature, the song of heaven and earth and all their host, the song of the sea and the fullness thereof, the song of the hills and high places, the song of the trees and the grass, the song of the seas and the streams. Then did the men of Israel sit each under his vine or his fig tree, the fig put forth her buds and the green hills cast their charm from afar . . .

Those days were the days of breadth and beauty.

After these things, behold! The Day of the Lord came for all the cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan, for all the high hills and lofty mountains, and for all noble life.

Not man alone needs must bow before the glorious pride of the Cause of Being, but Nature, too, the whole Universe and all things that live. Not man alone must humble himself, become meek in all he does, but Nature too and all its doings must become lowly.

Not only upon the lowly, submissive man does the Blessed Holy One bestow His Presence, but it is Mount Horeb of all mountains on which He chose to be revealed, for it is the lowest of the hills and high places . . .

We had thought that God was power, exaltation, the loftiest of the lofty. We had thought that all that walked upon the heights became a vehicle for His Presence, but lo! a day came in which we learned otherwise . . .

Not the Universe is the source, but man alone, and in man, only his deeds. It is not man that is an incident to Creation, but quite the reverse.

Is it any wonder that men like Rabbi Isaac arose in our academies who said: The Bible should not have begun with Genesis, but with the Law? . . .[3]

Is it any wonder that there arose among us generation after generation despising Nature, who thought of all God's marvels as superfluous trivialities?

Is it surprising that we became a non-people, a non-nation—nonmen, indeed?

I recall from the teaching of the sages: Whoever walks by the way and interrupts his study to remark, How fine is that tree, how fine is that field—forfeits his life![4]

But I assert that then alone will Judah and Israel be saved, when another teaching is given unto us, namely: Whoever walks by the way and sees a fine tree and a fine field and a fine sky and leaves them to think on other thoughts—that man is like one who forfeits his life!

Give us back our fine trees and fine fields! Give us back the Universe.

THE QUESTION OF CULTURE (1900–1903)

I DO NOT BELIEVE those who say that we have a living inner culture, nor do I believe those who say that a culture can be grafted upon us from without. I do not believe it is possible to transmit our ancient light to continuous generations in exile, to spin this thread further in a true and vital line.

We boast in vain of a lofty ethical culture destined to be a light unto the gentiles, while in our tents is darkness and our lives are unlit.

Our shops deny our synagogues and houses of study; our secular

lives deny our holiness. Despite all the beacons we bear aloft in our hands, what are we and what is our life?

Yet, to those who go to tend alien vineyards, it must be said: Your lives, your substance, the blood that is in you, denies in some way all that you have ever said, thought, or believed.

Enlightenment and knowledge will avail little, so long as they are not necessary expressions of the course of our own history. Every culture is the end of a process, not a fresh beginning induced from without.

Culture is a spiritual and historical possession, comprehending the entire spiritual life of men and involving them in a fixed national-historic-psychic form which is peculiar to a particular community. If we wish to formulate it abstractly, we might say: Culture is the residue of eternity in temporal lives, a residue transmitted from father to son, from generation to generation. Every son begins at the point where his father concluded, and so each generation inherits from its ancestors and finds its work before it—to perfect and advance its selfhood.

In every other people, nationality is the single storehouse in which are preserved human individualities, and where the individual sees his achievements secured and his gains safeguarded. Among us, the individual finds in his Jewish nationality a power hostile to what is in his heart. Every one of us feels this opposition the moment he begins to improve himself and seek for culture; whether much or little, consciously or unconsciously, it is felt.

As a general rule, nationality enriches the individual, bestowing upon him ancient wealth, and, in turn, it becomes enriched from the individual works and creations of its representatives in every generation; but among us all those who work or wish to work in the field of culture find nothing from which to begin.

Other peoples demand sacrifices of their sons only in times of war, when foreigners seek to destroy them. In peacetime, in the processes of everyday life, the price of patriotism is rarely sacrifice—that is, the individual is not aware that he lives, or should live, on behalf of his people. The normal actions of the individual are themselves of benefit to the community. But among us, every individual is required to live always on behalf of his people and to make sacrifices for it every day, every hour, every minute; we demand this of him because his own life and needs strain toward a different arena than the group life, and, in some measure, his personal goals oppose the life of the group.

We require of every Jew that he be greater than other men, while our capacity for such greatness is severely limited.

The existence of our people, the very possibility of its existence, depends on creating a harmonious framework for our individual lives within the community—it depends on our capacity to be united within a structure capable of future survival. Our people can continue to exist only if there will be created among us a spiritual atmosphere and material possibilities for artists and builders.

Give the chance to live to a single individual, and the mass will follow after of its own accord.

THE QUESTION OF OUR PAST (1900–1903)

IF I HAD OCCASION at this time to take up the question of our past and present, and the relation between them, I could no longer divide them into two realms totally opposed to each other, two realms each of which can exist only by destroying the other.

It is true that when we struggle to create a new thing, suited to our contemporary lives and our aspirations of today, when our hearts are full of dreams and, deep within, a new universe is woven, a universe fashioned by our own hands—then there arises in our hearts the urge to destroy the universes that came before us and to eliminate whatever oppresses us by its existence. For the past demands that we devote our powers to guard and to serve it by every service of body and soul, but what we need is a new spirit. We need the spirit of God, that we too may speak to Him face to face; we need a God present in the secret places of our heart and in the universe of our own imagining.

The tablets of the Law are the work of God and persist down the generations; the letters inscribed on the tablets can no more be erased than the heavenly bodies. But let us renew them as the stars are rekindled; let us sing our song of life in our own way, and so achieve our essence, our immediacy. Let us, too, stand at the foot of God's mountain and cry out: "And God descended in the cloud . . ."[5] Let us, too, see with our own eyes visions of the Almighty.

Among us, man is crushed, living by traditional customs, laws, doctrines, and judgments—for many things were bequeathed us by our ancestors which deaden the soul and deny it freedom. But we also have the "Song of Songs"—we have paeans to life and its bounty; we

have the praises of David ben Jesse for the sublime and boundless glories of nature. . . . Our soul speaks this benediction: O Lord God, how great art Thou; Thou hast robed Thyself in splendor and glory! Unto this God do we hope, to God Who covereth Himself with light as a garment, Who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain; we hope in the Almighty God Who giveth salvation and freedom to man. . . . How mighty are the deeds of God, the whole earth is full of His creations! Bless the Lord, bless ye all His works.

When we ourselves stand in the midst of events, in the very stream of life, the past weighs upon us as a heavy load, and we reject it with wrath and fury. It is different when we regard the past as observers, not as struggling men. Our attitude changes when we see it as a completed thing, established in the final form of an historical phenomenon. Then the past often seems rich and beautiful. Nature has acquired a second sphere, the sphere of history, in which something is preserved and evolved from generation to generation.

What the individual cannot achieve for himself, he can acquire when he attaches himself to the group, and when his ear is attuned to the still voice of the whole. What a man cannot acquire in a single day, he can achieve by a bond with days gone by. The individual is not simply impoverished, but when he participates in the group he may also be enriched through the enduring wealth of the community.

Even a man of heroic spirit, laboring to attain sanctity for himself, could not—beginning on his own—devise the Sabbath which is given to the simplest man who observes it—because he was commanded, because he serves all those who ever observed it. . . .

What vast spiritual and moral labors are needed, even for the exceptional spirit, before one can reckon up his good and bad deeds and beg forgiveness for the bad. But here we have the simple, everyday Jew, far removed as he is all year long from any ethical spirit or absorption in divinity—on Yom Kippur he repairs to the synagogue, and at once the fear of the Lord falls upon him, the fear of God comes over him, and his heart is full of thoughts of repentance and the cleansing of his ways. One short prayer, not even properly understood, but with the hearts of hundreds of generations and myriads of souls poured into it, such a prayer softens the hardest heart and grants it healing. . . .

What the individual cannot achieve, that the whole can do.

The great sins we committed against life, because of which we are dying, were committed by men of perfect righteousness, by men of magnificent virtues. . . . Even in submission, in the duty to be trodden by every foot, there is a kind of grandeur; even in a man's lowliness before the Divine there is awe and fearsomeness and a kind of power. . . .

Even when we question the existence of God or deny His unity, we are overawed by the glory of those who died and were slain for the sanctity of His Name. . . .

Religion, the religion of the community, is a force that is active in us, and that enriches even while it oppresses us.

Rachel bewaileth her children. At a time when the strength of the individual is as nothing, the Synagogue raises its voice from the devastation of Mount Horeb.

That Israelite who laid down his life for a single one of the minor commandments, his blood cries out to me from the earth; and whenever I transgress that commandment, the image of that martyr, broken, shattered, blurred, and crushed though it be, confronts me as a reproof.

This is the grief that is in history; these are the pangs of memory, pangs that fill our hearts and souls, pangs that rend, tear, divide, and deliver them in turn to victories and submissions.

When we defeat the past, it is we ourselves who are defeated. But if the past conquers, it is we, and our sons, and the sons of our sons, who are conquered. . . . Elixir and poison in one and the same substance. Who shall show us the way? Who shall clear us a path?

ON SANCTITY (1899)

SCRIPTURE SAYS: Sanctify yourselves and be ye holy.[6] And this is our beacon light, even though we build new worlds and seek new ways.

Be ye holy—not only in thought and speech, not only in act and will, but in all your substance. The wholeness of heart, man's purity in all things, is the ultimate end. Thoughts alone are worthless, nor do complexes of feeling avail; wholeness is required of you, wholeness in everything.

And ye shall be a holy people; but a holy people is not a people expiring in torments. A beaten, tortured, and persecuted people is unable to be holy. If we have no national livelihood, if we do not eat the

fruit of our soil, but only toil on the lands of strangers, how can we be exalted in the spirit? If we are at war with ourselves in everything we do and think and are, how shall we attain elevation of soul and find the way to purification? A holy people must surely be a living people.