



AHAD HA'AM:
LOVER OF ZION

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“This is the word of the Lord to Zerubabel:
Neither by force of arms nor by brute strength,
but by my spirit!”
Zachariah IV, 6.

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A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Asher Hirsch Ginzberg, better known by his pseudonym *Ahad Ha'am*, was born in the Ukraine in 1856, into a rich family of Hassidic merchants. He was introduced to both Jewish and secular subjects by private tutors; he then embarked on the study of philosophy, the sciences and languages. His studies gradually led him to modify his religious stance and to join the circles of the intelligentsia – known as the *Maskilim* – the advocates of openness to general culture, and of active entry into civil society.

The Jewish world of central and eastern Europe at that time comprised three main trends. Hassidism, steeped in *Kabbalah* and organized into communities of devotees grouped around masters, preached pious adherence to ancestral traditions and rapture in worship of the divine which would enhance religious intent. Their opponents, the *Mitnagdim*, were recruited from the intellectual elites of the rabbinic academies. They mocked the religious puerility of the Hassidim and decried the magical significance they attributed to the commandments. The *Mitnagdim* prescribed study of the texts, particularly the Talmud, as the royal road to knowledge of God. Lastly, the *Maskilim* were more detached from tradition and determined to find the best way to prepare for life outside the ghetto.

Ahad Ha'am denigrated neither his Hassidic past, nor his *Mitnaged* inclinations. He willingly assumed the world of both or either – not devoid of a certain irony of course – to gain the largest possible readership. In his concern to escape from traditional classifications and to rise above the schisms which divided Jewry, he took pleasure in declaring himself “in love with Israel”:

The Lover of Judaism

I knew very well that in my youth I had grown up on the knees of the Hassidim. I had seized the rebbe's leftovers and I had drunk l'chayyim like any of them¹. Later, when I was married and in the company of my father-in-law, who was a considerable scholar and semi-Mitnaged, I would do as he did. I procured for myself an Ashkenazi-style prayer-book, made do with a brief prayer at dawn and spent the whole day over my Gemarah. Afterwards, when I saw that my evil instinct was taking me over, I did not choose to go somewhere where they did not know me, in order to satisfy my urges². Instead, I would don black clothes over

white, short garments over long and would become a Maskil. I knew all this, but what was I now? A Maskil? I cannot truthfully say that I really was one of those.

Even now when the Sabbath terminates, when the sun goes down, before the Havdalah candles are lit, I like to sit in darkness in a corner and to sink into the depths of my feelings. Then I feel as though my soul were rising above everything, as though my second soul³ were emerging from within. At times like these, I experience a great upheaval inside and varied memories from the days of my youth come back to me, laughable memories, but oh, so pleasant.... At other times, my lips move of their own accord and a familiar Aramaic⁴ song, in a familiar melody, escapes in a thin small voice, and all my bones rejoice and tremble, and tears well up in my eyes. I do not know the whys or the wherefores of this⁵.

In 1884, Ahad Ha'am settled in Odessa, then a hotbed of intellectual activity. He very quickly joined the circles of the *Hovevei Zion* – the Lovers of Zion – who advocated a national regeneration of Judaism, nourished by *love of Zion*. Ahad Ha'am was particularly influenced by Leon Pinsker⁶, a Viennese doctor, the author of a manifesto entitled *Auto-Emancipation*. Pinsker diagnosed the Jewish condition, threatened by Antisemitism. Ahad Ha'am even claimed to be Pinsker's disciple, subscribing to his proposal that a spiritual Jewish homeland be created in Palestine. *Hovevei Zion* ascribed all the problems which Jewry experienced, as well as the troubles confronting them, to national subservience – envisaging only one possible solution: national liberation. They had come to the conclusion that the national spirit of the Jewish People, like the Hebrew language and culture, could only be reborn on the soil of Israel. Since their first congress in Katowice in 1884, they had supported – both morally and financially – the first Jewish colonies in Palestine, which had been created under their impetus. These had included Petah Tikvah⁷ and Gedera, followed later by Hadera and Kastina. The Lovers of Zion wanted model colonies which would attract immigrants from the Diaspora.

Ahad Ha'am resolved to take up his pen to plead the cause of the love of Zion, but only: “for a brief moment, the time it takes to say certain things, and not as a writer but as a *man of the people* [*Ahad Ha'am* in Hebrew] before returning to my private life”. He found himself, however, drawn into the discussion aroused by his first article (1889) – *Lo Zeh HaDerekh* or *This is not the Way* – which was highly critical of the policy of the Lovers of Zion in Palestine. In the article he suggested that they direct their efforts towards an education propitious to creating colonists who were more dedicated and more disinterested than those already living there.

Despite the success of his first articles, he still considered himself “a guest in the sanctuary of literature”. The pseudonym he adopted – *Ahad Ha'am* – may

be polemical, since it can be contrasted with the phrase, *Ahad Ha'am* – one among men –, one of the *leitmotifs* of the *Maskilim* circles. This phrase was used by some who were more concerned with shedding their medieval Jewish garb than with assuming their Judaism to the full in order to be different from other men. Ahad Ha'am also liked to present himself as “a common merchant, more precisely the husband of a female merchant, because it is my wife who runs the shop”.

At the same time, Ahad Ha'am created a society – the *Bnei Moshe* or the Sons of Moses – which aimed to support and represent those Jews who had been won over to the idea of a national renaissance of Judaism, regardless of any religious or non-religious affiliations. The society's goal was also to work for the re-awakening of national feeling within Diaspora communities, and to encourage members to envisage returning to the land of Israel. The *Bnei Moshe* therefore wished to combine concern for the land of Israel with concern for the people, i.e. concern for spiritual things with concern for material things. They also wanted to turn Jewish nationalism into a moral ideal, but without rejecting any of the other moral virtues of Judaism.

The *Bnei Moshe* was a secret and hierarchical organization, divided into lodges subject to the authority of leaders. It functioned under Ahad Ha'am's umbrella for almost eight years in Odessa, Warsaw and finally Jaffa⁸. In the early days, its oath invoked the name of “the God of Israel” but a year later began with the words: “On the faith of my heart and in the name of all that I hold most dear and most holy in the world I promise that ...”. The association's statutes include the following passage:

The Sons of Moses

It is clear that for a national task to serve a national objective, what is required most of all is a pure and profound national love to be present in the hearts of every single member of the population. This love should aim to remove all conflicting opinions and individual desires. It should also bring close and unite the hearts of all without distinguishing between sects, whilst giving everyone the power and courage to work and suffer without weakening, until all obstacles – whether external or internal – are overcome.

At the present time, not enough national love of this sort can be found amongst our people. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the association to arouse such love and to strengthen it with every means available, to raise the national spirit in each person's heart, and to set it above all the different spirits which are creating dissension in Israel. We shall not in any way intervene in their mutual sectarian quarrels over Torah and Labor⁹. However, in a spirit of complete tolerance for their beliefs and individual opinions regarding matters that arise between man and God, we will, above all else, raise aloft the general national

*flag and try to implant in every person one belief and one opinion regarding matters that arise between the individual and his people*¹⁰.

*We shall also work very hard to arouse everyone's love for the general national attainments which belong to the spirit of our people in all its varied manifestations and throughout the generations. These include the land of our fathers and its settlement, the language of our fathers and its literature, the memory of our fathers and their history and the fundamental customs of our fathers and their national way of life*¹¹.

In 1891, Ahad Ha'am visited Palestine for the first time. Here, the Jewish agricultural colonies – some of which had been founded by the Lovers of Zion – were clinging to the rocks for dear life, with the support of Baron Edmond de Rothschild¹². Ahad Ha'am discovered for the first time that the region was not as deserted as his colleagues had thought, and that neither were all its Arab inhabitants “desert savages”. He further discovered that the colonists in their amateurism, their propensity to indulge in recriminations and their arrogance towards the Arabs betrayed all the characteristics of “the erstwhile slave in power”¹³. In a particularly critical article, “*The Truth from the Land of Israel*”, he complained about the motivation of these colonists, discovering that they were more concerned with growing rich as quickly as possible than with creating stable colonies: “In the whole *Yishuv*”, he wrote, “there is raging speculation on the stock market, whose banner should have woven into it the words: wealth or death”. Again, he emphasized the desolation of the colonies, which he likened to “ramshackle hovels which produce terrible suffering”. A sense of muddle and distress stayed with him throughout his visit, which included a visit to The Wailing Wall: “These stones bear witness to the ruin of our land; these folk to the ruin of our people. Which of the two ruins is more serious?”

Two years later he again visited the colonies – *moshavot* – of Palestine, this time returning more reconciled and reassured. Even his journey to Jerusalem on the evening of 9th of Av¹⁴ was more agreeable than first time around. He was fascinated by the spectacle of the worshippers who crowded at the foot of the Wailing Wall¹⁵:

“...With the echoes of our glorious ancestors who, in this very place, on a similar night, gave their lives for their country and their nation. They seemed to surround us, gazing down in surprise at their descendants who were crouched at the foot of the monument constructed in their honor, with books in their hands...”

On his return from Palestine, Ahad Ha'am launched the idea of a Hebrew Encyclopedia of Judaism and the Jewish World which would convey knowledge of these subjects to the public at large. However, what was envisaged would owe

more to Maimonides's *Mishneh Torah*¹⁶ than to any encyclopedia and would – in addition – take account of philological research. Furthermore, Ahad Ha'am did not cease to pray for the advent of a new Maimonides who would set about reassessing the future of the Jewish laws. Ahad Ha'am hoped that this new Maimonides would extract the religious sentiment from the yoke of superannuated practices, and harness this sentiment in such a way as to formulate a new body of legislation, better suited to the needs of the time.

These suggestions gave rise to a stormy discussion, alienating both the Orthodox rabbis and advocates of the Science of Judaism¹⁷, and therefore fell into temporary oblivion. In 1896, Ahad Ha'am was appointed editor of *HaShiloah*, the most important monthly journal of the Eastern European Jewish intelligentsia. He wished to promote this journal as “an original literary organ seen from the Hebrew spirit of our epoch” and as a “literary center” in which people of intelligence and taste will be able to make their voices heard “without yielding to the tumult and urgency of everyday life”. In 1897, Ahad Ha'am duly attended the First Zionist Congress¹⁸, held in Basle under the influence of Theodor Herzl¹⁹, a Viennese journalist generally regarded as the founder of Zionism as well as the visionary of the Jewish state.

Here, Ahad Ha'am did not hide his irritation with the “Jews of the West” who, devoid of any Jewish culture, were getting this new movement going by utilizing all the techniques of western parliaments: “The deliverance of Israel”, he cried, bitter and pessimistic, “will not come from diplomats but from Israel”. Or again “the salvation of Israel will come from the prophets, not from diplomats”. He greeted the resolutions of the Congress delegates with skepticism and sarcasm, at least those that advocated the creation of a Jewish state. He did not think that such a State would be able, if indeed it ever came into being, of solving the serious economic problems of the Jews, whether they flowed en masse to Palestine or remained en masse in the Diaspora.

Ahad Ha'am deplored the de-Judaization which presided over the birth of Zionism and claimed to be the spokesman for eastern Judaism which was scorned by Westerners. He set this eastern “love of Zion” against west European Zionism. The first he defined as: “A Jewish nationalism stripped of all traces of the things which have nourished the soul for a thousand years and which have enabled it to gain a special place in the cultural development of mankind.”²⁰ His ambivalence in respect of Zionism was also expressed in a severe critique of Herzl. He mocked his vision (engendered, in his view through fantasy and imagination) of an independent Jewish State. He also mocked the puerility of *Old-New Land* or *Altneuland*²¹, the book in which Herzl set out his utopian vision of the future of the Jewish People and its land. Ahad Ha'am particularly deplored the absence of any Jewish elements in its descriptions of renewal. To Ahad Ha'am, *Altneuland* was no more than an, “apish imitation, without any original national quality,

slavish in its advocacy of freedom, characteristic of the western Diaspora, which is obvious whichever way you look at it".²² Nonetheless, after Herzl's death, he acknowledged him as one of those, "remarkable individuals whom the people adopt from time to time to map out a new path for them".

In 1901, Ahad Ha'am embarked on a third journey to Palestine, where he spent twenty weeks on a study mission on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Odessa branch of the Lovers of Zion. He drafted a detailed study on the work of the Alliance Israélite Universelle²³ and its schools in Palestine, particularly the schools in Jaffa and Mikveh Israel. He was especially upset by the scant attention paid by the staff of this latter institution to the teaching of Jewish subjects and Hebrew²⁴: "We regret to have to admit that the activity of this institution in which we have placed our hopes for the resurrection of Hebrew and national education, are yielding less fruit than flowers."²⁵ For both financial and pedagogical reasons, he suggested that the Lovers of Zion suspend their collaboration with the Alliance and leave it to administer its schools by itself. Above all, he waxed indignant at the downfall that threatened the colonists, who had been reduced to the status of vassals and beggars by Baron de Rothschild's representatives. More generally, he exposed the regime of philanthropic patronage which discouraged any spirit of initiative, and threatened to transform the *Yishuv* into "a house of invalids", "a nest of a new type of degrading mendacity and yet another place for philanthropists and charitable organizations to get their hands on".²⁶ Ahad Ha'am ended his long review of the *moshavot* by calling for them to become autonomous. He concluded with two English words to the donors: "Hands off!"

Shortly after this, a joint meeting between the Lovers of Zion and representatives from the colonies took place in Odessa. It called for a complete halt to all patronage of the *Yishuv*. A delegation numbering five people and led by Ahad Ha'am traveled to Paris to ask the Baron to reconsider his method of intervention, though without withdrawing any financial support. To this, the Baron replied: "The colonization in Palestine is my work, and mine alone, and no-one, either colonist, or association, has the right to interfere in my affairs, or pass judgment on my actions. I completely and categorically oppose this". Representatives of the *Yishuv*, also present in Paris, did not wish to question the Baron's authority, and therefore abandoned any attempt to hand him a list of their grievances.

Ahad Ha'am was so disappointed by their timidity that he despaired of the entire undertaking: "A single individual, settled in Paris and endowed with great resources, maintains hundreds of beggars settled on his lands in Palestine. Sometimes he sustains them generously, sometimes parsimoniously, but always with scorn and disdain. He thereby arouses feelings which vibrate to the very depth of one's heart and puts paid to all sense of honor and dignity. To this man, the colonists are nothing but vile and contemptible slaves, schnorrers and thieves,

whose only ambition is to squeeze another penny out of him' Ahad Ha'am actually went so far as to compare the colonists to "a fantasy of the Baron"s, stating bitterly: "Slavery and mendacity in Israel, pompous and low-down rhetoric in the Diaspora – that is all that we can see for our twenty years of hard labor."²⁷

In 1903, Ahad Ha'am retired as editor of *HaShiloah*, although he continued with his public activities. In 1904 the Sixth Zionist congress – known as the Congress of Uganda²⁸ – was held, like its predecessors, in Basle. This congress set up a commission charged with studying the British proposal to establish a Jewish national home in northern Africa. This decision brought an outcry of protests from the east European Lovers of Zion, most of whom had in the meantime joined the Zionist movement. For his part, Ahad Ha'am deplored the impatience and despair which he detected as being the root cause of the interest evinced by western Zionists in the possibility of settling in a territory other than the land of Israel. Once again, he attacked the poverty of their Jewish culture and the timidity of their national feelings. Neither did he spare his critics or mince his words: "For ten years," he said, "we have been led to Africa with songs of Zion on our lips"²⁹. He himself did not conceive of a Jewish national renaissance anywhere but in the land of Israel, the homeland of Hebrew culture and the soil of its resurrection.

The pogroms which broke out almost everywhere in 1903, particularly in Kishinev³⁰, which suffered a huge number of victims, obviously led him to regard Antisemitism as an irresistible and irremediable phenomenon. He chose self-mockery to illustrate the disarray into which these pogroms had plunged his co-religionists:

The confusion caused me to lose my mental balance and, instead of exclaiming: "Alas, brethren of mine, it is a decree of nature that man swallow his neighbor alive, and you have no right to complain about it!" – instead of that, I shouted out in a bitter voice, "Oh, ho! What has happened to my shop?" And, like an arrow from a bow, I sped to the place where I had been earning a living, but found nothing left, except my wife wailing and weeping over her lost goods, which looters had pillaged and utterly destroyed, without leaving a trace."³¹

Twelve years after his first trip, Ahad Ha'am again spent nearly two months in Palestine (1907). This time the balance-sheet he prepared regarding colonization was fairly positive. These were perhaps the happiest days of his life. The achievements of the *Yishuv* were piecing together the lost fragments of a national passion. The *Yishuv* was animated by the instinct for life to pursue a goal which exceeded the intentions of some and the declarations of others. Above all, Ahad Ha'am discovered that the national center for which he had prayed was in process of becoming a reality: "I am not ashamed to admit openly that it appears that in

the Land of Israel I am seeing with my own eyes the realization of a dream I had twenty years ago.” He extolled the revolution which had occurred in the teaching and practice of Hebrew, describing with emotion how a teacher in a German class had despaired of explaining a new word in that language, and had therefore found himself forced to translate it into Hebrew. In the *moshavot*, it seemed to him that he breathed “national Hebrew air”:

A National Ambience

In the existing moshavot, although most of the work is not done by Jews, it seemed to him, a Jew coming from the Diaspora, that they were like small creative nuclei from which a new type of national life was emerging, with no parallel in the Golah. Whenever he reached a Jewish settlement, he immediately felt enveloped in the atmosphere of a Hebrew nation. All forms of life, all public institutions, from “the council of the moshavah” to the school, were stamped with a Hebrew imprint. Here, unlike in the Diaspora, it was almost impossible to experience foreign influences at work, which would burst like a stream from the alien world around and break the form of the Hebrew mould ... The Jewish visitor passes from settlement to settlement, which are separated from each other by many hours of travel. And fields and villages owned by strangers occupy the intervening territory. But he sees the distance between them as though it were no more than a desert empty of men. And, after passing through the desert, the terrain is occupied again and once more he breathes the national Hebrew air which restores his spirit.

Days pass, weeks pass, and it seems to him as though all that time he is living in another world – in a world of the distant past or the distant future. And when he leaves this world, he says to himself, “If it is like this now, what will it be like when the moshavot multiply and are organized to perfection”? At that moment the consciousness dawns that the solution to the question of our national existence is to be found here, in this land. Moreover, from here will go forth the spirit that will revive the dry bones which are currently dispersed east and west, in every country and among every people. But they will return and be reborn.³²

In 1907, Ahad Ha'am settled for a time in London, where he was associated with the various initiatives and approaches which were then being directed towards ensuring the support of the British authorities for the creation of a Jewish national home³³ in Palestine. In 1922, however, he finally settled in Palestine and worked on a complete edition of his writings. These appeared under the title *Al Parshat Derakhim*, or *At the Crossroads*. These texts, written in Hebrew, display a great knowledge of culture and rare mastery of a language which was only just emerging from the religious sphere and beginning to embrace poetry and politics as well. His research broke free from the Science of Judaism, which had rejected

the burden of apologetic considerations and was not very interested in the practical implications of its research, being more concerned to keep to its precise methodology, than to study the relevance of any conclusions which ensued. Ahad Ha'am further deplored the aridity of its studies which, in his view, were influenced far too much by the works of non-Jewish researchers. He saw these studies contributing to no more than the erection of "a monument which only commemorates past spiritual work". Strongly wishing to break away from this approach, he set against it the type of textual study which would ensure the perpetuity of Judaism in a way which was relevant for contemporary Jewish life. Ahad Ha'am's writings therefore denote that disillusioned humor which is so characteristic of age-old Jewishness, familiar with the vagaries of destiny.

In his political activities Ahad Ha'am advocated a paradoxical pragmatic idealism, which would attest to the utmost people's needs and desires either to come to terms with reality, or change it. He was obviously a supporter of a provisional and limited type of idealism. This would progress gradually, in order to protect itself from the more extreme type of idealism, with its grandiose goals and contempt towards the more cautious approach of those who might oppose it, thus finally destroying the dreamers of big dreams:

The Dream of Grandeur

And because [our unhappy nation] always abounds in extreme ideals, it has grown accustomed to despising modest objectives and has shown no interest in activities of which it is actually capable, but has yearned only for grandiose schemes which are unrelated to real life, because it lacks the means to actualize these yearnings in any concrete fashion. It has discharged its duty "with a vague declaration" and learned to satisfy itself only with visions and dreams. Therefore, it has ended up losing any sense of reality, or being able to balance ideal and action, in other words, the need which exists in the imagination and the capacity to carry out this need in practice.³⁴

Ahad Ha'am ended the final preface to his writings with words which would constitute a political credo as much as a warning: "Take care not to hasten the end before the concrete conditions required for its advent are in place. Also be perfectly sure in your own minds that there is no time at which you doubt the possibility of such action, even if it does not help hasten the advent of the Messiah today or the next day..." On the one hand, Ahad Ha'am strove to be rational and pragmatic. On the other hand, he appeared open to the poetic qualities of the imagination, which counterbalanced a certain rational aridity and threw a vital eschatological light on the present in particular. This, in turn, allowed both a glimpse of the future and the perspective from which to prepare for it. For Ahad Ha'am, the biblical Prophets emphasized the past in order to draw from it the

inspiration necessary to anticipate the future and avert any threats it held by acting on the present. The portrait that Ahad Ha'am paints of the prophet as a brave man in love with his people would be rather like the portrait one could draw of him.

The Prophet

The Prophet is distinguished from the rest of mankind by two fundamental qualities:

The Prophet is a man of truth. He sees facts as they are, not through a haze of personal predispositions; and he tells the truth as he sees it, without regard to the consequences. He tells the truth not because he wants to tell the truth, nor because he has convinced himself by the reasoning process that he is duty bound to tell the truth, but because he "can no other". Truth-telling is the law of his nature; he cannot escape it even if he would. As Carlyle put it, every man has it in his power to raise himself to the level of a Prophet by seeking the truth. But what the ordinary man can become only by strength of will and determined effort, the Prophet cannot help being by virtue of his very nature.

The Prophet is a man of extremes. His ideal fills his whole heart and mind; it is the whole purpose of life, and its empire must be made absolute. The world of actuality must be remodeled to conform to the ideal world of his inner vision. It must be so, and therefore it will be so. He can accept no excuse, admit no compromise. He cannot cease thundering out his denunciations, even if the whole universe stands against him.

These two fundamental qualities of the Prophet come together to form a third: the empire of absolute justice which permeates his soul and his every word and deed. Being a man of truth, he must also be a man of justice, which is simply truth in action; and being an extremist, he cannot make subordinate justice (any more than truth) to any side issue, or sacrifice it for opportunist or sentimental reasons. His justice is absolute justice, limited neither by social necessity nor by sentiment.

Unable to perfect the world as he would wish, and equally incapable of the self-deception which would blind him to its defects, the Prophet can never be at peace with his environment. There is thus a grain of truth in the popular conception of the Prophet as – first and foremost – a foreteller of the future. The only reality for him is the inner vision he possesses of what is to be in "the latter end of days" – the vision that brings him joy and comfort when the cup of sorrows is full to the brim, when he has no strength left to cry out against the evil that he sees around him³⁵.

THE CROSSROADS

Ahad Ha'am analyzed the situation of Judaism and the Jewish People at a critical moment in their common history. He found them standing at a major crossroads between past and future, tradition and modernity, and nationalism and humanism. The integration of various Jewish communities into the wider society brought about changes in attitude and behavior. These, in turn, threatened to destroy the convergence between Jewish beliefs and practices which had so long prevailed. Torn between the private and public spheres, the intimate message of his heart and the rationality of his mind, the modern Jew wavered between Judaic particularism and philosophic universalism, loyalty and assimilation, withdrawal into self and emergence from self. Moreover, he was caught between Antisemitism, which strikes at the humanity of "everyman" and emancipation³⁶, which threatens the specific Jewishness of every Jew. On the one hand, the Jew would be contemptible in Gentile eyes. On the other hand, he would be contemptible in his own eyes. Nevertheless, Ahad Ha'am paid less attention to the condition of the Jews as individuals than to the situation of Judaism *per se*, questioning the nature and vocation of Judaism, whilst discarding the apologetic considerations which characterized so much Orthodox and liberal thought:

The Exodus from the Ghetto

It is not only the Jews who have emerged from the ghetto: Judaism has emerged from it 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 plays complete havoc with the inner defenses of Judaism, so that it can no longer remain isolated and live a life apart. The spirit of our people desires further development. It wishes to absorb the basic elements of the general culture which are reaching it from the outside world, as well as digest them and 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 the culture must repress his individuality and become absorbed into 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.*³⁷

Although Ahad Ha'am endorses the analyses and diagnoses of the members of the Jewish intelligentsia – the *Maskilim* – he challenges their solutions. He does not believe as much in revolution, as in a long maturing of hearts. Moreover, he notes the collapse of the *Haskalah* slogan which urges Jews to integrate actively in the public sphere, assuming as far as possible all their rights and duties in the public sphere, while continuing to respect Judaism in the private sphere. The *Haskalah* Jew, he states, will have cherished his universalist exterior and neglected his Jewish interior to such a degree that he will have succumbed to an obsessive dissonance. In the *Haskalah's* exhortations to humanism, Ahad Ha'am discerned and denounced a wish to liquidate all national dimensions, as well as an inadmissible temptation to total assimilation. He regretted that humanism was presented as transcending nationalism in general and Judaism in particular: “When we speak of humanism, we forget the Jews, and when we speak of Jews, we forget humanism.”

Humanism and Nationalism

These two words have become banners in the hands of the two factions, each considering the other its enemy. But if we look carefully, we will find no contradiction at all between these concepts – the only difference between them being the difference between the general and the particular. We all know that there is no reality to a general concept, that each man is necessarily either Reuben or Simon, etc. Only in our own mind do we remove the different individual characteristics from the details, leaving behind the basic characteristics which are common to all. In this way, we obtain the abstract idea. This designates that general entity which is found in all particulars, without any concern for those manifold and varied characteristics which it assumes on being actualized in every particular as a concrete creation.

Let us take humanism as another example. The way in which ‘humanism’, i.e. the unity of the human species, is perceived and felt in its social sense (i.e. ‘the general idea’) is only made accessible to us by way of abstraction. ‘Nationalism’, by contrast, is a concrete form in which the humanism of every people is revealed, together with the conditions of its life, its needs and its history. Humanism is the general and internal spirit from which it emerges into social life in all its aspects, whilst nationalism is the external form, the particular. This particular is manifested differently in every people which the internal spirit assumes when passing from potentiality to actuality. Without this particular

*external form, the internal spirit would not be seen or found in the world of deeds.*³⁸

It is in this context that Ahad Ha'am deplored the internal enslavement which is easily concealed by the external and political freedom pursued by western Jews, taking the French Jews as an example. In his opinion, these French Jews are living in "slavery amidst freedom". He views their patriotism as betraying moral and intellectual poverty, rather than encouraging self-fulfillment. He criticizes them for having sold out their Jewish nationality in exchange for the derisory "Rights of Man" which will be challenged, in his view, the first time they experience an outburst of Antisemitism. He also makes fun of their anxiety to justify their Jewish survival by claiming that the Jews have a mission among the nations. In his view, they no more understand the question they pose themselves, "Why continue to be Jews?", than if he were asked why he was his father's son. We can see that he is adopting a position against their soul-searching, evasions and simulations:

The Right to be Oneself

*I see there, behind the glory and the grandeur of it all, a twofold spiritual slavery – moral slavery and intellectual slavery – and ask myself: Do I envy these fellow-Jews of mine their emancipation? – I answer, in all truth and sincerity: No! A thousand times No! Their privileges are not worth the price! I may not be emancipated; but at least I have not sold my soul in exchange for emancipation. I at least can proclaim from the roof-tops that my kith and kin are dear to me wherever they are, without being constrained to find forced and unsatisfactory excuses. I at least can remember Jerusalem at other times than those of "divine service": I can mourn for its loss, both in public or in private, without being asked what Zion means to me, or I to Zion. I at least have no need to exalt my people to Heaven, to trumpet its superiority above all other nations, in order to find a justification for its existence. I at least know "why I remain a Jew" – or, rather, I can find no meaning in such a question, any more than if I were asked why I remain my father's son. I at least can speak my mind concerning the beliefs and opinions which I have inherited from my ancestors, without being afraid of snapping the bond that unites me to my people. I am even able to adopt that scientific heresy which bears the name of Darwin, without any danger to my Judaism. In a word, I am my own, and my opinions and feelings are my own. I have no reason for concealing or denying them, for deceiving others or myself. And this spiritual freedom – let him who wants it, take it! – I would not exchange or barter it for all the emancipation in the world.*³⁹

Even the promises given on the subject of the cultural regeneration of Judaism, one of the leitmotifs of *Haskalah*, did not always seem to convince Ahad Ha'am. He repeatedly lamented the poverty of Hebrew literature, criticizing it for being a clumsy pastiche of European literature and overly self-important. It only yields, says he, "thin ears of corn", gleaned from the fields of other cultures, which was driving the most demanding and most talented minds to despair. Rather than submit to the enthusiasm of thinkers and writers who wanted to extend creative work in Hebrew to all areas of life, thus confirming the greatest possible coincidence between the Jewish condition and the human condition, he wanted to limit its domain to the treatment of subjects engendered by the clash between Judaism and the wider social culture.

Given the current state of work in Hebrew and the Jews' socio-political conditions, he questioned their capacity to absorb the poetic, philosophic and scientific achievements of the West without diluting them. "They think they have hebraicized the cultural heritage of Europe," he said, "by reading it from right to left." Ahad Ha'am also deplored the break with the past and its traditions which threatened to dry up the source of all great creation. Nothing can be created *ex nihilo* and, without drawing on the heritage of the past, it would not be possible to aspire to great creation. He suggested taking up the challenge offered by the seductive charms of other nations through imitation, in a spirit of competition, rather than submission, the better to surpass them. This had been the practice in the period of Judaism's encounter with philosophy in Medieval Spain.⁴⁰ In short, what he advocated was an equal relationship between Jewish culture and the cultural resources of other nations. This would demand real attachment to its own cultural heritage and virtues, in order to support a "competitive imitation".

A JUDAISM OF THE HEART

Ahad Ha'am deplored the hidebound state of Judaism which had been caused in and through the written word. Even the Oral Law⁴¹ had to some extent deteriorated through having been written down, thus enslaving the impulses of the heart to the written text. And this Law, which had originally been promulgated in order to guarantee the permanent updating of the Torah in and through constant textual interpretation, had – instead – become the “law of the heart”, presumed to govern the feeling and life of the Jews:

The Generations and the Books

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. Once the seed is planted, life does the rest. The tender shoot is nurtured and brought to maturity by the spontaneous action of men's minds, whilst 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 once 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. Even when that sanction is found, the response is neither simple nor natural, but 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 even in cases where the latter has ceased to be in harmony with current needs.⁴²

Ahad Ha'am demands that the heart be freed from the yoke of the written word. It should be re-established as a crucible in which national feelings capable of regenerating the sources of Judaism are born and grow, and as a place which will see "the dry bones rise". The working of the heart has the advantage of weakening the contradictions which tear life apart, encouraging it instead to win fame in the creative responses which are urgently needed. In the crisis which threatened to ruin his coreligionists' attachment to Judaism, Ahad Ha'am proposed to encourage study, not so much in order to promote practice, as in order to cultivate love of Israel. In so doing, he side-stepped the question of God by identifying him more or less with the national spirit at work in Judaism and in the history in which he is incarnated:

The Believer and Unbeliever

I already pointed out some years ago that every entity whose action is perceived in life, even if in itself it is only an imaginary representation, is a true "find", real in the historical sense. Therefore, even a person who does not believe in the reality of divinity per se, still cannot deny its reality as a historical and genuine force. Therefore, a national Jew, even if he denies the centrality of this notion, cannot say "I do not have a share in the God of Israel, in that historical power which gave life to our people and which influenced the character of its spirit and the course of its existence over thousands of years". The person who truly has no share in the God of Israel, the person who does not feel in his soul any inclination of the spirit to that "higher world" in which our ancestors rooted their mind and heart throughout the generations, and from which they drew their moral strength – that person can be "kosher", but he is, nevertheless, not a national Jew even if he "dwells in the land of Israel and speaks the holy tongue".

The above conclusion also applies to the sacred texts. The believer sees in them "the Book of Books", a revelation of the divine which is not measured by the criteria of literary criticism. Therefore, there is no resemblance between this book and other books, nor is there any room for the question of its literary merit. But even the unbeliever, if he is a national Jew, has a relationship to the sacred texts. This relationship is not solely literary, but literary and national at one and the same time. From the literary point of view, the Jew can judge the Bible as he wishes. It is even possible that other famous works will be regarded by him as "greater and deeper". From the national point of view, however, this judgment will have not changed anything in the emotion which binds him to the Bible. This is an emotion of a particular intimacy, charged through with national sanctity, an emotion from which thousands of fine threads lead him back through history to the depths of the distant past. Moreover, this closeness of spirit is not like that which a man feels in relation to any old book which is dear to him purely because of its content or form. The reason for this is not just that the Bible is a book in

which we find the “incarnation of the spirit of our people”, dating back to an earlier period which is separated from us by thousands of years. In that sense there is actually no great distinction between the Bible and the Apocryphal writings.⁴³ For these, too, are a fine historical monument to the period to which they belong. However, they lack the main element: that “hypnotic power” itself, which has raised the Bible from the level of a historical monument, dating from a particular period, to the status of a historical power whose strengths cover eternity. It is not important why it is the books included in the Bible – and not others – which were treated in this way. Because it was precisely those books which attained that status and became what they are: an independent part of our national “ego” which is inconceivable without it. They are “sacred writings” in both the national and religious sense, at one and the same time.

There must be something terribly wrong with our turns of phrase, if people can just come and call themselves “national Jews”, maintaining that “we have already liberated ourselves from the hypnotic effect of the holy writings, because we have found other books that are greater in our eyes”. Have you ever heard of a child who turns his back on his mother because he has found someone more beautiful than she?⁴⁴

Ahad Ha'am relied on the heart to lift religion out of its rut and stamp it with new forms – but always under the control of the internal logic which, in his eyes, was at work within Judaism, incessantly driving it to go beyond concrete representations and to seek the absolute. For him, the history of Judaism was that of a permanent battle of the spirit against the realism which materialist considerations dictated. Otherwise, he felt that Judaism would topple over into an asceticism which would condemn the evil enchantments of the flesh, rather than attempting to reconcile the needs of the flesh with the aspirations of the mind. The result would be that rather than disparaging carnal life, it would be sublimated and raised to the level of the spiritual: “An inner union [if] the spiritual element penetrates into the very heart of the material life”. Referring to a *midrash* in which a Gentile comes to see Hillel the Elder⁴⁵ – one of the fathers of Pharisaism – to ask him to sum up the Torah in one principle or one maxim, Ahad Ha'am suggested the following principle:

The Cult of the Ideal

If the heathen of the old story, who wished to learn the whole of the Torah while he stood on one leg, had come to me, my reply would have been: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness” – that is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary”. What essentially distinguishes Judaism from other religions is its absolute determination to make the religious and moral

*consciousness independent of any definite human form, and to attach it to an abstract incorporeal ideal without any mediating term.*⁴⁶

A staunch advocate of letting the present gradually permeate the past, in order to gently encourage it in the direction of new needs, Ahad Ha'am placed his confidence in a natural evolution of religion on the pathway of life. This would be a non-deliberate, non-programmed evolution. It would perhaps be motivated by the moral conscience which, according to him, governs all interpretations of the written text, constantly reconciling it with the moral sentiments which animate men, but without imagining any change in the text itself. In the permanent interaction between religion and morals, Ahad Ha'am thus emphasized the regulating role of morals, which constantly purify the religion, clothing God with eminently moral attributes of action. With this in mind, he challenges the altruistic, Christian principle of positive *consideration* for one's neighbor, emphasizing instead the negative and Jewish principle of *preservation* of one's neighbor. On the one hand, there is Matthew⁴⁷ who declares: "Always treat others as you would like them to treat you: that is the Law and the Prophets" (*Matthew VII, 12 – New Testament*); on the other hand, we have the Jewish Sage, Hillel, who declares: "Do not do unto your neighbor what you would not have him do unto you". Jewish Ethics, animated by justice, rather than by love – as in Christianity – must guard against toppling over into that state of responsibility in which the other takes precedence over the self. For Ahad Ha'am, safeguarding one's own life is more important than safeguarding the life of the other, insofar as the first is not done at the expense of the second. He recalls that Jewish martyrdom invokes *Kiddush HaShem*⁴⁸ with its intimation of death on account of a religious-moral ideal:

The Self and the Other

In this case also, the root of the distinction lies, as I have said, in the preference of Judaism for abstract principles. The moral law of the Gospels asks the "natural man" to reverse his natural attitude towards himself and others, and to put the "other" in the place of the "self" – that is, to replace straight-forward egoism by inverted egoism. For the altruism of the Gospels is neither more nor less than inverted egoism. Altruism and egoism alike deny the individual as such any objective moral value, and merely turn him into a means to a subjective end. However, whereas egoism makes the "other" a means to the advantage of the "self", altruism does just the reverse.

Judaism, however, entirely eliminates this subjective attitude. Its morality is based on something abstract and objective, on absolute justice, which attaches moral value to the individual as such, without any distinction between the "self" and the "other".

Following this theory, a man's sense of justice is the supreme judge both of his own actions and those of other men. This sense of justice must be rendered independent of individual relations, as though it were a separate entity; and before it all men, including the self, must be equal. All men, including the self, are obliged to develop their lives and faculties to the best of their abilities. At the same time, each is obliged to assist his neighbor's self-development, so far as he can. But just as I have no right to ruin another man's life for the sake of my own, so I have no right to ruin my own life for the sake of another's. Both of us are men, and both our lives have the same value before the throne of justice. I know no better illustration of this point of view than the following well-known Baraita⁴⁹: "Suppose two men journey through the desert, only one of whom has a bottle of water. If both of them drink, they will both die; if only one of them drinks, he will reach safety. Ben Petura held that it was better that both should drink and die, than that one should witness the death of his comrade. But Akiba⁵⁰ refuted this view by citing the scriptural verse: "and thy brother shall live with thee". With thee – that is to say, thine own life comes before thy neighbour's" (Baba Metzia 62a).⁵¹

Elsewhere, Ahad Ha'am regretted that young Nietzscheans were scheming among the supporters of the Jewish national renaissance. They called for a trans-valuation of values which, in the circumstances, would favor matter to the detriment of mind. This would be a trans-valuation which negated all the norms, principles and practices of exile and which, according to the Nietzscheans, was necessary to bring the Jews out of their political stagnation and cause a revolution in their social and cultural condition. For Ahad Ha'am, the moral ideal of Judaism remained diametrically opposed to the Aryan ideal which animated Nietzsche's philosophy⁵²: "... highly developed moral strength, the subordination of the animal instincts, the pursuit of truth and justice, in thought and deed, eternal war against falsehood and wickedness".⁵³ A Nietzschean accent nevertheless slips into Ahad Ha'am's text when he describes the moral distinction of Israel:

The Super-Nation

It is admitted by almost everybody – not excluding Nietzsche – that the Jewish People is pre-eminent in its genius for morality. No matter how it happened, or by what process this particular gift was developed, it is certainly a fact that the Jewish People became conscious early on of its superiority to its neighbors in this respect. In the manner of those times, this consciousness found expression in the religious idea that God had chosen Israel "to make him high above all the nations", not in the sense of forcible domination – for Israel is "the fewest of all peoples" – but in the sense of moral development, "to be His own treasure . . . and that thou should keep all His commandments": in other words, to realize

through the ages the highest type of morality⁵⁴, and to bear for all time the burden of the most exacting moral obligations. There was no thought of the advantage or disadvantage over the rest of mankind; the sole object was the existence of the superior type. The Jews have retained this sense of election throughout their history, and it has been their solace in time of trouble. They have never tried – if we ignore a few exceptional cases – to augment their numbers by conversion: not – as their enemies say – out of narrowness, nor yet – as Jewish apologists plead in extenuation – out of extraordinary tolerance, but simply because this behavior is characteristic of the superior type...

It is indeed a unique feature of Judaism that it distinguishes its own adherents from the rest of mankind only by imposing on them a heavy load of duties and obligations, whereas it lets the non-Jews off lightly, allowing them to earn life eternal by merely fulfilling the most fundamental moral duties (embodied in the seven “Noachide Laws”⁵⁵).⁵⁶

Ahad Ha'am nonetheless noted the dramatic gap between the moral pretensions of Judaism and the political condition of the Jews, a gap which prevents them assuming their moral duties. Consequently, he looked forward to the creation of concrete conditions for a national renaissance of the Jewish People. This would guarantee its moral blossoming. It would courageously favor the collective-social dimension of Judaism to the detriment of the individual-existentialist dimension, social and political collective salvation, at the expense of eschatological and supernatural individual salvation. More precisely, in Judaism the individual would find his soul whilst pursuing the interest of the nation, and the nation would find its vocation whilst pursuing its mission as an essentially moral priesthood among the nations.

LOVE OF ZION

To Ahad Ha'am, the heart – or more accurately, perhaps, sentiment – plays such an important role in the national-moral renaissance of the Jewish People, that he deliberately suggested love of Israel as the true reason why Judaism – or, to be more precise, its nationalist version – should be perpetuated. By “nationalist”, he means love of Zion, a concept which he sums up in the following terms: “A Judaism which shall have as its focal point the ideal of our nation's unity, its renaissance, and its free development, through the expression of universal human values which it shall define through its own distinctive spirit.”⁵⁷ More precisely, love of Zion is the umbrella term for the nationalism of his dream, which he continually advocated as the means not only of *regenerating* Judaism, (impoverished by exile and threatened by emancipation and assimilation), but also of *solving* the cultural, social and political problems facing the Jewish People *per se*. Ahad Ha'am's love of Zion was so great and so deliberate that it was transformed by him into a cult of the Jewish nation. This love was indisputably a passion for him, and he found that it equipped him better than reason to inspire the devotion that great achievements demanded and to win over the people to new ideals. Ahad Ha'am also relied on this passion to galvanize the pioneers who would have to demonstrate a great deal of patience and endurance in order to stay attached to the land of Israel and serve as role models for the mass of the people. On the other hand, he also wanted to make sure that this passion did not fall prey to the underlying dangers of ignorance and overflowing revolutionary enthusiasm. He realized that this state – if left to its own devices – might very well end up as apathy:

An Informed Passion

The truth is that confidence can be a very powerful attribute when it flows from an internal source, i.e. from the source of the heart's desire of reaching its goal. This state is attained when the man of confidence is fully conversant with the precise parameters of the path which he intends to follow and is totally aware of all the obstacles which lie along it. This desire gives him the strength to believe in himself and places him the position of being able to envisage his victory over any impossible obstacle whatsoever.

But, if this confidence is no more than a certain waywardness, which is the result of a lack of knowledge, if its motivating factor is not the heart's desire, but

only the ignorance that this or that way is fraught with danger, and he therefore mistakenly believes that it will be an easy matter for him to achieve his goals, then it just won't happen. In this situation confidence does not prove to be the strength that surmounts all obstacles, but rather its very opposite, a negative force, a new inner obstacle to be added to all those external obstacles. As soon as a man in this position encounters an opposing force and realizes his error, he will retreat in fear and bitterness. And, in addition to this, seeing as he is actually not at all prepared for war, it is very likely that he will be in danger of falling victim instead to absolute despair.⁵⁸

Ahad Ha'am distinguishes between the western version of Jewish nationalism, which is typical of the de-Judaized, if not assimilated, Jews of the West, and its eastern variety, characteristic of the Jews of the East who were still attached to Judaism. Zionism is motivated by western nationalism, which pursues essentially political objectives. On the other hand, the eastern version of Zionism is the love of Zion (*Hibbat Zion*), which pursues essentially spiritual and cultural objectives. For Zionism – from which Ahad Ha'am partially broke away and whose interest focuses more on the well-being of the Jews than on the blossoming of Judaism – the creation of an independent State is the starting point from which all else follows. For *Hibbat Zion*, on the other hand – which regarded the national-spiritual regeneration of Judaism as a necessary condition before the situation of the Jews could be improved in any way – the creation of the State was deemed to be the last stage of this process, and its crowning glory:

A Secure Refuge

In sum: Hibbat Zion, no less than Zionism, desires 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 tranquility and national glory, Hibbat Zion is fully aware of the fact that our State will not give us all these things until, “universal Righteousness is enthroned and holds sway over nations and States”. Hibbat Zion therefore looks to a Jewish State to serve only as a “secure refuge” for Judaism and as a cultural bond to unite our nation. In short, to sum up, Zionism begins its work with political propaganda. Hibbat Zion, on the other hand, starts 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 to the will and the needs of the Jewish People.⁵⁹

Ahad Ha'am used more than one argument in his polemic with Zionism. First and foremost, he criticized it as no more than a western reaction to the Antisemitism that was slowing down all attempts at assimilation. He also criticized Zionism for

not being a positive creation, unlike *Hibbat Zion*, which had been influenced in its entirety by national considerations. If Antisemitism helps to raise awareness of national consciousness, this consciousness can only be maintained and kept going through common memories, feelings and thoughts. Ahad Ha'am further criticized Zionism for its Euro-centrism, because this orientation created the risk that people might prefer to take refuge in Europe, rather than emigrating to an, as yet, undeveloped Middle-Eastern country like Palestine. Furthermore, Ahad Ha'am criticized Zionism for addressing itself almost exclusively to the outside world, its discourse being intended far more for non-Jews than for Jews.

Above all, Ahad Ha'am deplored the de-Judaization of the leaders of Zionism. He also feared that if a Jewish State came to be created by them, it might merely turn into "a State of Germans, or Frenchmen, of the Jewish race". In addition, he did not have in mind an ordinary State structure, as he felt that the latter would do nothing to solve the problems of either Antisemitism or of assimilation, as the climax of two thousand years of resistance. What he wanted, instead, was a great national project that would not jettison the Prophetic ideals of justice and universal peace. However, in the prevailing geopolitical conditions in Europe and the Middle East, a small Jewish State would inevitably be the plaything of the Great Powers. This being the case, and in order to ensure its own survival, it would tend to favor economic and material considerations, at the expense of spiritual considerations.

Ahad Ha'am warned the political Zionists against the exclusivism of a State solution. This solution did not take into account the maintaining of a national life for the Jews in the Diaspora, and actually envisaged the short or long term liquidation of the latter. For his part, he distinguished on the one hand between a subjective negation of the *Golah*, which he felt was woven into the very texture of Judaism, which regards the exile of the Jews to be their downfall. On the other hand, he also objected to a so-called "objective negation" of the *Golah*, which originated with the collapse of the system of socio-communal protection that had hitherto preserved the Jews from assimilation.

Between the political Zionists – who called for the liquidation of the *Golah*, together with the gathering of the exiles into one political entity – and the Bundists⁶⁰ – who called for national autonomy in the *Golah* itself – Ahad Ha'am advocated the creation of a spiritual center in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel). This would constitute a home engendered by the national culture. In his view such a center would regenerate the communities of the Diaspora as well, whose disappearance he was, naturally enough, totally unable and unwilling to imagine. In the following passage, Ahad Ha'am returns to the distinction between the interests of Judaism and the interests of the Jewish People. This distinction underlies his polemic with Zionism. *Hibbat Zion* pursued the interests of Judaism, in order – as the outcome – to be in a better position to consider the interests of

the Jewish People. Zionism, on the other hand, was concerned only with the interests of the Jewish People, and disregarded the interests of Judaism.

The Center and the Periphery

Judaism is therefore in a quandary. It can no longer tolerate the characteristics of the Galut, which it was compelled to adopt when it was exiled from its own country, in obedience to its will-to-live. However, bereft of those characteristics, Judaism's own life is in danger. So it seeks to return to its historic center, where it will be in a position to live a life in which it will develop in a natural way. In addition, once it is settled once more in its historic center, Judaism will be able to bring its strengths into play in every field of human culture, as well as broaden and perfect the national distinguishing characteristics which it has acquired up to now. It will, thus, be able to contribute fully to the common stock of humanity, in the future as it has in the past. People will discover that the Jewish culture is a great national culture, nothing less than the fruit yielded by the activity of a people living unhampered by the light of its own spirit.

In order to achieve these ends, Judaism does not, for the present, need much to keep it going. It does not need, for instance, an independent State. What it does need is that favorable conditions be created in its native land that will ensure its positive development. For this to come about, the center will need a good-sized settlement of Jews [Hebrews⁶¹], which will work unhindered in every branch of civilization, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature.

This Jewish settlement, which should be allowed to develop gradually, should, in the course of time, become the center of the nation. Here, its spirit will find pure expression and grow fully and in every way to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then, from this center, the spirit of Judaism will radiate out to the great periphery, to all the communities of the Diaspora, in order to inspire them with new life and preserve the over-all unity of our people. When our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may then be confident that it will produce men in the Land of Israel itself who will be capable, at a favorable moment, of establishing a State there – and a State, moreover, which is not merely a State of Jews but a really Jewish State.

This Hibbat Zion is totally concerned with the preservation of Judaism and especially at this very time when we can see that the Jewish People is experiencing so much suffering. It is true that Hibbat Zion comes over as a somewhat peculiar and unintelligible movement to the political Zionists of the West. But, this is exactly how the demand of R. Yohanan ben Zakkai for Yavneh⁶² came over to the comparable party of his time. And so we can see that political Zionism cannot totally satisfy those Jews who care for Judaism per se. The growth in political Judaism seems to them to be fraught with dangers, as far as the goals of their own aspirations are concerned.⁶³

In Ahad Ha'am's view, the ambitions of *Hibbat Zion* were truly spiritual. He expected *Hibbat Zion* to provide a global solution to the difficulties then faced by Judaism. Moreover, he deplored the fact that *Hibbat Zion* remained restricted to the elites – i.e. the writers, educators, politicians – whilst the working classes were left with the sole option of attending the occasional ceremony organized by *Hibbat Zion*. It should be borne in mind that, at best, the working classes could only find the spare time to attend these types of events occasionally and sporadically.

Ahad Ha'am still puts the emphasis – and this is not the least of his quirks – on the quality of the Jewish presence in Palestine, rather than on the number of people actually living there. “A healthy colony”, he declares, “which would lead the people to love the land, is preferable to ten shaky colonies”⁶⁴ :

The Founding Pioneers

This is not the case in the land of Israel. For in Israel this ‘one percent’ is not an isolated creation, but only one stone, of whatever size it might be, whether big or small, in the construction of a complete edifice. It is from here that we will, in the foreseeable future, witness a significant outcome for the existence of the entire people, as well as for its prosperity and honor. We should realize that the future of the entire edifice is dependent on the character and form of this foundation.

What is more, since each and every stone out of which the edifice is created has its own unique effect on the general prosperity of the totality, it is therefore necessary for every single person to take extra care to make sure that the basic material is strong and the design appropriate to the purpose of the edifice as a whole. In other words, without beating around the bush and going straight to the point, it is up to each one of us to try as hard as we can to ensure that the immigrants – and, particularly, the first vanguard, i.e., those who are building up the foundation – should not constitute ‘a mixed multitude’ of poor exiles and fortune hunters who will end up by failing completely in all their endeavors.

Instead, these first immigrants should be people who enjoy the best of health, as well being fine, upright human beings, who love hard work, want to live in peace and favor an ordered society. It will only be from men such as these that it will be remotely possible to expect from the immigrant population that they will devote themselves totally and utterly to hard physical work on the land of our fathers, through living a simple and healthy life. And, what is more, it will only be with men such as these, in addition, that it will be remotely possible to expect that when they are looking in the land of Israel for an answer to the question: “What shall we eat?” that their response will be to suffer in patient silence all the hard slog and difficult work.

*Despite all the obstacles that they will endure, we shall also therefore expect them to march ahead in good spirits along the path which they have chosen, until they find an appropriate answer to their question in healthy and purposeful labor done by the sweat of their brow. By adopting this attitude, they will become a role model for the whole people and will win over to themselves the hearts of the entire population of the land.*⁶⁵

The establishment of a national center in the land of Israel, which would turn into a magnet with which people would identify and which would act as a source of stimulation, would also be able to overcome the deep divisions which threatened to shatter the Jewish People:

A Melting Pot of Union

*There is one way out of this danger, and one only. In order to weld the scattered Jewish communities together, in spite of the disintegrating effect of the differing local influences to which they are subject, we need a center which will exert a strong pull on all of them. This should not be established through some fortuitous and temporary connection, but in its own right, because it is what it is. Such a center will, in some measure, impose itself on every community in the Diaspora, and will serve them all as a transmuting and unitary force.*⁶⁶

Elsewhere, Ahad Ha'am thought that the creation of a national home in Palestine would take generations to set up. He therefore felt that, in order to revitalize the people of the Diaspora, it would be more worth-while to invest one's energy in cultural creation and educational action than in political or diplomatic processes, or, on the other hand, in the extension of the colonies in Palestine. He hoped eventually to see a place of national recovery for the Jewish People:

A Center of Wisdom and Talent

We must ... assemble the forces of heart and mind and brain that will repair our spiritual devastation and restore the Jewish People to its rightful place of honor in the comity of human culture. The establishment in Palestine of a single great school of learning or art, or of a single Academy [Bet HaMidrash⁶⁷] of language and literature, would, in my opinion, prove to be a national achievement of the very first order of importance, and would contribute more to the attainment of our aims than a hundred agricultural settlements. These agricultural settlements are merely so much building material for our future home. They cannot of themselves provide the driving force for a revolution in Jewish life. A great cultural institution in Palestine, on the other hand, which might attract a large number of gifted Jewish scholars and provide them with the opportunity of carrying on their work in a Jewish atmosphere, where they would be free from repression and

relatively protected from extraneous influences – such an institution could even now become a source of new inspiration to the Jewish People as a whole, and bring about a true revival of both Judaism and Jewish culture.⁶⁸

We need a national spiritual center for Judaism, which will be loved and cherished by all the people, as well as acting as a unifying and bonding force for them. This will be a center of Torah and wisdom, of language and literature, of physical labor and spiritual purity, a true microcosm of the people of Israel, as it should be ... so that a Hebrew man living in exile will think it bliss to see with his own eyes this “center of Judaism” and will return home and say to his neighbors: do you want to see a prototype Israelite in his truly authentic form, whether it be rabbi or Sage, writer, peasant, artisan or merchant – then all you have to do is travel to the land of Israel and there you will find him.⁶⁹

CONCLUSION

For Ahad Ha'am, man's full potential can only be found inasmuch as he is a social and national being. This is because man is permanently under the influence of, or even falls under the magnetic spell of social structures, in which the presence of the spirit of the past can be sensed. Ahad Ha'am takes things so much for granted on the strength of national feeling that he even relies on the workings of national feeling as a means through which he can set about the cultural and spiritual re-creation of the Jewish People, who had been rendered powerless by exile and assimilation.

In fact, underneath Ahad Ha'am's brand of nationalism, one can easily discern his "love of Israel", the first and last duty of the Jew who is sensitive to the destiny of his people. This love constitutes *a priori* an existential category, which becomes even more imperative than reason itself. Love of Israel can be found in all the great representatives of the Jewish nation, including Maimonides⁷⁰, even though the latter was in fact an unwavering supporter of the rule of reason. In other words, for Ahad Ha'am, love of Israel takes on the aspect of a moral nationalism which, despite giving the impression of being closer to its own hearth and home than to the earth and home of others, is nevertheless at pains not to exalt, or to count exclusively on, force. For, if we had guns, he says, we would begin by massacring ourselves.

On the subject of religion *per se*, Ahad Ha'am seems to agree with the views which he attributes to Maimonides regarding religion's role, vocation and special pedagogic qualities in the education of the masses. This is because, according to him, religion would prepare the masses to find their moral and religious fulfillment through working hard for the welfare of the community. Ahad Ha'am demonstrates the same type of sensitivity towards the common man, his limitations and his expectations as did Maimonides. This sensitivity urges that religion be regarded as the best way of teaching and inculcating philosophic truths to the common people. Only exceptional individuals can attain intellectual bliss, without deviating from their responsibility for the moral instruction of mankind.

However, Ahad Ha'am would not himself consent to carrying out the commandments or Jewish practices except as a national duty – out of respect for the bond that these commandments and practices establish with the man in the street. In addition, Ahad Ha'am made a great effort to go beyond considerations of

faith and heresy, stressing and favoring instead the national character of the Jewish sources. He even put forward the idea of national feeling as a palliative for people who no longer believed in God. By this he means love of Israel, the work of the heart. Once again, he uses the texts in such a way as to vouchsafe to Judaism a natural evolution, in which it would pursue the goal of a moral fulfillment without which any renaissance would be ephemeral: "... the introduction of a new stirring of life in the heart of the people which – even without it having any connection to religion, either of the right or of the left – will restore to the Hebrew heart the strength and the freedom to expand. In addition, it will prepare the Jewish People for the role of actor, as well as spectator – to influence, as well as to be influenced".⁷¹

On the other hand, Ahad Ha'am did not evince much respect for messianism, which he regarded as the fate of the vulgar masses that, seeing themselves as the initiated among the elect, were full of enthusiasm for their own aspirations and achievements, whilst resorting to poking fun at the reservations of those who were wiser and more cautious in approach.

Like his Judaism, Ahad Ha'am himself was at the "crossroads" of an Orthodoxy turned in on its traditions and closed to modernity. On the other hand, however, he loomed the liberalism which, given half a chance, would allow the science and the wisdom of the nations to overwhelm the religion. And by being thus overwhelmed, the religion would undoubtedly lose its Jewish inwardness. Ahad Ha'am was, therefore, a target for a number of groups: He was a target for the rabbis who, 'forgetting nothing and learning nothing', accused him of heresy. He was a target for the colonists and political Zionists, who accused him of demoralization. He was a target for the Bundists, who accused him of narrow nationalism. He was a target for the Nietzschean revolutionaries, who accused him of being reactionary. And, last but not least, he was also a target for the socialists and communists, who accused him of being an enemy of the Jewish working classes.

For, despite all his undoubted ambiguities and paradoxes, Ahad Ha'am belonged solely to the party of Judaism. He continued to be fascinated by the prospect of national regeneration in the land of Israel and at the same time remained closely attached to Jewish life in the Diaspora. He therefore extolled the national-moral passion and deplored the political activism and enthusiasm of both the colonists and the militant Zionists. Ahad Ha'am was both an idealist and a pragmatist, passionate and cautious, engaging and critical. He belonged both to the great world and to the ghetto. He belonged to Greek and Hebrew, to the humble people and to the men of letters. On the one hand, he was a prophet, with a stormy temperament and possessed by a moral conscience: he thereby loathed compromise and pursued his ideal to the exclusion of all else. On the other hand,

he was a priest, with a well-balanced temperament, conscious of realities and conciliatory towards the people in his entourage. Here, in quest of harmonious relationships, he did not pursue the ideal as much as the possible.

What Jewish thought will retain from the reflections of Ahad Ha'am is his concern to maintain a vital link between Judaism and Zionism. It will especially retain his concern to safeguard Zionism from overlooking either its sources of inspiration; the cultural weakness which lies in wait for it; or the rupture of its link with the masses. Without rediscovering its roots in history and in the spirit of the nation, or remembering to cultivate these roots, he warns his readers, Zionism runs the risk of remaining or becoming an airy-fairy movement which builds mere "castles in the air". Through his political interventions, Ahad Ha'am's legacy to the political history of Israel remains, for the main part, an attractive model of relations between Israel and the Diaspora, a model which, moreover, expects from Israel that it will continue to shine its national-spiritual light on every single community, however remote and distant they may be.

GLOSSARY

Antisemitism: Since Wilhelm Marr coined it in 1879, this term has designated hatred of Jews, as well as to describe the measures taken to persecute and exterminate them.

Kabbalah: From the Hebrew *Kabbalah*, *Cabbala*, or *Qabbala* (tradition and reception), a general designation for that Jewish mystical literature which deals, within the framework of tradition, with the hidden life of God, the Creation of the world, God's Revelation to human beings and the Redemption.

Catechism: The religious instruction given to young children to ensure their adherence to the principles and dogma of the Christian faith.

Diaspora: A Greek word meaning the dispersion of Jews, exiled from their country. Since the creation of the State of Israel, it tends to mean the totality of Jews living outside Israel.

Eschatology: Study which deals with the ultimate perspectives opened up to mankind in the context of the prophetic promises about the salvation of man and the world to come.

Ghetto: Italian word that may have originated from the letters originally designated on the cannon foundry in the district of Venice where the Jews lived from 1516 onwards. The word *ghetto* subsequently passed into all the European languages as the term for a district, generally surrounded by walls, where Jews were living until their emancipation.

Golah: Hebrew word which, with *Galut*, means the exile of the Jews. Unlike the Greek word, *Diaspora*, it has overtones of political downfall.

Hassidism: From the Hebrew *hassid* (pious and holy), Hassidism denotes a pietistic movement centered on the cult of holiness, religious intent and respect for religious leaders or *Tzaddikim*.

Idealism: Philosophical doctrine which favors ideas and concepts, and which, by extension, designates activity or attitude animated by thought and by ideal, the aim of which is to improve the condition of men.

Kasher (Kosher): Hebrew word meaning food and products permitted for consumption according to Biblical and rabbinical prescriptions and, more generally, every thing and any attitude which accords with these prescriptions.

Maskilim: From *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), denotes the intellectual movement of emancipated Jews favoring an opening up to modernity and general culture. The *Maskilim*, supporters of the Enlightenment or *Haskalah*, were found among a range of Jewish groups.

Messianism: From Messiah or *Mashiah* (anointed one), a term designating the savior expected at the end of time. Messianism views history in general, and at the history of the Jews in particular, from the angle of the prophetic promises of national, universal and/or cosmic redemption.

Midrash: From the Hebrew *dr(a)sh*, which signifies the action of interrogating the text in order to draw out its teachings. The Midrash generally designates a rabbinical commentary of the sacred texts, the intention of which is to illuminate and/or explain a point of the Law, or a point of doctrine.

Mitnagdim: From the Hebrew *neged* (against), this term denotes the opponents of the Hassidic movement. They were primarily recruited from scholarly Talmudist circles.

Moshavah: Plural *moshavot*, Hebrew word for the early colonies created in Palestine in the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century.

Nationalism: Doctrine which emphasizes the role of the nation in the development of the individual and calls for the conditions necessary for the exercise of the self-determination or independence of nations.

Palestine: A historical appellation for *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), once the land of Canaan, perhaps derived from the Hebrew *Peleshet*, employed by Roman and Arab authors.

Pragmatism: Doctrine which regards an idea or theory from the perspective of its practical consequences, and which determines their truth according to the degree to which they conform to concrete reality, or according to the feasibility of their application/s.

Talmud: From the Hebrew root *l-m-d* (to study), denotes by extension the records of the discussions of the Pharisaic Sages on the teachings of the Torah, together with the applications of the latter.

Yishuv: Word in Hebrew which designates the Jewish population of Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel (1948).

Zionism: National liberation movement of the Jewish People, born at the end of the nineteenth century, which advocated the restoration of Jewish national sovereignty on the land of Israel, the immigration of the Jews of the Diaspora and the consolidation of the structures of the Jewish state.

NOTES

¹ It was the Sabbath custom of the Hassidim to crowd around their Master, in order to share the leftovers – *sh'erayim* – of the dishes he enjoyed eating. Tasting those leftovers was regarded as a way of associating the faithful in the work of redemption, or, in other words, in helping to propagate holiness throughout the world.

² Ahad Ha'am is alluding to a passage in the Talmud (*Mo'ed Katan* 17a), which states: "Rabbi Elai says: If a man sees that he can no longer overcome his instincts, let him go to a place where he is not known, dressed in black and covered in black, and let him do what he wants, from the moment that he does not profane the heavenly name in public."

³ During the Sabbath, the Jewish soul is said to double, receiving, as it were, a second soul, from which it is separated by *Havdalah*, the prayer marking both the end of the Sabbath and the transition between the sacred and the profane, the Sabbath and the rest of the week. *Havdalah* comprises a blessing on wine, another blessing on a candle and a third blessing on "diverse kinds of spices". This is intended to console the worshipper for having been separated from his Sabbath soul.

⁴ Aramaic is a Semitic language in use among the tribes of South-East Mesopotamia. For a long time it was the language of communication – particularly in the commercial and diplomatic spheres – among the populations of the region. The Jews are said to have adopted Aramaic during their captivity in Babylon (c. 598-538 B.C.E.), possibly with the idea of raising Hebrew to the status of a sacred language. The Jews have continued to use Aramaic in parallel with Hebrew, both in their relations with Gentiles and in their literary works. This is because a considerable number of their writings – the biblical book of Daniel, as well as the Talmud and the Zohar – are written in that language or are studded with long Aramaic passages.

⁵ Ahad Ha'am, "Ancient Writings", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 233.

⁶ In a small pamphlet, entitled *Auto-Emancipation*, Leo Pinsker (1821-1891), a Polish-born doctor, put forward a diagnosis of the Jewish condition which would act as a great motivation for the dreams of the Lovers of Zion and re-emerge in Zionism. Pinsker was overwhelmed by the persistence of Antisemitism, which he likened to an incurable disease – a demonopathy – which had contaminated the very fabric of Christianity. In his view, the Jewish People would only be saved from this disease when they regained their national dignity together with their national attributes. By this, he had in mind a common land, a common language and a common legislation. Ahad Ha'am had so much admiration for Pinsker that he suggested turning his book into the sacred text of Zionism: "Pinsker", he declared, "is the legislator of Zionism, and Herzl its apostle".

⁷ Modern Petah Tikvah is a town twelve kilometers from Tel Aviv and located on the coastal strip. It is regarded as the first of the Jewish colonies in Palestine, founded by a small group of religious Jews who had left Jerusalem, the inhabitants of which were living in very straitened circumstances, on subsidies from Diaspora communities. The name, Petah Tikvah – Gate of Hope – is taken from a passage by the prophet Hosea II, 15: "I will restore her vineyards, turning the Vale of Trouble into the Gate of Hope, and there she will answer as in her youth, when she came up out of Egypt."

⁸ For centuries, Jaffa (Yaffo) was the main port through which Christian pilgrims entered the Holy Land, and through which the first pioneers of the Jewish national renaissance entered the Promised Land. Well known since ancient times, today, Yaffo, or Jaffa, is one of the most picturesque and popular districts of Tel Aviv. It takes its name from Noah's son, Japhet, who settled in the region after the flood.

⁹ *Torah VeAvodah* is a variant of *Torah im derekh erez*, a slogan coined by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) of Frankfurt. Hirsch advocated combining public – particularly professional – activities with strict observance of the rabbinical commandments. He opposed religious liberalism, because it advocated the pursuit of acculturation and assimilation. In his main work, *Nineteen Letters on Judaism*, published under the pseudonym of Ben Uziel, Hirsch emerged as being in favor of a modern Jewish orthodoxy, open to western culture. This slogan is still a feature of all the different groups within modern Jewish orthodoxy.

¹⁰ Ahad Ha'am's distinction between "the relations between man and his Creator" and "the relations between man and his people" recalls the traditional distinction between "man's sins against the Creator" and "man's sins against his neighbor". Cf. *Yoma* 85b.

¹¹ Ahad Ha'am, "An Endeavour that Did not Succeed", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. IV, p. 204.

¹² Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845-1934), a member of the famous Rothschild banking family, devoted his life to the arts, letters and the colonization of the land of Israel. Once he had adopted the idea of the return of the Jews to Palestine, he neither spared his efforts nor his resources in support of the first colonies, whilst asking from the very outset of this enterprise that his anonymity be respected. In 1900, tension between his organization and the Lovers of Zion, under the umbrella of Ahad Ha'am, caused him to withdraw from direct responsibility for the colonies, handing over their supervision to the Jewish Colonization Association, which he continued to finance. His name remains connected with the purchase of land in Palestine, the building of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the creation and growth of new colonies. Observers would finally come to acknowledge the fundamental importance of Rothschild's contribution to the Jewish renaissance in Palestine, awarding him the title of "Father of the *Yishuv*". Returning from a trip to Palestine, he himself was to declare, "Without me, the Zionists would have done nothing, but without the Zionists, my work would have collapsed". In 1954 his mortal remains and those of his wife, Adelaïde, were interred in the vast park of Ramat HaNadiv (Hill of the Generous Donor), situated near Zichron Ya'akov.

¹³ Ahad Ha'am refers to a Biblical expression which denounces the abuse of power to which the slave succumbs when he achieves the highest office, but, nevertheless, continues to behave according to the norms of his lowly condition. Ahad Ha'am takes the expression from the Book of Proverbs: "At three things, the earth shakes, four things it cannot bear: a slave turned king, a churl gorging himself, a woman unloved when she is married, and a slave-girl displacing her mistress" (XXX, 21-23).

¹⁴ A fast day which falls on the 9th of Av or Ab, the eleventh month of the Hebrew calendar, which generally coincides with July-August. This fast commemorates two national disasters: the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians (c.585 B.C.E.) and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans (c.70 C.E.). In Jewish collective consciousness this date designates the saddest and most melancholy day of the year. Since the beginning of the Jewish revival in Israel, the 9th of Av is regarded as a day of public mourning, during which the Wailing Wall is thronged by a large crowd in mourning, who proceed to read the Book of Lamentations: "How solitary lies the city, once so full of people ! Once great among nations, now become a widow..." (I, 1)

¹⁵ The Western Wall (known as the Wailing Wall) is a section of the western supporting wall of the mount on which the Jerusalem Temples stood. Its construction goes back to the period of King Herod (c.40-4 B.C.E.), when it underwent a vast amount of construction work to extend its sanctuary. This section of the wall, which eventually became the most symbolic and most holy place for the Jewish People, was so called because of the spectacle it afforded to worshippers. Over the centuries they would gather there for prayer, whilst wailing in the shadow of the wall. According to one rabbinical legend, this wall is inhabited by the Divine Presence, or *Shekhinah*, who is weeping for the exile of Her children. According to another legend, the wall was only protected from ruin and oblivion, because it was "the work of the poor". Cf. *Lamentations Rabba* 1, 31.

¹⁶ The *Mishneh Torah* or *Yad Hahazakah* by Maimonides (1135-1204) is a compilation of the principles and laws of Judaism in fourteen volumes. This work, written in Hebrew (1185), constitutes an unprecedented attempt at summarizing the Torah – hence its name *Mishneh Torah*, or "replica of the Torah" – in the eventuality of the restoration of Jewish national sovereignty. The first of the fourteen books, *Sefer HaMada* (translated into English as *The Book of Knowledge*), addresses the fundamentals of Judaism and provides an introduction to Maimonides's thought.

¹⁷ *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, or "The Science of Judaism", designates an intellectual movement in German Jewry which, from the mid-eighteenth century, aimed to marry the study of Judaism to the methods of historical and philological research. Its representatives were moved by a genuine desire to preserve, re-cast and enhance Judaism, as much as by an apologetic desire to explain Judaism to non-Jews. The opening, in 1854, of the Seminary of Jewish Theology in Breslau helped to institutionalize research and encouraged the creation of similar or rival institutions in England, France, Austria and Hungary, as well as the proliferation of reviews and periodicals.

¹⁸ The First Zionist Congress was held in Basle on 29-31 August 1897, under the presidency of Theodor Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement. It adopted the Basle program, which turned the World Zionist Organization into the political institution of the "Jewish people on the way".

¹⁹ Theodor (Zeev Benjamin) Herzl (1860-1904), born in Budapest, Hungary, and from 1878 settled in Vienna, Austria, was a lawyer, journalist and dramatist. Overwhelmed by the persistence and virulence of the Antisemitism he encountered while covering the Dreyfus trial in Paris, he came to the conclusion that the Jewish question would only be solved by gathering the Jews into a territory over which they will exercise sovereignty: Zionism was thus born of the political wish to solve the religious and social problem of the Jews by creating the conditions for their return to the land of Israel. Thenceforth, Herzl devoted his life to this cause, employing all sorts of measures to persuade his co-religionists to support his projects and to influence the leaders of the great powers of the day.

²⁰ Ahad Ha'am, "Reaction and Silence", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. III, p. 91.

²¹ *Altneuland* (1902) is a fictionalized version of Theodor Herzl's first book, *The Jewish State, the Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Problem*. In *Altneuland*, the visionary of Zionism sketches out the broad outlines of the future society of a modern State where Jews and Arabs would live in perfect understanding. Herzl placed his confidence in the desire and creative gifts of his co-religionists to turn their dreams into reality: "If you will it", he declared, "it is no dream".

²² Ahad Ha'am, "Altneuland", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. III, p. 159.

²³ The Alliance Israélite Universelle (A.I.U.) was an association founded in 1860 Paris by young Jewish intellectuals, who set out to fight for the rights of their co-religionists throughout the world. In 1862, A.I.U. created its first school in Tétouan on the coast of Morocco, soon to be followed by many schools in communities around the Mediterranean. In 1870, it founded the agricultural school of Mikveh Israel – today situated in the southern suburbs of Tel Aviv – which would play an important role in training the early pioneers in the first Jewish colonies in Palestine. It also opened primary schools in Jaffa, Jerusalem, Safed, Haifa and Tiberias.

²⁴ Hebrew as a living language and as a language of literary creation had progressively fallen into disuse in favor of languages which were currently being used in the societies in which Jews lived. These included Arabic and German, or dialects such as Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), Judeo-German (Yiddish) and Judeo-Arabic. The revival of Hebrew as a living language goes back to the beginnings of Jewish emancipation, when writers, particularly in Eastern Europe, anxious to preserve their cultural identity, began to write in Hebrew. The birth of Modern Hebrew is attributed to Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922) who, by his example and his work, urged his co-religionists, and particularly the pioneers who came to Palestine, to give up their mother tongues and Jewish dialects and, instead,

adopt Hebrew as their language.

²⁵ Ahad Ha'am, "The Alliance School", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 162.

²⁶ Ahad Ha'am, "The Yishuv and its Patrons", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 202.

²⁷ Ahad Ha'am, "The Representatives of a Poor People", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. III, pp. 131-32.

²⁸ The Sixth Zionist Congress, held (like its predecessors) in Basle, in 1903, following the Kishinev pogroms, was the scene of a confrontation between supporters of the creation of a national homeland in Uganda as a temporary solution, and those "faithful to the land of Israel" – principally *Hovevei Zion*. The latter abhorred any mention of any territory other than Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel).

²⁹ Ahad Ha'am, "The Weepers", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. III, p. 204.

³⁰ A first wave of pogroms against the Jews of Russia and the Ukraine followed the assassination, in 1881, of Tsar Alexander II by a member of the revolutionary movement. A second wave in the early 1900s was orchestrated by reactionary circles who described the revolutionary agitation as "a Jewish plot". The first attack in this wave took place during Passover 1903. It was accompanied by murders, mutilations and rape: reports tell of no less than 45 dead, hundreds of injured and 1,500 Jewish homes and shops pillaged. This second wave of pogroms aroused a new awareness among eastern European Jewish youth and stimulated them to form self-defense groups in both the Diaspora and Palestine, where HaShomer, the earliest forerunner of the Israeli army was created.

³¹ Ahad Ha'am, "Ancient Writings", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 240.

³² Ahad Ha'am, "Balance-Sheet", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. IV, p. 174-75.

³³ On 2 November 1917, at the end of long negotiations with the Zionist leaders, the British published a declaration which advocated the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. In a letter addressed to the vice-President of the Zionist Federation of England, Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, declared: "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

³⁴ Ahad Ha'am, "Need and Capacity", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 10.

³⁵ Ahad Ha'am, "Moses", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. III, p. 213.

³⁶ Emancipation designates the process of granting civil rights to the Jews, considered in Western Europe as second-class citizens up to the end of the eighteenth century, and in Central and Eastern Europe, up to the beginning of the twentieth century. The emancipation of the Jews was engendered in the wake of the Enlightenment, and the ensuing separation of Church and State, together with the French Revolution, which granted the Jews the rights of citizenship. Emancipation also highlighted the problems of acculturation and the social dilemmas which lay in wait for the Jews when they left the ghetto. The Jews found themselves torn between general culture and their Jewish heritage, the universalism of Christianity and their religious particularism, which was sometimes resented as sectarianism.

³⁷ Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 28.

³⁸ Ahad Ha'am, "The Man Beneath the Tent", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, pp. 87-88.

³⁹ Ahad Ha'am, "Slavery in Freedom", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 132.

⁴⁰ For several centuries the three monotheistic religions attempted to co-exist on the Iberian Peninsula. In territories under Muslim domination, the Jews enjoyed relative prosperity and reached positions of political responsibility. They also gained fame through their vast poetic, philosophic, legal and scientific output. The "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry – from the tenth to the eleventh century – produced great names like Yehuda Halevi (c.1075-1141), Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c.1020-1057) and, to some extent, Maimonides (1135-1204).

⁴¹ The Pharisaic interpretation of the Scriptures accompanies the Written Law, principally contained in the Pentateuch, with an Oral Law which interprets and explains the first, and which finds its most eloquent expression in the sayings of the Sages contained in the Talmud, as well as in the rabbis' comments on these sayings.

⁴² Ahad Ha'am, "The Law of the Heart", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 93.

⁴³ The Apocryphal and Pseudoepigraphical books designate writings which the rabbis did not include in the Jewish canon of the Bible. On the other hand, the former (the "hidden" books) appear in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Bible) and in the Vulgate (its Latin translation by St Jerome): among the most famous books of the Apocrypha may be included the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* and the two *Books of the Maccabees*.

⁴⁴ Ahad Ha'am, "A Torah from Zion", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. IV, pp. 127-28.

⁴⁵ During Herod's reign (c.40-4 B.C.E), Hillel the Elder, or Hillel the Babylonian, was generally known as the leader of the Pharisees, while Shamai, his colleague and adversary, was the head of the Sanhedrin. Hillel's simplicity, his devotion to disinterested study of the Torah and his great moral qualities made him the Pharisaic Sage *par excellence* – "loving peace and pursuing peace" (*Pirkei Avot* –

Ethics of the Fathers –, 1 : 14). He is also considered as the founder of the principles which govern the Pharisaic reading of the Scriptures, and which would find their climax in the hermeneutical processes practiced by the teachers of the Talmud. So important to him was the continuous interpretation of the Scriptures that when a proselyte asked him to sum up the whole Torah in one maxim, he answered: "Do not do unto another what is hateful to you. That is the whole Torah. Now go and learn." Cf. *Shabbat 31a*.

⁴⁶ Ahad Ha'am, "Between Two Paragraphs", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. IV, p. 42.

⁴⁷ Matthew was the name of a tax-gatherer who followed the teaching of Jesus. He is generally regarded as the author of the first New Testament Gospel, which bears his name: "As he passed on from there, Jesus saw a man named Matthew at his seat in the custom-house, and said to him, "Follow me"; and Matthew rose and followed him." (*Matthew IX, 9*).

⁴⁸ *Kiddush HaShem*, the Sanctification of the Name, fulfilled by martyrs who choose to die proclaiming the name of God, rather than be forced to break the most fundamental principles of Judaism, such as the prohibition against worshipping pagan gods. *Kiddush HaShem* designates by extension the paradigmatic form of Jewish martyrdom.

⁴⁹ A *Baraita* – an Aramaic word – designates an "external teaching", generally a legal instruction (*halakhah*) which goes back to the first centuries, and which was not included by Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi in his compilation (c. 200-220 CE) – known as the *Mishnah* – of teachings done by the early teachers (*Tannaim*). Composed of six orders and divided into sixty-three treatises, the *Mishnah* represents the fundamental corpus of laws which formed the basis for the homiletic commentaries and legal extensions of the teachers (*Amoraim*) who succeeded the *Tannaim*, and whose records form what is generally known as the *Talmud*. The *Baraitot* – plural of *Baraita* – are mentioned mostly in the *Talmud*.

⁵⁰ Akiba ben Yosef (c.45-135 C.E.), a Talmudic Sage who began his studies late in life, attracted many disciples, and was one of the ten martyrs tortured to death by the Romans for having supported the messianic Bar Kochba revolt (132 C.E.), as well as for infringing Roman prohibitions. Rabbi Akiba is generally held to be one of the boldest and most ingenious commentators on the Scriptures, probably the one who brought the Pharisaic methods of interpreting the texts to their freest expression. He is also considered the only one of the four Sages to have ventured successfully into the *Parades*, or the Paradise of *Knowledge*, to have mastered all the levels of interpretation, and to have left it unharmed. Cf. *Hagiga 14b*.

⁵¹ Ahad Ha'am, "Between Two Paragraphs", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. IV, pp. 45-46.

⁵² Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) found in the religious beliefs and moral values of Judeo-Christianity the ascetic ideal which would have discredited this world, duplicating it with hidden worlds and worlds to come, in order to counter-balance the moral blackmail exerted on man. Against the religious and moral disparagement which characterizes the ascetic ideal, which is likened by Nietzsche to the most pernicious nihilism, he himself proclaims the *amor fati*, or acquiescence in the tragic nature of life: "A formula of superior acquiescence born of plenitude and super-abundance", he wrote in *Ecce Homo*, "an unreserved yes to life and even to grief, and even to sin, and to everything confusing and problematic that there is in life..." This radical change in outlook on life demanded a no less radical upheaval in values that, in his view, had been contaminated by the ascetic ideal, perhaps a rejection of Semitic values for Aryan values.

⁵³ Ahad Ha'am, "The Trans-valuation of Values", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 70.

⁵⁴ Here, Ahad Ha'am is obviously engaging in a polemic with the Nietzscheans among the *Maskilim*, by stressing the moral dimension of the "new man of Israel". His superior moral type would correspond to the super-man of whom Nietzsche declares: "I show you the super-man. The man is something that must be overcome" (*Thus spoke Zarathustra*, "prologue", § 3). Similarly his idea of a super-nation would correspond to the super-species of which Nietzsche declares: "Towards the altitude we travel, overtaking the species to reach the super-species" (*Thus spoke Zarathustra*, I, "Of the squanderer of virtues", § 1).

⁵⁵ The Noachide laws (from Noah, hero and survivor of the Flood, considered as the father of peoples and nations) designate the universal precepts which link the members of other nations. They prescribe the institution of civil justice, the prohibition on blasphemy, the rejection of idolatry, the prohibitions on incest, theft and the consumption of flesh taken from a live animal. According to the rabbis, the respect afforded by the Gentiles to the Noachide laws alone ranks them on a par with the Righteous of the Nations, and awards them a share in the world to come.

⁵⁶ Ahad Ha'am, "Judaism and Nietzsche", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, pp. 71-72.

⁵⁷ Ahad Ha'am, "Torah of the Heart", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 96.

⁵⁸ Ahad Ha'am, "Truth about the Land of Israel", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 65.

⁵⁹ Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 31.

⁶⁰ The Bund – the General Union (Bund in Yiddish) of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland and Russia – was founded in 1897 in Vilnius (Vilna). Its aim was to integrate the Jewish proletariat into the general labor movement and represent its specific interests within this movement. From the start, the Bund decried Zionism as a bourgeois reaction against Antisemitism, condemned its territorial ambitions, and was directed more and more towards a concept centered on the national and cultural autonomy of the Jews. The Bund's quarrels with the Russian social-democratic party led it to turn all its efforts into defending the Yiddish language and culture. The Bund regarded Yiddish as the Jewish national language, and became more than anything the champion of Jewish cultural

secularization. Today, the only visible traces of the Bund's activities are the *Landsmanschaften* (societies of people of common origin) in the United States and some other countries, most of them located in South America.

⁶¹ The 'Hebrews' was an early name for the Jewish forefathers and their descendants. The term 'Hebrew' is said to come from the Acadian word which, in the second half of the second millennium, designated the populations who lived on the margin of Canaanite society, which was governed by Egypt. These populations were known as the *Habirou*. The term 'Hebrew' gradually gave way to that of *B'nei Israel*, or "Children of Israel", and finally to that of Judeans, or Jews. The supporters of the national regeneration of the Jewish People, desirous of restoring the territory, language and culture of the past and of marking their distance from the term Jews, besmirched by the national downfall of the exile, demonstrated a great predilection for the term 'Hebrew'.

⁶² Yavneh is the village where, according to Talmudic tradition, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, predicting the defeat of the Jewish side in their revolt against the Romans, decided to settle with his disciples, in order to perpetuate Judaism. Jerusalem was besieged at the time by the Roman legions, as well as being prey to internal struggles between rival factions who had resolved to deal most severely with anyone who might think of deserting the town (c.70 B.C.E.). Therefore, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai decided to pass himself off as dead, and leave the town in a coffin. Once outside, he went to see the Roman commander, Vespasian, and asked him to, "Give me Yavneh and its Sages" (*Gittin* 56a). Yavneh, the seat of the Sanhedrin for some time after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, is generally considered to be the crucible of the new Pharisaic national entity which rose from the ashes of the revolt against the Romans.

⁶³ Ahad Ha'am, "The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁴ Ahad Ha'am, "Introduction", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. IX.

⁶⁵ Ahad Ha'am, "Truth about the Land of Israel", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 56.

⁶⁶ Ahad Ha'am, "Imitation and Assimilation", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 177.

⁶⁷ The *Bet HaMidrash* – House of Study – designates the place *par excellence* for the study of the texts, of the traditions surrounding them as well as the interpretations of the latter. In addition, the *Bet HaMidrash* constitutes the true crucible of the Jewish soul. Its importance is all the more fundamental in that study of the Torah is considered in Judaism as one of the prime religious commandments.

⁶⁸ Ahad Ha'am, "Zionism and Jewish Culture", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. II, p. 130.

⁶⁹ Ahad Ha'am, "Pinsker and his Publication", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, pp. 83-84.

⁷⁰ Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, known by the acronym "Rambam", as well as by the name, Maimonides (1135-1204), was born at Cordoba in Spain and died in Egypt, where he was doctor at court of the Viceroy, or Vizier. Maimonides was also a rabbi, doctor, philosopher and man of law, whose philosophical works – and in particular *The Guide for the Perplexed* – and legal work – above all, the *Mishneh Torah* – marked a turning point in Jewish thought. Although he was at first regarded as controversial by certain pietistic circles who denounced his philosophical positions on a number of subjects, including, for example, the Creation, the Messiah and the Resurrection of the Dead, in the end Maimonides gained recognition by all the groups within Judaism as "the great Eagle" of Jewry. This was particularly the view of the rationalist groups, who were proud to claim him as their role-model, admiring him as they did for his attempts to find a synthesis between reason and revelation.

⁷¹ Ahad Ha'am, "Words of Peace", in *Al Parashat Derakhim*, vol. I, p. 113.