The Essential Agus

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Published by NYU Press

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The Essential Agus: The Writings of Jacob B. Agus.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/15755.
ISRAEL IS AT ONCE the name of a people, a state, a religious community, and an ethereal ideal. A certain ambiguity characterized the term “Israel” from the very beginning. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel in order to indicate his elevation to a high cosmic status. He was on a par with angels, “for thou hast struggled with God and men, and hast prevailed.”¹ Philo interprets Israel to mean “he who sees God,” that is, the man of Divine visions.² Certain it is that from the moment of its historic genesis, the people of Israel considered itself to be “covenanted” unto the Lord. A covenant is more than a love affair, no matter how impassioned, since it cannot conceivably be terminated at the whim of either partner. It is rather like a marriage, as marriage was originally intended to be; exclusive, enduring, indeed eternal.³ Accordingly, the people of Israel are also called “sons of the living God,” or the “firstborn son,” or the treasure-people.⁴ It is not possible, in any case, to speak of the historic community of Israel without taking note of its special relation to the God who was different from all other gods, a Being unique and alone (Ehad). A people that is lifted out of the mass of struggling humanity by the One God, set apart from all other nations and given a unique cosmic status, cannot but deem itself radically different. When the elders suggest to the prophet Ezekiel that it might be wise for “the house of Israel to become like all the nations,” he storms at them, “It shall not be.”⁵ The very thought is absurd. The children of Israel are not at liberty to mold their
own destiny. They are committed. They “belong” to God, who will rule over them as their “King,” with “wrath outpoured,” whether they will it or not.

This feeling of radical difference from the Gentiles became a powerful historical force. It affected the policy of the last kings of Israel. So Hezekiah resisted Sennacherib, pinning his faith on the One God, for whose sake he inaugurated a reformation. Josiah carried forward that spiritual revolution and centralized all sacrificial worship in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem. Though he died on the battlefield, his reform was not undone. In time, the feeling of being radically different penetrated into the depths of the national psyche. Jeremiah phrases in Aramaic the message that the exiles were to bring to Babylonia: “So shall ye say unto them, ‘The gods that did not make heaven and earth will pass away from the face of the earth.’”

In this formula, Jeremiah articulated the uniqueness of the One God of Israel. He is not merely one, but He stands above and beyond the whole of creation as its master. He transcends the battles between the diverse gods and the empires that worship them. But this God, who is alone, is not simply the God of the universe that all can find and worship in their own way. He, too, is committed, covenanted, bound by His spoken word. He is wedded to Israel, as it were; He had sworn an oath to the patriarchs; He had spoken to all the Israelites at Sinai; He had revealed to them His Torah. Thus was the import of Israel’s message given a more personal tone and a cutting edge: “It is our God, the God of Israel, who is the One God of the universe.”

It is this double message that demonstrates the two-sidedness of the concept of Israel. The self-image of the historical community reached up to the universal realm of metaphysical entities. It “corresponded” to a heavenly reality. But this self-image also contained a written history of a living people, its poignant memories, its agonizing anxieties, its bread-and-butter needs, its flesh-and-blood desires and hopes.

The two-sided character of the Jewish self-image and its resultant sense of radical difference from all other nations evoked a corresponding reaction among the non-Jewish population. How could they help but react with an extra measure of hostility to a people that considered itself especially set apart from all others, separated by a distinction that ranks far and beyond the usual differences that separate all human groups? If they acknowledged the unique status of Israel and its message in an affirmative way, they became either converts, semiconverts, or sympa-
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If they reacted against either the cogency of the message or the claim of Israel's election, they came to regard the Jews as "the most odious race of mankind." Here was a people that insulted and assaulted their gods and arrogated to itself an exalted cosmic rank. In many cases, admiration and scorn were combined in a puzzling complex of hate. Thus, classical anti-Semitism emerged as one of the responses of the pagan world to the twin challenges of Israel and its monotheism. In their turn, the Jewish people felt the loneliness of their situation to be a direct consequence of their covenanted status. If God had chosen to make them different, their destiny in history must also be different. When the nations are uplifted, they are degraded; when the others are defeated in the End of Days, then Israel's turn will come.

In periods of bitter rivalry and persecution, the notion of being chosen as against the rest of humanity tends to take the place of the feeling of being chosen for the sake of humanity. The eschatological vision becomes zealot, narrow, and exclusive, a vindication of Israel rather than the triumph of its teaching. Thus, the actual situation of Jewish people at any one time helped to shape the outlines of their collective self-image. Their earthly misery and their cosmic power, their martyrdom in the present and their Messianic glory in the future lent vitality and vividness to one or another aspect of the traditional concept of Israel.

One trinity of ideas remained unbroken throughout the long history of the Jewish people down to the emergence of our secular age: the presumed unity of the conceptions of Israel, Torah, and God. Israel was covenanted to the Lord, and Torah was the bond that united them—the contract which stipulated the terms and conditions of a union that could be cruelly stretched, but never entirely severed. It is in the Zohar that this unity is formulated in the most incisive way: "Israel, the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one." The Qabbalistic author assumed that each of the three entities in this triad was a cosmic current that extended all the way from this lowly earth to the highest heaven. The glory of God fills the world, but in His essence the Lord is infinite, transcending all humanly conceivable categories. The designation "the Holy One, blessed be He" corresponds to the aspect of the Divine Being that is directly concerned with the administration of earthly affairs. In a similar way, the Torah is in this earthly life a body of laws, principles, and narratives; but up in the

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heavens it is an ethereal essence, "written in black fire or white fire," and consisting of an articulation of the Names of the Lord. So, too, the people of Israel "correspond" to a heavenly essence that merges at its source into the effulgence of the Divine Being.

This mystical concept of Israel illustrates the extent to which the collective self-image of the Jews was an integral part of the prevailing theology. Its contours varied in accord with one's philosophic approach. Accordingly, we may best describe the concept by filling in the details in the several self-images as they appear at the rationalistic pole of thought and at the mystical pole. It will then be possible to indicate the degree to which one or another concept predominated in the minds of the legalistic authorities, who steered generally a middle course between the two extremes.

Already in the Talmud and Midrashim the mystical character of Israel is suggested. "The image of Jacob is carved into the throne of Glory," we are assured, and, when the patriarch enjoyed his famous dream, the angels went up and down on the heavenly ladder, comparing the upper image with the lower one. The Throne of Glory symbolizes the aspects of Divine power that relate to the administration of mundane affairs. We are told that this Throne of Glory "hovered over the deep" before the creation of the cosmos. The souls of the righteous are kept there after death until the Messianic redemption, the resurrection, and the World to Come. Another passage tells us that "the Patriarchs—they are the Divine Chariot"—that is, they are part of the mediating channel of Divine grace. Abraham, in particular, had a continuing function in heaven. His prayers and those of the other patriarchs keep the scales of mercy weighted against those of justice. Also, he stands at the gates of hell in order to prevent those who are circumcised from being thrown into its yawning abyss.

The close mystical association between Israel and the Divine Being is adumbrated in the concept of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence. In one sense, the Shechinah is found where love, compassion, and devotion abide. In yet another sense, "ten persons who steadily engage in the study of Torah, the Shechinah rests with them . . . even five . . . even three . . . even one . . ." In a more potent, more openly manifest way, the Shechinah was found in certain synagogues in Babylonia. But in a special and more immediate sense, it dwelt in the Holy Temple, and it
departed thence prior to the destruction of its abode, although, according to some authorities, “the Shechinah did not move away from the western wall.”

The Holy Temple “corresponded” to the sanctuary in one of the heavens, and the Archangel Michael offered “lambs of fire” on the heavenly altar, matching the sacrifices of the high priest. Now that the Holy Temple is in ruins, Michael continues to sacrifice on his altar the souls of the saints.

The sanctuary in the wilderness and later the two Temples were visible habitations of the Divine Presence, but even when these were destroyed, the Shechinah did not depart from Israel. “Wherever the Israelites were exiled, there the Shechinah too went into exile.”

Indeed, Moses was assured that the Shechinah will be associated with Israel, and Israel only. “Said Rabbi Johanan in the name of Rabbi Yose: Three things did Moses ask of the Holy One, blessed be He, and He granted them to him—that the Shechinah shall abide in Israel . . . that it shall not abide on the ‘worshipers of stars,’ and that he might know the ways of Providence . . . .”

Explaining the superiority of the pure-blooded Israelite in regard to the capacity to intuit the Divine Presence, the philosopher Halevi writes: “The Shechinah which is visible to our eyes is presently lacking, for it is revealed only to the prophet or to the people generally only in the selected place, and this is the meaning of our prayer for the return of the Lord to Zion, ‘and may our eyes behold when Thou returnest unto Zion.’

“But the hidden, spiritual Shechinah dwells with every born Israelite, who is also a believer in the true faith, whose deeds are pure, whose heart is true, whose soul is attuned to the God of Israel.”

This association was so commonly accepted that to be converted was described as “entering under the wings of the Shechinah.” In the course of the discussion concerning the non-Jewish identity of Job, some rabbis in the Talmud argue that he could not have lived after the death of Moses: “After Moses died, did the Shechinah abide on worshipers of stars [that is, non-Jews]?”

The bond between Israel and the Shechinah was so close that every worshiper was “to feel as if the Shechinah were opposite him.” So deep was this awareness that some rabbis considered it sinful to walk erect, or with head uncovered: “It pushes the legs of the Shechinah.” This mystical consciousness of the Divine Presence heightened the tone
of Jewish piety: "He who commits a sin in secret, it is as if he pushed the legs of the Shechinah." 35 The Divine Presence was a comforting reality to the downhearted: "The Shechinah rests on the heads of the sick"; 36 "When a person is troubled, how does the Shechinah speak—'my head hurts, my arm hurts.' If the Holy One, blessed be He, is so pained by the blood of the wicked, how much the more so by the spilled blood of the righteous?" 37

In their prayers, Jews were admonished to think of the "exile of the Shechinah" or of the "anguish of the Shechinah," rather than of their own troubles.

After detailing the mystical effects of evil deeds in closing the channels of mercy, an Orthodox pietist of the nineteenth century describes the function of prayer: "Though the law of the Talmud permits a person to bring to mind his own troubles when he prays, the core of his intention must not be the petition to assuage his own sorrows, since it is through suffering that his sins are purged. . . . But the essence of his intention must be the need on high, for there might be an involvement of his Name, if the honor of Israel is involved. . . . But even if there be no desecration of the Name, the Divine Presence feels his pain, and if the worshiper forgets his own pain in his intense concentration on the anguish of the Lord, then indeed his sins are forgiven. . . ." 38

The ideal "congregation of Israel" (Keneset Yisroel) is often treated in Talmud and the Midrashim as an interlocutor with the Deity. It presents the case of the empirical people to the Lord and the demands of the Lord to the people. Anyone who partakes of the pleasures of life, without a prior offer of thanks (berocho), "it is as if he robbed the Holy One and Keneset Yisroel." 39 The benedictions were formulated and instituted by the rabbis, acting in the Name of God. So Keneset Yisroel is the heavenly counterpart of the sacred tradition.

"Said Keneset Yisroel to the Holy One, blessed be He—acknowledge this as my favor to Thee, that I made Thee known to the mighty in the world [that is, in the discussion, to the Jewish people]." 40

Here, too, the ideal congregation is regarded as distinguished from the actual, living people of Israel. Referring to the symbolism of the Song of Songs, which portrays the Lord and Israel as a lover and his bride, a Talmudic sage says, "I am a wall, that is Keneset Yisroel, 'and my breasts are like towers,' these are the synagogues and houses of study." 41

Naturally, even in the first centuries of our era some Jewish people frequented the circuses and theaters of their cities more than the syna-
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gogues. Yet, the ideal congregation is imagined to speak as follows: " 'I did not sit among players.' "^{42} Said *Keneset Yisroel*, 'Master of the Universe,' I have never gone to theaters and circuses of the nations of the world, and played with them."^{43}

To the mystics, the revealed Torah was only an earthly shadow of the heavenly entity. Since the written and oral laws refer almost exclusively to the people of Israel, an intimate association had to be assumed between the Divine Being and the ideal congregation of Israel. I have already referred to the unity of the triad—God, Torah, and Israel. At times, Torah is left out, and a dual unity is asserted: "The Holy One, blessed be He, and *Keneset Yisroel* are called one." The image of a lighted candle is often used: "Israel is the wick, Torah is the oil, the Divine Presence is the flame."^{47}

The pre-existence of the heavenly Torah was a widespread assumption in the literature of the Midrash. From this belief it followed almost inevitably that the congregation of Israel, its acceptance of the earthly Torah, its destiny, and its eventual redemption through the Messiah, were also provisioned. "If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not foreseen that after twenty-six generations the people of Israel will accept the Torah, he would not have written in it—Command the children of Israel."^{48}

The Torah was the goal of creation, since it represented the will of God, while all creation was merely the work of God. Hence, the Midrash asserts that the Torah furnished the design for all creation, and the "Holy One, blessed be He, looked in the Torah as He created the world."^{49}

It follows that Israel, the people of Torah, occupies a central role in the administration of this world, not merely in the World to Come. On its account, the sun shines, the rains come down to bless the soil, and the golden harvest ripens at summer's end. By the same token, however, the failure of the empirical people to abide by the precepts of the Law causes the order of nature to be disturbed, with dire consequences for all mankind. If the nations had only known of this relationship, "they would have appointed two policemen for every Jew," to make certain that he observed the entire Law. All earthly gains are due to the merits of Israel; "even boats that travel from Gaul to Spain are blessed only for the sake of Israel." On the other hand, the catastrophes of nature and history are also due to Israel. While the constellations of the stars and
the ministering angels usually and largely control the affairs of “the nations of the world,” the people of Israel are lifted above this natural order and governed directly by God. “There is no mazal [determination of stars] for Israel.” They are “beloved more than the ministering angels.”

Even while they glorified the congregation of Israel as an ethereal “City of God,” the mystics allowed that not all living Jews were equally exalted. The Talmud asserts that “all Israelites have a share in the World to Come” and “will not see the face of hell.” Yet, the Zohar, which concentrates and magnifies the mystical streams in the ancient tradition, declares, “Not all Israelites are alike, for some of them are princes, deriving from the Holy Kingdom [Shechinah], and some of them are slaves, deriving from the side of the slave [Satan].” Also, “Israel is called man and beasts; if they merit, they are man, fashioned after the one above; if they do not merit, they are called beasts.”

The notion that the people of Israel contain a vital core of saints who are closely associated with the Divine administration of the world is rooted in Talmudic literature, though it was left for the Hasidic movement of the eighteenth century to provide concrete institutionalization of this belief.

We read in the Talmud that “the Holy One, blessed be He, decrees, but the Saint repudiates it”; also that “the Saint decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, abides by this decision.” These saints suffer for the sins of their people, and their anguish is accepted as a sacrifice of atonement for their contemporaries. Since the order of the world depends upon these saints, “no Saint perishes until a Saint of equal stature is created.” While the world may exist even for the sake of one saint, it was widely believed that “there are never fewer than thirty-six saints who confront the Shechinah every day.”

The Qabbalists deepened the gulf between the pneumatic saints and the ordinary scholars. The power of the saints is felt even after their death, when their souls enter into hell in order to redeem the wicked who were attached to them in some way.

The Hasidic movement created many saint-centered societies on the supposition that each saint was an embodiment of the redeemed world. In him, the evil desire and the impulses of material nature had been transmuted into forces of holiness. Even the occasional sin of the saint is due to a holy impulse. “The Holy One, blessed be He, in his Mercy impels the Saint to sin, so that he might fall from his high level and
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descend to that of the public; then, later, when the Saint raises himself to his holy height, he uplifts the people along with himself.” 62

The emphasis on the ideal of sainthood did not lead, in the Hasidic movement, to the weakening of the ethnic element in Jewish piety. The saint was never thought of in isolation, but as the living center of “all Israel.” His prayer is focused on the “exile of the Shechinah,” and in behalf of all Israel.

In the mystical stream of thought, the Jewish people were a unique metaphysical creation; hence, they were biologically different from the rest of mankind. We read in the Talmud: “Why are the worshipers of stars unclean? Because they did not stand at Mount Sinai. Because when the serpent cohabited with Eve, he threw uncleanness into her. The Israelites had their uncleanness removed at Sinai. The worshipers of stars, not having been at Sinai, their uncleanness was not removed.” 63

We have here a version of original sin, which is purely racist, assuming that Jews are free by birth from the corruption which is the lot of humanity. Yet, this racist emphasis was contradicted by the law which admits Gentile converts into the holy community. The Talmud assumes that, in the case of converts, “though they were not present at Sinai, their mazal was there.” 64 This means that they were included in the Holy Community, but in a category of their own (“under the wings of the Shechinah,” as against “over the wings of the Shechinah”). 65

The romantic philosopher Halevi assumes that even in the Messianic era, the descendants of converts will be distinguished from those of pure Israelitic lineage in this, that only the latter will be endowed with the gift of prophecy: “Whoever clings to this way, will participate along with his descendants in our nearness to God. But the convert will not have equal standing with the Israelite by birth, since only the Israelites by descent are suited for prophecy. . . .” 66

In the Talmud, the gift of prophecy is further restricted, even in the future, only to those whose line of descent is completely unblemished: “The Lord causes His Shechinah to rest only on the pedigreed families in Israel.” 67

The racist dogma permeates the mystical stream in Judaism down to the present day. Halevi stands close to the center between the mystical and rationalistic currents, for he admitted the worth of the other monotheistic faiths: “We deny to no man the reward for his good deeds, no matter which creed he belongs to. But we see the perfect good which comes to the people that are close to Him, in their lifetime. . . .”
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"But our destiny it is to cleave to the divine quality in prophecy and in states of mind that are close to it. . . ." 68

The belief in the dogma of Jewish centrality and supremacy in the Divine scheme of creation became more deeply rooted in the popular mind in the late Middle Ages as a result of the decline of rationalism and the growing influence of Qabbalah. In fact, the medieval era continued for the Jewish masses of Central Europe down to the twentieth century. We find the most extravagant formulations of the holy character of Israel in the last few centuries. Israel should properly be the "portion of the Lord," because "the Perfect One should have the perfect." 69 A sixteenth-century pietist wonders why the physical appearance of Jews is so much like that of non-Jews, seeing that their souls are drawn from radically different heavenly realms. The founder of the Liubavich dynasty of Hasidim asserts that of the two souls of every Israelite, one is a Divine portion of the Lord Himself, and the other derives from the shell of nogah (radiance), which is both good and bad, while the souls of the other nations are formed "out of the unclean shells, which have no good at all." 70

A nineteenth-century Hasidic author wrote: "Every nation has a certain holy spark, even as it possesses vicious qualities, since 'Thou givest life to them all,' and this is the purpose of the Jewish exile, to absorb these sparks. . . .

"As the root of Keneset Yisroel is the love of the Israelites for God, so the root of all the nations is their love for the pleasures of this world. . . ." 71

So deeply rooted is this dogma in the tradition that even some of the modernist reformers of the nineteenth century could not resist its impact. Thus, Geiger, the architect of Reform Judaism, spoke of a Jewish "genius" for religion.

The mystical temper predominated in Jewish life only in the darkest periods of political oppression and cultural stagnation. Whenever the warm winds of enlightenment mellowed the hostility of the Jews' neighbors, the Jewish spirit regained an equilibrium between the insular mentality of self-glorifying myths and the open horizons of theistic humanism. In such open cultures as those of the Hellenistic era, of the Moslem Renaissance, of Christian Humanism, and of the Age of Enlightenment, the rationalistic threads in the web of tradition came to light.
Contrary to a widespread impression, the Talmud contains significant components of a moral-rational approach to the understanding of the Jewish character and destiny. A broad definition of what it means to be a Jew is offered on a purely intellectual plane: "Everyone who denies idolatry is called a Jew." 72

"Said Rabbi Elazar, The Holy One, blessed be He, exiled Israel among the nations for the sole purpose of adding converts to their number. So, it is said 'and I shall sow it in the ground.' 73 Doesn't a person sow one measure only in order to harvest many more?" 74

According to this view, the dispersal of Israel was not due to an outburst of Divine wrath, but, on the contrary, to His concern for the redemption of mankind. The "chosenness" of Israel was, therefore, to be interpreted not as an exclusive privilege, setting Israel apart from the nations, but as a task, to bring hosts of men and women to the service of the Lord. Israel is the "firstborn," but not the only child. In the Torah, the "firstborn" cannot lay claim to the whole inheritance, but only to a portion double that of his brothers. Israel's vocation is to be an example, not an exception, to the other nations. It is not set apart, but set ahead, and ordered to work for and with other peoples.

Elaborating on Israel's task to "witness" unto the nations, the Midrash applies the law in regard to those who withhold testimony from judges: "If he does not tell, he shall bear his sin—if you will not explain my Divinity to the nations of the world, I shall punish you..." 75 This missionary task was imposed upon Israel from the very beginning: "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel in order that they might bestow its merit upon all the nations." 76

Naturally, the people of Israel are not alone in this task. The wise and the pious, wherever they may be, are allies of Israel. They are "priests," so to speak, individually, as the people of Israel were designed to be a "people of priests": "The Holy One, blessed be He, will grant to the pious among the nations a share in the life of the World to Come... because they are priests to the Holy One, blessed be He. ..." 77

The duty to "bring people under the wings of the Shechinah" is treated as a supreme mitzvah. Said the leading sage of third-century Palestine, Rabbi Johanan: "Why was Abraham our father punished and his children were enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years? Because he separated people from entering under the wings of the Shechinah. As it is said, the king of Sodom said to Abraham: 'Give me
the souls, while you take the property’ (and Abraham returned the captives, without converting them).”78

For this reason, it was mandatory for masters to convert their slaves; they, in turn, were then obliged to observe the practices that were obligatory on Israelite women. Upon liberation, these slaves would become full-fledged Israelites, qualifying to be counted in the prayer-quorum of the synagogue.

The interpretation of a Biblical verse offered the great Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai an opportunity to illustrate and to condemn the chauvinism of his disciples.79 In Proverbs 14:34 (usually rendered, “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people”), the Hebrew original puts the last two words in the plural—“the nations”—and it seems to draw the line between the one people—Israel—and all other nations. The zealous disciples vied with one another in finding an interpretation that would exalt Israel and scorn the Gentiles, namely, “even the charitable deeds of the nations are imputed to them as a sin, because of the impurity of their motives or their arrogance.”80 Then the aged master points out the true meaning of the verse: “As the sin-offering would bring forgiveness to Israel, so does charity bring forgiveness to the nations of the world.”81 This interpretation is the one favored by Abraham Ibn Ezra in his commentary.82

We may assume that this discussion took place after the burning of the Temple, when the Israelites, too, could count only on deeds of charity, along with prayer and repentance, for the expiation of their sins. Jew and Greek became one in their need for forgiveness. When the same rabbi was apprised of the burning of the Temple, he said, “We have a nobler means of atonement—righteousness and charity.”83

The tension between the moral-rational and the romantic-mystical interpretations of the difference between Israel and the nations can be recognized in the many debates in the Talmud in regard to such issues as to whether Torah should be taught to slaves or not,84 whether those who accepted Judaism and were baptized, but did not undergo circumcision, were to be considered full-fledged members of the community,85 whether the laws of the Torah, barring intermarriage with the neighboring nations, were to apply to their descendants at all times, or possibly even be extended to all Gentiles, as Ezra and Nehemiah inferred, or whether those laws were no longer valid because “Sennacherib came and mixed up the nations.”86
There was also the theological question of “exclusive salvation,” that is, whether the Gentile who accepts the “Seven Principles of Noah,” and is classified as a ger toshav, must do so in the presence of three learned Israelites and on the basis of a dogmatic acceptance of the Torah of Moses. Finally, we encounter the well-known dispute as to whether or not “the pious of the nations have a share in the World to Come.”

The lines of demarcation are frequently blurred, particularly since dialecticians always endeavor to impose systematic consistency upon ancient controversies. The same Midrashic work might contain views that are in diametric opposition to one another. In an honored Midrash we encounter a dramatic affirmation of the equality of all men in the sight of God: “I call heaven and earth to witness that a Gentile or an Israelite, a man or a woman, a slave or a servant-girl—the Holy Spirit rests upon him only according to his deeds. . . .”

“Is it conceivable that the Lord will discriminate between a Gentile and a Jew, between a man and a woman, between a slave and a servant-girl? No, whatever mizvah one does necessarily brings its reward, for it is said, ‘and Thy righteousness is like the mighty mountains,’ ”

But we also find in the same Midrash the assumption that, in point of fact, only Israelites are “God’s children,” and they alone are due to share in the glories of the World to Come: “Though everything is His, and all are His creatures, He does not delight in all, but only in the seed of Abraham. . . .”

“Once, as I was going from place to place, I met an old man. Said he to me, ‘Will the nations of the world exist in the days of the Messiah?’ I said to him, ‘All the nations of the world that tortured Israel and oppressed Israel will come and behold its joy, then return to dust and not ever be revived. But all the nations and peoples that did not oppress or torment the Israelites will become the peasants and vineyard-keepers for the Israelites. . . .’ But this is only the days of the Messiah, not the World to Come. . . .”

We need add only that the zealous author discriminated among Israelites as well. He praised the Lord for choosing the sages and their disciples “to the end of all the generations,” assigning to the “sinners in Israel” the dubious distinction of being destined to be burned within the “Great Synagogue and the Great Academy of the Future.”

While the Aggadic material of the Talmud varies greatly, containing even crude insertions by vulgar hands, the Halachic material is more
organized and consistent. In Talmudic law, Ezra's insistence on the "Holy Seed" is definitely repudiated. Converts are warmly welcomed after due warning of the hardships they may expect to encounter: "When a person comes to be converted, we say to him, 'Why do you wish to convert? Don't you know that Israel is at this time driven, distressed and troubled?' If he says, 'I know, and I am not worthy to join them,' he is immediately accepted. He is then told the roots of the faith—the unity of God and the prohibition of idolatry, elaborating on the meaning of these principles. Then, he should be told of the mizvot, the light and the awesome ones. . . .

"And he should be told that by means of those mizvot he will merit the life of the World to Come, and that there is no complete Saint, except for the wise who know and observe these mizvot. He should be addressed as follows:

"Be it known to you that the World to Come is kept only for the saints, and they are Israel. The circumstance that in this world Israel is troubled is really a favor to them, for they cannot receive an excess of favors in this world, like the worshipers of stars, lest they become arrogant and err, losing the reward of the World to Come. But, the Lord does not punish them too severely, that they might not disappear. For all the nations will perish, but they will endure." 94

In the eyes of the Law it was a mizvah to induce a person to accept the Jewish faith. "Whoever brings one person under the wings of the Shechinah, it is accounted to him as if he had fashioned and brought a person into the world." 95 To be sure, some of the converts reverted to their pagan ways, causing all Israel to be guilty of sin in accordance with the principle that "all Israelites are responsible for one another." 96 Some of the rabbis protested for this reason against "those who accept converts." 97 Still, the legal authorities considered that all the nations will be converted in the time to come. 98 Once converted, a person has the same privileges as those who were born Jewish, except that he may not be a judge or a king over Israel. 99 He is expected to think of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as his ancestors, for "Abraham has been called 'the father of a multitude of nations.'" 100

Hellenistic Judaism, to judge from the writings of Philo, was conspicuously liberal in its interpretation of the concept of Israel as the vanguard of humanity. Although Philo speaks of the Jewish people as "sons of God," he maintains that all who have knowledge of the universal Father
are “children of God.”

The people of Israel represent symbolically “those who have a vision of God.” Prophecy (in the highest or dogmatic sense), resulting in laws, was reserved for the Israelites of the Biblical period, but the message of the Scriptures is universal. Indeed, Philo identifies Plato’s “philosophic frenzy” with one of the phases of prophecy. “For what the disciples of the most approved philosophy gain from its teaching, the Jews gain from their law and customs, that is, to know the highest and the most ancient cause of all things.” Out of Abraham “there issued a whole people, and it is of all nations the most beloved by God, for, as it seems to me, to them priesthood and prophecy were given for the benefit of the entire human race.”

Philo describes proselytes as being related to Jews “by kinships of greater dignity and sanctity than those of blood.” Praising the proselyte “who comes to God of his own accord,” he adds, “in order that all men who behold this example may be corrected by it, learning that God receives gladly virtue which grows out of ignoble birth, utterly disregarding its original roots.”

The semiproselytes, or the “spiritual proselytes” (to use Wolfson’s term), are included in the Mosaic polity of the “sons of God.” They are the philosophers and the righteous men who share the monotheistic philosophy of life. Thus Philo speaks of “the blameless life of pious men who follow nature and her ordinances” and of “all who practice wisdom either in Grecian or Barbarian lands and live a blameless and irreproachable life” as belonging to the ideal community.

The Torah itself was, to Philo, not a mystical entity and a supreme source of values, but an educational instrument conveying the saving truths that God had built into human nature. The Sabbath is a covenant between God and mankind, not merely between God and Israel. It is a call for men to share in the Divine activity of contemplation. In his listing of ten festivals, Philo leaves out Hanukkah and Purim, possibly because he regarded them as national observances. He listed “every day” if it is lived as a holy day. In Philo’s judgment, Passover was not so much a festival of national freedom as a perennial call on all men to “pass over” from a life of passion to the life of yearning for God. Similarly, Sukkot was not a symbol of Divine concern for the Israelites, but rather a symbol of the equality of all men and of the duty of cultivating the virtue of gratitude.

For Philo, therefore, the empirical community of Israel was still the most beloved community, but ideally its boundaries shaded into a twi-
light zone, embracing those who in various degrees dedicated themselves to the love of God. Philo, too, looked forward to a Messianic era when Israel would triumph, but then all other nations would merge with it: "I think that each nation would abandon its peculiar ways and, throwing overboard their ancestral customs, turn to honoring our laws alone, for when the brightness is accompanied by national prosperity, it will darken the light of others as the risen sun darkens the stars."

The rationalistic and mystical streams in Judaism diverged more decisively in the Middle Ages than they did in the Talmudic and early Gaonic periods. For a century the Jewish world was torn by a long and bitter controversy between the followers of Maimonides and the antirationalists. Both schools included in their category of Israelites the "righteous proselytes," that is, those who were fully converted to Judaism. However, regarding those who worshiped the one God in purity of thought and in ethical action, the romanticists and the legalists hesitated to make use even of the category of ger toshav ("semipro-
lytes") of the Talmud. As was earlier noted, some maintained that the ger toshav is one who accepts only the "seven mizvoth of the sons of Noah" on the basis of Mosaic revelation and by way of a formal declaration in the presence of three learned men. Others added that this category applied only "at the time when the Jubilee institution was in effect." In this school, even the "pious of the nations" were merely peripheral to the only bearers of salvation, the empirical people of Israel.

On the other hand, the rationalistic school in nonlegalistic works projected the concept of a spiritual elite, who, apart from any rites and ceremonies, advance ever closer to the Divine Being through the service of mind and heart. For them, the empirical people of Israel were significant only insofar as they were likely to produce a greater number of such philosophical saints. The "Torah-society" was designed and ordered to stimulate the emergence of men and women who love God and ceaselessly meditate on the wonders of His creation. But it is not the mizvoth in themselves that generate holiness or "nearness of God," but their presumed effect upon the moral character of the individual and the peaceful order of society. This effect is by no means certain or even likely in the case of the majority of the people. Saintly philosophers may arise among all nations, and only a few Jews may qualify for the honor. The living people of Israel were, therefore, in Maimonides' view, by no means coeval with the spiritual elite, those who approach
most closely to the Divine Being. It was a good school, indeed the best possible school, designed by the Lord Himself. But even in the best schools some students will be no wiser on their graduation than on their initiation. And students of poor schools have been known to excel. Salvation or fulfillment is an individual achievement.

Isaac Arame, whose work *Akedat Yizhak* was long a popular source book for preachers, manages to combine the view of individual judgment, on the one hand, and the collective salvation of Israel, on the other. He maintains that “one is truly designated as Yisroel [an Israelite] only if he is a saint [Zaddik],” for an Israeliite and a saint are synonymous in respect of their tasks. “‘All Israelites’ [that are assumed to have a share in the World to Come] means those who fulfill the obligations imposed upon an Israelite.” The Torah, according to Arame, is so designed as to lead all its devotees to salvation. Writing in the last decade of the fifteenth century, Arame saw hope only for “the remnant” of the nations that will accept the Torah: “For He scattered and subordinated Israel among them, in order that they [that is, the nations] should be encouraged to learn to know the Israelites, their customs and the ways of their Torah, so that they will desire and accept it [the Torah]. In this way, Israel will cause a remnant of the nations to be saved, that they might call on the Name of God. But they see and do not take it to heart... interpreting the verses of Scriptures as they desire. . .” 111

Maimonides maintained that only “true ideas” lead to God, but those ideas are accessible to the human mind and are readily deducible from first principles. They comprise the doctrines of God’s unity and incorporeality, the first two of the Ten Commandments. All the other *mizvoth* are principles of training for the individual and of a properly ordered society. He summarizes his view of the various categories of religious people in a famous passage: “I will begin the subject of this chapter with a simile. A king is in his palace, and all his subjects are partly in the country and partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned toward the king’s palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to the palace, seeking ‘to inquire in his temple,’ and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house.

“Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go roundabout in search of the entrance gate; others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the antechamber; and others have succeeded
in entering into the inner part of the palace and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king or speak to him; for after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king—at a distance or close by—hear his words, or speak to him.

"I will now explain the simile which I have made. The people who are abroad are all those that have no religion, neither one based on speculation nor one received by tradition. . . .

"Those who are in the country, but have their backs turned toward the king's palace, are those who possess religion, belief and thought, but happen to hold false doctrines. . . . Because of these doctrines they recede more and more from the royal palace, the more they seem to proceed. . . .

"Those who desire to arrive at the palace, and to enter it, but have never yet seen it, are the mass of religious people, the multitude that observe the Divine commandments, but are ignorant.

"Those who arrive at the palace, but go roundabout it, are those who devote themselves exclusively to the study of the practical law; they believe traditionally in true principles of faith, and learn the practical worship of God, but are not trained in philosophical treatment of the principles of the Law, and do not endeavor to establish the truth of their faith by proof.

"Those who undertake to investigate the principles of religion have come into the antechamber; and there is no doubt that these, too, can be divided into different grades.

"But those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, insofar as a true knowledge can be obtained, and are near the truth, wherever an approach to truth is possible, they have reached the goal, and are in the palace in which the king lives." 112

In Maimonides' gradation, the philosophers of the nations who seek God are far ahead of the masses of the empirical people of Israel, coming nearer to God than the zealous Talmudists who only go around and around the palace of the king. A commentator expressed the views of many shocked pietists when he wrote, "Many of the wise rabbis said that this chapter was not written by the master [Moses Maimonides]. And if he wrote it, it should be hidden or, better, burned. For how could he say that those who contemplate the laws of nature are on a
higher level than those who busy themselves with the duties of religion?" Maimonides did not list the belief in the Chosen People among his principles of faith. He welcomed genuine converts most warmly, writing in a famous letter to a convert: "You may say, 'our God and God of our fathers,' for Abraham is your father. Since you have entered under the wings of the Shechinah, there is no difference between us and you. . . . Let not your pedigree be light in your eyes. . . . If we trace our descent to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, you trace it to Him who spoke and the world came into being." 

However, in his popular and legal works, Maimonides employs the imagery and rhetoric of the people, in the belief that the maintenance of the Torah-society requires that certain popular opinions be stated by the philosophers as if they were true. (In his letter to the Jews of Yemen, he asserts that those who leave the fold are not descended from ancestors who stood at Sinai.) These "necessary truths," as he calls them, help to bridge the gap between the philosophers and the populace, creating an enduring, vital community in which the few guard the many from gross errors, and the many help the few to attain human fulfillment.

Divine Providence, in the judgment of Maimonides, was not focused on the people of Israel except insofar as the Messianic age was predetermined, but normally the degree of Divine guidance depended on the extent of attachment to the Divine Being by single individuals. However, to placate his opponents, Maimonides reintroduced the belief in the resurrection and in the World to Come as predestined events at the end of history.

The radical intellectualism of Maimonides was repudiated by many of his successors. Arame postulates a special miraculous form of Divine Providence that is distinctive for Israel as a people. In turn, there are several levels of Divine Providence in Israel, depending upon degrees of piety. Some felt that "nearness to God" was more a matter of love or of faith or of Divine grace than of sustained reflection. But the axiom that the way to holiness is infinite and that it is reached by inward meditation and self-scrutiny was accepted by many popular preachers and pietists.

The axiom that the pathway to God runs through the intentions of the heart and the further realization that this pathway is infinite could, in theory at least, blur the distinction between the "people of Torah" and those without the Covenant. It is this emphasis on inwardness that,
in the Hasidic movement, served to elevate the dignity of the unlearned masses. The application of the same principle to non-Jews was already foreshadowed by Rabbi Judah the Prince, editor of the Mishnah, who upon being told of a Gentile who offered his life for God wept and cried out, “Indeed, it is possible for a person to acquire his world in one hour.” Albo added the principle that the Lord may well give different Torahs to various peoples. “Even when the Torah of Moses was valid for the Israelites, there was the Torah of the sons of Noah for all the other nations. There is no doubt that people would attain through it their fulfillment as human beings, since it was Divine, though it was not of the same degree of attainment as the Israelites could obtain through the Torah. . . . So we see that it is possible to have two Divine Torahs at one time, but for different peoples.” Since the “chosenness” of Israel was effected by the Torah, which specifies the terms of the Covenant, it could no longer be regarded as an exceptional phenomenon. To be sure, in Albo’s view, the merit of the Mosaic Torah consisted in the fact that “human perfection could be attained by means of even one of the mizvot. . . .”

All through the Middle Ages the intimate association between ethnic feeling and religious loyalty in the concept of Israel was not questioned. The rationalists might recognize the relative holiness of other faiths, but only for non-Jewish groups. They might interpret the purpose of Israel’s existence in terms of the education and ultimate redemption of all mankind. “For indeed the earth belongs to me, and the pious of the nations are precious to me, without a doubt. ‘But, ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests.’ In this respect, you will be my treasure—you will be a kingdom of priests to instruct and to guide the entire human race, that they might all call on the Name of God and serve Him together, shoulder to shoulder, as Israel will be so transformed in the future.”

Even the mystics thought of Israel as the vanguard of the redeemed portion of humanity in that it is the Jewish function to gather the “Holy sparks” that have become imprisoned by the “shells of uncleanness” throughout the world. These holy sparks must be rescued before the appearance of the Redeemer. The Messianic redemption of Israel would justify the Divine intention in the creation of man; through Israel’s triumph, the human race would come into its own and attain fulfillment.
For Christian theologians as for Jewish thinkers, the ethnic separateness of the Jewish people was axiomatic. The place of the Jew in the medieval world was determined by the fact that he was of the "stock of Abraham." Socially, too, the Jews were nearly a self-governing enclave. They were outside the feudal system, not as individuals, but as a corporate body. Taxes were nearly always levied upon the community as a whole, and it was up to the Jewish authorities to distribute them. In the Spanish communities, Jewish authorities had the right to impose severe corporal punishments. In the German and Slavic areas, similar, though unofficial, means of discipline were frequently available. Furthermore, the semi-autonomous Jewish communities had in common the same basic laws and religious literature. The local variations, considerable as they might be—especially those between the monogamous society of Ashkenazic Jewry and the polygamous society of Sephardic and Oriental Jewry—did not prevent the Rabbinic authorities from moving freely throughout the Diaspora and speaking in the name of a common sacred tradition.

Those in Moslem or Christian lands who left the Jewish faith might still be considered members of the Jewish community in the first generation on the ground that they were irrevocably committed by the oath that their souls took at Sinai. "Once Israel was chosen to be God's people, no Israelite can become a member of another nation. They belong to God's people, even against their will and even if they leave the fold of their religion. Therefore, said the prophet, 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.' This is an allusion to the angry waters of baptism through which pass all those who accept their religion [Christianity]."120

The travail of the Marrano families in both Christian and Moslem lands is well known, but in the course of time they disappeared from the Jewish community. Even the Frankist Jews who joined the Catholic Church en masse in 1759, with the intention of retaining their own collective identity, did not leave more than a nostalgic memory in the first half of the nineteenth century, when Adam Mickiewicz, the poet laureate of Poland, was their most illustrious descendant.

It was through the changes in their religious convictions as well as outside pressure that some Jews left the fold. Their rationalist views might lead them to feel that the various monotheistic religions are so many social expressions of one philosophy, so that a change from Judaism to Catholicism is not very different from the change of one
language to another. In their view, those differences that were left were not worth the cost of lifelong martyrdom.

On the other hand, Jewish pietists might be led by the impetus of the mystical tradition to feel that the Christian faith was the logical development of Biblical Judaism. Abner of Burgos, Spain, who was converted in 1321, was a famous and ardent convert, and he addressed many books and pamphlets to his former co-religionists, calling upon them to emulate his example. His arguments were directed chiefly against the rationalists.

"Abner began with a critique of the rationalist interpretation of Judaism, cultivated by the Jewish intellectuals who were his friends—and for this he found ample support in Qabbalistic doctrine—and moved ultimately to a position of complete identification with the Christian ideology." 121 The majority, however, retained a balanced faith, rejecting the extremes of both rationalism and mysticism.

The modern period opened with the dawn of the Age of Reason. The intelligentsia began to glory in the balancing of religious tradition by rational and moral enlightenment. At the same time, the feudal age with its corporate bodies began to evolve into the modern State, which consists of individual citizens.

The new ideals and circumstances confronted the Jewish people with the task of reorienting their own self-image to suit the new categories of social thought. Spinoza met this challenge by calling for the complete dissolution of the Jewish community. Reducing the core of Jewish faith to a few principles that could be applied in diverse historical religions, Spinoza maintained that the vast body of Jewish law applied only to a self-governing community, living in its own land. He did not rule out the possibility of the emergence of a Jewish state in Palestine, but, insofar as the Diaspora was concerned, he declared that only the essential principles of faith in Judaism were valid. As to the people of Israel, they were no more “chosen” than any other nation that accepts its lot with gratitude and seeks to make the most of its heritage for the benefit of mankind. "... We have shown that the divine law, which renders man truly blessed, and teaches him the true life, is universal to all men... ingrained in the human mind." 122

Although Spinoza lived as a lonely Titan on the border of the Jewish community, his philosophy exerted enormous influence on the Jewish intellectuals who remained within the community. Yet his contention
that the State had the right to regulate all the actions of its citizens, as
distinct from thoughts and feelings, ran counter to the emerging liberal
philosophy of government.

For a century Jewish statesmen in the West allied themselves with the
dominant ideology of liberalism. Religion and State must be separated;
the State should abolish the corporations and estates of feudalism and
base itself on a free and equal citizenry; all institutions, including those
of religion, should be subjected to the scrutiny of reason. The concept
of Israel, argued Moses Mendelssohn, should not be taken as an example
of the ideal unity of religion and civil government. For ancient Israel
was a unique creation, intended for the meta-historical, especially cho-
sen people of the Biblical period, and reserved also for the meta-
historical period of the Messianic era in the future. In historical times,
the laws of reason, common to all men, must govern human society.
Religion, consisting of the free interaction of the Divine mind and the
human heart, cannot be subject to the coercion of the State. Also, in
historical times, the Jews were simply a religious community, with the
hope for a return to Zion being merely a transworldly, pious dogma,
affirming an action on the part of God, not on the part of the empirical
community. "This state existed only once in the world. Call it the
Mosaic society by its proper name. It has already disappeared from the
earth. Only God knows in which people and at which time we shall
again see a similar situation." 123

Mendelssohn agreed with Spinoza that the Torah was a revealed law
of action intended for a specific community, but he maintained that the
Jews of his day were still individually obligated to abide by the Torah
insofar as a personal observance of ritual laws was concerned. Mendels-
sohn also agreed that the ideas necessary for salvation were placed by
God in the hearts and minds of all peoples, that they are in no sense,
therefore, a monopoly of Israel. The loyalty of Jews to their Law is due
to the impetus of the past. They were born into the Torah-community,
but the salvation of mankind does not depend upon them. All men are
judged by God as individuals, and as individuals the Jews should enter
the State. The concept of Israel, for Moses Mendelssohn, was dual in
nature: total separateness and a metaphysical dimension in the distant
past and in the mythical future, but social integration, in all ways except
religion, in this mundane realm.

Mendelssohn's concept of Israel was a logical development of the
rationalist stream in Jewish thought; it implied a complete repudiation
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of the romantic-mystical currents that removed the empirical community of Israel as well as the ancient and eschatological ones from the common course of human events. His viewpoint was certainly shared by the upper circles of Jewry in Western Europe, but in the long belt of Jewish mass-settlements, extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea, the influence of Qabbalah was reinforced by the rise of Hasidism. The wall between East and West, established by the division of Poland and the policy of the Czarist Empire, was supplemented by a cultural-religious schism between the rationalist philosophy of Western Jewry and the mystical isolationalism of Eastern Jewry. Although this wall was constantly breached by the flow of immigrants from East to West and by the return of young men from the universities of the West, it nevertheless remained an obdurate social factor down to our own generation.

In the West, the exponents of Judaism were aware that the ancient Covenant of Israel with the Lord needed to be complemented by a second covenant between Israel and the nations. The new covenant would be far more than a business transaction, but, like the ancient one, it would involve a total reorientation of heart and mind. Unlike the various agreements of the Middle Ages, the new society called for the attainment of “fraternity” with the host-nations. No longer was the Jewish status to be that of an alien enclave, tolerated by the sovereign under certain conditions; the Jews were to become members of one unit—the Nation-State—which, on the surface, was a legal-rational entity and, below the surface, an idealized fellowship which reached down to the dark bedrock sentiments of a blood-brotherhood. So it was that the Grand Sanhedrin of Paris was asked whether the Jews would regard Frenchmen as their brothers.

Because the rationalists had already subscribed to a concept of Israel that included the fellowship of the right-thinking, it was but a small step for them to identify the fellowship of the right-thinking with the society of the enlightened in the eighteenth century, with German Kultur in the nineteenth, with the French homeland of liberalism, and with the architects of a free society in England and America. Although they could not join a blood-brotherhood without physical assimilation, they could become part of the new cultural fellowship as well as its political expression, excepting only religion.124 “The Freedom of the Jews,” noted a French-Jewish author, “has put an end to our exile.” 125

This trend of thought within Western Judaism was reinforced by the rising tide of liberalism in Europe that aimed to separate the Church
from the State, that is, the fellowship of culture and politics from the
traditional institutions of religion. The liberal world was based upon the
association of individuals, sharing cultural values as well as political
loyalties. The Jewish individual could become part of this new fellow-
ship, since his specifically Jewish loyalties were restricted to the trans-
worldly realm, the mythical past, and the eschatological future.

But the liberals within Judaism, as well as similarly minded men and
women in the Catholic and Protestant worlds, were pulled back by the
residual, romantic-mystical forces in their respective traditions. The
European nations of nineteenth-century Europe were Janus-faced, now
turned toward the liberal vision of an open society, now facing back to
the older plan of a closed society associated with one or another
religious tradition, and going back through the mists of prehistoric time
to the primitive, yet potent, feelings of blood-brotherhood. The reli-
gious romanticists, who called for a Catholic France, a Protestant Ger-
many, a Greek Orthodox Russia, were allied psychologically with the
ethnic romanticists, who idealized the Slavic or the Russian soul, the
Teutonic character or the Gallic spirit. Both kinds of collective ro-
manticism were engaged in fighting the same, all-pervasive enemy, the
rational spirit in philosophy, the egalitarian spirit in politics, the progres-
sive \textit{\`elan} in culture and in social legislation. Soon enough the emanci-
pated Jew became the symbol of the hated age of liberalism to the
romantic lovers of the good old days. To the protosocialists and eco-
nomic romanticists the Jew symbolized the rising industrial era, with all
its vulgarity and corruption, causing the coarse and uncultured \textit{nouveau
riche} to usurp the leadership of the wellborn and the well-bred. To
the ethnic romanticists, the ideal age antedated the historic era, when
an alien Christianity and a citified culture were imposed upon the
guileless noble savages, whose innate culture was too inward and too
refined to be noticed by the earliest chroniclers with their monkish
minds. To the religious romanticists, the emancipated Jew was also the
symbol of the passing of an idealized age, the great Middle Ages, when
religion dominated the private as well as the public life of the country,
separating the faithful flock from the goats who would not so believe,
and putting the latter in their proper places.

In each of these three phases of romanticism, a distorted image of the
Jew was constructed around a grain of truth. Jews were predominantly
an urban people, participating actively in the creation, first, of a com-
mercial and, later, of an industrial society. They were long the one and
only tolerated religious minority. Their ethnic roots went deeper into
the past and farther into distant lands than did those of their neighbors.
Moreover—and on this point the three kinds of romanticism concurred
again, though, on the whole, they were mutually contradictory—the
Jew was a child of mystery, doomed by a dark destiny to dwell apart
from, and in opposition to, the rest of humanity.

Thus, the “meta-myth” of modern anti-Semitism was born—the
mythological notion of the Jew as being metaphysically set apart from
the rest of mankind. Between the Jew and the rest of the nations of
Europe the gulf was cosmic, eternal, and unbridgeable. This myth,
deriving from both Jewish and Christian dogmatism, was now set up in
three dimensions: religious romanticism, ethnic culture, and the eco-
nomic sphere.

In Europe of the post-Enlightenment age, religion was rooted in
“feeling” rather than in supernatural revelation. Thus the dogmatic
image of the Jew was transposed into the language of “feeling”; his
“Semitic” nature could not possibly appreciate the noble sentiments of
Christianity. In this view, the Jewish nonacceptance of the Christian
faith was transposed from theology to biology. In the realm of politics
the same myth implied that the Jew could enter only into superficial
alliances with the host-nations, since, in moments of national crisis, the
Jew would listen to the voice of his blood. He belongs to a unique
species of mankind, a mystical category that is sui generis, an interna-
tional nation.

In the dimension of economic life this myth projected two images
that reflected the same animus, although they were mutually contradic-
tory. In the literature of proletarian rebellion and antibourgeois propa-
ganda, the Jews took on, collectively, the lineaments of Shylock, that
caricature of the heartless capitalist. In the reactionary literature of
those who struggled against the exploding age of industry, the Jew was
the economic radical, the new Messianic enthusiast, who had no roots
in or love for the ancient virtues of aristocracy.

The one meta-myth combined the feelings of traditional religion, the
“pooled pride” of ethnicism, the resentments of the military aristocracy,
and the militant malice of the new proletarian radicals. It is easy to see
that these diverse elements could be given a spurious façade of unity
through the meta-myth of anti-Semitism, though this development did
not appear until the rise of the Nazi movement.
Echoes of the meta-myth abounded in the Jewish world, since writers in the Western as well as the Eastern world were exposed to the same influences that produced the romantic reaction to the liberal revolution. Samson Raphael Hirsch reasserted the claims of Orthodoxy along the romantic-mystical lines of Judah Halevi. His vision of a Yisroel-Mensch imposed the luminosity of humanism upon the image of a unique ethnic group segregated supernaturally from the Gentile world. Even Geiger, the rationalist, taught that the Jews were endowed with an ethnic genius for religion. Krochmal wove a new pattern of Jewish history around the ancient dogma that, while the Gentiles worshiped certain angels, the people of Israel were alone dedicated to the One God. Ahad Ha'am asserted that in the domain of ethics the Jewish national soul was at work. And it was unique, incomparable, unlike that of all other nations.\textsuperscript{129}

Even the Jewish writers who left the fold shared in some of the manifestations of the myth that was torn from its Judeo-Christian context. Disraeli viewed the Jews as not merely another ethnic group but a Messianic race, bearing the seeds of universal salvation.\textsuperscript{130} To Marx, the Jew was the capitalist par excellence, the class enemy that had to be overcome. Moses Hess, the one-time socialist, projected the vision of a Jewish utopia in Jerusalem reborn. Even to Léon Blum, the Jew was uniquely disposed to bring into realization the glorious utopia of socialism.\textsuperscript{131}

Jewish secularism, however, did not appear as a worldwide movement until the year 1897 when the World Zionist Organization came into being in Basel and the nucleus of the Jewish socialist movement was formed in Vilna. From that time to the present, the variety of Jewish self-images did not change drastically. The revolutionary events of the past two generations—the transfer of the center of gravity of the Diaspora from the Old World to the New, the replacement of czarist oppression by communist repression, the annihilation of Central European Jewry, the rise of Israel, and the virtual liquidation of the Diaspora in Moslem lands— all these developments have been fitted into the following spectrum of shades and nuances, marking the contemporary concept of Israel.

Going from right to left, we have, first, the ultra-Orthodox group, which is small in numbers but intense, even feverish, in devotion. Theirs is an airtight world that rejects the underlying categories of the
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secular age and employs the ancient axioms of the romantic-mystical school of medieval Judaism. They regard the State of Israel not as a Messianic-eschatological event, but as simply another framework within which the people of Torah may live or not, as they choose. While they agree that it is a mizvah to live in the Holy Land, they insist on viewing this mizvah within the perspective of the ancient commentaries as if there were no State and no ingathering. Indeed, in their view, the Jewishness of the secularists and the socialists who control the government of Israel is so woefully attenuated as to border on the meaningless. The Torah—and the Torah alone—is the sole yardstick of belonging to the "people of God." The Messianic-eschatological State is one in which the Torah is the constitution, the Holy Temple is brought down from heaven or built up, the Sanhedrin is reconstituted with the help of the Holy Spirit, and the Messiah is revealed. All else belongs to the historical world, where the loyal remnant of the meta-historical people must make do, waiting for the coming of the Promised One.

The moderate Orthodox (Mizrahi, or Religious National Party, or the modern Orthodox in the Diaspora) assume that the concept of Israel is bipolar, national, and secular as well as religious and fundamentalist. They participate in the government of Israel, recognizing the Jewishness of all ethnic Jews who have not broken away from the fold officially and flagrantly. They regard the State of Israel as the "beginning of the growth of our redemption." They look upon the present situation as the twilight between the night of exile and the day of Messianic redemption, the borderland between history and meta-history. They have not given up the hope for the fullness of redemption, but they feel that its course must not be plotted in advance. Hence, it is the duty of all Jews to work for the upbuilding of the land, the ingathering of the exiles, and the sovereignty of Torah within the limits of a modern state. They waver between the teaching that it is a meritorious deed for a Jew to settle in Israel and the doctrine that it is the bounden duty of a Jew to live in the land of Israel. This indecision is due only in part to practical considerations; essentially, it is a reflection of the feelings of tension between the compulsions of our temporal existence and the claims of the meta-historical realm that is even now taking shape. Were not the excesses of twentieth-century anti-Semitism, culminating in the Nazi "final solution," precisely the "pains of the Messiah" that the ancient tradition foretold? Was not the flight of the Arabs from Israel in
1948 a miracle that made possible the ingathering of the exiles? Do we not live in a world where the light of redemption and the night of exile are commingled? If so, how is one to tell whether any issue is to be seen in the sober perspective of everyday existence or in the wondrous mirror of the days of the Messiah? For the present, there is no answer to this question.

The ideology of the national-religious movement in Israel was expressed most profoundly by the great Orthodox mystic Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kuk. While he esteemed all forms of nationalism to be fragmentary and partial expressions of the holy dimension, he considered Jewish nationalism to be clearly and fully Divine, the “foundation and essence of Judaism.”134 “Torah and Zion are two sanctities that supplement and imply each other.”135

The Divine quality of the “congregation of Israel” is not due to any achievements of the empirical people, but to the free act of God.136 But the living people can bring its Divine endowment to fruition only when it is healthy, physically as well as spiritually. “The wisdom of holiness shines only in the land of Israel. Whatever is envisaged in the Diaspora is nothing but the corollaries of the understanding and its branches. . . . In the land of Israel, the spiritual fountain of the inwardness of holiness, which is the light of the life of the soul of the congregation of Israel, flows spontaneously.”137

In the mind of Kuk, the yearning to live in the land of Israel is itself proof of the activity of the Holy Spirit that functions primarily only in the Holy Land. “The Holy Spirit received in Palestine continues to function, even if the recipient should by chance go to the Diaspora, either through an error or for some compelling reason. . . . The more difficult it is to bear the atmosphere of the Diaspora, the more one feels the spirit of uncleanness of the unclean soil, the more true it is that the soul has inwardly assimilated the holiness of the land of Israel and that the grace of the Lord did not desert it. . . .”138

Yet, Kuk believed that the redemption of Israel would bring salvation to all mankind, since there was an inner correspondence between the spirit of Israel and that of humanity. “Original Jewish creativity, in thought and in the practical achievements of life, is not possible for Israel, save in the land of Israel. . . . and this is a great boon for Israel and the world. . . . Judaism of the Holy Land is salvation itself.”139

This last statement is a neo-Qabbalist doctrine, equating the “secrets of Torah” with the course of redemption.
In Israel there is no organized religious ideology apart from the Orthodox and the ultra-Orthodox. The secularists fall into two categories—the romanticists who continue to use the traditional categories of thought, albeit with new meaning (for example, substituting “the Rock of Israel” for “the God of Israel”), and the humanists or leftist socialists who seek to build a state that will in no way differ from other progressive countries. The romanticists intend to retain the bond between the Synagogue and the government of Israel because they consider the Jewish religion to be the matrix of Jewish culture and inseparable from the life of Jews. For them, too, a Jew who converts to another faith cannot be designated as a Jew. They do not necessarily believe in a God who chooses, but they do affirm with impassioned zeal that the Jews are the Chosen People, somehow separated from all the nations, set apart and charged with a Messianic vocation. They sound the tocsin for the ingathering of the exiles, specifically for the immigration of American Jews, partly because they feel so insecure and partly because they can see no future life for Jews in the Diaspora. Thinking in nationalistic terms, they consider the Hebrew language to be the key to the tradition, and the mark of assimilation to be the nonuse of Hebrew.

Yet nationalism does not exhaust their concept of Israel, since their national awareness is forged in the crucible of the meta-myth. By itself, the national ethos does not inspire a process of global concentration; the Irish do not leave the “fleshpots” of America; the Italians are not deserting the sidewalks of New York; and even the French Canadians with all their bitterness against the English and the Protestants show no signs of emigrating en masse to la patrie. It is nationalism plus the protean cloud of myth and mystery that extends to the heavens, appearing as a “pillar of flame” by day and a “pillar of smoke” by night. The Jew feels, in the light of his history, that his is a special glory; but he also feels that he is dogged by a massive satanic hate which can never be overcome. Even after Israel has been established, the Jew is still not among the nations, but unique, as against them all. Certain it is that if the gates of Russia were opened, many thousands would flock to Israel and to the West in order to be able to affirm their unity with the millennial stream of Jewish history—this in spite of the fact that the present generation of Russian Jews received hardly any religious or even Hebraic instruction.

Romantic secularist nationalism is a real factor in the life of Jewish people today, even if it seems irrational to liberals and humanists. It enshrines the feelings of identity that were nourished by the religious
tradition, though it negates the central faith of the heritage. It is a
reaction to, or the Jewish counterpart of, the meta-myth in the Chris-
tian world. It is the equal and opposite reaction to the nationalist frenzy
in the twentieth century. Finally, it reflects the awareness of Jewish
history that throws a vast shadow on our age. Three thousand years cast
a strange spell, like a heaven-piercing pyramid so massive that it seems
to be part of the inner structure of the universe.

Romantic nationalism in Israel is balanced by the ideals of humanism
and socialism that European Jewry embraced so heartily. It is these ideals
that impel the government of Israel to undertake a program of foreign
aid that is far out of proportion to its size and resources. More than fifty
new and underdeveloped nations are being assisted by technicians and
scientists sent out of this small state of barely 2,565,000 people. Scholar-
ships by the hundreds are made available to students from Asian and
African nations. The Histadrut (Organization of Workers) maintains a
year-round institute for the training of African industrial managers and
secretaries of cooperatives. Toward the Arabs in Israel, the Histadrut
directs a number of projects with the purpose of developing the skills of
these people and of furthering their integration into the economy of
the land.

The lamentable rift between Israel and the Arabs was not due to the
absence of a humanist approach in the ideology of Zionism. On the
contrary, the vision of Zion (rebuilt in the writings of Herzl, Ahad
Ha’am, Lilienblum, and Borohov) included the native Arabs of Palestine
in the idyllic picture of a noncompetitive, nonexploitative, nonaggres-
sive utopia. The “exiles” would go back to awaken the East, as re-
turning natives armed with the technical skills of the West. They would
embrace the Arabs as long-lost “brothers,” descendants of Abraham,
laying the foundation for a joint renaissance of the two kindred nations.

That the Arab phase of the Zionist ideology went so tragically awry
was due to a number of factors. The returning Jews were actually
Europeans, in the cultural sense, and “Semites” only in their own
dreams and in the eyes of anti-Semites. The rhythm of their life was
centuries away from that of the Arab masses, while the Arab leaders
could gain standing in the eyes of the mandatory government only as
nationalist agitators and revolutionaries. A generation later, to sit for a
few months in an English jail was a prerequisite for any would-be savior
of his country. Again, the contending ideals of romantic nationalism
and liberal humanism did not move on the same plane. The former
aimed at making the life of Israel possible, while the latter detailed that which the life of Israel would make possible. As Herbert Spencer pointed out long ago: in a crisis, the necessities of life will always prevail over its ideals. The rebuilding of Israel was effected by way of an uninterrupted series of crises.

The renowned religious thinker Martin Buber traced the mystical dimension of the Zionist idea from the dim beginnings of Biblical history to the present day. A modernist and an antitraditionalist in the field of ritual, Buber was essentially a mystic, though with reservations. He did not aspire to achieve unity with God or to overcome "selfhood," but he was perpetually aware of a Divine Presence, a Divine call that may address us in diverse ways. While his mystical or existentialist philosophy is shared by few people, his interpretation of the Zionist ideal is resonant with the undertones and overtones of Jewish history: he spoke of Zionism as an age-old religious and popular reality, adapted to the universal form of the national movements of the nineteenth century. This reality was the holy matrimony of a "holy" people with a "holy" land, the local point of which was the name of Zion.

"In other respects the people of Israel may be regarded as one of the many peoples on earth, and the land of Israel as one land among other lands, but in their mutual relationships and in their common task they are unique and incomparable. And, in spite of all the names and historical events that have come down to us, what has come to pass, what is coming and shall come to pass between them, is and remains a mystery. From generation to generation, the Jewish people have never ceased to meditate on this mystery."  

Buber regarded this "mystery" as an objective phenomenon, by no means comparable to the similar illusions of other nations. In the case of Israel, the "mystery" was embraced in authentic faith. It was given by the Divine Commander: "The essential point is that Israel heard the will of the Lord of the world at the beginning of its expedition to Canaan and conquered the land in the perfect and well-founded faith that it was accomplishing His Will . . . at all times there have been peoples who have given divine labels to their passions and interpreted the acts of violence born of their own greed for possessions, power, and destruction as commanded by these divinities . . . but, so far as we are able to judge from the record, no other people has ever heard and accepted the command from heaven as did the people of Israel. So long
as it sincerely carried out the command, it was in the right and is in the right insofar as it still carries it out. Its unique relationship to its land must be seen in this light. Only in the realm of perfect faith is it the land of this people. . . . Where a command and a faith are present, in certain historical situations, conquest need not be robbery.”

Coming down to modern Zionism, Buber showed how the “love of Zion” steered the quest of Jewish leaders for a haven of refuge toward Palestine, regardless of rational and pragmatic considerations that pointed to other territories. Such westernized intellectuals as Pinsker and Herzl wavered, but the instinct of the masses was sure and firm. Ahad Ha’am, rationalist though he was, recognized the mystical dimension of the land of Israel and projected the ideal of a cultural center. Yet Ahad Ha’am did not go far enough when he wrote of the “power of the historical feeling that unites the people and the land.” For Buber, the bond between the people and the land was not merely subjective feeling. “The decisive question is the objective reality which is mirrored in the historical feeling.” He asked, “Is it merely a historical reality, transient like all merely historical things, capable of being annulled by new historical facts like all merely historical things? Or is what has befallen this people in its encounter with this land, and this land in its encounter with this people, the token and expression of a suprahistorical relationship?”

For Buber, there was no question that a “suprahistorical” reality is incarnate in the Zionist enterprise. He quoted approvingly from the writings of A. D. Gordon, the revered Halutz and mystic. “‘It seems as if the whole nature of the plenitude from on high that is poured from all worlds into the soul of man, but especially into the soul of the Jew, is entirely different from what it is in the lands of the Diaspora.’”

Gordon was a mystical poet, but not religious in a formal sense. He apotheosized the spirit of the land of Israel because of its intimate union with the people of Israel. “David’s harp can only regain its power here in the land of Israel.” And the land speaks, as it were, to the people. “It is not we, it is our land that speaks to the people. We have merely to express and intimate the words spoken by the land, and we say to you, to the whole people: ‘The land is waiting for you.’”

Buber’s ascription of a mystical dimension to the people Israel and to its bond with the land of Israel is based upon two sources: the romantic folkism of his youth and the testimony of the Hebrew Bible. Though he had disavowed the mystical racism of his early writings, he had
continued to glorify the primitive sense of direct communion with
God, nature, and folk.

All who are able to see through the web of romantic illusions must
recognize that if we posit sanctified “feeling” as our guide, there is no
way for mankind to keep from repeating the bloody errors of the past.
The elimination of the context of rational culture from the quest of
reality puts all ethical considerations on a secondary plane. To reassert
Biblical nationalism as unique, because the Israelite conquest was kept
within the framework of a divine command, is to open the floodgates
to similar feelings and similar consequences.¹⁴⁴

Buber did not believe in the literal revelation of the Divine will in
the Hebrew Bible. It is the light of meaning that a person experiences
when he studies the Scriptures that is Divine. Like Spinoza, Buber
regarded the entire Law as invalid, but unlike the great rationalist, he
looked to the feelings of devotion for guidance, and he esteemed
the “mystery” of Israel as a “spiritual reality” that is objective and
normative.

The mystical concept of Israel, in all its variations from the Qabbalists
to Buber, contains several dynamic tendencies that might lead to the
self-transcendence of the individual and the nation. First, the emphasis
on inwardness in the service of God.¹⁴⁵ In comparison with the su-
preme significance of the intention of the individual, the boundaries
between the various systems of serving the Lord lose some of their
dogmatic rigidity. If the whistle of a shepherd boy could open the
heavens, why not the Gregorian chant or the cry of the muezzin? There
is an undercurrent of antinomianism in any upsurge of mysticism.
Second, the projection of an infinite dimension in the cultivation of
religious feeling reduces the finite variations among diverse sects to
insignificance. Third, the awareness of an ever-present mystery militates
against the need of dogmatists to direct the events of history by their
own power and do God’s work for Him, as it were. The overtones of
skepticism toward the affairs of this world introduce a healthy detach-
ment from the plausible panacea of the moment.

As we move from the romantic-mystical side of the spectrum to the
rational and humanistic views, the concept of Israel tends to break along
the line between religion and nationalism.

The nationalists, like Dubnow and Ahad Ha’am, regard the Jewish
religion as one of the historical expressions of national culture. While
there are no radical breaks in history, the creative energies of the people may be expected to seek new expressions in keeping with the spirit of the times. Both Dubnow and Ahad Ha’am were convinced that the age of religion had ended. The Jewish people, who had formerly lived within the protective walls of the “inner ghetto” of law and myth, must now rearrange their life in order to be a “cultural,” or a “spiritual,” people. Ahad Ha’am saw the future Jewish world-community as one organic body, with its heart in Israel and its scattered limbs in the Diaspora. He maintained that this “center and periphery” arrangement would sustain the Jewish sense of being radically different (the meta-myth in our analysis), and would halt the “normal” processes of assimilation.

Dubnow portrayed the entire panorama of Jewish history as of a “spiritual nation,” a people that learned long ago to confine the drives of nationalism to the domain of culture and self-government. He fought for the principles of autonomy in behalf of all minority nationalities. In the interim between the two world wars, Dubnow’s philosophy became the basis of the minority clauses of the Versailles Treaty as well as of the organization of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Long before the holocaust, the currents of life had ebbed away from the secularist communities and all their agencies. The community organizations of the large Polish cities were torn between the two irreconcilables—the Bundists and the Orthodox. In the Soviet Union, the Yiddish organizations lacked popular support, with most Jewish parents preferring Russian schools and cultural fare. It was not the Yiddish language that appealed to them in the first instance, but the ideals and sentiments of the literature—ideals that the communists did their best to undermine. The impassioned will to live as a Jew falters and fades away in the atmosphere of secularism.

In America, the philosophies of Ahad Ha’am and Dubnow were brought up to date and revised in the Reconstructionist movement, founded by Professor Mordecai M. Kaplan. Religion is not a temporary dispensable “garment” of the enduring genius of the people, but it is the crown and glory of every civilization. Religion is the “firstfruits” of the evolving civilization of the Jewish people.146 It should change in accord with the changing patterns of the life of the people, reflecting their collective hopes and ideals. Organizationally, Israel should be constituted as a world-community centered in the Holy Land, where its civilization is dominant, and extending into the Diaspora, where Jews
will live in “two civilizations.” Liberal in religion, Reconstructionism is romantic in its concept of the “organic community.” But, unlike Ahad Ha’am, Kaplan disavows the “chosenness” and the uniqueness of the Jewish people. The meta-historical phase of the concept of Israel belongs to a supernaturalist world-view that should give way to a naturalist philosophy of religion and to a concept of Israel that reintegrates it into the evolving society of mankind.

At the extreme end of the nationalist spectrum, the attempt was made to remove the ethnic plane entirely from the concept of Israel. The Jewish community was simply a religious community—nothing more. This view emerged with some hesitation, even in the ranks of the classical Reformers. Abraham Geiger still postulated a Jewish racial genius in the domain of religion. At the turn of the century, classical Reform was radically opposed to the Zionist view of Israel as a nation. The Jews ought to take on the national character and the specific culture of the nations among whom they live, retaining only their own distinctive faith. Their mission to humanity consists in the promotion of “ethical monotheism.”

Perhaps the most profound thinker among the ideologists of this school was Hermann Cohen, who thought of Israel as the vanguard of humanity. Its religion consists of the glorification and sanctification of pure ethics. Its collective purpose is to help establish the “Kingdom of Heaven,” the perfect society of universal justice for all mankind. Its destiny is to be the “suffering servant” of humanity, since all chauvinists and zealots, sensing in the Jew the harbinger of the time to come, vent their fury upon him.147

Cohen combated the Zionist ideal not on the ground of its impracticability or its utopianism, but because it was a deliberate attempt to reject the noble role of martyrdom. “They do want to be happy,” he complained of the Zionists.

Cohen’s disciple, Franz Rosenzweig, veered sharply from rationalism to existentialism. He believed in the revealed religion of Judaism, not in a “religion of reason,” and he thought of the people of Israel as a community formed by Divine will and lifted out of the course of history—a meta-historical people. But Rosenzweig’s view was remarkable in that, for him, the Christian community was engaged in fulfilling Israel’s mission. The people Israel was like the sun; the Christian community was the effulgence of Divine rays permeating the nations with the spirit of monotheism. The boundary line between Judaism and
Christianity was not along the plane of intellectual thought, since the Divine Being could be caught only figuratively or symbolically within the meshes of human reason. Existence is prior to thought in the life of the community, as in the experience of the individual. Our role is determined by our place within the unfolding charade of world history. Specific functions were assigned by Providence to each community: the cultures of India, Greece, and China to prepare the ground; the people of Israel to preserve the heavenly fire; the Christian community to convert the pagan world. Both communities are the agencies of Divine redemption, since “salvation is from the Jews.”

Rosenzweig based his conception upon the assertions of both Halevi and Maimonides that Christianity and Islam are “preparations” for the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate triumph of Judaism. Yet his view is a distinct advance, for they operated within the context of a literalist faith. Hence, the deviations from the “pure” faith were grave sins. At the same time, Rosenzweig moved within the thought-world of modern Judaism, where diverse religions are so many pathways to the one goal. For him, the being of God was the ultimate truth, and deviations were only distractions that were unavoidable in any case.

Rosenzweig saw the course of revelation in the actual processes of history, inverting Hegel’s dictum, “The rational is the real.” For him, “The actual is the way to Truth.” Thus anti-Semitism, embodying Christian resentment of the metaphysical character of the Jews, was, in the view of Rosenzweig, part of the Divine revelation, as was the defiant stubbornness of the Jew, his indomitable pride in possessing the fullness of truth, believing himself to be standing at the goal toward which others only stumble and fumble—a self-assurance that exasperates and offends.148

Rosenzweig felt that Judaism was both “more and less” than nationality and also “more and less” than a religious denomination. It was unique, meta-historical in the present because of its meta-historical roots in the past and the persistent incursions of Divine grace within the stream of history. He conceived of the Zionist enterprise as being in the same relation to Judaism as socialism is to Christianity. Both social movements operate on the basis of opposing ideologies, but historically they fulfill the real purpose of religion: the establishment of a just society here on earth.149

The position of classical Reform is still maintained by some ideologists, but it is now largely defunct, chiefly because the course of events
The Concept of Israel has rendered it academic. The Jews of the Western countries could not shed their nationality in one century when the Eastern Jews were so obviously reasserting their ethnic character and their determination to reconstitute themselves as a nation. The triumph of racist anti-Semitism in Germany made all theories worthless. For a while, at least, the vision of one humanity had turned into a cruel mirage.

Yet, in spite of his temporary successes and his slaughter of six million Jews, Hitler failed. His downfall served to clear the air and to usher in an era rich, in hope and boundless in promise. The apostles of hate have retreated into the shadows, and concerted efforts are made in many parts of the world to overcome the dragon’s teeth of bigotry still embedded in the soil of contemporary culture.

No concept can be understood apart from the historical context in which it is placed. In the past generation, the Nazis provided an object lesson of the powerful momentum of ancient hatreds. At the same time, the rapid realignments in the postwar world, projecting the vision of a Europe united, demonstrated the range of freedom in human affairs. It is not written in the stars that France and Germany must forever fight against each other. Nor is it written that the Jews must be forever homeless wanderers. The rise of Israel through the voluntary effort of individuals in the course of two generations is perhaps the greatest demonstration of the range of freedom in the history of mankind. Its foundations were laid by individuals from many parts of the world, and they received their inspiration from books; they labored for several decades to realize a vision that appeared to be hopeless, but which was, for them, the quintessence of spiritual rebirth—a blend of hope, faith, and love.

If we should now proceed to project the concept of Israel into the future, we must take note of the following considerations.

First, the continuity of trends in Jewish history. As a community that is constituted by reverence for a sacred literature, we cannot ever dismiss any of the major movements of antiquity. We may expect that there will always be fringe-groups, and by no means only in isolated communities, that will cherish ancient myths and legends, however antiquated they may seem to those who are in the mainstream. We do not have an authoritative body to define the faith for all Jews. We may regret many passages in the Talmud, and we might want to edit some of its discussion. But as a collection of notes and a record of ancient disputes, it
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belongs to the past. To the Conservative and Reform, it is a literary monument of the past to be studied with ardor and devotion, but not as a guide for our times. Still, there will always be some pietists who will insulate their minds from all contemporary winds of doctrine and force their living souls into the frozen molds of ancient times.

For this reason, the entire spectrum of opinions from the past looms as a perpetual pageant of potentialities for the future.

Second, the gradational character of the concept of Israel. Whether Israel is defined primarily in ethnic or in religious terms, allowance must be made for those who will associate themselves with it partially or marginally. In the domain of religion, we run the gamut from ultra-Orthodoxy to total skepticism, stopping short only at the lines of express atheism. In the domain of ethnic loyalty, we have the Canaanites of Israel at one end and the Councilites of America at the other. Ethnic assimilation can be as gradational and near-total as an asymptotic line.

Third, the interaction of the concept and the complexities of life. The equilibrium of tensions within the Jewish community is naturally responsive to the changing forces in the general society. Every flare-up of anti-Semitism is likely to frustrate the liberals and to strengthen the isolationists. Every intellectual movement in philosophy, as in statecraft, will challenge either the religious or the ethnic phase of the concept of Israel and evoke a corresponding response. The self-image of the Jew is too intimately enmeshed in the texture of life to be kept pure and inviolate, “unspotted of the world.”

Fourth, the diversity of views within Israel. The diversity is too great to permit any kind of meaningful, communal unity. Jews will agree that anti-Semitism is evil and that a united effort to combat it is possible. They will also respond to campaigns for refugees and for the relief of whatever branch of Jewry is sorely threatened at the moment. But short of the necessity to combat the physical threat of annihilation, Jews are unlikely to act in concert or even to share a vision of the future. On the other hand, a persistent threat, maintained for a long time, might well call into being an association of organizations representing world Jewry, a quasi-community that might continue to exist for years, by the impetus of sheer momentum, after the emergency has passed.

Fifth, several tendencies that might eventuate in the expansion of the scope of the “invisible Synagogue” and the identification of Israel with the moral-spiritual vanguard of humanity. The strong component of rationalism within Judaism focuses attention on the moral-spiritual core
of faith, the "religion of reason"; in this view, the diverse faiths of our time incorporate this core in varying degrees.

The rites and ceremonies of the different denominations are only so many varying instruments. It is not the instruments, but the manner in which they are used that matters.

The mystical trend also favors the view of a greater Israel, insofar as it deprecates the criteria of ritualistic conformity, and it points to the infinite dimension of religious intention and enthusiasm. The "inter-subjectivity" of the realm of feeling corresponds to the objective standards of the rationalistic philosophers.

On the ethnic plane, the secular version of Messianism implies an active commitment to the task of building the "Kingdom of Heaven" here on earth. This goal may well go hand in hand with the warning that emerges out of so many pages in our tradition—the warning against the varied seductions of pseudo-Messianism. Jewish Messianists are cautioned by their history against the assumption that any project or plan or person represents the final hope of mankind. The Messiah is up in heaven; he is a vision, a goal, a hope; in historic times, he is not here and now.

The secularized version of Jewish Messianism was embodied in the past century in three movements, each promising redemption for the Jew and claiming to be the final form of Judaism in the End of Days.

The first ideal which appeared in this light was that of individualistic liberalism. All men were to be torn out of their historic context and left to float in splendid isolation within the ethereal realm of absolute law. The Jews in France and Western Europe were indeed emancipated by the upsurge of liberalism. As we have seen, to many of our nineteenth-century philosophers, the "religion of reason" was indeed the soul and substance of Judaism.

The second ideal to acquire the deep pathos and ringing resonance of Messianism was the vision of socialism. It was represented as a contemporary "scientific" version of the prophetic quest of righteousness, of the "Kingdom of Heaven" on earth. At the same time, it would liberate the Jews from the historic hates of anti-Semitism which—so it was proven again and again—derived from the "inner contradictions" of capitalist society.

The third ideal which appeared to be the light of the Messiah was that of Zionism. The Jew would be redeemed from the crushing burdens of hate, and his faith would be revitalized in the land of its birth.
We can now say without fear of contradiction that these three secular versions of Messianism represented different colors in the ideal spectrum, but that none of them constituted the final revelation. Each movement achieved fulfillment in the modern world, but each also eventuated in certain frustrations of its own.

Here, then, we have concrete illustrations of the dangers of pseudo-Messianism.

Two major events are likely to intensify the attraction of the movements at the two ends of the spectrum. First, the rise and rapid growth of the State of Israel is likely to dramatize and reinvigorate the ethnic base of Israel. Second, the growth of the ecumenical movement is likely to strengthen the humanist trend in the concept of Israel, transforming it into the vision of the invisible fellowship of all who seek the Lord with heart and soul. This development is likely to gather additional momentum if Moslem intellectuals should fall into line. We may expect some deep and sustained soul-searching among Jews, and this will result in according full recognition to the latent universalism within the Jewish faith.

Will the universalist trend be opposed by the resurgent national loyalties centered on the young and fragile state? The State of Israel is dominated by secularists, though the Synagogue is not separated from the government. To the preponderant majority of Israeli, the concept of Israel is largely that of a nationality united by sentiments of affection and concern with the nuclear center in Israel—largely, but not entirely. The bond between nationality and religion has been hammered out by the forces of history. The nonreligious have approved of the law prohibiting the raising of pigs, or disqualifying the "Jewishness" of a Brother Daniel.

The secularists may embrace their religious heritage in one of two ways. They may esteem the Jewish faith to be an asset and instrument of the national ethos, in which case they will stress the doctrines and customs that confer a mystical aura upon the national being. Consciously or not, they would seek to revive and glorify the meta-myth. On the other hand, they may spurn the manipulative and cynical approach toward the Jewish religion and, in their earnest search for spiritual roots, discover and make their own the prophetic core of Judaism, the eternal quest of the soul for truth and holiness. In that case, they would strengthen the unifying thread between their historic past, their vision of the future, and their bold social experiments that
are designed to follow the narrow pathway between Messianism and pseudo-Messianism.

In sum, the "chosenness" of Israel remains a tantalizing challenge to Jewish people, whether they be secularist or religious. The dogma derives not only from the many-sided tradition that we have analyzed, but from two sources that are perennially replenished: the wonder of Jewish history and the personal experience of the Divine.

Within the complex course of history, the role of the Jew has been particularly conspicuous. His past appears to be unique as the agent of monotheism, as the target of hate, as an object of mystery, as a pioneer, and as a pariah. Many secularist Jews will find in the experiences of their own day subjective confirmations of the meta-myth, which they are likely to articulate in the literary-cultural terms of their day. Strange as it may sound, the secularist mentality has had no difficulty in accepting the status of "chosenness," while rejecting belief in a God who chooses. The resources of the mythological imagination are endless. It would be easy to cite abundant evidence from contemporary "mystics of Jewish history," who reassert the metaphysical uniqueness of Israel, though in all other respects they are realists and pragmatists.

At the same time, "chosenness" is a phase of the individual's experience of grace. As we move in thought and feeling away from the outward appearance of things and yearn for the "nearness of God," we do get on occasion that flash of illumination which is the basic quantum of religion. It is at once a feeling of surrender and of assurance. As we yield in trust, we feel the upwelling of the Divine within us. We are accepted, we are loved, we are anointed, we are commissioned—these are various ways in which our grateful reception of Divine favor is expressed. This sense of possession that accompanies all religious experience is so close to the notion of "chosenness" as to merge with it. To be sure, religious experience also leaves us with the feeling of privation—we know that we do not know—hence, its inexhaustible dynamism.

Thus, personal religious experience, in the case of Jews, is likely to seek confirmation in the rhetoric of the Jewish tradition and in the collective experience of the Jewish people. In turn, the ancient doctrine in all its variations acquires the fresh resonance of contemporary experience from the mystical fervor of deeply religious people.

Rooted in the sacred tradition, in history, and in religious experience,
the "chosenness" of Israel, however, it is interpreted, will long continue to intrigue the imagination of Jews and non-Jews alike.

NOTES

2. De Congressu Eruditorum Causa, 10.
3. The school of Shammai maintained that divorce was permissible only in the event of the woman's adultery. Their attitude was similar to that of Jesus (Sanhedrin 90a).
5. Ezekiel 20:32.
8. The notion of "correspondence," which was developed extensively in Qabbalah and in the medieval commentaries, was probably contained in the Torah. The vessels of the Sanctuary were modeled after heavenly patterns (Exodus 25:9). In the higher reaches of pagan thought, the same assumption was axiomatic—the ritual on earth affected a corresponding reality in the invisible world.

Abraham Ibn Ezra (Exodus 25:40, Commentary) lays down a general principle: "We know that His Glory fills the world; still, there are places where His Power is more manifest than in others, either because the recipient is more adapted, or because of the higher Power supervening above a certain area. Therefore, the place of the Holy Temple was chosen. And if the Lord put wisdom in your heart, you will understand the Ark, the Cover, the Cherubim that spread out their wings... These are the Glory of the Lord."

10. Thus the Hellenizers are described as eager "to conclude a covenant with the nations around us." The Covenant of Israel with God interposed an obstacle to their fraternity with their neighbors (I Maccabees 1:11).
11. On the other hand, in times of peace, the concept of Israel was expanded generously to include "those who seek the Lord," or "those who fear the Lord" (Psalms 34:11, 69:33, 118:4, 135:20).
12. This much-quoted passage occurs in various forms. A more careful formulation is this: "Three series of levels are bound together: the Holy One, blessed be He, Torah, and Israel" (Zohar, Vayikro, 73; also Zohar, Vayikro, 93).
13. Zohar, Beshalah, II, 64b. Rabbi Shimeon asks how the generation of the desert could doubt if the Lord was among them, seeing that the clouds of Glory were around them. He answers that they sought to know the relation between "the Ancient One, the Hidden of Hidden," and the "Miniature Face (Zeir Anpin) that is called YHVH."
14. "The Commandments of the Torah are all limbs and fragments that add up to one mystery. . . He who removes even one of the Commandments, it is as if he diminished the image of the faith . . . for they all add up to the pattern of Man. . . For this reason, Israel is called one people . . ." (Zohar, Teruma, 162b). Nahmanides in the introduction to his commentary on the Pentateuch: "We have a true tradition that the entire Torah consists of the Names of the Holy One, blessed be He . . . that the Torah written with black fire on white fire was to be so construed. . ."

15. "And when the Holy One, blessed be He, decided to destroy His House below and the Holy Land below, He first removed the Holy Land above (Shechinah) and lowered it from the level where it drew from the Holy heavens (Tiferet), and only then did He destroy the earth below" (Zohar II, 175a). This action was in keeping with the general principle, "The Lord does not cause a nation to fall, before He casts down its prince above" (Shemot, Rabba 21a).


17. Rashi, in Hullin 91b: the image of Jacob was that of the man in the Divine Chariot.

18. Rashi, Genesis 1:2.
19. Shabbat 152b.
20. Bereshit Rabba 47.
25. Megillah 29a. The commentary of the Maharsha distinguishes between the Shechinah, as such, and Giluy shechinah, the revelation of the Divine Presence.
27. Menahot 110a. In time to come, the altar that is above will descend to earth (Midrash Aseret Hadibrot, 1).
29. Berochot 7a.
32. Baba Bathra 15b.
35. Hagigah 16a.
36. Shabbat 12b.
37. Hagigah 15b.
38. R. Hayim Volozhin, Nefesh Hahayim, II, 11.
40. Menahot 53a.
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41. Pesahim 87a.
42. Jeremiah 15:17.
43. Lamentations, Rabba.
44. "Woe is to the wicked who say that the Torah is only the narrative, for they look at the garment only. . . . The narratives are the garment of Torah . . ." (Zohar, Bamidbar 152).
45. Zohar, Vayikra 73.
46. Zohar, Vayikra 93.
47. Tikkunai Zohar, 21.
49. Ibid.
50. Tanhuma, Behukotai 2.
51. Yebamot 63a.
52. Ibid.
53. Shabbat 156a.
54. Hullin 91a.
55. Sanhedrin 90a.
56. Zohar, Bamidbar 244.
57. Zohar, Bamidbar 147.
58. Yomah 38b.
59. Sukkah 43b.
60. Raya Mehemna, Deuteronomy, Tetse.
62. R. Elimelech, No'am Elimelech, Vayehi.
63. Shabbat 146a.
64. Ibid.
65. See R. Margolis, Shaarai Zohar, in reference to Yebamot 49a and Shabbat 146a.
67. Kiddushin 70b.
70. Tanya, ch. 1, 2.
71. R. Zadok HaKohen, Zidkat HaZadik, 256, 257.
72. Megillah 13a.
73. Hosea 2:23.
74. Pesahim 87a.
75. Vayikra Rabba 6:8.
76. Tanhuma, Deuteronomy 52.
77. Yalkut, II Kings 296.
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78. Nedari m 32a.
79. Proverbs 14, 34.
80. Yebamot 48b.
81. Baba Bathra 10b.
82. See note by W. Bacher, Agadotha Tanaim Veamoraim (Berlin, 1922) I, 26.
83. J. Berochet 2:1, Standard Prayer Book for Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur: "Repentance, prayer, and charity avert the severe decree." Also, Berochet 17a and 26a.
84. Yoma 87a.
85. Yebamot 57a.
86. Yadaim 4, 4.
87. Abodah Zara 64b.
88. Tosefta, Sanhedrin 13.
89. Ish Sholom, ed., Tana dibai Eliyahu, ch. 45.
90. Ibid., ch. 135.
91. Seder Eliyahu Raba, 2.
92. Ibid., p. 121.
94. Shulhan Aruch, Yore Dea, 268.
95. Horayot 13a.
96. Shebuot 39a.
97. Yebamot 109b.
98. Abodah Zara 3b.
100. J. Bikkurim 1:4.
102. De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia.
103. De Virtutibus.
104. De Abrahamo, M., 1, 15.
106. Praem 26, 152.
107. Moses II, 7, 44. Wolfson, in Note 100 of Philo (II, p. 417), equates the opinion of Philo with that of the Talmud, citing as reference Abodah Zara 24a.

But the term *gerim gerurim* connotes contempt and a lower status than that of righteous proselytes, let alone Israelites. That term is still compatible with another reference in the Talmud that in the Messianic age all Gentiles will become "slaves of Israel." Airubi n 43b.

Rashi explains the term *gerim gerurim* (dragged converts) as meaning that "they will convert of their own accord, but we shall not receive them, because their motivation is the triumph of Israel." This interpretation is in accord with the oft-quoted principle: "We do not receive converts in the days of the
Messiah. So too, converts were not accepted in the days of Kings David and Solomon.” See Yeabmot 24a. In the Talmudic text, the implication is that the Lord will delight in humiliating them. See Abodah Zara 3b.

108. See Tosafo on Abodah Zara 2a.


110. The distinction between Maimonides’ legalistic and philosophic works has been the subject of heated debates. Philosophy deals with principles, not laws. In the long night of exile and dispersion, the medieval rabbis felt powerless to amend the law and to bring it into conformity with their principles. See Maimonides, Yad, Hilchot Issuri Bia 14:7.

111. I. Arame, Akedat Yizhak, 60.


114. Teshuvot HaRambam.

115. Maimonides, III, 28 and 36.


118. Ibid., 23.


120. I. Abravanel, Mashmia Yeshuah, Saloniki, 1526, Amsterdam, 1644.


123. Jerusalem, Part II.

124. Rabbi Ishmael of Modena (1723–1811), a leading Halachic authority, wrote as follows in answer to Napoleon’s inquiry about “fraternity”: “Though the term brotherhood implies natural kinship, there is a unity of faith between the Frenchmen, or the other peoples of Europe, and the Jews. Since these nations serve the One God, each in their own way, they are now accounted in the eyes of the children of Israel as brothers, for we are obligated to deal with them in fraternity and love, in friendship and peace, and the Holy Torah commands us to help their needy.” See J. B. Agus, The Meaning of Jewish History (New York, 1963), II, 330.

125. Agus, II, 338.

126. About Fichte’s opposition to Jewish emancipation and his concept of the eternal struggle between the people of Vernunft and the people of Verand, see Agus, op. cit., pp. 333–342.

127. Toussenel, a notorious socialist, in Jews, the Kings of the Epoch (Paris, 1900) wrote: “Like the masses of the people, I apply the odious name of Jew to all the people who lived by the manipulation of money, to all the exploiting parasites who live by the sweat of others.”
128. The pre-Marxist socialists of France were generally anti-Semitic. So were Fourier, Toussenel, and Leroux. Even Karl Marx, in his youthful articles on the question of Jewish emancipation, maintained that the real problem was emancipation from Jewry. He identified Jewry with the capitalists. It is only in the latter two decades of the nineteenth century that the socialists of Europe realized that anti-Semitism, as the “socialism of fools,” was a tool of the reactionary forces. See Agus, op. cit., pp. 334—344.

129. “But every true Jew, be he orthodox or liberal, feels in the depths of his being that there is something in the spirit of our people—though we do not know what it is—which has prevented us from following the rest of the world along the beaten path, has led to our producing this Judaism of ours, and has kept us and our Judaism ‘in a corner’ to this day, because we cannot abandon the distinctive outlook on which Judaism is based. Let those who still have this feeling remain within the fold; let those who have lost it go elsewhere. There is no room for compromise.”

This excerpt from Ahad Ha’am’s reply to Montefiore reveals the pathetic contradiction between his “sovereignty of reason” in matters of faith and his surrender to what may be called the “sovereignty of feeling” in urging the authority of a sense of radical difference. See Leon Simon, Ahad Ha’am (Philadelphia, 1912), p. 127.

130. See B. Disraeli, Coningsby (London, 1928), “The Jews, independently of the capital qualities for citizenship which they possess, are a race essentially monarchical, deeply religious and essentially Tories. The fact is, you cannot crush a pure race of Caucasian organization.”

131. See Louise Elliott Dalby, Léon Blum, The Evolution of a Socialist, New York, 1963. Blum is quoted as believing that the Jew would take an active part in the building of a socialist state because of the “national law of their race.” For Blum, the Jewish religion was only a tissue of ceremonies, but the real faith of the Jew was justice. “If Christ preached charity, Jehovah wanted justice,” or “it is not an oversight of Providence that Marx and Lassalle were Jews.” Blum felt that the “essence of Jewish thought is, perhaps, the gift for ideal reconstruction of the world.”

132. By the term “ultra-Orthodox,” I refer here to the members of the Agudat Yisroel, not to the still more zealous pietists such as the Grand Rabbi of Satmar (Rabbi Joel Taitelbaum). This group holds that it is a sin to participate in the government of Israel to the extent of voting in the elections to the Knesset. Their main reason is the statement in the Talmud that the Israelites took an oath not to come out from exile by collective effort and “not to force the End” (see Kethubot 111a).

Referring to the decimation of world Jewry in our day, this rabbi writes: “Now in our generation it is not necessary to go searching for hidden reasons, since the sin which brought this catastrophe upon us is clearly stated in the
words of our Sages who, in turn, learned it from the Holy Writ—not to end the exile by a united effort and not to force the End, 'lest I make your flesh free for all like that of the deer and the antelope'” (Vayoel Moshe, Brooklyn, 1959, p. 5).

And he thinks of redemption as occurring through repentance and the works of piety: “For the Holy Temple above is constructed through the labors of the saints and their good deeds. And when it is completed, our righteous Messiah will come, but the wicked cause the destruction of that which the saints build up” (ibid., p. 11).

The first task of the Messiah, who will bring back the Urim Vethumim, is to compel Israel to return to the ways of Torah (ibid., p. 134). The first group of those resurrected from the dead will precede the Messiah or accompany Him when He is revealed (ibid., p. 135).

133. The Maharal of Prague, favorite author of Chief Rabbi A. I. Kuk: “It is impossible for redemption, that is, an exalted form of existence, to come all at once.” See Kol Kitvai Maharal, II, p. 347.


137. Kuk, Orot Hakodesh, pp. 133, 134.


139. Loc. cit.


141. Ibid., p. 49.

142. Ibid., p. 147.

143. Ibid., pp. 160–161.


145. The elaboration of the infinite pathway of the “duties of the heart” was the meeting ground of the philosophical and Qabbalist schools, as well as the preoccupation of the popular preachers. See Bahya Ibn Pakuda, Duties of the Heart, Introduction.


149. Ibid., p. 580.