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Yehoyada Amir

### **Prophecy and Halakhah Towards Non-Orthodox Religious Praxis in (Eretz) Israel**

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**PROPHECY AND HALAKHAH  
TOWARDS NON-ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS PRAXIS IN (ERETZ) ISRAEL**

By Yehoyada Amir\*

**Abstract**

Non-Orthodox Jewish thinkers and writers confront two different layers of classic Jewish culture: the emphasis on deed and the legalistic manner in which rabbinical Judaism forms its deed as Halakhah. While commonly rejecting the latter, the earlier is celebrated. The paper deals with the attempts of several (Eretz) Israeli thinkers and writes to constitute a non-Orthodox, non-legalistic sense of Halakhah that would shape Jewish Zionist life. Chayyim Nachman Bialik's call to form new Halakhah, alongside with the prevailing Agaddah; Aharon David Gordon notion of "Life of Expansion", based on woman's "life perception" (chavayya); Lea Goldberg's praying poetry; Eliezer Schweid prophetic-Halakhic cry. It confronts the question whether such a Halakhah can be valid and sustainable, and to which extent it could determine individual and communal life?

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There must be a new wo/man [*adam*]; for every person brings a new relationship to the world, as if s\he were Adam, the first wo/man on earth. ... With no new heaven, there is no new earth; with no new eternal life, there is no new human life; with no God, there is no person, no human in God's image.

Aharon David Gordon<sup>1</sup>

We do not seek oblivion and the miracle, if it comes, will not save,  
Horror was there and who is still there for the angel to save,  
Our prayer has been long silenced, the day is darkened,  
Forgive us not, God, God full of mercy, forgive us not!

Leah Goldberg<sup>2</sup>

## **I. The Jewish Deed and the Halakhic Formulation**

It is well known that traditional Judaism is a civilization of the deed, or at least one in which a profound emphasis is put on the deed, that is to say on practical conduct as manifested in diverse aspects of individual and social life. Judaism tends to express beliefs and conceptualizations in a detailed life regimen – a thickly woven fabric of actions structuring individual, social and national life on all levels. Thus, Genesis conceives the covenant between God and humanity after the Flood as a specific code of rules,<sup>3</sup> later expressed in the Rabbinic notion of the seven Noahide commandments.<sup>4</sup> In the same manner, the Bible presents Abraham's life story as anchored in God's commandment that he change radically his life course, rooted in and symbolized by emigration to the land God would show him. The same practical emphasis is expressed

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<sup>1</sup> Aharon David Gordon, "Hirhurim ve-hegionot" ("Reflections and Thoughts"), *Ketavim*, Tel Aviv: Ha-po'el Ha-tza'ir, 1925-1928, V, 186.

האדם צריך להיות חדש, כל אדם – יחס חדש אל העולם, כאילו הוא אדם הראשון [...] באין שמים חדשים – אין ארץ חדשה, באין חיי עולם חדשים – אין חיי אדם חדשים, באין אלהים – אין אדם, אין אדם בצלם אלהים.

<sup>2</sup> Leah Goldberg, "Al ha-asham" ("On Guilt,") A (1943), *Shirim* [Ketavim, I-III], Tel-Aviv; Sifriyyat Po'alim, 1973, III, 174–175.

לא שִׁכַּחָה נְבֻקֶשׁ, וְהִנֵּס, אִם יָבוֹא, לֹא יִצְיֵל, / כִּי הָיָה הַמְּגֹרֵר וְאֵת מִי עוֹד יִגְאָל הַמְּלֻאָה, / תִּפְלֹתֵנוּ נִדְמָה מִכְּבָר, הַיּוֹם הָאֶפְיֵל, / אֵל תִּסְלַח לָנוּ, אֵל, אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, אֵל תִּסְלַח!

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 9: 8-17

<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud (BT), *Sanhedrin* 66a (A central obligation all nations have according to this tradition is the constitution of a legal and juristic system).

when he is retrospectively appraised by God not as a pure believer, but rather as one who unambiguously “kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws”.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, once the Israelites were fully freed from slavery and took their first steps as an independent society under God, God’s providential care over them was conditioned not on their abstract faith but rather on their future praxis – on doing “that which is right in His eyes.” God will guard them and save them from “all that disease” Egypt was suffering from if they “give ear to His commandments” and “keep all His statutes”.<sup>6</sup>

Such emphasis on life’s practicality can be expressed and developed in various directions: voluntary or obligatory, spontaneous or strictly formalized and fixed. Jewish tradition has chosen the latter course, in an overtly legalistic manner. Contrary to our intuitive sense, this tradition insists that a “commanded” act is superior to a voluntary one motivated by free will and inner conviction.<sup>7</sup> One can easily trace this legalistic notion to the Bible itself. The Torah, as well as the prophetic literature and Biblical poetry, speak of “laws,” “commandments” and “judgments”. They portray a rich and comprehensive, though not necessarily systematic, obligatory praxis: from ritual to civil affairs; from private life to public conduct; from sexual behavior to economy and agriculture. The Torah reveals the presence of well-established legal and juristic systems even before the Sinai revelation; the prophetic imagination foresees law and justice even in the messianic period.<sup>8</sup> The Psalmist depicts the righteous that never slips or falls as someone who, among other qualities, refrains from bribery and illegally high interest.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Torah speaks of the mighty God as He who would give no-one unjustly special consideration or accept bribery.<sup>10</sup>

Rabbinic literature expanded these elements and intuitions and developed a full-scale legal system, including courts and litigation, judicatory formulations and legal presumptions and considerations. Halakhic experts are the main religious Jewish

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. 26:5. The Rabbinic tradition tends to learn from this verse that Abraham actually observed “the entire [written and oral] Torah,” despite the fact that he lived long before Sinai (for example: *Bereshit Rabbah* 64:4).

<sup>6</sup> Ex. 15:26.

<sup>7</sup> "אמר רבי חנינא: גדול המצוה ועושה משאינו מצוה ועושה" (for example: BT, *Avoda Zara* 3a).

<sup>8</sup> Is. 2:4; 11:4.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 15:5.

<sup>10</sup> Dt. 10:17.

authorities, where many other religious cultures might be more inclined to assign such authority to theologians, priests, prophets and mystics.<sup>11</sup> Jewish sources, Halakhic as well as Aggadic, tend to employ legalistic terms when discussing the proper balance between human autonomy and devotion to God – issues other religious traditions might tackle with “spiritual” or “philosophical” terminology.<sup>12</sup>

The above picture inevitably simplifies a much more complex state of affairs, and is therefore somewhat superficial. It does not do full justice to the essential role of theology, mysticism, religiosity and spirituality in Jewish life;<sup>13</sup> it glosses over the variance in approaches and directions of non-rabbinical Jewish factions and directions; it depicts a heterogenic and multidimensional social and cultural phenomenon as if it were homogenous and two-dimensional. Nevertheless, I believe it accurately identifies a core trait of this multidimensional phenomenon; it points out to an essential element characterizing the many appearances of this heterogenic culture. Furthermore, it can serve us in illuminating an important aspect of the modern non-Orthodox interaction with pre-modern Judaism’s legacy, which forms the heart of our current discussion.

Turning to the modern Jewish landscape, one need to distinct carefully between the non-Orthodox responses to these two layers of classic Judaism: the emphasis on deed and its place in shaping Jewish life and spirituality, on the one hand, and the legalistic manner in which rabbinical Judaism expresses this emphasis, on the other. The latter challenged non-Orthodox Judaism’s sense of religiosity and seemed to contradict the non-Orthodox emphasis on the “self” and its autonomous will;<sup>14</sup> the former constituted an essential building stone in its own sense of religiosity, Jewish particularity and

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<sup>11</sup> This approach is typified by the famous Rabbinic ruling that “a sage [or: scholar] is higher in hierarchy than a prophet” (BT, *Baba Batra* 12a).

<sup>12</sup> A typical example of this approach can be found in a discussion between the sages regarding the value and justification for human life. A harsh debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel ends with a vote, a procedure often used in Halachic decision-making processes. The result is that it would have been better had one not been born (or created); but once a person is born, he should focus on examining his deeds, namely the mitzvot s\he has fulfilled and the transgressions s\he has committed. (BT, *Eruvin* 3b).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Rosenzweig’s splendid analysis: “Judaism *is not* Law. It creates Law. But it *is not it*. It “*is*” Jewish-*being*” [Das Judentum *ist nicht* Gesetz. Es schafft Gesetz. Aber es *ist es nicht*. Es “*ist*” *Judesein*] (Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, 2 [*Der Mensch und sein Werk – Gesammelte Schriften*, 1.2], 762).

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Eugene B. Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: a Theology for the Postmodern Jew*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991, 284-99. Borowitz seeks to balance the role and respect the “self” receives in modern Jewish theology (and should continue to receive in his own “postmodern” one) with the notion of being commanded as borne by its “Jewish” component.

Jewish-being. Against the background of the close connection between these two aspects in classic Judaism, most non-Orthodox Jewish theologies struggle with the inner tension between their desire to deepen, renew and strengthen Jewish deed and *orach chayyim*,<sup>15</sup> and the demand to free this deed from limiting and oppressive chains of legalistic discourse, i.e. from the Halakhah.

A discussion of non-Orthodox Judaism might center on the organized religious denominations that have flourished since the nineteenth century,<sup>16</sup> examining their official statements, platforms, sermons, prayer books, rulings, and so forth. The field might also be widened to include diverse thinkers, authors, theologians, and philosophers, more or less identified with the broad liberal religious sphere, but not necessarily affiliated to any of these denominations, let alone having an official role in any of their institutions.

In regards of the former, institutional layer, it is notable that Conservative Judaism strove, in its own view, to remain fully loyal to Halakhah, while not necessarily agreeing with the interpretation and methodologies applied to this literature by the Orthodox authorities. Although the life reality and religious sentiments of most Conservative Jews are profoundly non-Halakhic, official Conservative rabbinical discourse addresses global issues as well as specific practical ones in clearly Halakhic terms. From nineteenth-century “positive-historical” German Judaism to the contemporary debate over homosexuality, the statements produced by that movement’s seminaries, rabbinical assemblies, law committees, etc. are comprised of Halakhic argumentation, consequences, and decisions.

All the other non-Orthodox religious denominations – the Reform and Reconstructionist movements and their likes – consciously departed from the Halakhah

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<sup>15</sup> *Orach Chayyim*: This term, derived from the title of the first of the four divisions of the *Shulchan Aruch*, was ingeniously co-opted by non-Halakhic thinkers to refer to the ordinary regimen of life as structured by ethical imperatives.

<sup>16</sup> The map of non-Orthodox denominations varies in the relevant Jewish communities. In nineteenth-century Germany, the title “Liberal” effectively referred to almost all non-Orthodox phenomena, whereas the term “Reform” referred to the more radical ones. In the US, the main non-Orthodox denominations are the Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist. In contemporary Great Britain, there are three denominations, Masorti (Conservative), Reform and Liberal, of which Masorti is the most traditional and the Liberal the most radical.



as an authoritative legal system maintained by rabbinic-Halakhic scholars and through legal discourse. They differ in terms of the extent of their declarative loyalty to the specific normative deeds, positive injunctions [מצוות עשה] and negative prohibitions [מצוות לא תעשה] alike, anchored in Halakhic tradition. Their thinkers, rabbis, and scholars hold diverse positions as to the role Halakhic discourse should take part in their deliberation and the weight they are entitled to give it their in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, they unanimously agree that they cannot accept Halakhah as *the* religious authority determining Jewish deed and rituals, and that negotiation with this legalistic tradition must be profoundly non-legalistic. While respecting the legalistic fashion in which Halakhah functions and striving to empathize fully with it,<sup>17</sup> they refuse to adopt this approach as a guideline for the religious life they wish to develop and conduct.<sup>18</sup>

Needless to say, the secular [*chiloni*] Jewish movements—whether Zionist, Socialist, Communist or Humanist—viewed the legalistic and authoritative Halakhic system, which traditionally determined the individual, social and political Jewish life, as completely irrelevant, unacceptable, and inferior; superior was the ways of life their values and beliefs were determining. When partially imposed on such a public by Israel’s political and legal system, the Halakhah is perceived at best as an unwelcome burden and at worst as an illegitimate and obscene coercion. As an authority, it is unacknowledged; as a way to conduct public affairs, it severely offends modern values of equality, democracy and self-autonomy. Though many may accept Halakhic tradition as a source from which one can selectively adopt rituals, institutions of civil religion and individual *orach chayyim*, they reject its claim to authority and to a no lesser extent its legalistic discourse.

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<sup>17</sup> See for example Eugene Borowitz, “Halakhah’ in Reform Jewish Usage: Historic Background and Current Discourse”, in: *Studies in the Meaning of Judaism*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2002, 415-433.

<sup>18</sup> Typical is the Reconstructionist slogan “the past [i.e. Halakhic tradition] has a vote but not a veto”. Such a formulation expresses respect to the treasure of deeds and ritual elements designed by Halakhic literature and desire to adopt and realize in individual and communal life a wide range of those. Nevertheless, it makes clear that this notion is in no way “Halakhic”, namely that is in no way anchored in an acceptance of the Halakhah as religious life’s supreme authority. See for example: Jack Cohen, *Judaism in A Post-Halakhic Age*, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010.

The harshest critic of Halakhah among religious Jewish thinkers was Martin Buber (Vienna, 1878 – Jerusalem, 1965). A total and univocal negation of Orthodox Halakhah was a central element of Buber's perception of religion in general and of Judaism in particular.<sup>19</sup> He embraced spontaneous, non-institutionalized *religiosity* and was highly suspicious of its social crystallization in the form of *religion*. The institutions of religion, and particularly laws and doctrines, are legitimate means only as long as they maintain and empower religiosity. "Once religious rites and dogmas have become so rigid that religiosity cannot move them or no longer wants to comply with them, religion becomes uncreative and therefore untrue". There can be no doubt that for Buber Halakhah has reached this point, and therefore become an obstacle endangering Jewish religiosity.<sup>20</sup>

Such an existential approach, anchoring the Jewish religious deed in the presence and its demands, leads of necessity to a rejection of the various "softer menus" of defined rituals offered by non-Orthodox movements. Buber even rejected the call of his friend and ally Franz Rosenzweig (Kassel, 1865 – Frankfurt am Main, 1929), to balance the will to commit oneself to entire scope of Halakhah with the obligation to submit the realization of each specific *mitzvah* to the selective power of the existential "ability".<sup>21</sup>

Buber's transition from a "mystical" to a "dialogical" approach is well known and widely discussed.<sup>22</sup> In his late forties, and in the aftermath of the First World War, Buber abandoned the Schleiermacherean notion of *Erlebnis*, namely the sense of the divine within one's self, and the positive and mystical concept of *Verwirklichung*, namely the

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Arthur A. Cohen, "Revelation and Law: Reflections on Martin Buber's View on Halakhah", in: *An Arthur A. Cohen Reader: Selected Fiction and Writings on Judaism, Theology, Literature, and Culture*, ed. David Stern and Paul Mendes-Flohr, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, 121-129; Shalom Ratzabi, "Mitzvot ve-ortodoxia be-haguto shel M.M. Buber", *Iyyunim bitkumat yisrael*, 10 (2000), 641-671.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Buber, "Jewish Religiosity", *On Judaism*, ed. and tr. Nahum N. Glatzer, New York: Schocken Books, 1967, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders: Concerning the law", *On Jewish Learning*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, tr. Nahum N. Glatzer & William Wolf, New York: Schocken Books, 1955, pp. 27-54 (see: Yehoyada Amir, *Da'at ma'amina: iyyunim be-mishnato shel Franz Rosenzweig*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004, 289-298. Buber summarizes his critique against Rosenzweig's notion by stating that "one can learn experimentally; one cannot do experimentally, since the deed commits the doer in the sense of an expression of his own nature; a deed which by nature is an expression of specific faith should not be committed when this very faith is not there" (Martin Buber, "Darkhei ha-dat be-artzenu" ("The Ways of our Religion in our Country"), *Tikva le-sha'ah zo*, ed. Avraham Shapira, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992, 95.

<sup>22</sup> See for example Avraham Shapira, *Hope for Our Time: Key Trends in the Thought of Martin Buber*, tr. Jeffery M. Green, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999, 79-100.

realization of one's self through deeds and life direction. He subsequently developed philosophical and theological notions anchored in Feuerbachian philosophy and developed by Hermann Cohen (Coswig, 1842 – Berlin, 1918) and Franz Rosenzweig of the encounter with the "You," namely with a real partner who is in no way within me but rather confronts me. Unlike Schleiermacher's *Erlebnis*, Buber's "encounter" takes place between [*im Zwischen*] the 'I' and the 'You', whether this be a human "You" or the divine "Eternal You."<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, Buber no longer speaks of "realization" but rather of that which one is commanded, that which one receives in encounter as a commandment in the full sense of the word.

This new dialogical philosophy affected almost all areas of Buber's thought, including his insights regarding education, society, religion, sociology, the Bible and Hasidism, The one element that remained completely unchanged was his sharp and fundamental negation of Halakhah. In his dialogical writings, Buber perceives Law as belonging to the past, to the "It-sphere". It can in no way express the present, the "You-sphere" of living relation. At its best, it is irrelevant to religious life; in most cases, it is an obstacle, threatening to block religiosity and to fossilize and degenerate it. He views the Orthodox *Halakhic* approach as "possessive", a realization, though without an actual Temple, of that which the Prophet Jeremiah warned against, when speaking of the false confidence people in Jerusalem had, "saying: 'The temple of God'".<sup>24</sup>

In the midst of the huge system of detailed mitzvot may easily get lost the grand teachings [*ha-torot ha-gedolot*], those that might have been expressed only in very few detailed mitzvot, some of which in our times are non-applicable any more. Furthermore, the objective Torah has totally swallowed the personality, the very "I have set God always before me",<sup>25</sup> that takes place in entire sphere of reality. Rather than fulfilling God's Will, for which self-decision is essential, one limited aspiration is to fulfill His Will with as-if given fixed acts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See for example: Yehoshua Amir, "The Finite Thought and the Eternal Thought in The Work of Buber", in: Haim Gordon and Jochanan Bloch (eds.), *Martin Buber: A Centenary Volume*, New York: Ktav Publishing House (for The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ben Gurion University), 1984, 69-85.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah 7:4.

<sup>25</sup> Psalms 16:8.

<sup>26</sup> "The Ways of our Religion", 94-5; See also: ----, "The Holy Way", in: *On Judaism*, 136-139.

Nevertheless, this negative non-Orthodox and secular [*chiloni*] rejection of the legalistic nature of Halakhah, its claim to shape individual and communal religious life and its inherent authority should in no way be understood as the negation or undermining of the value-concept of the *deed* as a cornerstone for Jewish life. On the contrary, the question of the praxis that would determine the renewed Jewish life, of the deed that would award life with sacred quality and Jewish form, has been an intensive and serious preoccupation of most non-Orthodox thinkers, writers and institutions from the beginning of the nineteenth century to current days. In line with the traditional Halakhic approach, discussion discussed *orach chayyim* in the fullest sense, that of the “prose” of daily life rather than only the “poetry” that might mark festive and special moments.

Reform Judaism shifted the emphasis from Halakhah to the esthetic and supernal quality of Jewish ritual, and still more so to the moral deed, formulated in the terminology of ethical monotheism and prophetic zeal. This shift embodied a submission to the Hegelian notion of “progress”, on the one hand, and to the Kantian insight of moral imperative as the dominant manifestation of human reason, on the other. Reform Judaism was certainly inclined (and is still inclined, albeit in a much more moderate and careful manner) to abandon many specific rituals. This was indeed a dramatic and revolutionary act, fiercely attacked by Reform’s traditionalist critics; but it did not change the central and essential place of the *commanded deed* as such, and it never intended to do so. It is only within this sphere of praxis that it radically changed priorities and measurements. Thus, it could believe itself to be fully loyal to the practical nature of Judaism and to its emphasis on the daily, obligating deed.<sup>27</sup> By way of

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<sup>27</sup> See for example the formulation used by the 1885 Pittsburg Platform of the Reform Central Conference of American Rabbis, the most radical and reformist of all North American Reform statements of principles: “We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine, and today we accept as binding only its moral laws, and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization” (see: <http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/declaration-principles/>, Declaration of Principles: The Pittsburgh Conference, paragraph 3). While abandoning many of the ritual laws (see paragraph 4), the conference approves the binding authority of “moral laws” as well as the role of ceremonies to “elevate and sanctify our lives”. The 1999 Pittsburgh Platform is much more inclined to adhere to Jewish ritual, the conceptual value of Talmud Torah and other traditional components of Jewish life. It states: “We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of מצוות (*mitzvot*) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these מצוות (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand

example, we may consider Hermann Cohen, a moderate Reform (or Liberal, in the German terms of the time) Jewish philosopher. A student of Kant and Maimonides, Cohen was also (as his disciple Julius Guttman has noted) implicitly influenced by the Schleiermachereian quest for “religious being”.<sup>28</sup> He attached a highly significant role to Jewish law in constituting the Jewish version of a “Religion of Reason,” though he also made sure that no-one would overlook his carefully selective approach to detailed Halakhic requirements. By titling the main chapter dealing with this issue “The Law” [*Das Gesetz*], he deliberately left room for two complementary interpretations. On the one hand, the title referred explicitly to his own Neo-Kantian understanding of moral law as the heart of religious life. On the other, he referred overtly and extensively to the Halakhah and its role in shaping Jewish life. Only the combination of these two streams of deed, applied by Jews as a reflection of their religious devotion, constitutes the Jewish religious “share in reason” and realizes that which Jewish religion commands.<sup>29</sup>

Mordecai Kaplan (*Švenčionys* [*Lithuania*], 1881 – New York, 1983) developed a “*Reconstructionist*” approach to Halakhah as to all other layers of Jewish texture. Though essentially non-Halakhic in terms of its concept, its grounding authority and its developmental dynamic, Kaplan’s emphasis on Jewish peoplehood and holistic community includes a thick stratum of Jewish deeds.<sup>30</sup> He advocated a very high level of synagogue ritual observance, Hebrew proficiency, Jewish education, and so forth. For Kaplan, the Jewish deed – land, language, mores, laws, and folkways – was an

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renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times” (ibid., A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism: Adopted in Pittsburgh, 1999, Torah).

<sup>28</sup> Julius Guttman, “Religion and Science in Medieval and Modern Thought,” in: Alfred Jospe (ed.), *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1981, 327-339.

<sup>29</sup> George Y. Kohler, “Finding God’s Purpose: Hermann Cohen’s use of Maimonides to Establish the Authority of Mosaic Law”, *Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy*, 18,1 (2010), 75-105; Eliezer Schweid, “Yesodot ha-filosofia ha-datit shel Hermann Cohen,” *Mechkery Yerushalayyim be-machshevet Yisra’el*, 2, 2 (1883), 255-306; Yehoyada Amir, “Lefikhakh nivra adam yechidi: particularism ve-universalism be-filosofyat ha-dat shel Hermann Cohen”, in: Yehoyada Amir (ed.). *Derekh ha-ru’ach* (Eliezer Schweid’s Jubilee Volume), Jerusalem: The Institute of Jewish Studies, Hebrew University and The Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, 2005, II, 643-675.

<sup>30</sup> It is typical that Kaplan was the very few Jewish thinkers ever to focus systematically on the existential-theological meaning of the calendar cycle of Jewish holidays (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, New York: Behrman’s Jewish Book House, 1937). Among the very few other Jewish philosophers and theologians to take this direction are Franz Rosenzweig (*Star of Redemption* [1921]; analysis of most of the Jewish holidays) and Eliezer Schweid (*The Jewish Experience of Time: Philosophical Dimension of Jewish Holy Days* [1984; English translation: 2000]; an analysis of the entire yearly cycle).

obligatory cornerstone of “Judaism as a Civilization”<sup>31</sup> – an element without which this civilization would neither “function” for the Jews nor exist in the long term.

Though Martin Buber was, as discussed, a harsh critic of the very notion of Halakhah and of attempts to institutionalize any kind of dictated Jewish act, he was simultaneously *the* philosopher who repeatedly and unequivocally demanded full devotion to the Jewish deed. He declared: “Not truth as an idea nor truth as shape or form but truth as deed is Judaism’s task; its goal is not the creation of philosophical theorem or a work of art, but the establishment of true community”.<sup>32</sup> In fact, he would not have been such a sharp critic of Halakhah had he not been so concerned with defending and securing the Jewish deed from its internal enemies who threatened to rob it of its spontaneous quality. and hence of its soul.

I will discuss below some pronounced parallel tendencies in modern secular [*chiloni*] Judaism; although these approaches rebelled against much of the specific content of traditional Halakhah, certainly against its aspiration to respond to divine authority, they fully maintained the place of formative praxis in Jewish life, and to this extent they may paradoxically be termed “Halakhic”.

## **II. Non-Orthodoxy and the Formation of (Eretz)-Israeli Society and Culture**

Non-Orthodox religious denominations played only a minor role in the formation of the pre-state Eretz-Israeli society, and later of Israel as a state and as a society with a large Jewish majority. The basic structure of this society was essentially shaped in the early decades of the nineteenth century based on Jewish and general cultural and political models developed in Eastern Europe, where the presence of non-Orthodox Judaism was marginal at best.<sup>33</sup> This formative stage was only indirectly and hesitantly subject to the influence of tendencies and models developed in Western Europe and America, the centers of post-emancipation societies in which non-Orthodoxy was the leading power.

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<sup>31</sup> Mordecai M. Kaplan. *Judaism as a Civilization*, New York : Macmillan, 1934, 186-205; See: Jack J. Cohen, *Guides for an age of confusion : studies in the thinking of Avraham Y. Kook and Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York : Fordham University Press, 1999, 93-109.

<sup>32</sup> Buber, “The Holy Way”, 113.

<sup>33</sup> Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, New York: Oxford University press, 1988, 196-200.

Only much later was the question raised as to the possible contribution of models developed by Jews living in Arab societies – models of a moderate, “soft” and traditional religiosity that constituted a mainstream Jewish response to gradual and partial modernity.<sup>34</sup>

For our discussion, it is important to emphasize two well-known and widely discussed aspects of this Eastern European tradition whose influence on shaping Jewish society in Eretz-Israel was undoubtedly overwhelming. The first is the Eastern European notion of political parties and equivalent political organizations as holistic entities that address and are active in all aspects of life – from politics to ideology; from education to labor; from culture to art; from health to religious services; from scholarly work to the attitude toward competing ideologies and worldviews.<sup>35</sup> Parties of this kind differ radically from their American or even West European counterparts, and tended to create and design the entire environment in which their adherents lived, from birth to death. In this context, it is clear that political processes and powers played a crucial role in shaping the place of religion in pre-state Eretz-Israeli society, as well as its role in the Israeli state. It is also notable that this political dynamic expressed holistic worldviews, rather than the social arrangements and compromises characteristic of pluralistic societies.

The other crucial element Israel inherited from its Eastern European background is a sharp division between the traditional and essentially pre-modern ultra-Orthodox factions, on the one hand, and strictly secular and revolutionary groups, on the other. The former strove to maintain the kind of religious Jewish existence developed in the major demographic centers of the Jewish people in Poland and in the areas of massive Jewish settlement within the Russian empire [*techum ha-moshav*]. The latter – mostly

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<sup>34</sup> See for example Yaacov Yadgar, “Beyond the Religious-Secular Dichotomy: Masortim in Israel”, in: Zvi Gitelman (ed.), *Religion or Ethnicity? Jewish Identities in Evolution*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009, 171-192; Zvi Zohar, “Halakhic Responses of Syrian and Egyptian Rabbinical Authorities to Social and Technological Change”, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 2 (1986), 18-51.

<sup>35</sup> Typical is the holistic range of responsibilities and engagements fulfilled by *Histadrut Ha-ovdim*, established 1920 by two socialist Zionist parties (*Poalei Zion* and *Ha-po'el Ha-tza'ir*): trade union activities, cooperative consumption and manufacture, banking, education, sport, cultural and religious services and initiatives, publishing house and media, establishing and maintaining settlements, security, foreign affairs, etc. Many of those also areas characterized the fabric of the right wing *Histadrut Ha-ovdim Ha-le'umit*. See: Ze'ev Tzahor, “The Histadrut: from Marginal Organization to ‘State-in-the-Making’”, in: Jehuda Reinharz & Anita Shapira (eds.), *Essential Papers on Zionism*, New York: New York University Press, 1996, 473-508.

Zionists, Socialists of various kinds, and Communists – represented a radical and rebellious energy, a will to free oneself from the enslaving prison of religion, of the ghetto mentality, and of dysfunctional Jewish life.

It should be noted that in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, almost two million Eastern European Jews, mostly the young and the more innovative, emigrated to the countries of freedom and prosperity of the west: Western Europe, South America and, above all, North America. These migrants were by far the mainstream of Jewish movement in this period. The small minority who took a different course and chose to make *Aliyah* [immigrate] to Ottoman and later British Eretz-Israel naturally included those who were the most ideologically committed, the best educated, and the most rooted in their Jewishness. These enthusiastic youngsters were motivated not merely by a search for a better life for themselves; they also longed for the betterment of humanity and their own people's redemption. No wonder then, that they were also fully committed to the struggle against the rotten religious Jewish existence of Exile. This was a holy war against religion.<sup>36</sup>

Between the anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox fractions and the ultra-secular groups of pioneering Zionists, representing the two poles of the emerging Jewish community in Eretz-Israel at the time, there were few who occupied the middle ground. In fact, it was only the Orthodox Zionists, somewhat more modern than the ultra-Orthodox, who gradually succeeded in finding a place and playing a leading role in this society and politics. They did so initially as a marginal, though energetic, appendix to the mostly secular Zionist majority, but after 1967 they would emerge as a leading force aspiring to redefine Zionism and determine Israel's political, cultural, and social course.<sup>37</sup> The non-Orthodox religious movements failed to gain a foothold in this social and political context. For all their impressive growth and success in Israel over the past decade, the Conservative and Reform denominations, that were so visibly influential in pre-Holocaust Central Europe, as well as in nineteenth- and twentieth-century North

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<sup>36</sup> See for example, the literary expression given to this notion by the writer Haim Hazaz (Sidorovichi, Ukraine, 1897-Jerusalem, 1973) in his novel *Haderasha* (The Sermon, 1942). See: Barukh Kurzweil, "Mahuta u-mekoroteha shel tenu'at ha-ivrim ha-tze'irim", *Sifrutenu ha-chadashah: hemshekh o mahapekha*, Jerusalem & Tel Aviv: Schocken 1960, 270-300.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Dov Schwartz, *Religious Zionism: History and Ideology*, tr. Batya Stein, Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009.



American Jewry, still struggle to survive and grow in Israel. They are widely perceived as an “American” phenomenon that is alien to Israeli reality.<sup>38</sup> Although some prominent thinkers, writers and activists of clearly non-Orthodox religious European and American origin lived and worked in Israel, and although some of them secured remarkable achievements in other fields,<sup>39</sup> their religious approaches and insights were largely overlooked. They failed to convince their Israeli readers and listeners that that which they represented in their being and faith was more than a strange sentimental approach; an irrelevant leftover of their previous Diaspora life.

Nevertheless, the Zionist *chiloni* sphere is not, and has never been, strictly secular.<sup>40</sup> From the very beginnings of the new Zionist settlement in Eretz-Israel, its thinkers, writers and readers have advocated diverse attitudes to Jewish tradition in general, and to Jewish religiosity in particular. The struggle to renew Jewish life and to purify it from the “diseased” exilic elements, to employ the common terminology of the writers and spokespersons of the Second and Third Aliyot [waves of Zionist immigration to Eretz-Israel], included at least two distinct directions that engaged in open and intensive debate. On the one hand, there were indeed those who wanted to abandon all the traditional elements of Jewish existence, viewing all versions and manifestations of religiosity as symptoms of the exilic “sickness” from which Jews must heal themselves in order to live a “healthy” and “normal” life. For people such as Joseph Hayyim Brenner (Russia [today Ukraine], 1881 – Eretz-Israel, 1921), the negation of Jewish tradition, exilic being (*shlilat ha-golah*), and religiosity was a supreme commandment, an

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<sup>38</sup> An illustration of this is the attempt by the secular *beit midrash* network and the Israeli *kehillot mitchadshot* (Israeli versions of Jewish renewal) that have flourished in Israel over the past decade to distinguish themselves carefully from the Masorti (Conservative) and Reform movements.

<sup>39</sup> To mention a few prominent names: Henrietta Szold (Baltimore, 1860 – Jerusalem, 1945), the founder of Hadassah and the head of the Youth Aliyah movement; Judah Leon Magnes (San Francisco, 1877 – New York, 1948), a prominent Reform Rabbi and founder and first president of Hebrew University; Martin Buber; Akiba Ernst Simon (Berlin, 1899 – Jerusalem, 1988), philosopher of education and head of the School of Education at the Hebrew University; Hava Lazarus-Jafeh (Wiesbaden, 1930 - Jerusalem, 1988), a leading scholar of Islamic literature and philosophy

<sup>40</sup> Above I have used the attributes “secular” and “*chiloni*” as synonyms. The discussion here, clarifying the complex relationships between the two applies, of course, to those usages as well.

approach that must be adhered to unequivocally in order to choose life over degeneration and death.<sup>41</sup>

However, others wished *chiloni* Zionists to apply a more selective and nuanced approach regarding what they were obliged to abandon and negate when renewing their life and building Eretz-Israel. Not all that which Jewish tradition has carried and taught was to be dismissed. On the contrary, they viewed the essence of healing life and of getting rid of “sick” elements as an effort to reinvest Jewish tradition with vitality and relevance – to empower it, rather than let it vanish. This approach had two fruitful branches. For profound secular writers such as the Hegelian Ahad Ha’am (Asher Ginzberg; Russia [today Ukraine], 1856 – Eretz-Israel, 1927)<sup>42</sup> and Nietzschean Micha Joseph Berdichevski [Bib-Garion] ([Medzhybizh](#), Ukraine, 1865 – Berlin, 1921),<sup>43</sup> the tradition they embraced was clearly one of the national good, folkways, and cultural foundations; rooted in an ancient religious existence, but to be transformed and reinterpreted in a secular context.

Others, such as the philosophers Aharon David Gordon (Podolia, Russia [today: Ukraine], 1856 – Degania, 1922), Martin Buber, and Shmuel Hugo Bergmann (Prague, 1883 – Jerusalem, 1975) or the poet and author Chaim Nachman Bialik ([Volhynia](#), Russia [today Ukraine], 1873 – Tel Aviv, 1934) imbued this notion with a clearly religious, yet non-Orthodox interpretation. Like Ahad Ha’am on the one hand and

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, Menachem Brinker, “Brenner’s Jewishness”, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 4 (1988), 232-49; Nurit Govrin, *Brenner: oved-etzot u-more derekh*, Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense and Tel Aviv University, 1991; Eliezer Schweid, “*Shtei gishot le-ra’ayon shlilat ha-gola ba-tzionut*”, *Hatzionut*, 9 (1984), 21-44; Barukh Kurzweil, “Sipurei Brenner ke-anticipatzia shel be’ayat ha-sipur ha-moderni”, *Bein chazon le-vein ha-absurdi*, Jerusalem & Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1973, 303-318.

<sup>42</sup> See for example, Steven Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha’Am and the Origins of Zionism*, London: P. Halban, 1993; Alfred Gottschalk, *Ahad ha-Am, the Bible, and the Bible Tradition*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: UNI, 1981; David Vital, “Ahad Ha-am as a Sage of Zionism”, *Jewish History*, 4, 2 (1990), 25-32; Alfred Gottschalk, “From Tradition to Modernity: Ahad Ha-Am’s Quest for a Spiritual Zionism”, in: Ronald A. Brauner (ed.), *Shivim: Essays and Studies in Honor of Ira Eisenstein*, Philadelphia: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1977, 135-54; Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Greater Judaism in the Making*, New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1960, 415-31; Eliezer Schweid, “Mekorot ha-mechuyavut la-moreshet lefi Ahad Ha-Am”, *Tura*, 4 (1996), 18-31.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche and Zion*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004, 73-154; Ehud Luz, *Parallels Meet*, tr. Lenn Schramm, Philadelphia, New York & Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1988, 163-172; Avner Holzman, “M.Y. Berdichevsky’s Literary World,” in: M.Y. Berdichevsky, *Miriam & Other Stories*, various translators, New Milford Ct.: The Toby Press, 2004, 3-18; ---, *Micha Yosef Berdichevski* (Hebrew), Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2011; Nachshon Perez, “Zehut yehudit bein netek le-chidush: bikoret ha-zehut shel M.Y. Berdichevski”, in: Moshe Helinger (ed.), *Ha-masoret ha-politit ha-yehudit le-doroteha*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2010, 201-27.

Berdichevski on the other, they spoke of Jewish culture of the need to anchor the new revolutionary Jewish being in the past. At the same time, they expressed not only a deep and unequivocal personal religious commitment, but also a profound conviction that the Zionist Jewish culture and society of the future should and would be religious in essence, in order to remain heavily influenced by the past. Each of these writers understood religiosity in his own manner; each defined the cultural impact of Zionism in his own way. Nevertheless, they all shared the clear notion that Zionism strives for a great human and Jewish revival, and that such a revival cannot but place the human being as standing in front of God and view God as a present partner in human life.

A third group that deserves attention includes many Modern Hebrew authors and poets who expressed a profound search for religiosity, prayer and transcendence that was firmly rooted in the *chiloni* sphere, and indeed in many cases was clearly identified with specific secular cultural and political Zionist factions.<sup>44</sup> I will present this phenomenon through an analysis of selected aspects of the poetry of Leah Goldberg ([Königsberg](#) [today Kaliningrad], Russia, 1911 – Jerusalem, 1970).

This paper seeks to explore the struggle of writers rooted in a non-institutionalized non-Orthodox religiosity for a comprehensive Jewish praxis, voluntary in nature but nevertheless coherent and demanding. I will describe the extent to which each of them attempted to present a call for stable Jewish praxis based on their understanding of religion and religiosity, and to examine the coherence and power of conviction of such a call. A further, interrelated question concerns the scope and life-dimensions of each thinker's "life regimen:" do they refer to a small selection of active rituals (*mitzvot aseh*) and an even smaller selection of things from which one refrains – again, for ritual reasons (*mitzvot lo ta'aseh*)? Or do they address the entire scope of life: politics and economy, social behavior and military ethics, culture and education?

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<sup>44</sup> See for example, Avi Sagi, *Petzu'ey tefilah: tefilah le'achar tot ha-el* [Wounded of Prayer: Prayer after God's Death], Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University & Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2011; Haim O. Rechnitzer, "To see God in His Beauty : Avraham Chalfi and the Mystical Quest for the Evasive God", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 10,3 (2011), 383-400; ----, "Haim Guri and Rabbi David Buzaglo: A Theo-Political Meeting Place of Zionist Sabra Poetry and Jewish Liturgy", *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*, 1 (2008), 37-62; ----, "From Honolulu via Mt. Gilboa to Tel-Aviv: the Rise and Fall of Shlonsky's Messianic Halutz," *Hebrew Studies* (to be published in the near future); Eliaz Cohen, "Zavit ha-r'iyah hi eohei casdi': Yehuda Amichai mshorer a eohim", *De'ot*, 10 (2001), 31-33.

This paper is based on the following dual point of departure:

- (a) Non-Orthodox religiosity is indeed not only an integral part of the overall modern Jewish spiritual and social map, but also of Zionist and (Eretz) Israeli experience. Hence, it deserves a close and critical view relating to several parameters, including that I have chosen to address, i.e. the theoretical power of conviction of its call to establish a formative praxis that would complement, stabilize, and enhance its beliefs and commitments.
- (b) *Chiloni* Jewish society in (Eretz) Israel, which can be taken to include secular Jews, *masortiim* [people with a soft attachment and inclination to religious tradition], and non-Orthodox religious Jews, has shown a persistent unease regarding the kind of Jewish education and lifestyle it has managed to develop and maintain. From the 1930s to the present day, an endless series of taskforces, committees, writers and educators have expressed the sense that “something is wrong” in this regard. Such inherent dissatisfaction invites openness to new ideas and approaches. Among other implications, it suggests that a non-Orthodox religious approach may be found fruitful by parts of this society that are alienated by state-backed Orthodox aggressiveness yet unsatisfied with strict secular formulations.

At the end of the paper in its later stages of development, I intend to argue that a critical analysis of the coherence, power of conviction and communicative quality of such an attempt may also have much broader relevance. It could also serve as a test case for the capacity of liberal religion to play an essential and decisive part in determining its adherents’ life and deeds on the individual level and the communal and sociopolitical level. On both these levels liberal religion has relinquished the claim to unilateral authority, but it has never abandoned its aspiration to represent an “absolute” and “supreme” demand. It has willingly given up political/state power and deliberately submitted its validity and claims to the context created by its commonality with humanistic worldviews. The crucial question it must face, therefore, is whether it can nevertheless lay claim to substantially influence the values, deeds and commitments of

its believers, or whether it must content itself with “decorating” their lives, fully determined by external powers and criteria, with some ritual religious “ornaments”.

### **Bialik’s “Halakhah va-Aggadah”**

Bialik is best known as a poet, and indeed he has been honored in recent generations with titles like “the national Hebrew poet laureate”, “one of the greatest Hebrew poets of the modern era,” and so forth – titles that are of very little relevance to an understanding of his writings. Scholars who have studied his writing in depth have made a much more significant contribution by identifying the wide range of sources which influenced him and the wells of inspiration from which he drank. Even more importantly, the poets, writers and thinkers whom he influenced interacted with his legacy and continued to follow in the path he blazed.<sup>45</sup>

For the purpose of this paper, it will suffice to examine his famous essay from 1917, in the middle of the First World War, “Halakhah and Aggadah:”<sup>46</sup>

Halakhah is the master-art that has shaped and trained a whole nation, and every line that it has graven on the nation’s soul, be it coarse or fine, has been inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and by a supreme wisdom, which sees the end in the beginning. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, it is intent on its task of creating one form and one form only – the true likeness of God’s creature, the image of God in man.

[...]

No! Halakhah is in no way a negation of emotion, but its subjugation. It does not exalt justice at the expense of mercy, but combines the two. [...]

Shall we return, then, to ... the *Shulchan Arukh*? So to interpret my words is to misunderstand them completely. The words “Halakhah” and “Aggadah” come

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<sup>45</sup> See for example, Sara Feinstein, *Sunshine, Blossoms and Blood: H. N. Bialik in his Time*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2005; Dan Miron, *Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000; David Aberbach, *Bialik*, New York: Grove Press, 1998; Hamutal Bar-Yosef, “Recreating Jewish identity in Haim Nahman Bialik’s poems : the Russian context”, in: Benjamin Nathans & Gabriella Safran (eds.), *Culture Front: Representing Jews in Eastern Europe*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, 176-195; Avner Holzman, *Chaim Nachman Bialik* (Hebrew), Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2009; Eliezer Schweid, *The Idea of Modern Jewish Culture*, tr. Amnon Hadary, ed. Leonard Levin, Boston : Academic Studies Press, 2008, 173-192.

<sup>46</sup> Tzipora Kagan, *Halakhah va-aggadah ke-tzofen shel sifrut*, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1988; Shay Zarchi, “Hirhurim al tefisat ha-halakhah shel Bialik”, in: Avraham Shapira (ed.), *Ma’anit ha-lev*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006, 22-39.

from the Talmud, where they each have a fixed meaning; but from the point of view of their inner essence, their meaning may well be extended and enlarged to cover the whole range of related phenomena, whether earlier or later than the *Talmud*. They are two different forms, two distinct styles that go together in life and literature. To each age – its own Aggadah; to each Aggadah – its own Halakhah.

[...]

Many generations and sects of Jews have sinned grievously against Aggadah by severing the vital link between it and themselves [...] Today we have lived to see an age of pure Aggadah, both in literature and in actual life. The whole world is but Aggadah within Aggadah: of Halakhah, in whatever sense, there is no trace and no mention.

[...]

A Judaism that is all Aggadah is like iron that has been heated but not cooled. Aspiration, good will, spiritual uplift, heartfelt love – all these are excellent and valuable when they lead to action, to action, which is hard as iron and obeys the stern behests of duty.

[...]

Come now, let us set up *mitzvot* [ordinances] upon ourselves!

Let there be given to us moulds in which we can mint our fluid and unformed will into solid coin that will endure. We long for concrete deeds. Let us learn to demand more action than speech in the business of life, more Halakhah than Aggadah in the field of literature.<sup>47</sup>

Any analysis of the content and impact of this text should be anchored in the understanding that Bialik's worldview, as expressed in his writings and correspondence, was unmistakably religious yet at the same time profoundly secular.<sup>48</sup> "Chaim Nachman Bialik is the head of Jewish poets for whom prayer is the tensed moment of God's presence and of His death".<sup>49</sup> Simultaneously, "Bialik's entire literary work [...] was a performance of primeval prophetic vocation, translated into literary work meant for a

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<sup>47</sup> Hayyim Nachman Bialik, "Halakhah va-aggadah", tr. Leon Simon, in: *Revelment and Concealment: Five Essays*, Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2000, 50-87 (a slightly different translation).

<sup>48</sup> Eliezer Schweid, "The Revival of Judaism in the Thought of Bialik", *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book* (1974), 187-193.

<sup>49</sup> Sagi, *Petzu'ey tefila*, 142.

secular age”.<sup>50</sup> In countless poems, he expresses his religious sentiment and commitment and his lifelong struggle with the God in whom he yearned to believe. These include poems in which he prayed, confronted the obstacles threatening to make prayer almost impossible for him, or mourned the loss of direct contact with the Divine. At the same time, he was a rebellious secularist who could no longer simply accept the traditional concepts, teachings, praxis and beliefs he had inherited from his parents and on which he was educated. His tense encounter with God was based much more on protest and doubts than on loyalty and trust. He was simultaneously an insider longing to take a final farewell and free himself and an outsider mourning the existential loss of faith and tradition. As well as writing about love and history, about nature and Diaspora, he wrote about Shabbat and the Beit Midrash, and about the wretched God, no less wretched than his believers are. He spoke of God’s expectation that the pogroms’ horrifying events would make Jews rebel against Him and cease to believe in His providence. He stood on the threshold not only of the traditional Jewish House of Study, but also of faith and tradition altogether. He was torn between spiritual and emotional forces that struggle to draw him inside and the winds that were pushing him far away to a new world that aspired to be that of “light”.

So much for Bialik’s inner meaning expressed in many of his poems. In his essays, some of which became cornerstones of cultural Zionism, this strong religious dimension seems to disappear, or at least to be hidden. Contrary to the poet, Bialik the thinker walked in the footsteps of the secular-cultural theorist Ahad Ha’am; the religious dimension he brought to this sphere was much less obvious here than in his poetry, correspondence and diaries. Bialik sensed that his Zionist audience was deaf to religious argumentation and sentiment, and that in order to reach their ears and minds he should limit himself to the secular dimension of his thoughts.<sup>51</sup> His religious thought was thus reserved for the quasi-private, metaphorical sphere of poetry, or for future generations of readers.

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<sup>50</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Nevi'in le-amam ve-la-enoshut* [Prophets to Their People and to Humanity], Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999, 108.

<sup>51</sup> See: Ehud Luz, “Bialik al ha-tzorekh be-tirgum chiloni shel ha-lashon ha-datit”, in: Jonathan Cohen (ed.), *Safot ve-sifruyot ba-chinukh ha-yehudi*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007, 217-235.

This state of affairs is notably evident in the essay “Halakhah and Aggadah,” his most explicit call for a restoration of Jewish tradition within the new Zionist, *chiloni* society and culture. As the essay’s title implies, Bialik explicitly addressed the two traditional central categories that have dominated Jewish religious literature, thought and life. He acknowledged the essentially religious content of these Talmudic terms in their original context. He even dared to challenge the lack of Jewish praxis – the absence of an obligatory life regimen in society that proudly and openly had freed itself from the burden of that which was viewed as exilic, including its traditional life-texture. However, this in no way implies that the new course he advocated was intended to be religious in character, let alone Orthodox.

By broadening the sense of these two central value-concepts and proposing their use as the bases for the new Zionist society and culture, Bialik deliberately divested them of any religious meaning. He spoke in cultural terms, avoiding recourse to transcendence, divine source or traditional authority. He analyzed the way in which each of these value-concepts shapes societal and individual life-art, he spoke of their functional, and cultural role, namely the way in which each of the two – and still more so the two combined – can and should shape national Jewish culture and society. The only mention of Jewish religious tradition is negative: Bialik assured his readers that his intention was in no way to recommend a “return to the *Shulchan Arukh*,” i.e. to the Orthodox Halakhah. If his call also embodied a religious dimension; if Bialik hoped that the new Halakhah he proposed would not only shape life but also endow it with sanctity [*asher kideshanu be-mitzvotav*], this was carefully hidden behind an opaque secular-cultural curtain.<sup>52</sup>

As noted, Bialik did not refer to the traditional Halakhic code symbolized by the *Shulchan Arukh*, nor to the partial and selective sets non-Orthodox denominations might have suggested. What alternative model, then, did he develop? What was the character of the deeds, authority, and obligation he advocated?

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<sup>52</sup> Bialik expressed his deep awareness of the “hidden,” implicit layer of language at general and Hebrew in particular, and of its power to hint towards the transcendent, in his essay “Giluy ve-khisuy ba-lashon” (Bialik, *Revelment and Concealment*, tr. Jacob Sloan, 11-26). See: Zvi Luz & Ziva Shamir (eds.), *Al giluy ve-khisuy ba-lashon*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2001.



His rhetoric is of little help to us in this regard. His claim that his approach forms part of a harmonious continuum, since every generation had its own Halakhah, along with his call for a new, innovative notion of Halakhah responding to the needs and desires of the current generation, is clearly weak and even misleading. The inner evolution of traditional Halakhah from generation to generation has very little in common with the kind of revolutionary steps he advocated. The former was carried out with a strong sense of succession, articulated in carefully-crafted legal discourse and subject to the exclusive authority of the *chakhamim* (scholars of Oral Torah). These scholars and their communities viewed innovations, when such occurred, as a necessary tool for continuity, a legitimate expression of the respect they had to the authority of past generations and sacred literary sources.

The new “Halakhah” Bialik proposed was not to be an outcome of legal discourse conducted by authorized scholars, but rather of a socio-cultural discourse developed by various layers of the renewed Jewish society. Rather than representing the authority of the past, it would represent the innovative energy and authority of the present, albeit a present that strives to maintain its connection to an honored past. Furthermore, this *chiloni* Halakhah is clearly a set of commandments (*mitzvot*) that are anchored not in the authority of a transcendent commanding voice (*metzaveh*) but rather in human sovereignty. “*Bo’u ve-ha’amidu aleinu mitzvot*” [“Come now, let us set up *mitzvot* upon ourselves”], he calls.

When liberal religious thinkers attempted to constitute a Halakhah or a fixed and binding religious praxis, they tended to posit an alternative, soft authority in which such a set of *mitzvot* would be anchored and from which it would gain its power to shape life. In Conservative discourse one would speak about “Catholic Israel;” Reconstructionist thought spoke of the building-stones of “Jewish Civilization;” and when Reform Judaism aspired to a common, stable set of ritual behaviors, it would speak of communal unity and Jewish responsibility echoing God’s presence in human life.<sup>53</sup> Bialik seems to have strived for no less. He spoke of the “yoke” we are ready to take

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*, New York: UAHC Press, 2000; Moshe Zemer, *Evolving Halakhah*, Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 1999.

upon ourselves and yearned for a holistic set of obligating deeds that would shape our private and communal lives.

Nevertheless, he did not succeed in grounding his notion of Halakhah in any kind of convincing rationale. The readers of this article are encountered with a passionate, genuine call. They are presented with a convincing critique of solely Aggadic Judaism, understood as weak, soft, unstable and transient. They might even be convinced of the *need* to constitute praxis that would function as Halakhah and would be strongly tied to the Aggadah to which they adhere.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, when it comes to the question as to how to constitute such Halakhah and what could serve as its authoritative rationale, they are left empty-handed. Having to hide the religious aspects of his passionate call completely, Bialik was unable to convince his readers and to motivate them to take such a huge step toward a new form of life.

Another fascinating question that arises from Bialik's text concerns the scope of "Halakhah" in his sense of the term. Was he referring solely to a ritual life-regimen in the narrow sense, namely the manner of celebrating Sabbath and Jewish festivals, the forms of life-cycle events and ceremonies, and such like? Or was his proposed set of *mitzvot* a much broader one that might shape the entire scope of social, political, spiritual and cultural life in the new environment created by secular Zionism in Eretz-Israel? The reader is again left empty handed with no answer or even a hint. It is quite possible that Bialik himself was not clear in this regards and did not fully realize how daring and far-reaching his call was, on the one hand, yet how ambiguous and vague, on the other.

Secular Zionism appears to have been the most "Halakhic" of all modern national movements. It aspired to constitute a comprehensive set of *mitzvot* that would shape the life of the Jews. Many other national movements renewed an old, largely-forgotten national language and were the well from which flowed a new literature written in that language. All such movements created a new, comprehensive historical narrative,

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<sup>54</sup> For the role Aggadah might play in constituting the Halakhah in Rabbinic discourse see Berachyahy Lifshitz, "Aggadah u-mekoma be-toldot ha-torah she-be-al peh", *Shenaton ha-mishpat ha-ivri*, 22 (2001-2003), 233-328. Lifshitz opens his discussion with an analysis of the meaning this literature attributes to term Aggadah. In his view that meaning was quite different than Bialik's or the way the term is used in this paper.

competing with those developed by neighboring national movements. They engaged in political disputes concerning that piece of land perceived as the nation's homeland. And so on. However, no other national movement engaged simultaneously in all of these dimensions. None of them strived to command its adherents to leave their birth-country and emigrate; adopt a language many of them had to learn anew; specified the kind of labor to which they should aspire; create and design completely new formal and informal educational systems, etc. No other historical narrative and national literature had to compete with not only alternative ones of neighboring peoples, but also with the traditional narratives and literature to which the target people itself had adhered. The revolutionary idea of creating a "new Jew" was to be realized through means that were strictly "Halakhic", even though they were also rigidly secular.

One may similarly argue that the largely secular kibbutz movement and its associated youth movements were far more "Halakhic" than most analogous communist and socialist phenomena. They developed a comprehensive "*Shulchan Aruch*" covering as wide a scope of life as the original treatise: from birth to death; from eating and table manners to work; from education to culture; from sex and family life to generational relationships; from daily life and fashion to celebrations and ceremonies, and so forth.

Both secular Zionist "Halakhah" and that of the Kibbutz movement based themselves on the authority attributed to established ideologies, or in Bialik's terms: bodies of Aggadah. They gained full authority at times, supported by strong and consensual educational, social and political establishments. Literature backed them and provided them with the necessary Aggadah. In other words, one could argue that secular Zionism did succeed quite well in creating in the public sphere, as well as in the individual one, a new innovative joint fabric of Halakhah and Aggadah. Bialik's call reveals a deep unease about the Jewish quality of this fabric. It is in this context that he argues against Aggadah alone, i.e. about a lack of specific deeds to accompany the theoretical Jewishness of the prevailing Aggadah. One must assume that what Bialik was striving for in these early days of the Zionist venue was of no less comprehensive scope, and not merely a set of rites.

Yet it remains completely unclear how he viewed these bodies of Aggadah and Halakhah. What could be the fabric of deeds that would imbue Zionist life in Eretz-Israel with a “Jewish” quality commensurate with the rather lofty Jewish “Aggadah” in which this society claimed to believe? Bialik’s passionate call reveals a clear sense of critique: something basic is missing in the existing systems of “Halakhah” and hence in the bodies of “Aggadah” that nourish them. When he says that our life is full with Aggadah, which nevertheless does not gain the formative power to establish Halakhah, he is clearly referring to a complementary, if not alternative, kind of Aggadah.

The Aggadah Bialik advocates is much more “Jewish” and traditionally anchored than the prevalent ideologies and narratives that formed the basis for secular Zionism and the emerging kibbutz movement. The co-editor of *Sefer ha-aggadah* is thinking of stories, values, and interpretations incorporated in traditional Jewish literature. This Aggadah has served, according to his own words, as the counterpart of comprehensive and traditional Halakhah. When read anew by the secular Zionists, this Aggadah is supposed to give rise to a new Halakhah, endowing secular Zionism life with stable, deep Jewish meaning and serving as a central educational tool. Bialik cannot move beyond these general outlines. Abstaining from expressing religious motivations, he is condemned to remain unclear and somehow feeble. The Halakhah he advocates itself remains a kind of Aggadah, an ideological idea and a value-concept that cannot be implemented in daily life. Bialik’s call was provocative but failed to engender action. No wonder, then, that while this daring call won the attention of readers and thinkers it did not lead to actual deeds, neither at the time of its publication nor in subsequent generations. It was surely provocative, but it was not evocative.<sup>55</sup>

For all its weakness, however, Bialik’s call was not only formative but also “prophetic.” He articulated what he saw as crucial question facing his generation, namely the possibility and need to constitute sustainable praxis, an effective and powerful Halakhah. Jewish Aggadah seemed to be flourishing; only its translation into Jewish action was questionable. However, Bialik issued a clear warning that Aggadah alone

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<sup>55</sup> For the polemic perception of this article at that time see Kagan, *Halakhah va-aggadah*, 95-114; Pinchas Genosar, “Bialik, Berl u-Brenner: halakhah va-aggadah u-shtey teguvot,” in: Pinchas Genosar (ed.), *Ha-sifrut ha-ivrit u-tenu’at ha-avoda*, Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University, 1989, 54-86.

would not only merely fail to provide the substance needed to educate future generations and shape their lives; unaccompanied by strong, stable Halakhah, Aggadah itself would inevitably decline and lose its stronghold over life and culture.

Reading with the benefit of hindsight the endless discussions held in pre-state Eretz-Israel, and later in Israel, concerning the eminence of humanistic and *chiloni* Jewish education, it is impossible to not to notice the dramatic decline of Jewish Aggadah of which Bialik warned. Among other causes, this decline is surely anchored in the inability and unwillingness to translate the Jewish Aggadah, while it was still a powerful component of Zionist *chiloni* life, into what Bialik calls Halakhah, namely a sustainable corpus of deeds, ritual as well worldly. Aggadah alone could survive and be influential for no more than the generation of secular rebels, rejecting the authority of traditional Halakhah but still connected to the spirit of Jewish Aggadah, to the melody and texture of Jewish literature and narratives.

The following generations lacked this attachment and yet had no recourse to an alternative dense and meaningful “Halakhic” way of life. Accordingly, they were doomed to be stripped of Jewish “Aggadah.” The challenge that Israeli-Jewish education faces today in *chiloni* circles is not limited to the lack of praxis. It relates to no lesser an extent to the intrinsic weakness of all aspects of Jewish “Aggadah,” namely the literature, philosophy and history that might imbue Israeli-Jewish existence with significance and content. That applies also to the study of Bible, no longer understood as a cornerstone of Israeli-Jewish culture but rather, in many cases as a burden anchored in empty and meaningless nostalgia, or as that which Orthodox Judaism, mainly ultra-nationalistic and/or ultra-Orthodox, is trying to impose.

## Aharon David Gordon: “Life of Expansion”<sup>56</sup>

For Aharon David Gordon’s contemporaries he was primarily an educator. They sensed very clearly that the man who lived among them wished to be a prophetic teacher and to show a way to build their new life in Eretz-Israel as an ongoing educational process of individual and communal “self-education” [חינוך עצמי]. Every individual should teach him- or herself to deepen her roots.<sup>57</sup> Each should learn to realize the highest layers of his or her being. Each should recreate a natural flow between his individuality and the entire Being [*havaya*] manifested by nature. The process Gordon yearned for was one in which the community [*chavruta*] would learn to create a genuine human togetherness, empowering its members and uniting them on a higher level than that of common interests and practical collaboration. It would be a process in which each human unit – the individual, the *chavruta* and the nation – would learn to exercise full responsibility toward itself on the one hand, and toward all humanity, and hence the entire community, on the other.

Gordon based his philosophy on the existentialist notion that all we comprehend, express and do is anchored in our being and in our perception of life. However, “life” is not a general static given, whereby each individual “discovers” what is out there. Each individual, and hence each human togetherness, is unique: it perceives reality according to its “root of the soul” (*shoresh ha-neshama*) and in order to live fully it should realize what this individual perception reveals and commands. As such, human beings develop two modes of perception: “cognition” [*hakara*] and “life-experience” [*chavayya*].<sup>58</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> For general discussions of Gordon’s biography and philosophy see, for example, Einat Ramon, “Equality and Ambivalence: The Political Repercussions of A.D. Gordon’s Maternal Ethics”, *Nashim*, 3 (2000), 74-105; Eliezer Schweid, “Prophetic Mysticism’ in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought”, *Modern Judaism*, 14, 2 (1994), 139-174; Avraham Shapira, “A.D. Gordon and the Second Aliyah Realization of Utopia,” in: Yosef Gorni, Yaacov Oved & Idit Paz (eds.), *Communal Life*, Efal: Yad Tabenkin & New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987, 130-141; Samuel Hugo Bergman, “A.D. Gordon: The Recovery of Cosmic Unity,” *Faith and Reason: Modern Jewish Thought*, New York: Schocken Books, 1963, 98-120; Eliezer Schweid, *Ha-Yachid: Olamo shel A.D. Gordon*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Eliezer Schweid, “Ha-mivneh ha-filosofi ha-chinukhi shel machshevet A.D. Gordon,” *Iyyun*, 46 (1998), 393-414; Yehoyada Amir, “Towards ‘a Life of Expansion’: Education as Religious Deed in A. D. Gordon’s Philosophy”, in: Yisrael Rich & Michael Rosenak (eds.), *Abiding Challenges: Research Perspectives on Jewish Education*, London: Freud Publishing 1999, 19–63.

<sup>58</sup> The word *chavayya* (< *chai*) was invented by Gordon, apparently influenced by the German word *Erlebnis* (< *Leben*), which was central to Friedrich Schleiermacher’s perception of religion. This term should not be confused with another favorite Gordonian word *havayya* (< *hayah*), “Being,” referring to God or to reality in its entirety. The interplay between these two words is often significant.

former is the sum total of those phenomena of perception upon which science, technology and rational philosophy are based, as well as the person's perceived feelings and his or her actions in economic, political and other spheres of human civilization. Nonetheless, life itself is in no way given to a person by virtue of cognition; it is given to cognition by virtue of another perception, which necessarily lies above cognition and precedes it, namely "life perception" or "life experience". Even before a cognizant individual confronts the world and realizes that he is separate from or an exception to it, he perceives that he possesses a "life perception". He or she is connected to, part of, and a result of that "life perception." Even before she analyzes the phenomena, distinguishing among them and their individual components, she perceives Being to be an all-inclusive unity, an infinite everlasting flow.

This duality transcends the boundary of cognition alone and illuminates all aspects of life. Each individual exists in a constant and incessant dialectic tension between two kinds of internal forces of gravity, forever juxtaposed to each other. When a person applies herself to "life perception", when she opens herself up to nature – to the *havayyah* – while devoting herself to labor and its ideal, she lives a deeper, healthier and more complete life. In Gordon's terminology, she lives "more"; she creates her "life of expansion" [חיים של התפשטות]. Choosing between submitting oneself to "cognition" and its forces alone and living "less", or lifting oneself up to the forces of "life-perception" and living "more" is a challenge one faces on a daily basis; the choice made today establishes the viewpoint and horizons for tomorrow's choice. One who chooses a life of expansion lives naturally; she lives this life through her own entire desire and being. She does not negate the "lower levels" of her being but rather raises them to her highest levels. Through "life of expansion" she implements not only a higher state of mind but also a higher sensibility, desire, and will; she develops her true individuality, rather than submitting herself to egoistic separation from fellow human beings.

The highest life does not base itself upon the aspiration to escape from one's own 'I' into the 'I' of others, or to annul one's own 'I' because of the 'I' of others; it also does not base itself upon the aspiration to hide and barricade oneself against the rest of the universe within one's own 'I' [. . . ] Highest life is only established upon the person's desire to live, to live, as much as possible - more,

to live his whole self, from the depths of one's soul to the ends of the higher spheres.<sup>59</sup>

This is the basis of Gordon's evaluation of religion and its role in human life. He viewed religion as a universal phenomenon that deeply reflects the duality of human existence, ripped between "cognition" and "life perception". Each person perceives himself or herself and reality in a unique dual manner, different from that of all of other living creatures. This manner necessarily establishes a complex and problematic relationship to nature, a relationship that has accompanied humanity from the dawn of its existence and characterizes all its facets and revelations. On the one hand, one feels increasing strength the more that one soars above primitive existence, the more one "conquers" nature and makes it technologically "usable". However, this is also the source of an increasing sense of weakness and separation, loneliness and helplessness, as the person becomes increasingly detached from nature and orphaned from the *havayyah*. Thus, the question of the relationship to "nature," self-evident for all other living creatures is transformed by the human being into an open and problematic query.

Such is the rupture between the person and nature – it begins at the depths of the person's soul and reaches to all the offshoots of his life and all the spheres of his universe [...] Thus, it should be said, as the grounds for the growth of religion came into existence, so came into existence the sensibility of cosmic separateness and detachment within the person's soul with the sensibility for a need, a latent longing to return and mend the rupture with nature [...] <sup>60</sup>

Religiousness, in its essence, represents an awareness of the split between the person and Being; the desire to mend this rupture is the understanding that it is only possible to mend this rupture through a perpetual, conscious spiritual effort. It expresses the awareness that one must struggle all one's life to acquire, even if only partially, that which for all of other nature's creatures is the simple reality of existence. Religiousness is not always manifested in an avowed faith in God; even more so, it does not always take the form of a commitment to an institutionalized religion, with its frameworks, tenets of faith, and commandments. The fundamental religious questions arise when

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<sup>59</sup> Gordon, *Ketavim*, III, 116-117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, III, 121-122.



people enter into the severest disputes, and where the gaping abyss between their discrete souls appears.

The question has many cognitive expressions [...] People ask: What is the creation of the universe? Who created it and from what? What preceded it, and what follows it? What is Being itself? They ask: Is there a God, or is there not a God? Is there wisdom in a highest Being? Is there justice in how the world is guided? They ask: What purpose does man have? Does man's soul exist? Does he have free will? Is there any benefit in doing a good deed?<sup>61</sup>

Gordon consciously formulates this question in various ways reflecting the approaches and “*shoresh ha-neshama*” of different people. The question might also appear in different modes in the light of the same person's different experiences. In whatever way, however, this “cosmic question” does not let the person rest; it affects her. The various specific formulas and even more so the various opposing answers given, are not of real importance. No individual can avoid confronting this mystery, consciously or not, whether or not one provides “believing” or “heretical” answers, whether or not one declares faith in God or professes a fundamentally atheistic stance.

This absolute demand is the source of all other higher sensibilities [רגשים], primarily “the sensibility of beauty” [רגש היופי] and “moral sensibility” [רגש המוסר]. “Morality founded upon blind will, as a blind negation of will, is mysticism, which no normal human mind can accept, or which is merely absurd ... when one speaks of responsibility, one necessarily speaks of a hidden intelligence”.<sup>62</sup> Gordon views moral responsibility as based upon the “continuation” of the individual's life into the other person's life. It is not at all fully exhausted in Kant's notion of the consciousness of an “obligation”, and not even in the awareness of a “commandment” in the traditional Halakhic sense. It is based upon the fact that only when I have empathy with the other person's suffering and weaknesses, only when I view myself as responsible for him and as his partner, only then do I live a true and complete life.

“Life-perception” [*chavayyah*] is the basis of the life of the individual, and hence of one's connectedness to all concentric circles around oneself: family, nation, nature, and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, III, 110-111.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, IV, 120.

*havayya* (Being). Most important is the nation. The individual's "source of the soul" is a blend of the elements that characterize one as an individual and the elements that express the concentric circles to which one belongs. The individual is molded primarily by the national culture into which one was born. Inasmuch as the basic forms and unique character of the nation were imprinted upon that person's soul, one is a product of that nation and its history.<sup>63</sup> Although the individual can disavow her membership of the nation, she can never totally cut herself off. One can live a "parasitic" life, knowingly adopting the national life of another nation. However, one can live a universal "human life" only by experiencing a national life, whether one's own national life or unnatural adherence to the national life of another nation.

Religion correctly and fully expresses this; it is the pinnacle of "highest life". Religion speaks of a connection to *havayya* (Being) and nature within which the organic flow between the individual and the nation is the most basic and primary circle. Thus, religion is simultaneously an expression of an individual and a national legacy, that is, the highest expression of a unique national culture. It expresses the nation's spirit. For the individual it represents the path to humanity, and for humanity, it represents the place and status of the particular dimension of each individual Being. Thus, more than any other national phenomenon, religion expresses the dualism of the nation's existence. On the one hand, it is the deepest manifestation of the nation's particularity, its self-awareness, and its singularity and uniqueness. On the other hand, each one of the different national religions is a supreme manifestation of the ultimate significance of particularity for the sake the unity of humanity.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Avraham Shapira, "Individual Self and National Self in the Thought of Aharon David Gordon", *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 3, 3 (1996), 280-299; Eilon Shamir, "Yachasey yachid ve-chevra be-mishnoteyhem shel Moshe Hess ve-shel Aharon David Gordon", in: Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ru'ach*, I, 345-407; Sara Strassberg-Dayana, *Yachid, Uma, Enoshut*, Tel Aviv, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995, 91-100.

<sup>64</sup>It is evident that though Gordon wished to develop an overall, universalistic discussion of religion in general, he could not but think of religion in way profoundly designed by the Jewish religion. Religion is, as in the Jewish case and contrary to the way Islam and Christianity believe themselves to be, a national phenomenon, particularistic in essence. Consequently, he could easily accept the validity and fruitfulness of parallel "Judaisms" among the nations, namely other hypothetical national religions, but was unable to conduct real dialogue with the actual non-Jewish universalistic forms of monotheism. See his article "Le-verur ha-hevdel ben ha-yahadut la-natzrut" [Clarifying the Difference between Judaism and Christianity]. Gordon, *Ketavim*, III, 197-232.

The national and public character of religion also raises the danger of crystallization facing all social institutions and establishments. National culture tends to give religion an orderly, permanent form and builds social institutions around it: religious ritual, various types of priesthood, myths surrounding the “acceptance” of the religion from God, “eternal” religious laws, and especially, theoretical theological formulations. These may well endanger the vitality and purity of “religious sensibility” and render religion no more than a fossil.

For Gordon, a particularly serious danger in our times is that the sundry forces of cognition will overpower and strangle religion. In general, the malaise of modern culture is that it does not encourage people to activate “life-perception” forces, which should balance the powerful and even overwhelming force of cognition in its various aspects. The opposite is the case. The person who expends more “cultural energy” and who has a greater need for a connection to nature is actually more disconnected and alienated from it than any person who lived before. “Cognition took over in the development of human nature as if it were the sum total of the human being, all of human nature”.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, all cultural phenomena, including religion, bear the character of “a plant lacking chlorophyll”. They lose their true creative ability and their capacity to imbue people’s lives with content and significance.<sup>66</sup> The influence of these general historical processes is especially decisive for the nascent life in Eretz-Israel; they affect the roots of the Zionist enterprise. However, it is not religion that is the issue, but rather its external manifestations, especially its public image and its role in society. The modern person truly needs – perhaps even more than any person beforehand did – a living, changing religion.

Gordon did not believe in a direct struggle for the renewal of religion, but rather in a struggle for the renewal of life altogether; if successful, this should in turn induce religious renewal. The enterprise of the revival of national life has a definitely religious content and there is therefore simply no place for an artificial, cerebral attempt to rebuild religion’s status. In the nation’s present situation, no such attempt has any chance of succeeding. However, the new sensibilities that the enterprise of revival will

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, IV, 52.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, IV, 68.

engender do possess the needed strength. Thus, they will in any case change religion's status, that is, the status of the rooted national religion that is not dependent upon its external appearance or fossilized social institutions.

What is this Judaism, which Gordon wishes to rejuvenate? What kind of praxis (or in Bialik's terminology: Halakhah) can and should it constitute?

As with any other national religion, it expresses the "root of the soul" of the Jewish people and its unique "life-perception". Consequently, one cannot base its description primarily on conceptual definitions in the realm of theology or law, or on the social institutions that it fashions. They describe in mere "cognitive" language religion's outer manifestations, but in no way distill its essence. What they often express is precisely institutionalized religion's decline and attrition, rather than its vitality. Moreover, the present condition of our national life contains no sufficient "life-perception" to enable us to experience Judaism fully. This will only become possible – and then it will be no less than imperative – through national revival of the people of Israel, through a nation newly created, and through its renewed connection to nature and *havayya* (Being).

Nevertheless, one can offer some outlines.<sup>67</sup> As stated above, religion represents the awareness of the unity between the person and nature. Its pinnacle is the national religion, which reveals that the "religious relationship" belongs to the entire nation. However, the nation is only part of humanity and nature. Therefore, religion's true and complete expression can only be monotheism, which includes the person and the nation in this comprehensive unity:

The highest union between an individual and his inner self, as between a person and another member of his nationality, as between nations, and accordingly: between members of different nations, and similarly between a human being and nature with all that lives and exists – this the highest responsibility can only be attained by religion when it reaches the understanding of one absolutely unique and invisible God. Only a religion that has attained, or is about to attain such a level of highest understanding can achieve ideals, such as: "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself", "Nation will not lift up sword against nation", "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb," "For the earth shall be full of the

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<sup>67</sup> Einat Ramon, *Chayyim chadashim*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007, 193-229; Ron Margolin, "Ha-kemi'ha la-ru'ach: datiyyut yisra'elit beli mechuyyavut hilkhaitit," *De'ot*, 40 (2008), 8-11.

knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”; and on another level, the level of responsibility can comprehend: “You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy”.<sup>68</sup>

Biblical national monotheism is *the* manifestation of religion that fully implements the ideal religious relationship and reveals its complexity. It truly expresses the particularistic dimension in the nation’s life, namely its share in humanity. The Biblical prophets’ universalistic messianic visions and their uncompromising demand to base one’s life entirely upon holiness express the heart of Judaism’s orientation. Such a demand can only be an expression of absolute religiosity, that is, of monotheism, which proclaims that the human being is created in the image of one God. In itself, this demand is “Jewish” only in its historical origin; its essence is universal. Judaism is unique only in the singular manner in which it expresses and realizes this demand. This manner, reflecting the particular spirit of the Jewish people, is truly revealed only through introspection and complete empathy with Jewish existence, and not through the scientific research of Jewish sources. The crux of Judaism’s call is to strive for complete internal harmony between the body and the soul, and external harmony among the individual, the nation, nature, and the *havayya*. Creation of humanity “in God’s image” is the central demand Judaism places before human existence. God’s image is not “given” to a person, but rather is a command one receives. A human being possesses cognition, which differentiates and detaches him or her from nature. From the moment of creation, human existence is forged with the aspiration and demand to overcome the rupture – to live in the image of nature’s life and to develop absolute responsibility towards nature and all that is created in its image. The demand for this all-inclusive union is the central characteristic of the Bible, that is, of the spirit revealed in the Jewish people; not a theoretical unity or a dogma, but rather the way in which the Jewish people should act and live.

The revival of Judaism means the revival of the people’s creative energies and of its renewed rootedness in its own soil and nature. This revival, if it occurs, will necessarily be followed by the revival of the great religious demand for a “life of expansion” in God’s image: as individuals, as a society, and as a nation. The actual expressions of such a

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, III, 129; Gordon cites Lev. 19:18; Is. 2:4; 11:6; 11:9.

renewed Jewish demand will then be “contracted” (brought down to earth and concretely manifested) by renewed forms of Jewish religious tradition:

Have we asked ourselves, what does religion signify ... for man’s soul? Specifically, what is the religion of Israel, the national spirit’s creation, for the Jewish soul? ... Is it possible, is it thinkable, that such a force [that maintained and strengthened us in the exile - Y.A.] is composed of the imaginary delusions and spiritual madness of an ignorant soul, with no basic valid core? Was the accepted opinion that the loss of a basis for blind faith will also cause a loss of religion’s basis sufficiently examined and weighed; was it sufficiently based in logic and the human soul?<sup>69</sup>

Not only did the “religious sensibility” have a central role in the renewal of the Jewish people and nation; also the historical religion, which expressed the written tradition in ceremonies and holidays. Of course, Gordon cannot and does not want to accept this religion in its Orthodox form; certainly, he cannot accept it as divine revelation. Much must be radically changed; some must be fully eliminated; all must be renewed. However, this very renewal cannot take place in a vacuum; it must draw upon and be grounded in the past.

As an educator and a theoretician of education, Gordon put decisive emphasis on the constant tension between a “life of contraction”, ruled by cognition and its lower powers alone and a “life of expansion” directed and fertilized by “life-perception” and its higher powers. Each day and each hour, the individual and the nation must choose between “forces of contraction” and those of expansion, between deterministic dependency and freedom, between egoism and responsibility. Whoever decides in favor of a “life of expansion” and lives accordingly develops “higher sensibilities” and “higher thoughts” that one previously could not even imagine. These higher sensibilities and thought will henceforth determine the horizons and point of departure for future decisions to expand life or to contract it. This is the significance of the Zionist endeavor seeking to renew the nation’s life. In 1920, Gordon addressed a Zionist political audience:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, V, 214-216.

We have come in the name of a creation for which there is no precedent, something that we can only point to and hint at: here you have a source for thoughts that have not yet been thought, for sensibilities that have not yet been sensed, for a life that has not yet been lived.<sup>70</sup>

He and his audience are embarking upon this enterprise of revival. Only a new life, which they strive to create and fashion through their present decisions and thoughts, will open them to new thoughts, sensibilities, and higher dimensions of life that in turn will fashion the challenges of tomorrow. One can already indicate the direction and work forwards it. The “destination” will always remain beyond the horizon, which keeps receding, as the human action moves and draws the person along.

The main arena for this process is the ongoing self-education to which each individual, and especially educators, should devote themselves. However, the decision to live a “life of expansion” surpasses the very nature of this individuality. It brings the individual to a merger with the family, nation, and nature. More important, whoever lives such a life does not merely participate in fashioning the nation; she or he is also fashioned by it. Hence, the nation plays a role also in the individual’s basic decisions. True, even regardless of the nation’s condition the individual can and should make the basic decision in favor of a “life of expansion” and be engaged in self-education. Nonetheless, the individual does not have the power to fully and thoroughly develop this life when the nation is rootless and exiled, when it is alienated from the “root of its soul” and from the terrain to which it belongs, when it cannot live its essence, when it is not rooted through this national life in humanity. Not only is the individual the object of this self-education, but the nation as well.

This is especially true in connection with the Zionist enterprise of national revival and its religious connotations. *Chalutziyut* (pioneering Zionist activity) was based upon many individual decisions: to immigrate to Eretz-Israel, to adhere to the Hebrew language, to dedicate oneself to the ideal and daily demanding reality of “labor”, and to devote all one’s energy to this. Nevertheless, these decisions alone are only the first steps on the path, both for the individual and the nation. This is Zionism’s main aim. “The

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, II, 33; see Gad Ofaz “Yetzirat ‘am adam’: ha-utopia ha-leumit shel Aharon David Gordon, *Hatzionut*, XV (1990), 55-75.

mainspring is the nation. The nation's revival precedes the redemption of the land of Israel. We place everything upon the people".<sup>71</sup> Only the fruits of the nation's renewal can nourish the renewal of the individual Jew's life, and can give his or her self-education its full significance and depth.

The desired Jewish Zionist praxis must therefore be a dynamically evolving one. Only life-renewal, when accomplished, will renew Jewish religion; one cannot know or even fully imagine in advance the form it will take. All one can do and all one should strive for in that early stage of the Zionist enterprise are merely partial, hesitant steps toward a holistic, multi-dimensional approach to be revealed through that process of individual and national renewal. Furthermore, at its best it would never be a fixed, "eternal" law, namely a kind of Halakhah in the conventional Orthodox sense of the word, but a gushing fountain of deeds and responsibilities, of connectedness to the Jewish heritage and of forms of social engagement. It would determine the Jewish togetherness in and around Eretz-Israel, and would express the unique share of this people, parallel with the unique share of each people, in humanity. In accordance with the literal meaning of the word Halakhah, it should be a path in which one walk; it would shape a common landscape through which various individuals and communities take their courses and determine their particularity and responsibility.

Gordon's own life exemplifies the move from Orthodox Halakhah to a new demanding and highly religious form of Jewish life: physical labor, self-education, negotiation with major Jewish sources and practices, etc. The notion of responsibility embedded in his concept of "life of expansion" certainly portrays the desired praxis as a holistic one, covering all layers of individual, social and political life. He was a "prophet" who fully realized his prophecy in his individual life and in his demands from his listeners. As discussed, Gordon believed that a renewal of Jewish religion, and hence of Jewish religious deed, can occur only in the context of an overall renewal of Jewish life; in that context it would occur automatically. The question to what extent and in which forms Zionism has actually succeeded in renewing the life of the Jewish people, or even of those Jews who have chosen to live in Israel, should remain open here. Nevertheless, it

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, II, 33.



is clear that Jewish religion was not renewed and did not flourish – in the sense Gordon was longing for and anticipating – to the extent that it could develop a clear and acceptable Jewish pattern of action relevant to the lives of his disciples.

Very much like Bialik's call, one might well see his "prophecy" as fully relevant and promising for those who wish to develop a notion of stable, valuable Jewish life in a non-Orthodox context, secular and liberal-religious alike. Gordon's thought is highly "Halakhic" in nature, anchored in demand to establish a thick, holistic fabric of deeds. Nevertheless, the "Halakhah" he envisions for future generations, that which will mark the life of Jews fully celebrating the renewed Jewish religion as a supreme layer of their renewed life in Eretz-Israel, remains, very much like Bialik's, no more than a kind of "Aggadah". a challenge and a question-mark rather than a clear path. Both "prophecies" from the early days of the Eretz-Israeli Jewish existence need a concrete and well-grounded interpretation in order to take part in the struggle for the way twenty-first century Jewish Israeli society would design its directions.

### **Leah Goldberg: The Praying Poet**<sup>72</sup>

Contrary to the various models of *chiloni*-religious being, Goldberg seems to be, on many layers of her life, strictly *chiloni*. She grew up in a secular-socialist home in Kaunas, Lithuania and studied in secular-Zionist Hebrew-speaking gymnasia. Before her *Aliyah* (immigration) to Eretz-Israel (1935), and even more so thereafter, her affiliation was with the hardcore of secular socialist-Zionist factions. Though never a member of any party, she was engaged with the literary and cultural organs of the Zionist Labor Movement: the Histadrut newspapers *Davar*, and its weekly children's edition, *Davar li-Yeladim*, which she co-edited for many years; *Al ha-Mishmar*, the organ of Mapam (the United Workers' Party), the most profoundly secular and socialist of all the Zionist parties.

Her prose, in many cases of semi-autobiographic nature, was profoundly *chiloni* Jewish. The viewpoint prevailing in most of her prose is that of the European Zionist Jew

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<sup>72</sup> For general discussions of Goldberg's life and work see: Amia Lieblich, *Learning about Lea*, London: Athena Press, 2003; Hamutal Bar Yossef, *Leah Goldberg*, Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2012; Tuvia Rübner, *Leah Goldberg: Monograph*, Tel Aviv: Sifriyyat Po'alim & Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1980.

heavily integrated in local culture and society. One may find, of course also non-Jewish figures, perspectives, and viewpoints in her stories; the same applies to religious ones, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. However, these are no more than elements serving the Jewish *chiloni* fabric. An overview of her diaries<sup>73</sup> gives the same impression. Very rarely, though deeply and significantly, does she discuss religious matters and issues of faith [*emunah*]. The overwhelming majority of the entries, ideas and events she reports in the diaries from various periods of her life profoundly secular in nature.

The same is true for Goldberg's scholarly work and her theoretical and ideological essays. They seem to be much more of "cosmopolitan" nature, commonly based on and referring to European culture, than those of many of her Israeli contemporaries. A typical example is her famous essay, published in 1938, which she titled "*Ha-ometz le-chulin*" [The Courage to (cling to) Secularity].<sup>74</sup> Facing the rise of Nazism and its admiration of the "festive personality," she desperately advocates secularity as the only way one might save humanity and humanism. She ends the essay saying:

Those who betrayed secularity and crowned the "festive personality" sinned with their impatience and lack of courage. Almost all of Europe participated in the flood of this fraudulent solution. The free authors, still laboring to disassemble the machine in order to find one day the great human synthesis, lose one by one – homeland, working conditions and followers. But all of those who still treasure human's fate and future, those who did not through impatience lose their capacity to think, will follow them and bless them with one blessing, the blessing of our time: the courage to [cling to] secularity!<sup>75</sup>

The only hope to find the "great human synthesis" and to create a better, humanized social environment is to take the hard course secularity, the Sisyphean labor of analyzing human nature as a "machine", to detach from sentimental admiration of the 'personality' and its false greatness. In the shade of threat of war and destruction, Goldberg speaks here of secular redemption.

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<sup>73</sup> Leah Goldeberg, *Yomanei Leah Goldberg* [Leah Goldberg's Diaries], ed. Rachel & Arie Aharoni, Tel Aviv: Sifriyyat Po'alim, 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Leah Goldberg, "Ha-ometz le-chulin", *Ha-ometz le-chulin: bechinot u-te'amim be-sifrutenu ha-chadashah*, ed. Avraham .B. Yaffe, Tel Aviv: Sifriyyat Po'alim, 1976, 165-170.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

She is in no way on the threshold of the religious world, its institutions and discourse, like Bialik; neither does she anticipate or desire any kind of revival of Jewish religion, like Gordon. She even does not advocate a dense fabric of “Judaism as culture” in the way Eliezer Schweid will do in one of his early writings I will discuss at length. She is planted in the secular world: her Jewishness is secular, and so is her Zionism.

Nevertheless, Goldberg’s poetry reveals an intimate religious layer of her personality that is almost completely neglected or concealed in the other genres of her work. She is a praying poet. Much of her poetry consists of prayers and negotiation with the desperate need and the quest to pray. Many poems are explicit prayers to God, very commonly referred to as “my God”; in other praying-poems the Divine addressee is less explicit, and somewhat intertwined with earthly, human addressees. Some poems take prayer [*tefilah*] as their theme; in many others, across the entire range of themes addressed by her poetry, she simply prays.<sup>76</sup>

The main potential obstacle threatening to block her way towards prayer is her difficulty with the issue of *emunah*, namely the theoretical layer of faith in God, presumed and expressed by the very act of religious prayer. Goldberg rarely speaks of this theme. However, the few places in her poetry and her diaries where she does so are significant, faithful and thought-full.

At the age of sixteen, she wrote in her diary, under the impression of a statement made by her teacher’s confession of belief in God; the teacher she was unilaterally in love with:

How happy is he who has his God; he does not have to look for Him. How happy also is he who believes that there is no God, and indeed that he has no need of Him. I, I know nothing. I am miserable. I need some *emunah*. I shall not be able to live without such. However, I am a skeptic, and therefore I feel cold.<sup>77</sup>

This existential need for *emunah*, without which Goldberg cannot live, as well as the obstruction her skeptical reason build against it, are in no way just an expression of a stormy search of a teenager. Thirty-five years later, in 1962, she writes in a poem, “For

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<sup>76</sup> Sagi refers briefly to Goldberg as a “wounded of prayer”; that to say, as one who strives to pray to the God experienced as “dead”. He seems to underestimate her living posture of God she actually “believes in” (Sagi, *Petzu'ei tefilah*).

<sup>77</sup> Goldberg, *Diaries*, 135 (entry from December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1927).

one who does not believe / it's hard to live this year - /the fields ask for blessing/ the sea asks for faith/and you – you ask for nothing”.<sup>78</sup> Ten years earlier she publishes a poem titled “Pitz’ey Ohev” (Wounds of the Lover) in memory of the poet Avraham (Sonne) Ben Yitzhak ( [Przemysł](#), [Galicia](#), 1883 – Hod Hasharon, Israel, 1950); again a person she desperately loved, who expressed deep, univocal belief in God.<sup>79</sup> In the poem’s third verse, she writes:

Indeed, I was among the infidels,	אָכֵן, חִלְקֵי הָיָה עִם הַכּוֹפְרִים,
For a cruel God tortured me	כִּי אֱלֹהִים אַכְזָר אוֹתִי עָנָה
And gave me a heart empty of <i>emunah</i>	וְלֵב נָתַן בִּי רֵיק מְאֻמוֹנָה
Yet ready for all torments.	אָבֵל נְכוֹן לְכָל הַיְסוּרִים.

And when my poor spirit surrendered to you,	וְעַת רוּחִי הִדֵּל לְךָ נִכְנַע,
To your eyes’ purity and your look’s beauty,	לְתֵם-עֵינֶיךָ וְלִיפֵי-דְמוּתְךָ,
It was not lit in the fire of your belief,	הוּא לֹא נִצַּת בְּאֵשׁ אֱמוּנָתְךָ,
It was not saved from the poison of reason.	הוּא לֹא נִצַּל מִרַעַל הַתְּבוּנָה.

And when we stood together, painful	וּבְעַמְדָנוּ יַחַד כּוֹאֲבִים
At the bedside of a sick generation, day and night,	עַל עֶרֶשׂ דוֹר חוֹלָה יוֹמָם וְלַיִל,
And its corps misshapen and ugly,	וּגְוִיָתוֹ מְשֻׁחָתֶת וּמְכַעֲרֶת,

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<sup>78</sup> Goldbeberg, *Shirim*, III, 52; Lea Goldberg, *Selected Poetry and Drama*, tr. and ed. Rachel Tzvia Back [poetry] & T. Carmi [drama], New Milford, Ct.: The Toby Press, 2005, 149.

<sup>79</sup> Leah Goldberg, “Pegisha im meshorer” (Encounter with a Poet), *Prosa [Ketavim, IV]*, ed. David Hanegbi, Tel Aviv: Sifriyyat Po’alim, 1972, 275-325.

My heart sorrowed, remained godless and did not  
imagine

דָּאָב לְבִי, כָּפַר וְלֹא פָּלַל

That it would heal, grow, gain splendor

כִּי יִחְלִים, יִגְדֵל, יִלְבַּשׁ תְּפָאֶרֶת

And above its head stars will shine.

וְעַל רֵאשׁוֹ יִנְצוּ כּוֹכָבִים.

In light of the full-hearted *emunah* of the diseased beloved poet, Goldberg presents her deeply ambivalent attachment to *emunah*. She was one of the infidels, the ungodly (כּוֹפְרִים). Her heart is empty of *emunah*. Even the fire of *emunah*, so passionately expressed by the one she loved and surrendered to, could not lighten her heart with the same kind of flames. It was poisonous reason that prevented it from surrendering also to *emunah*. Nevertheless, at the same time, this very heart is the heart that God – cruel, torturing God – gave her; though empty of *emunah*, it is fully open to the torments the torments that would not let this heart remain indifferent to the call of *emunah*. Moreover, in the last lines there is a turn. At that past moment in which she and the diseased were standing together at the bedside of the sick, corrupted generation, her heart did not but sorrow; it stuck indeed to its ungodly, reasonable position. Lacking the power to imagine and hope for,<sup>80</sup> her heart could not anticipate a process of new growth and healing. However, she hints that that is precisely what she is experiencing now. The splendor her heart is gaining, the stars that shine above it, hint to new perspectives she dares now to open herself to, substantially different than those determined by suborn rejection of *emunah* (כּפִירָה), with which her text opens.

This heretical worldview is a main obstacle her prayer must overcome. In 1957, three years after her visit to the USSR, Goldberg expressed a decisive shift in her evaluation of

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<sup>80</sup> The Hebrew word *pilal* (imagine; long for) hints at the related form *le-hitpalel* (to pray). Goldberg alludes here to Jacob's testimony upon reencountering his lost son Joseph that he did not dare even to hope ever to see him again (Gen. 48:11, (ראה פניך לא פיללתי).

the homeland she left. Influenced by the destruction and the loss of Jewish life there, she regrets her previous alienation and contempt toward Lithuania and its Jewish life.<sup>81</sup>

## Ending

סיום

## II

ב

I left and never returned.

הלכתי משם ולא שבתי,

Nor did I wish to return.

אף לא רציתי לשוב.

The past I never loved

עברי אשר לא אהבתי

Has again become my beloved past,

שוב נהיה עברי האהוב,

In a world I had left,

בעולם אשר עזבתי,

In snows, in wilting, in blossoms.

בשלגים, בקמילה, בלבול.

The gray homeland

בדמעת זכרונות זרחת

Shines in memories' tear –

– המולדת האפורה –

The barrenness of the distant city,

שממון העיר הנדחית,

Melancholic Sabbaths,

שבתות של מרה שחרה,

All that encircled me like fear

כל אשר הקיפני כפחד

In the nights when I was a girl.

בלילות בהיותי נערה.

Loss that has no remedy

בדמעת זכרונות זרחת

Shines in memories' tear.

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<sup>81</sup> Goldberg, *Diaries*, 382 (a slightly different version, titled “Shiva el beyti ha-yashan” [Return to my Old Home]). Published 1959; Goldberg, *Shirim*, I, 245; ----, *Selected Poetry*, 48-49 (in a slightly different translation).

אבדה שאין לה תמורה.

I left for another country,

The winds erased my footprints,

Today with concealed shame

I long for my dead to come alive.

I left proud and ungodly

And who will hear my prayers?

הלכתי לארץ אחרת,

הרוחות מחו עקבותי,

היום בבושה מסתרת

איחל לתחיית מתי.

הלכתי גאה וכופרת

ומי ישמע תפלותי?

She returns to a homeland she left, abandoned and despised. The past, so undesired at time, is for her now a beloved one, lost forever. Those whom she left are now “her dead”; she longs, fully conscious how unrealistically, to see them alive again. The conflicting shame she experiences exposes her to the crucial change in her spiritual trait. She recalls that when immigrating to “another country”, namely to Eretz-Israel which she has ideologically chosen to be her home, she was “proud” and “ungodly” [כופרת]. Now she prays. Now she is puzzled whether her prayers may be heard, whether God may accept them. She does not make statements of *emunah*; all she can, and will say is that with this turn she experiences, no more she is simply an ungodly heretic; she is a praying woman longing and praying that her prayers will be heard.<sup>82</sup>

Goldberg’s negotiation with her heresy, her longing for *emunah* and the “healing” process in which she finds herself much closer to *emunah*, is careful and restrained. Its

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<sup>82</sup> The last of the four poems collected under this title “Ending” (ibid, 247; ibid, 50), expresses a pessimistic view and a realization that this lost world cannot be renewed and the not revival is to be expected. Nevertheless, the wording she uses here are profoundly traditional, alluding to the High Holidays *piyyut* “*Netane Tokel*”:

No *shofar* calling in silence  
No shelter in the black gloom,  
No escape from the weeping angels  
The dead never rose

אין שופר קורא בדומיה,  
אין צללים בשחור העלטה,  
אין מפלט מבכי המלאכים.  
המתים לא קמו לתחיה

explicit expressions are scarce, though they reveal a constant struggle throughout her life. The rare occasions on which she deals openly with this issue are usually evoked by shaking experiences, by the impact of confessions of faith by those she loves and admires. Even in those moments, she is blunt and explicit only about the heretical, ungodly pole of her Being, the pole from which she is now distancing herself. She is much more hesitant and ambiguous about that which she is on the way towards. There is never a full confession of *emunah*, never a sense that she has reached a point in which one can or should speak theologically. In other words, those of Bialik's desire to re-balance between Jewish life's theoretical and the practical elements, one may say that Goldberg adhered to a highly restrained "Aggadah", but this was far from the case regarding the kind of Halakhah" she practiced through her life-long, ever-present prayer.

"Prayer" is indeed the theme and title of the first piece of prose Goldberg intended to write at the age of twelve. A short text, presented as an introduction to a longer work, is embedded in her diary.<sup>83</sup> It opens with a statement that only one of the many prayers she heard was genuine, anchored in the prayer's heart. Nevertheless, she might have witnessed also another prayer of this quality. The story of this prayer is the text's main theme. It tells about a sister, "not that much of a believer in God", who on Friday night takes her younger brother, a twenty year old youth, to the theater. While the entire family is ready for the Shabbat meal and its ceremonies, the siblings go to hear a performance of the *Ave Maria*. The brother, heavily impressed and touched by the religious Christian piece of art, kneels enthusiastically and makes the sign of the cross. Then, completely shocked at himself, he runs out, rushes back home and opens his heart praying *ma'ariv* [the evening prayer]. This text would not have been of that much interest for our discussion did it not anticipate central themes regarding prayer and its Jewish quality that will appear repeatedly in Goldberg's poetry.

The best known of Goldberg's prayers, serving as a popular liturgical text in wide circles and embedded in non-Orthodox prayer-books,<sup>84</sup> is the untitled one opening with the

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<sup>83</sup> Goldberg, *Diaries*, 31-32.

<sup>84</sup> See for example, *Mishkan tefila* (Central Conference of American Rabbis, Reform, published 2007), 21, 145, 393 [Hebrew and English]; *Seder ha-tefilot* (Movement for Reform Judaism, Great Britain, published



words “teach me, my God”, one of “*Shirey sof ha-derekh*” [Poems of the Journey’s End]:<sup>85</sup>

Teach me, my God, to bless and pray	לְמַדְנִי אֱלֹהֵי, בְּרָךְ וְהִתְפַּלֵּל
over the withered leaf’s secret, the ready fruit’s grace,	עַל סוּד עֵלָה קָמַל, עַל נֹגַהּ פְּרִי בְּשֵׁל,
over this freedom: to see, to feel, to breath,	עַל הַחֲרוּת הַזֹּאת: לְרֵאוֹת, לְחוּשׁ,
to know, to hope, to fail.	לְנִשְׁם, לְדַעַת, לְיַחַל, לְהַכְשִׁיל.

Teach my lips blessing and song of praise	לְמַד אֶת שְׁפֹתַי בְּרָכָה וְשִׁיר הַלֵּל
when your days are renewed morning and night,	בְּהִתְחַדֵּשׁ זְמַנְךָ עִם בִּקְרָה וְעִם לַיִל,
lest my day be today the yesterdays,	לְבַל יִהְיֶה יוֹמֵי הַיּוֹם כְּתִמּוֹל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם,
lest my day be for me an unthinking haze.	לְבַל יִהְיֶה יוֹמֵי עָלֵי הַרְגֵּל.

As in many of her praying poems, Goldberg here addresses “her” God,<sup>86</sup> praying to be taught to pray. Without prayer, without its language, she would lose spiritual amazement, a sense of life’s miraculous renewal. She prays openhearted and with complete willingness to conduct a life of prayer. She expresses no doubt about her God, about the possibility that He will hear and respond.

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2008), 331 [English]; *Ha-avoda she-ba-lev* (Kehillat Kol HaNeshama, Israeli Reform, published 2008), 45 [Hebrew and English]; *Va-ani tefilati* (Israeli Masorti (Conservative), published 2009), 186; *Siddur erev shabbat* (Beit Tefilah Yisra’eli, published 2011), 21 [Hebrew].

<sup>85</sup> Goldberg, *Shirim*, II, 154; ----, *Selected Poetry*, 97. The poem was originally published in 1954.

<sup>86</sup> In most praying-poems she refers to Him with the Hebrew word *eli* that hardly ever appears in Jewish liturgy (though see Psalms 22:2 and its adaptation in the New Testament: Mathews 27:46, Markus 15:34). Here she chooses to use a form a bit more common in Jewish liturgy, *elohay*, from which comes the plural *elohaynu*, very common in Jewish liturgy.

Nevertheless, that very prayer signifies that she poet senses that life of prayer is not yet at her reach. She needs to learn, to let her lips adopt “blessing and songs of praise”. In other words, the prayer she is longing and praying for is not the institutionalized one of Jewish liturgy that she might simply read from a prayer book. One might even doubt to what extent, if at all, her prayer would embody elements from that liturgy. Goldberg’s praying poetry is only loosely and episodically connected to the language, figures, themes, and events with which Jewish tradition tends to associate prayers. Though she refers from time to time to Jewish liturgical cornerstones, such as the *Kaddish* or the *Ne’ilah* prayer for Yom Kippur, Goldberg creates her own liturgy, designs her own prayer book(s).

In a Prayer Book of Mine:

בְּסֵדוֹר שְׁלִי

Master of the Universe,<sup>87</sup>

רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם,

If you forced your day on me as a kingdom,

אִם כְּפִיתָ עָלַי אֶת יוֹמְךָ כְּמַלְכוּת,

And its gold is weighty on my shoulders,

וְכֶבֶד עַל כְּתָפַי זָהָב,

And I would have it as pardon and glory and favor

וְהִיָּה לִי סְלִיחָה וְתַפְאֶרֶת וְזָכוּת

בְּשָׁעָה אַחֲרוֹנָה כִּי תָבֹא –

In the last hour when arrives –

רְבוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם,

Master of the Universe,

אִם הָיוּ לִילוֹתֶיךָ הַדּוֹם-רַגְלִי

If your nights where my footrest,

וְכֹכְבֵיהֶם – רְבִיבִים לְהַשְׁקִיט

And their stars – drizzle to saturate me,

צְמָאוֹנִי,

And you planted a white moon for me

וְנִטְעַתָּ יָרַח לְבָן בְּשִׁבְלִי

<sup>87</sup> From the viewpoint of religious language’s emotive quality, a more accurate translation would be, here and hereafter, “My good Lord”

In front of the window of my pauper's dream –

– מול אָנשׁבּ חלומי העני –

And I

ואני

Did not keep secret of my tear

דמעתי לא שמרתי בסוד,

Did not know to silence prayers

לא ידעתי תפלות האלים,

And my tired heart is so lowly

ולבי היגע נמוך עד מאד

In the rising corn

בקמות

With the remaining stems.

עם ספיהי שבליים.

There is a borderline she is repeatedly tempted to cross, but knows she should never do, namely that borderline she confronted in her early prose discussed above. Christian worship, prayers and art figures fascinate her; for a long time she loved the figure of Jesus.<sup>88</sup> In various poems, she stands at the crossroad like the Madonnas that will never kiss the “kid from Nazareth”;<sup>89</sup> reacts to the alien festival’s bells ringing;<sup>90</sup> experiences the departure of a lover as a departure of “the alien God”, and the Venetian hotel room she stays in as a monastery chamber.<sup>91</sup> However, she knows she should not submit herself to this temptation. That which “the alien figure of God” gave her to drink was poisonous for her; the ringing of the bells mislead her; she had to guard herself from kneeling and betraying “the splendor of my dreams”. Facing this temptation she hears the “voice of generations” calling her: “let go of this stupidity; / the tear of the mourning Madonna is not for you, / the laughter of mothers is not for you”.<sup>92</sup> This border is not of religious nature; she does not reject Christian religiosity on any theological basis. It is an

<sup>88</sup> At the end of a diary entry dated May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Goldberg makes a remark out of context suggesting an aspect of her life never exposed elsewhere: “By the way, why did I cease lately to love Jesus [ישו הנוצרי]?” (Goldberg, *Diaries*, 226).

<sup>89</sup> Goldberg, *Shirim*, I, 39.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, III, 97.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, I, 162.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, I, 69 [“אך קול-דורות לוחש: “הרפי מן האולת; / לא לך דמעת מדונה מתאבלת, / ופחוק האמהות לא לך”]

ethnic, cultural legacy “of generations” that tells her that this kind of religiosity is not hers, that for *her* the idea of surrendering to that temptation is no more than stupidity and betrayal.

In most praying poems, prayer is not the theme but rather the existential viewpoint in writing of love, death, loss, hope and happiness. Such is the case in a verse Goldberg planted in two of her poems. The first, from 1938, brings the recollections of a man who as a young boy lost his sister. The poem speaks of their mother’s prayers, first for her daughter’s recovery and later the mourner’s *Kaddish*. Her son, the somewhat older brother of the dying girl, is following his mother in praying.<sup>93</sup> The other poem, from 1949, is written as a love song talking about the poor Cinderella trying to get permission to enter a palace after a long journey. In the course of the poem, there is a shift. Gradually it becomes less clear whether the poem refers to an individual loving woman or to the bitten, murdered, wandering Jewish people. Furthermore, it is no longer clear whether this “Cinderella” is about to enter a palace, alive and happy, or actually to die and enter a heavenly palace.<sup>94</sup> In both poems, one reads the prayer, ascribed to the brother in the first case and to the poet herself in the second:

Master of the Universe! Your mercy –	רבונו של עולם! רחמיך – אין סוף.
endless,	היא קטנה, הכניסנה פנימה.
She is young, let her in,	הרי היא מקדשת למות הטוב
She is hallowed to the good death	בתפלה הכשרה של אמה.
With Mom’s proper prayer.	

In both interrelating contexts, one prays to God to admit the girl/woman. In both contexts, the prayer connects itself to “Mom’s prayer” which is declared “kosher”, namely appropriate, sincere, and religiously proper.

It is only prayer that might make it possible for Goldberg to go through the miseries, nightmares and loss with which her life as an individual and as a Jew involved. She

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<sup>93</sup> “Layla ve-yamim acharonim” [Night and Last Days], *ibid*, I 174-177. Goldberg’s young brother died before reaching his first birthday (see: Lieblich, *Learning about Lea*, p. 110).

<sup>94</sup> Goldberg, *Shirim*, II, 182-184.

senses that prayer is not a given faculty, a qualification she possesses and is trained to utter. In the same manner in which she prays to learn to pray, she is fiercely scared to lose prayer, to forget how to spell it out. Thus, she writes in the first verse of her poem “*Bi-netiv ha-yisurim*” [On Nightmares’ Trail]<sup>95</sup>

And if I forget the prayer?	וְאִם אֲנִי אֲשַׁכַּח אֶת הַתְּפִלָּה?
And if strangled weeping from behind a locked door breaches the first gate?	וְאִם יִבְקַע בְּשַׁעַר הָרֵאשׁוֹן בְּכִי חֲנוּקִים מִדֶּלֶת גְּעוּלָה?
No, no, better I should not try to sleep. I cannot, I cannot –	לֹא, לֹא, מוֹטֵב לֹא לְנִסּוֹת לִישׁוֹן. אֵינֶנִּי יְכוּלָה, אֵינֶנִּי יְכוּלָה –
And if the windows open and the gloom from within darkened rooms breaks into day?	וְאִם יִהְיוּ הַחֲלוֹנוֹת פְּתוּחִים וְאֵל הַיּוֹם תִּפְרָץ הָאֲפֵלָה מִתּוֹךְ הַחֲדָרִים הַחֲשׂוּכִים?
And if I forget the prayer?	וְאִם אֲנִי אֲשַׁכַּח אֶת הַתְּפִלָּה?
The path always, always leads to this place. Always, always. But there was witchcraft, there was a word – My lips cannot remember the prayer.	תְּמִיד, תְּמִיד הַדֶּרֶךְ מוֹבִילָה אֶל הַמְּקוֹם הַהוּא. תְּמִיד, תְּמִיד. אָבֵל הִיא כְּשׁוֹף, הִיתָה מְלָה – שִׁפְתֵי אֵינֶן זֹכְרוֹת אֶת הַתְּפִלָּה.

In her nightmare, she is trapped. Her journey reaches always the same awful place, the inner darkness threatens to darken the very light of the day. Nevertheless, the crucial

<sup>95</sup> Goldberg, *Shirim*, II, p. 230; ----, *Selected Poems*, 115.

question, the shibboleth dividing life and death, is whether she will remember the prayer, whether “the word” will save her from this situation. In an even sharper version of this poem, embedded in her diary, the first lines do not speak of the cry of a baby behind a locked door, a somewhat softened metaphor, but state bluntly and painfully: “And if at the first gate I encounter / the spirit of the executioner that had executed?”<sup>96</sup> The prayer would not save from the murder, from facing the spirit of the murderer. The murder already occurred. Life is its shadow. However, with no prayer there is no chance to confront this horrible situation and remain alive, physically, psychologically and spiritually. That which makes the situation an unbearable nightmare is, more than anything else, that her lips do not remember the prayer.

This nightmare is evidently not merely a nightmare; it is close to her reality. In her poem “*Ne'ilah*,” she speaks of a genuine prayer she experienced while watching an old uneducated woman in her hometown. It is possible, that this is the prayer, which she was alluding to in the opening sentences of her story “*Ha-tefilah*”. She cherishes this memory but knows she cannot follow the woman. For her, to pray like the woman would be no more than praying to “dead angles”.<sup>97</sup>

I was never taught how to stand in prayer.	לא למדוני לעמד בתפלה.
Up in the women's section	למעלה, בעזרת-נשים,
There was one woman who lifted her voice	היתה אשה אחת נושאת קולה
Above words and meanings	מעבר למלים ופרושים
Sealed before her	לא מוכנים לא לה
And her God.	ולא יאלהיה.

With all the many killed, she has long since	היא נשפחה מכבר בין שאר הנכרתים.
been	ואני, בארץ אחרת,
forgotten.	רוצה לצעק כמוה
And I, in another land,	ואינני יכולה:
Want to shout out like her	איני זוכרת

<sup>96</sup> Goldberg, *Diaries*, 344 [ואם אפגש בשער הראשון/ את רוח התלן אשר תלה?]

<sup>97</sup> Goldberg, *Shirim*, III, 262; ---, *Selected Poetry*, 201.

But cannot:	איך מדברים אל מלאכים מתים
I do not remember	בשעת הנעילה.
How to speak to dead angels	
At the hour the gates are closing.	

Goldberg is a praying poet. Uttering prayer is her primary modus of writing poetry, the praxis that creates it. This is her profoundly non-Orthodox, nontraditional, “Halakhah”. Through that praxis, she encounters also from time to time Aggadic issues of *emunah*, of her attachment to classic Jewish sources. Through this praxis, she can walk the never-ending way towards life with the God she hesitates to confess she believes in, towards a reconciliation of her basic heresy and skepticism. In her poetry she cries *to* God as if she were as near as possible to Him. When speaking *of* God, He seems to be far away, almost too far from her in order to hope that she will be able one day to live in His presence.

**Somewhere in Samaria**

אי בזה בשומרון<sup>98</sup>

I picked a wildflower and tossed it away. I waited	קטפתי פרח-בר והשלכתיו. בגשם
For two days in the rain at a forsaken station.	חפיתי שני ימים בתחנה שכוּחה.
My God, you'll never believe in me again! I passed	אלי, אתה לא תאמין בי עוד!
by	עברתי
So close and didn't recognize you.	כל כך קרוב מבלי להכירך

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, III, 267; ibid, 176 (in a slightly different translation).

## **Eliezer Schweid: From Prophetic Philosophy to Renewed Halakhah<sup>99</sup>**

Discussing a contemporary still engaged in the process of writing, still repeatedly reshaping his thoughts and giving them ever-new formulations, is a tricky task. One lacks the perspective of insight so necessary for grounding an examination of past generations' thought and writings; one faces always the "danger" that that which was viewed and interpreted as the ripest fruit of this tree may one day come to be seen as no more than an intermediate stage leading to other directions and consequences. This is even truer in the case of the thinker I wish to discuss in the following chapters, Eliezer Schweid, given the intensity and diversity of his ongoing process of writing and publishing. Moreover, I am discussing here my own teacher, the contemporary scholar and philosopher from whom I learned the most, was most influenced by, and with and against whom I argued. In such a discussion, I can claim no more than to do my best to examine and evaluate that to which I stand close. Of any other discussions I may develop, the current one can make the least claim to "objectivity" and "detachment".

Eliezer Schweid's biography, formation and writings are deeply rooted in the Zionist Eretz-Israeli milieu, mostly in the Zionist *chiloni* Labor movement, clearly politically and culturally dominant in its prime, though marginalized and defeated from within and without in later years. From his early years, Bialik and Gordon strongly influenced him; their legacy was a familiar presence both at his parents' home and in the *chiloni* socialist youth movement in which he was involved, *Ha-Machanot ha-Olim*. He was a young teenager at the time of the Second World War and the Shoah. Though far removed from the horrible events, he was exposed to the deep empathy and sorrow felt by his parents,

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<sup>99</sup> For general discussions of Schweid's philosophy and biography see: Ari Akerman, "Eliezer Schweid on the Religious Dimension of a Secular Jewish Renewal", *Modern Judaism*, 30,2 (2010), 209-228; Jonathan Cohen, "From Individuality to Identity: Directions in the Thought of J.B. Soloveitchik and Eliezer Schweid", in: Steven M. Cohen & Gabriel Horenczyk (eds.), *National Variations in Jewish Identity; Implications for Jewish Education*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, 243--261; Michael Oppenheim, "Eliezer Schweid", in: Steven T. Katz (ed.), *Interpreters of Judaism in the Late Twentieth Century*, Washington, DC: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993, 301-324; ---, "Eliezer Schweid: A Philosophy of Return", *Judaism*, 35,1 (1986), 66-77; Yuval Dror, "Mishnato ha-chinukhit shel Eliezer Schweid: Sikum beynayim ve-he'arot historiyyot-chinukhiyyot", Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ru'ach*, 97-136.



who were immigrants from Poland and Russia. From this experience he developed a deep sense of commitment to Jewish existence and culture.<sup>100</sup>

As to the public, educational sphere, as a teenager and young adult he witnessed at that time and in the following years one of the most painful and passionate debates within the Israeli Zionist Labor movement, concerning, among others, the attitude to Jewish tradition and to Diaspora/Exile (*galut*). On both sides of this harsh debate, which led to a schism in all the relevant institutions – his youth movement, its associated political party and its kibbutz movement – the *chiloni* premise was a given. The essential question was whether such a *chiloni* viewpoint should lead to a principled negation of all those aspects of Jewish tradition which are rooted loosely or inherently in religious foundations, and consequently to a total “negation” of exilic/Diaspora Jewish being. Alternatively, could and should one leave room for such elements, albeit secularly interpreted, as well as for empathy and a sense of connectedness to Jewish life all over the world. This debate was personified in the figures of Itzhak Tabenkin (Babruysk, Russia, 1881 – Kibbutz Ein Charod (Me’uchad), 1971), a follower of Joseph Hayyim Brenner’s legacy, on the one hand, and Berl Katzenelson (Babruysk, Russia, 1887 – Jerusalem, 1944) rooted in Gordon’s teachings, on the other. The debate played a formative role in the life of the young Eliezer Schweid, forcing and enabling him to take the basic existential and ideological decisions that would define his life course from this point and down to the present day.

Heavily influenced by the personality and conviction of Yehudah Sharet (Kherson, Russia [today: Ukraine], 1901 – Kibbutz Yagur, 1979), an educator and the author and creator of the most prominent kibbutz-based *chiloni* Passover Haggadah,<sup>101</sup> Schweid committed himself to the struggle for Jewish continuity, tradition and identity among the *chiloni*, mostly secular, Jewish-Israeli society. It was this decision that led him – before, during, and after serving in Israel’s War of Independence (1948–1949) as a

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<sup>100</sup> Yehoyada Amir, “Dyokano shel ha-hoge ke-ish tza’ir: al darko shel Eliezer Schweid el ha-mechkar ve-he-hagut,” in: Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ru’ach*, I, 3-38.

<sup>101</sup> Muki Tzur, “Pesach in the Land of Israel: Kibbutz Haggadot”, *Israel Studies*, 12,2 (2007), 74-103; Batja Bayer, “Seder Pesach Nusach Yagur”, *Dukhan: me’asef le-musika yehudit*, 8 (1968), 89-98.

soldier in the Palmach<sup>102</sup> to become a leading educational figure in a new youth movement he helped to create, *Ha-Tenu'a ha-Me'uchedet*, in Kibbutz Tzor'a, of which he was a founding member, and in wider circles. It was the same decision that positioned him at his twenties as a literary and cultural critic; it was that very determination that led him to his academic career and to his role as one of the leading voices of contemporary Jewish thought in Israel.

As mentioned, Schweid grew up in the heart of the *chiloni* environment in pre-state Eretz-Israel. There he made his first public and professional steps; and he has continued to write, educate and work ever since. Moreover, the educational and public role he has chosen is essentially that of a cultural agent striving to transmit Jewish tradition to the public in whose midst he lives and of which he was a part; namely, the secular, mostly socialist-Zionist public. Among his best-known, nuanced and discussed early essays is “Judaism as a Culture”.<sup>103</sup> The observation that opens and defines this essay is a distinction between three types of connectedness to one’s Jewishness:

Jews experience their Judaism today in three ways [...] These are Judaism as experience of fate; Judaism as experience of fulfilling the precepts of the Torah; and Judaism as a cultural experience [...] Relating to Judaism as a culture is the most positive way of relating to Judaism that is possible for most Jews in our generation. Finally, the power of the cultural Jewish experience was manifested in the greatest project of the Jewish people in recent generations—building up the Land of Israel as a Jewish homeland. The pioneering core that established this project in its lifetime was [...] influenced by the aspiration to revive Judaism as a holistic culture.<sup>104</sup>

By contrast to the first mode (“Judaism as fate”), this cultural approach is a profound gesture of will and self-determination; it is a decision not to confine oneself to a political Jewish framework and environment, but to strive for a “fullness” of Jewish life to be realized and experienced in all layers of private and public life. It is an existential choice to be a Jew and to live a Jewish life.

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<sup>102</sup> Palmach: the most trained and devoted military unit of the pre-State organized forces; during Israel’s War of Independence, the Palmach provided the elite units of the emerging Israel Defense Force.

<sup>103</sup> First published 1975; Republished in: Eliezer Schweid, *Emunat am yisrael ve-tarbuto*, Jerusalem: S. Zak, 1977, 152–178; English translation: “Judaism as a Culture”, *Judaism as a Culture: Confrontation*, Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980, 1-34 (later cited and translated from *Emunat am yisrael ve-tarbuto*).

<sup>104</sup> Schweid, *Emunat am yisrael ve-tarbuto*, 152--153.

As contrasted with the experience of Judaism-as-Halakhic-observance, it is an experience of free will, of a principled refusal to commit oneself inflexibly to Jewish norms defined and formulated in the past. “Judaism must be an expression of the self; it must be a *full* expression of the self [...] he who identifies himself [as a Jew] on the basis of his culture views himself as *a priori* free. He is free to accept and carry on that which he finds adequate for him and to reject that which he does not find adequate”.<sup>105</sup>

Judaism as a culture is in no way a content-less notion. It is expressed in a holistic creation; we need to respect it for that which it continued as well as for that which it created anew. The revival of Jewish nationality, of Jewish society in Eretz-Israel; the revival of Hebrew language and literature; the constitution of a Jewish ethos and personality: ethos of independence, heroism, social communality, of the love of Eretz-Israel, its nature and landscape [...]<sup>106</sup>

Schweid is aware of the problematic nature of this sense of freedom: it may weaken the very cultural identification on which it is based, and it burdens the task of educational transmission with severe difficulties and challenges. Nevertheless, he is no less aware that, existentially and sociologically, this freedom to be selective is at the essence of that phenomenon and hence non-renounceable. The heart of his essay is devoted to a discussion of the psychological, philosophical and cultural means that may be used to deepen, stabilize and enrich this form of Jewish identification, providing it with the sufficient educational quality that would make it a viable vehicle of Jewish continuity. The primary means he offers for dealing with these challenges is a change in the approach to Jewish religion, originally rejected by the “cultural” Jew and deprived of the authority to shape one’s life:

The only chance to continue the creation of Judaism as a holistic culture is dependent on a change of approach to religion and its commands. Only out of a positive relationship to religion as a realm of supreme values of the Jewish culture will it be possible to establish a sufficiently stable normative tradition that can preserve a vital connection to history, to the Jewish sources, to Eretz Israel, to the Hebrew language, and to forms of communal organization. Does this mean returning to the Orthodox conception, which negates the aspiration to creating a full, broad, self-creating culture? Certainly not. The rebellion against “religion” in its narrow Orthodox sense was justified; not only from a

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 170.

cultural standpoint, but also even from a religious standpoint [...] A positive attitude towards the Jewish Torah requires a clear commitment ... to what? First, to the essential stance that comes to expression in the Jewish Torah—opposition to idolatry, even in its secular modern sense. And affirmation of a stance of ethical responsibility toward man himself, toward one’s neighbor and society and natural environment, and second, obligation to defined imperatives that express the principled stance toward action, and even an aspiration to broaden the extent of realization of the values of Judaism into the full life regimen of a person of our times. Whoever takes on himself this obligation will be able not only to impart but also to add and create his own annex to the building of Jewish culture.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the positive approach to religion and even the call for renewed, selective commitment to *mitzvot*, the viewpoint from which the entire discussion takes place is clearly secular. Not only is any mention of faith or God deliberately lacking; the entire argumentation is based on human sovereignty; it celebrates the primacy of the free decision made in the present, even when such a decision might generate a voluntary commitment to elements inherited from past layers of Judaism. Moreover, the values that motivate the author of this essay – as well as the values he calls on to convince and motivate an ideal reader – are strictly cultural and in no way religious. The primary question Schweid raises here is the connectedness to Judaism, where religious affiliation is only one, non-preferable option. Moreover, when advocating this new, positive approach to religion, he does so mainly due to his belief that it might serve as a means to stabilize and deepen Jewish creativity and to provide the Jewish educator with better tools for transmitting these goods to the next generation, and not for its own sake.

Schweid’s notion of culture in this essay is essentially secular. One might view religion as one of culture’s layers, and in the Jewish case as essential one layer one simply cannot overlook. Nevertheless, it is in no way the pinnacle of culture, nor a supreme expression of its spirit, nor the aim towards which cultural efforts, conceptualizations and deeds are directed. In the spirit of *Ahad Ha’am* (as well as to the evidently secular discourse Bialik developed in his “*Halakhah va-Aggadah*”), Schweid here urges the adoption of a more positive attitude to Jewish religion in order to preserve and engender Jewish culture. It is hard to say whether Schweid was familiar at time with the name of Mordecai Kaplan;

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 175-176.

it is quite evident that, even if he was, Kaplan's notion of "Jewish civilization", which places religion at its peak, did not have any visible impact on his thought here.<sup>108</sup> The fact that Schweid did not even bother to spell out this secular perception explicitly, but rather correctly assumed that his Israeli readers would not understand him otherwise, proves this essay's profoundly secular point of departure. Its secularity is taken for granted; the call nevertheless to establish a form of semi-religious commitment is the element Schweid must explain and justify.

As stated, for decades Schweid's readers, adherents as well as critics, tended to identify his thought with this notion of "Judaism as a Culture".<sup>109</sup> They read the essay not merely as a public call, but also as direct evidence of what Schweid himself adhered to and believed in. Such a reading was not entirely wrong. The essay's substantially secular, cultural character was and is a genuine dimension in Schweid's personality and philosophy. The use of the anonymous third person, "the cultural Jew", indeed masked an unmistakable autobiographical quality. The notion of free choice, of the selective, sovereign negation of Orthodox Halakhic elements, alongside a selective and autonomous acceptance of and commitment to others, were and still are essential building-stones of his philosophy. Nevertheless, Schweid was never simply the "cultural Jew" he described and analyzed in this essay. The "cultural Jew" was at the end of the day no more than a "third person", albeit one close, dear, and fully relevant to the author's own being.

A few months after the trauma of the Yom Kippur War (1973), Schweid gave a first evidence of a shift in his thought, praxis, and being. The central idea of his book *Ha-yehudi ha-boded ve-ha-yahadut* [The Lonely Jew and Judaism]<sup>110</sup> was a critique of that sense of "freedom" and "committed-less" approach to Judaism, which "Judaism as a Culture" describes as the ultimate starting point for the "cultural Jew". Still in the third

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<sup>108</sup> Much later Schweid would become one of the most fruitful interpreters of Kaplan's thought in Israel. See for example: Schweid, *The Idea of Modern Jewish Culture*, 193-211; Eliezer Schweid, *Toldot filosofiyat ha-dat ha-yehudit ba-zeman he-chadash*, IV, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006, 363-387 (to be published in the near future in the English translation of Leonard Levin).

<sup>109</sup> See for example, Michael Rosenak, "Tarbut, dat u-sevirut: kavim li-demuta ha-chinukhit shel ha-yahadut ke-tarbut", in: Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ru'ach*, 137-162.

<sup>110</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Ha-yehudi ha-boded ve-ha-yahadut*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974; Avi Sagi, "Ha-yehudi ha-boded ve-ha-yahadut ke-masa esistentziali", Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ru'ach*, I, 63-80.

person, but this time in a much closer attachment to his own being, Schweid analyzed this sense from the viewpoint of a parent. Wishing to teach and impart, one may suddenly realize that one can aspire to impart to the next generation only that to which one is really committed: committed to not merely as a possible outcome of a conscious process of freely choosing between given options, but also as an inherited culture transmitted from previous generations. Only a descendant, a son or daughter relating to that which her/his parents carried in their being, can be a parent who would offer her/his offspring that which she/he is bearing in her/his being, that which awards his/her life with meaning and content.

This new notion of the need to belong, of the quest for a heritage one could adopt, even in this late hour of adulthood, creates for the Jew the sense of loneliness. The proud individual, when striving to depart from part of his/her individuality and re-attach himself/herself to a cultural and social Jewish togetherness, realizes that he/she is left alone, that though there are many Jewish individuals around, there is no community that might be relevant for him or her. The Orthodox religious community seems to be irrelevant to that person's quest; it is too "dense" and alien to the *chiloni* sense of the self and its dignity. The strictly secular one is no more relevant; its Jewishness is too "thin", content-less, and non-committed.

Based on this intellectual and existential insight, Schweid develops two lines of thought representing the unique indivisible combination he represents as a scholar, philosopher, and educator and as a committed Jew. The first line is philosophical and historical, offering a deep analysis of the inner and external forces that gave rise to these senses of proud Jewish individuality and to the loneliness imposed on the Jew who seeks modern Jewish community. Through this analysis, namely through placing the lonely Jew in a historical communal context, Schweid also hints at the philosophical basis that might inform the attempt to overcome loneliness. The lonely Jew is not alone: he or she is a representative of a people in crisis and in a transitional point in its history. By attempting to rebuild a committed modern Jewish life, she or he takes part in overcoming that communal crisis and in building the premises for a new phase of Jewish-Israeli being.

The other line, occupying most of the book, is a careful though preliminary description of personal and domestic efforts to regain a sense of Jewish rootedness, belonging and commitment. Most of the details of this hesitant discussion and its evaluation are of no importance for our discussion, but one point one deserves emphasis. As in “Judaism as a Culture”, Schweid is careful in this book not to detach himself from the *chiloni*, secular common ground he might wish to have with the potential reader. The book touches on loneliness and identity, history and literal sources, family and peoplehood, but never about religion or religious commitment. Nonetheless, and in contrast to the article, he makes here one further hesitant step. Here he dares to speak about *emunah* [faith or belief] and about the possibility to “return” to it. This is not merely a descriptive, though empathetic and sympathetic, discussion of the characteristic *emunah* of Jewish culture,<sup>111</sup> but rather a direct and open confrontation with the potential benefits and problems that belief may offer for the “lonely Jew” rebuilding her Jewish life. Schweid’s discussion addresses the existential meaning of belief, reliance and trust as a disposition and a determination. It hints to the intimate relationship between the acceptance of Jewish classic sources as Torah, namely wisdom and teaching, and the unavoidable confrontation with the believing viewpoint they represent and demand. It also explores faith as a question that arises inherently from a deepening Jewish identity. “We realize that the question of identity that we raised at the very beginning of our discussion was indeed in essence – long before the individual raising the question could be aware of it – a question of belief [...] the story of the individual’s loneliness is the story of the progressive undermining of faith”.<sup>112</sup>

One does not decide to believe in order to study Torah ... One decides to learn. One decides to raise questions. One does so, based on a prior conviction grounded in one’s attitude to the culture and history leading to the literary sources; whoever learns might discover in a certain moment that one has faith. More accurately: one might realize that one already had faith, only now one’s faith has risen to the full light of reflective thought and knowledge.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Schweid adopts the same approach to *emunah* in his article “*Mahi emunah*” [What is Faith], included in his 1977 book *Emunat yisra’el ve-tarbuto* (11-67), in which “Judaism as a Culture” was also reprinted.

<sup>112</sup> Schweid, *Ha-yehudi ha-boded*, 101.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

This hesitant chapter concerning *emunah* is by far the shortest of the book. It is anchored in the previous chapter dealing with *talmud Torah* [the study of Torah], but characteristically it does not lead to any further discussion. Schweid challenges the secularity of his *chiloni* standpoint in a much more explicit and daring manner than in the later essay directed to the “cultural Jew”, but he is not yet ready to ask consequential questions; *emunah* is a desired aim, but not yet a point of departure for religious discourse.

Almost twenty years later, in 1992, Schweid revisited his spiritual and philosophical biography, now speaking openly in the first person and defining himself primarily as “a son of the Jewish people”.<sup>114</sup> One of the most striking differences between the two books concerns the discussion of religious faith. Limited in the previous book to a short, hesitant chapter, this aspect forms the heart of the current one and is discussed at length in the most developed and by far the longest chapter in the book. Schweid exposes here much of his personal journey from deep belief formulated in the secular terms of his childhood and early adulthood environment to a Buberean understanding of “believing in”, as distinct from “believing that”, as an existential gesture of trust, reliance and expectation; and further to the Gordonean notion that:

Faith is a choice. It is voluntary. It comprises a choice between two alternative attitudes to human life. As such, it concretizes or realizes, in a primal way, the inner freedom that exists in a person’s soul. A person can decide to believe in what he believes; he can also refrain from deciding, or decide not to believe. However, even if this decision is spontaneous, it is not arbitrary. The will itself, which a person finds inside himself, is testimony to a given spiritual reality, prior to choice, in which will and choice are rooted.<sup>115</sup>

This discussion of *emunah* now manifests a clear, explicit non-Orthodox religious viewpoint. *Emunah* leads to prayer, a profound religious gesture that Schweid previously could not bring himself to affirm and one that was beforehand held within the confines of a quest and described as an almost unattainable aim.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, it

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<sup>114</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Lihiyot ben ha-am ha-yehudi: mabat ishi* [To Be a Son of the Jewish People: a Personal View], Bat-Yam: Eked, 1992.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>116</sup> Eliezer Schweid, “ha-Meyachalim li-Tefila” [Questing for Prayer], *Emunat am yisrael ve-tarbuto*, 96 – 108.



offers the basis for a discussion about “culture, tradition, and religion”. What was previously the premise for the discussion about “Jewishness” and Jewish identity – namely culture in the secular sense of the word – is now no more than an important outcome, closely interrelated with religion and tradition, of a long journey, starting with the notion of belonging to a people, and finding its pinnacle in the heights of *emunah*.

We have observed a *chiloni* journey from a secular viewpoint striving for rootedness in a selective choice of elements of Jewish tradition to a full-scale non-Orthodox religious stance, though one no less rooted in the *chiloni* environment that aims to constitute a rich and stable Jewish lifestyle and society. One must note that this journey reflects Schweid’s own development in a partial and dialectical way. A review of his diaries from his youth and early adulthood clearly reveals that the secular dimensions of his *chiloni* worldview and insights were always intermixed, challenged, and enriched by profound religious convictions. Long before he heard of Mordecai Kaplan, and certainly before this religious thought could have so profoundly influenced him, he had already written strikingly “Kaplanian” texts of his own, expressing deep religiosity and a quest.

At the age of 16, experiencing the joy of the victory over Nazi Germany and the devastating sorrow and grief at the Holocaust, he writes:

God is not omnipotent [...] With man, with all my persecuted brothers he is [also] persecuted [...] He is lonely, orphaned, abandoned [...] Nonetheless, God is eternal [...] when man unites with God (the God within man, within nature, God which is the spirit of goodness, man’s quest for happiness, completeness, freedom [...]) he will indeed be omnipotent. However, when man betrays his image and the likeness to God in which he was created, God wallows in the blood of the victims ... I believe in man’s God!<sup>117</sup>

A few months later, after visiting a synagogue for the *Kol Nidrei* service on the eve of *Yom Kippur*, he writes, referring to the Orthodox by the common Israeli term “the religious ones” [הדתיים]:

I am in search of God ... I do not believe in the God the religious people believe in. However, I do know: they have God because they believe in him and want

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<sup>117</sup> Amir (ed.), *Derekh ha-ruach*, 25.

him. I believe in a different God, God who talks from my heart; I have to build him another house, proper to my prayer.<sup>118</sup>

These two examples suffice in demonstrating the religious quality with which Schweid's *chiloni* worldview was imbued throughout all the stages of the journey we have observed. Like Gordon and Bialik before him, Schweid was simultaneously deeply secular and deeply religious. Furthermore, like these two "teachers" of his, he sensed a need to speak in a language loyal only to one pole of his being. Unlike them, it was only through this journey that he could fully realize what he was doing and openly admit to himself that the secular dimension he was expressing and using as a point of departure for his reasoning, had throughout all those years been just one of two dialectic poles motivating his life and thought.

Schweid's approach was largely Halakhic long before it reached the point in which he could openly establish a religious ground for it. It was a quest for Jewish praxis that might echo and enforce Jewish identity by obligating deed, albeit selectively and anchored in an act of free will. He now reached the point at which this Halakhic approach could be grounded, defined and stabilized in a non-Orthodox religious discourse, something neither of his *chiloni* Zionist "teachers", Gordon on the one hand and Bialik on the other, could do.<sup>119</sup> Achieving this stage Schweid could move on to examine the philosophical grounding for this combined commitment to modern Western secular humanism and to prophetic religious monotheism. He could also expand the very notions of non-Orthodox Halakhah, crossing the limited horizons of particularistic ritual deeds expressing one's Jewishness and rootedness in Jewish tradition toward a holistic notion of Halakhah as a demand addressing all layers of personal, social and political life.

In 1999, seven years after his second autobiographical testimony, Schweid published a scholarly book devoted to a phenomenon he referred to as "prophecy and prophets" in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>119</sup> In that sense, the two most influential "teachers" of Schweid are Hermann Cohen on the one hand and Franz Rosenzweig on the other, though Schweid tends distances himself repeatedly in his writings from the latter. See: Eliezer Schweid, "Ha-filosofya ha-datit shel Franz Rosenzweig mul etgar ha-chiloniyyut", *Da'at*, 6 (1981), 111-124; Schweid, *Filosoyat ha-dat ha-yehudit*, IIIa, 2003, 115-176.

late nineteenth century and the first decades of twentieth century Jewish thought.<sup>120</sup> He identified a series of Jewish thinkers, among them his “teachers” Bialik, Buber, Gordon, Cohen and Rosenzweig, who developed the “consciousness of renewing calling” and adopted the row model of the Biblical prophets:<sup>121</sup>

This phenomenon characterizes a large part, one might say the best and most influential part at its time, of Hebrew, Yiddish and German Jewish literature, especially philosophy and poetry. Exploring the prophetic “code”, namely delivering the Divine word to the people, is the key to the comprehension of its authority, its expansion and its messages: it was an admonishing and comforting word of truth, an evocative and commanding word, striving for realization in the worldly life of the Jewish people and of the nations among whom they exiled.

None of these “prophets” – from Hermann Cohen to Abraham Joshua Heschel – was a prophet in the full Biblical sense, nor did they believe themselves to be such, but all of them wrote with prophetic urgency, authority and passion. Like the Biblical prophets, they were destined to be unheard and misunderstood in their own time. Their fate was to fail in persuading the people to take the right, redemptive course to confront and overcome the dangers of which they warned. Like many of the Biblical prophets, the course of action they so desperately urged the people to take was viewed at time as naive and unrealistic, but has proven itself in retrospect to be a reasonable one, and sometimes the only possible one. All these prophets have been found to be fully relevant to later generations, despite the differences in the realities and challenges these face. The “prophecies” await the right time and an audience that can listen to them and is ready to learn and follow their message.

All the “prophets” whom Schweid describes combine a fully universalistic and a fully particularistic viewpoint, a sophisticated analysis of human crises and a clear sense of a required Jewish response. All of them were genuine believers who deliver a supreme message and call, though not in all cases was their faith directed to God and not all of them viewed the call they are delivering as anchored in Divine providence. They were

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<sup>120</sup> Schweid, *Nevi'in le-amam ve-la-enoshut*; to be published soon in an English translation by Leonard Levin. See: Ephraim Meir, “Shlichut nevu'it ba-me'ah ha-esrim”, *Da'at*, 44 (2000), 131-134.

<sup>121</sup>Schweid, *Nevi'im le-amam ve-la-enoshut*, 9.

representatives, each in their own way, of the best of humanistic devotion, on the one hand, and of Jewish religiosity, on the other.

This combination is in no way incidental. Though Schweid is fully aware of secular humanism's ambivalence toward, if not full negation of all appearances of religiosity, he also sees the deep commonality it has with the Biblical prophetic message, a commonality anchored in the very essence of the latter:

By relating positively to that culture which man creates at God's behest, prophetic monotheism did not disparage the independent intellect of man who was created in his Creator's image. On the contrary, man is commanded to contemplate the wonders of nature as an expression of the divine wisdom embodied in creation. In this respect, too, the wisdom of the Biblical priests and of the rabbinic Halakhah and Aggadah contains elements of the pagan hierocracy, especially in the mystical traditions, which kept a close connection with the pagan myths that were suffused with pantheism.<sup>122</sup>

Schweid's modern "prophets" called for action, for human and Jewish praxis, for courageous deeds aiming to change human and Jewish existence radically. By interpreting their writing in that prophetic manner, Schweid was certainly presenting his own prophetic call. This call must surely explain the crucial widening of the manner in which he discusses deeds and commandments. The ritual elements addressed in earlier stages of Schweid's writings could in no way fully meet this renewed prophetic demand for religious praxis, namely for the constitution of social, political, cultural and international life reflecting these values and insights.

Nevertheless, almost none of the thinkers he dealt with in this book, including those discussed in this paper, translated this demand into a new Halakhic" concept, even when they dared to use this word like Bialik or consistently called for specific actions like Gordon. As mentioned above, their prophetic demand for action remained mainly an "Aggadah", a theoretical notion, easily dissolved when encountering the demands and corrosive power of real life, as well as the common lack of will for commitment in general, and for obligatory Jewish deeds and practical standards in particular.

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<sup>122</sup> Schweid, *A History of Modern Jewish Religious Philosophy*, I, tr. Leonard Levin, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2011, 17 (revised slightly for the present context)

Schweid was their disciple, openly and explicitly influenced by each of them, and even more so by their common “prophetic” enterprise, to which he devoted his book. Nevertheless, he says at the very end of the book, referring to the aftermath of the Second World War and the Shoah:

The period of non-institutional, preparatory prophetic calling is over; a new period of struggle has emerged, whose essential task lies in the established normative domain of Halakhah, striving to shape daily reality.<sup>123</sup>

Heschel, the last of these “prophets”, on the one hand, and the post-Holocaust Zionist Israeli movements on the other, hint towards this new era. Schweid himself also had to move forward. In order to remain relevant to the changing reality and to respond to the actual and acute needs and challenges of our time, that is to say in order fully to realize his prophetic quality, he must cease to act solely as a “prophet;”; he must become also a “Halakhic” philosopher.

It is self-evident that the Halakhah he wished to advocate is non-Orthodox precisely because it is religiously committed. Referring to the Israeli context, Schweid writes:

Those who wish to live up to the responsibility the Jewish people as part of its statehood, based on the decision to place morality at the center of their religious stance must face a clear choice. They have no other alternative but to explicitly, consciously dissociate themselves from the interpretation that the most influential Jewish movements (as well as the Jewish religious literature) have given to the notions of “divinely revealed Torah” [*Torah min ha-shamayim*] and “Israel’s election”. [...] They have to depart from various norms implementing de-legitimization of religious pluralism and of non-religious humanistic approaches within the Jewish people, of discriminatory approach to non-Jews and to women in the Israeli state. [...] I am not calling for total but rather selective and local dissociation [...]<sup>124</sup>

Departing from these traditional principles for the sake of responsibility and morality means distancing oneself from Orthodox premises and legalistic thought and striving for a new non-Orthodox balance between demands anchored in human consciousness and

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<sup>123</sup> Schweid, *Nevi'im le'amam ve-la-enoshut*, 257.

<sup>124</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Chinukh humanisti yehudi be-yisrael* [*Humanistic Jewish Education in Israel*], Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2000, 178.

contemporary values, on the one hand, and the authoritative demands of tradition, also perceived and evaluated in a Non-Orthodox way, on the other.

The call for a new, comprehensive “Halakhah” dominates Schweid’s writings of the last decade. His discourse is characterized by a strong link between its particularistic Israeli and Jewish dimension and its universalistic one; both are rooted in his analysis of contemporary society and culture as dominated by postmodern academic notions, prevailing ideologies and economic structures.

The turning point from humanistic modernism to postmodernism is in his view the aftermath of the Second World War and the Shoah. Modern convictions, hopes, beliefs and intellectual orientations collapsed under the devastating destruction caused by both world wars, but more particularly the second. The defeated nations were completely destroyed; the winning ones only slightly less so, with the important exception of the United States, which was not forced to undergo battles on her own soil. Of no lesser impact was the moral collapse. Modern ideologies, previously a source of hope for secular redemption, or at least for the radical betterment of human society, had proven a bitter disappointment. When given political power, the ideologies had not only failed to deliver the secular redemption they promised, but they also proved to be a source of oppression, dictatorship and war. In some cases, they ultimately threatened to annihilate human existence altogether. With their collapse came the collapse of humanistic values and worldviews altogether.

The Second World War for all the Western countries (including the victorious United States), and the Shoah for the Jewish people, mark the end of the era marked by the struggle to realize humanism. The unequivocal failure was already apparent after the First World War. Even then, it was evident that the struggle to realize various forms of humanistic Utopias was hopeless. Beyond the false veneer of the regularity of progress within the history of Western civilization, contrary dialectic regularity was exposed. On the one hand, rapid progress in science and technology has enabled those peoples who enjoy progress and are equipped with the necessary knowledge, to make efficient use of technology to intensify their intervention in Nature in order to gain increasing material benefits; on the other, there has been a rapid

regression in the implementation of moral ideals of humanism – personal, social and political.<sup>125</sup>

Though these new developments are inherently rooted in the Second World War and its aftermath, some time passed before they prevailed and manifested themselves. “After the end of the Second World War there was a short period of humanistic renaissance in the form of the social democratic ‘welfare state’ constituted in the ‘free world’. [...] It was an immediate response to the desperate need to restore the Central and Western European peoples, as well as the Jewish people; to heal them from the consequences of the Second World War. However, this renaissance lasted no more than ten years in Europe and twenty years in Israel”.<sup>126</sup>

The prevailing stance from now on was that the only way to provide human society with a more prosperous and peaceful environment was to abandon failed comprehensive ideologies and worldviews. The basis for the new civilization should be economic and political efficiency as provided by rapidly improving technology; its grounding principle should be competition alone, the will of each individual to gain as many benefits as possible in the economic, political, social and other spheres. History, national culture, collective solidarity and social obligations are no more than options each individual, competing with all other individuals, might or might not find suitable for her or his needs and desires, which are anchored completely in the present.

The postmodern political and economic order is one of capitalism and globalization. However, the new model of capitalism differs substantially from the former modern one. Whereas modern capitalism was “national and humanistic”, its postmodern successor, which developed in the US and spread out around the globe, is “materialist-Darwinist, namely anti-humanistic”:

The new capitalism is based not on moral education but solely on the material and biological egotistical interests of the human animal. [...] According to the theory of new capitalism, sophisticated “postmodern” technology enables the transformation of the impulse of natural competition between individuals over property, power and happiness from the cause of wars into an agent of peaceful

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<sup>125</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Masot gordoniyot chadashot*, Tel Aviv, 2005, 11.

<sup>126</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Ha-medina ha-yehudit be-mivcheney hagshamata*, Jerusalem: Ha-Sifriyya Ha-Zionit, 2012, 89.

collaboration. This is possible thanks to the unprecedented abundance this technology can manufacture from nature and from people taking control over nature. To this end, all that is required is to direct the sophisticated technology toward the production of consumer goods, communication, organization and marketing, and to make those as efficient as possible. The way to achieve this is to provide all individuals with the freedom to compete and to exhaust their competence for their own benefit, and to prevent any kind of governmental intervention representing the collective benefit in competition over production and marketing or in the distribution of rewards and profits. [...] In other words, happiness and peace will not be achieved by means of education to the values of justice, the love of one's neighbor, camaraderie and peace, but rather through science [...]

This political-economic theory views the governmental authority as a technical and professional function rather than a vocational and ideological one [...] This theory makes moral education redundant and replaces it with a scientific and technological one [...]

The "postmodern era" is [...] one of privatization and specialization designed by the virtues of efficiency, competition and profitability, aspiring to gain material reward.<sup>127</sup>

This exclusive emphasis on the individual and her/his benefits also defines postmodern globalization. Contrary to previous periods, contemporary postmodern globalization is not the product of nations, empires or collectives that gain global influence and dictate the order that best serves them. The powers that run today's "global village" are anonymous capitalist corporations driven by private egotistical interests:

Global civilization is also considered a single village its privacy and the privacy of all its parts and sub-parts: this particular village, and all its parts and sub-parts, resemble each other as if they were made in the same mold; yet in terms of their selfness they are regarded as original, unique and sovereign.<sup>128</sup>

As I hinted above, Schweid draws our attention to the substantial similarities between modern humanism and monotheism. Both view wo/man as a commanded creature (the former by moral reason and the latter primarily by God, though also by reason) who may acquire her/his value by living a life of duty, responsibility and devotion. Both view nature as good in essence though also tempting and imperfect. Both expect wo/men to

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, , 90-92.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 94.



strive for the betterment of human life and of the world; both believe that wo/man is capable of fulfilling this duty, albeit partially and with occasional failures. In this sense modern humanism was indeed a secularized version of Biblical morality, transforming the notion of a “covenant” into an autonomous human submission to moral law.

Postmodernism is the contemporary form of idolatry.<sup>129</sup> It neglects human duty and responsibility, and celebrates the human capacity to make the most effective use not of nature but of other human beings for one’s own egoistic benefits and rewards. Its perception of wo/man is in no way a creation in God’s image, namely an earthy-spiritual entity balancing reason, morality and duty with instincts and impulses, but rather a hedonistic creature. It recognizes no requirement to balance giving and taking and speaks only of grabbing, limited only by one’s physical and intellectual capability. It leaves no room for any covenant, whether between wo/man and God or between the individual and the collective. “Monotheistic religion views law, justice and morality as the aim realized in good human sociality, whereas idolatry identifies the aim in mathematical science, enabling wo/man to control efficiently nature’s forces”.<sup>130</sup>

Postmodern civilization initially seemed successful and beneficial. For several decades, it provided Western societies with prosperity, stability and a sense of progress. To be sure, from the outset it served only the rich, highly developed countries at the expense of the “Third World”; and even within those rich societies only the middle and upper classes enjoyed prosperity, while the poor become poorer, hopeless and alienated. However, for a while one could overlook these inner contradictions and failures. Not any more:

After half a century in which postmodern civilization has celebrated its victory and achievements, it confronts [...] its severe prices in terms of humanity’s morality, in terms of its chance to provide all its members life of freedom, dignity and happiness based on self-realization. Frustration and great anxiety are growing, nourishing the fanatical reaction of religious fundamentalism.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Eilon Shamir, “Elilut u-vrit ba-chevrah ha-yisra’elit hayom”, in: Tamar Landau (ed.), *Ma yiheyē*, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2005, 19-90.

<sup>130</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Bikoret ha-tarbut ha-chilonit (Critique of Secular Culture)*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008, 103.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

Postmodern capitalism and the world order it creates are not only immoral and idolatrous but also lead to environmental catastrophes, wars, terrorism and the collapse of human culture, thereby endangering the very existence of humanity. Schweid calls for a restoration of modernism: of social democratic responsibility and solidarity, ; of the embracement of national cultures and identities, and of the morality of the monotheistic covenant. He raises this “Halakhic” demand both on a particularistic Israeli and Jewish level and on a universal one, in the context of the struggle for a renewed world order. He is fully aware of the impact of contemporary technology, political reality and economic development, and his call does not have a simplistic or reactionary nature. Rather, it is a prophetic and Halakhic call to constitute Neo-Modernism,<sup>132</sup> an updated version of social democratic responsibility, a relevant form of Monotheism, and, in local Israeli terms, a post-post-Zionist Zionism.

On the local Israeli and Jewish level, the Halakhic implication of this call is a demand for revolutionary reforms in the educational system; the reconstitution of Israel as a social democratic society, including the de-privatization of many services and social layers capitalistic Israel has abandoned and deserted; a balance between internal Jewish solidarity – in Israel and between Israeli Jews and the Diaspora – and fully equal partnership between Jews and Arabs; and the restoration of the Jewish religious-humanistic values and heritage.

In 2012 Schweid published a book examining the history of the debate over the norms that should shape Jewish and Israeli existence.<sup>133</sup> For the first time in his writings, he dared to characterize his discussion as “philosophic-Halakhic,” as the book’s subtitle states. The book constitutes a lengthy discussion of the norms, practical demands and social political order advocated by modern Jewish thinkers and denominations. Toward

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<sup>132</sup> It should be noted that the term “Postmodernism” is quite ambiguous and has been used to refer to divergent concepts by various authors and in various contexts. Accordingly, Eugene Borowitz understands this term that Schweid uses as a title for the contemporary phenomena he analyzes and criticizes in an almost opposite manner. In the context of the Diaspora, he raises concerns and hopes that are similar to those outlined by Schweid. Borowitz also advocates, albeit in a much more limited scope than Schweid, the renewal of non-Orthodox Halakhah based on the concept of covenant. Nevertheless, he describes labels these goals as profoundly postmodern, freeing the contemporary Jew from failures and ills of modernism. See: Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant*.

<sup>133</sup> Eliezer Schweid, *Normot ha-kiyyum shel ha- m ha-yehudi ba-zeman he-chadash* [The Jewish People's Norms of Existence in Modern Age], Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2012.

the end of the book, before his final discussion focusing on the collapse of collective Jewish norms in the age of globalization, Schweid departs for a few pages from the descriptive, though philosophically critical, tone he maintains throughout most of the work, and gives a clear notion of the Halakhah toward which his philosophic discussion aims. He enthusiastically and courageously adopts the moral and political worldview expounded by Arie Lova Eliav (Moscow, 1921 – Tel Aviv, 2010)<sup>134</sup> in his book “*Eretz ha-tzvi*” [Land of the Gazelle]:<sup>135</sup>

The State of Israel will not truly be a Jewish state unless it does justice to all its citizens as well as to the people present in Eretz-Israel for many generations and therefore also eligible to national self-determination in that land. [...] Lova Eliav’s “*Eretz ha-tzvi*” program called for Jewish-Zionist renaissance, renewing the pioneering and voluntary-vocational spirit in an enterprise fully of creatural, productive nature. [...] The process of entering a free market economy, leading to globalization and thereby subverting national identity, defeated this approach. Egotistical and competitive materialism destroyed the ethos of vocation that characterized the realization of Zionism, and which ensured that it had remained a practical and realizable Utopia. [...] Had this program been implemented, the State of Israel would have been in an entirely different situation than that in which it now finds itself, both in terms of its inner coherence and moral durability and in terms of its international relationships.<sup>136</sup>

The struggle to renew Zionist Jewish being and instill it with a renewed comprehensive Halakhah is in no way isolated from the universalistic struggle to overcome postmodern idolatry and save human existence. In a Halakhicprophetic appeal, Schweid concludes his discussion of the idolatrous values of the “global village”:

The only chance for salvation, therefore, lies in a return to humanistic monotheism and to the ethic of justice and mutual responsibility. Only this ethic can restore to advanced technological civilization the will and ability to strike the right balance between the welfare of individuals and collective welfare; between man’s rights and his obligations; between taking for the sake of one’s ego and giving to the other; between self-love and love of the other.

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<sup>134</sup> See: “Lova” (at the Spielberg Archive): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZIJ4oK4yPU>

<sup>135</sup> Arie Lova Eliav, *Land of the Hart: Israelis, Arabs, the Territories, and a Vision of the Future*, tr. Judith Yalon, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America. Published in Hebrew 1972; Schweid’s political convictions were at time significantly other.

<sup>136</sup> Schweid, *Normot ha-kivvum shel ha-am ha-yehudi*, 485-486.

This is still the same proclaiming voice first heard at Sinai. It still echoes in the space of the global village and calls for the same repentance demanded by the Prophet Jonah at Nineveh in order to save its poor and the animals that grazed there. Is there a chance that this time there will be a positive response to this call, if only in part, before the next world war erupts?<sup>137</sup>

These are the global-universalistic and local-particularistic outlines of the new Halakhah Schweid believes we must adopt today. Unlike those advocated by Bialik and Gordon, his notion of Halakhah is well grounded, justified and fully detailed. Nonetheless, it remains to be seen whether it will remain mere “Aggadah” or will actually be formulated in terms that enable individuals, communities and peoples to choose whether or not to observe and develop it.

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<sup>137</sup> Schweid, *Bikoret ha-tarbut ha-chilonit*, 144-145.